

# A Theory of Austria

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Culture rests not in talent, which is more or less equally divided between the nations, but in the layers of the social fabric which lie beneath it (Musil 1919, p. 1031).

## 1. Introduction

The present essay seeks, by way of the Austrian example, to make a contribution to what might be called the philosophy of the supranational state. More specifically, we shall attempt to use certain ideas on the philosophy of Gestalten as a basis for understanding some aspects of that political and cultural phenomenon which was variously called the Austrian Empire, the Habsburg Empire, the Danube Monarchy, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, or what one will.

These terms are all, to different degrees, equivocal, dependent on historical context and constitutional point of view. It is, in a certain sense, these equivocations which generate the problem here confronted: is it possible to characterise the peculiar way in which the political whole of the Austrian Empire was composed of constituent parts – nationalities, languages, religions and other social and ethnic groupings – in such a way as to throw light on the cultural and intellectual life of the Empire, especially in the *fin-de-siècle* period?

We shall in what follows simply use the term ‘Austria’ to describe that entity which developed out of the predominantly German-speaking Hereditary Lands of the Habsburg family, as this was enlarged by the accession by the Habsburgs to the Kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary in 1526. Thus the term will refer to that territory – called the Austrian Empire from 1804 until 1867 and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy thereafter – which was described in the most important constitutional document of Habsburg rule, the Pragmatic Sanction of 1713, as the ‘lands ruled by the House of Austria’. Our attention will be confined more particularly to the region that was under Habsburg rule throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and until the end of the First World War.

Our use of the term ‘Austria’ for this complex Gestalt is prompted by no disregard for historical developments or distinctions of constitutional law. This term was, in actual state practice if not in legal parlance, employed to refer to the lands ruled by the House of Austria in the period from 1804 to 1867.<sup>1</sup> It was clear to statesmen of the time that in an Empire which united Hungarians, Slavs, Italians, Rumanians, Germans and Jews,

Austria is a purely imaginary name which means neither a particular people nor a country or nation; it is rather a conventional term for a complex of clearly differentiated nationalities (Andrian-Werburg 1843, p. 8).

Even for the period after the Compromise (*Ausgleich*) with Hungary of 1867, which recognised two sovereign states united by a single monarch, there is some justification for the employment of the term ‘Austria’ for the Habsburg Empire taken as a whole. For the relations between the two constituent states

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did not rest merely on an accidental personal identity of their respective sovereign ruler: they amounted to a ‘*Realunion*’, not least in virtue of the fact that several important state functions were common both to the Kingdom of Hungary and to the ‘kingdoms and lands represented in the *Reichsrat*’ (or Imperial Council.)<sup>2</sup>

Here, however, we are not concerned so much with the legal details of the relations between the two halves of the Monarchy, but rather with the fabric of emotions, conceptions and traditions of the peoples of the Empire in relation to the peculiar structure in which they lived. And it is this which prompts us to use the term ‘Austria’ in the way suggested. Our motivations are to some extent those adumbrated by Robert Musil when he wrote of the Empire:

On paper it called itself the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy; in speaking, however, one referred to it as Austria, that is to say, it was known by a name that it had, as a State, solemnly renounced by oath, while preserving it in all matters of sentiment, as a sign that feelings are just as important as constitutional law and that regulations are not the really serious thing in life (1979, vol. I, p. 33).

## 2. The Mélange

The Danube Monarchy was in itself a compromise, a response to a quite specific problem of nationalities in Eastern Central Europe. Not only was it composed of a plurality of ‘historico-political entities’ (*historisch-politische Individualitäten*), as one called the different kingdoms, archduchies, duchies, margravates, principalities, etc., in Austrian constitutional law; these several entities were themselves far from being ethnically homogeneous. Thus Bohemia and the western part of the Kingdom of Hungary, and in particular the area including Buda and Pest, had substantial German populations; there were both German and Rumanian populations in eastern Hungary; the region of Trieste was inhabited by a mixture of Italians, Germans and Slovenes; Galicia was populated by a mixture of Poles, Ruthenians and of course Jews – and one could extend this list still further. The different nationalities were indeed scattered, to different degrees, throughout the Dual Monarchy, and no single ethnic or national group was confined to any one enclave or locality. (Some of the problems raised by these mixtures of populations – and also some of their positive ramifications – are in fact still with us, in different ways, today.)

A similar diversity was present also in the religious life of the Empire, which encompassed Catholics, Uniates, Protestants (among them Lutherans, Hussites, Calvinists and others), Muslims and Jews, as well as practitioners of the Orthodox religion. Catholicism was, however, the preponderant religion, and in 1905 the 31 million Catholics and 5 million Uniates together accounted for more than 75% of the population of the Empire. This made of Austria the largest Catholic Empire in Europe and made of the Emperor the worldly protector of all Catholic Christendom, still exercising his power to veto a candidate for the papal throne as late as 1903. The smaller religious groups did, however, benefit from the tolerance of the Emperor, and Jews, in particular, were at times able to rise to the highest levels within the Imperial hierarchy.<sup>3</sup>

The Habsburg Monarchy was not a heap of randomly accumulated territories and dynastic patrimonies. Its peoples shared, first of all, a common geographical region around the Danube-which had for centuries served as the “centre of gravity of the Austrian Monarchy”,<sup>4</sup> uniting the different peoples on its banks. These peoples shared a common enemy in the Turk, and more than 200 years of warfare against the Ottoman Porte had contributed not a little to the development amongst them of a feeling of a common fate and history. The peoples of the Monarchy shared further the presumption of belonging to a common political entity, a presumption bolstered not least by an allegiance to the Habsburg dynasty itself. Monarchical patriotism and loyalty to Austria certainly differed in degree according to regional, ethnic and social circumstances, but it is nevertheless the case that many people throughout the Empire simply felt that “their fatherland was Habsburg”.<sup>5</sup> And finally, in addition to dynastic loyalties, the peoples of the Monarchy were united by a highly developed bureaucracy, a common army, a common monetary system, and above all by a freedom of movement, of trade and of employment within the frontiers of the Empire,

all of which, as we shall see, had a quite peculiar effect on the social and cultural development of its constituent peoples.

### 3. Centre and Periphery

The unity of Austria was not, it must be noted, brought about through the predominance of any one single centre, nation or race. Certainly Vienna had a position of pre-eminence in matters both cultural and political-and there can be no such thing as a supranational integration without some kind of leadership and superordination, some kind of nucleus of crystallisation. But it has to be noted that Vienna was herself of a pluralistic nature, with a multinational and multilingual population, serving the assimilation of large and diversified ethnic and religious groups to an extent incomparably greater than would have been possible in any truly German city.

Vienna manifested at one and the same time a highly cosmopolitan and yet intensely local character, reflecting in part the sluggish industrialisation in the territories over which it ruled and a concomitant late process of urbanisation. But the pre-eminence which Vienna enjoyed resulted also from the contributions of the periphery. The city sat, in the words of Roth, "like some brilliant and seductive spider at the heart of the mighty black and yellow web, ceaselessly drawing power, energy and brilliance from the surrounding Crown Lands" (1984, p. 60). Thus the pre-eminence of Vienna did not conflict with the regional identities and allegiances of other groups and nationalities within Austria as a whole. Czechs still looked upon Prague, Croats upon Zagreb, Styrians upon Graz, Tyrolians upon Innsbruck, and the inhabitants of Bukovina upon Czernowitz as their respective capitals and as centres of economic and cultural activity. Vienna they looked upon as the capital of the Empire as a whole, and as the principal residence of the Emperor.

Certainly, too, the Germanic groups tended to arrogate to themselves positions of political power and influence in the Crown Lands. Their claim to supremacy was, until 1806, usually justified by reference to Vienna as the capital of the Holy Roman Empire (and, from 1815, by reference to the leading role which Austria played in the German *Bund*, though this argument lost its force with the Austrian withdrawal from the *Bund* in 1866). The German-speaking Austrians were however at least counterbalanced in their aspirations to political pre-eminence by the Hungarians, who enjoyed power and influence not only in Hungary but also in the joint (Austrian-and-Hungarian, Imperial-and-Royal) ministries in Vienna. And after the Compromise of 1867, Hungary-meaning Greater Hungary or the Realm of Saint Stephen-did indeed enjoy a very high degree of autonomy, if not complete independence, in all but foreign, military and financial affairs.

In the sphere of culture, too, German influences were never able to supplant the locally rooted traditions, whether in the realm of music or, for example, in a still sometimes orally transmitted literature. Efforts were made to enforce German as the only language of administration upon the peoples of the Vienna-ruled (Imperial-Royal) parts of the Monarchy, and still more deliberate efforts in the remainder of the Empire to enforce Hungarian as the language not only of administration but also of culture.<sup>6</sup> This attempted linguistic subjugation was indeed one of the reasons for the growth of nationalist feelings, particularly among the Croats against their detested Hungarian rulers. But such attempts were in every case without success, in part because they were carried out with a typically Austrian half-heartedness. Thus it was for a long time compulsory for Army cadets in the officer corps to learn at least one other language of the dozen or so spoken in the Monarchy (usually in addition to French) as part of their training. Moreover, these other languages themselves had marked effects on the German spoken in Vienna, as, in the opposite direction, German had influenced the languages of the Magyars and the Slavs.

The Danubian Empire was not, therefore, a hierarchical structure organised around any single centre. "Austria's essence", as Joseph Roth expressed it, "is not to be central, but to be peripheral". (1984, p. 17) Nor either, however, was it an artificial federation, a pseudo-democracy on the level of equal national

units. It was a much more complex web of variegated, pluralistic institutions, whose capacity to hold itself together politically owed more to a long process of common evolution among its parts – a process of development of a whole network of interleaved quasi-organic Gestalten – than to any deliberately worked-out rational plan or construction. One can say that it owed more to a general assumption that the Empire had to exist, than to any particular act of allegiance to the Crown. Thus Aurel Kolnai writes of the Empire that the “very imperfection of the Habsburg system” contributed to its cohesion:

Had it achieved an evidently rational and universally approved ‘solution’, the obsolete superstructure might have been abandoned without pent. But in fact the comparatively livable solution it presented was dependent upon its own existence. Thus the number of people was great, in Hungary for instance, who, while viewing the Habsburg rule with cool detachment or even antipathy, yet desired it to survive and behaved towards it as loyal subjects, because they surmised that its downfall would in most respects be followed by a deterioration of conditions (1942, p. 298).

Nowhere did this *opinio necessitatis* find a better expression than in the famous letter which the eminent Czech nationalist and historian, František Palacký, wrote to the Frankfurt ‘Preliminary Parliament’ during the revolutionary turmoil of 1848.<sup>7</sup> Palacký warns of the rapidly increasing power of the “new universal monarchy” which is the Russian Empire. Russia, he insists, must be considered a threat to the peoples living along its southwestern border, whose small nations would be able to resist Russia’s expansionist drive only if “a strong bond unites them all”. It is in the task of supplying this bond that Palacký, with astonishing prescience, sees the historic mission of Austria:

The essential artery of this vital association of nations is the Danube. Its Central Power must therefore not move away from this stream if it is to be at all effective. Indeed, if the Austrian Empire had not already existed for generations, it would be necessary to create such a state, in the interests of Europe and of humanity in general (1874, p. 152).

But Austria, “destined by nature and history to be Europe’s bulwark against Asiatic elements of all kinds”, can only live up to her task if she lets her policy be guided by two principles: to resist dissolution within the German *Bund*, which would only nurture the allegiance of the Germanic groups within the Empire, and to strengthen the independence and equal treatment of all nationalities in a strong and supranational Austrian state.<sup>8</sup>

#### **4. The Interdependence of Allegiances**

The constituent parts of that ramified structure which was the Empire were not merely the various national groupings, but also the court, the nobility, the Church, and each of these, too, manifested in microcosm the complex supranational structure of the whole. The Church, above all, preserved its local character in the various regions of the Monarchy. And this applies to the nobility also, which was comparable to the English nobility in possessing strong local roots: it was not a homogeneous phenomenon, set apart from the people in the manner of the Prussian Junker. There were autochthonous aristocracies in Hungary, in Poland, and in the Austrian Hereditary Lands. And in the course of the Thirty Years’ War an aristocracy was imported into Bohemia from other areas of Europe as part of the process of re-Catholicisation. Noblemen, and sometimes even aristocrats, would speak Hungarian, Polish or Italian among themselves, and even those members of the nobility who spoke German would often do so with a specific local dialect (though sometimes larded, of course, with bits of French).

In the parts of the Empire that were administered by Vienna, a trade-off frequently took place between political and cultural aspirations and interests. Thus Czechs and Poles were given cultural autonomy as a substitute for political autonomy, not as a step on the road to independence. Germans in Bohemia and Slovenes in Istria looked upon Habsburg rule as a protection against the oppression by Czechs or Italians which greater provincial autonomy would undoubtedly have brought in its wake. The equipoise upon

which the power of the Emperor rested thereby derived support from every nationality that feared local dominion by a more powerful nationality on its borders. And thus also the large civil servant class by which the Empire was administered depended for its prerequisites not only upon Habsburg authority but also upon continued disunity among the peoples.

In the alloy of the Empire, then, there was present a whole motley of surviving loyalties, bolstered by elements of Catholic and of aristocratic solidarity, and intertwined with disparate and sometimes counterposing forces tending towards ethnico-linguistic nationalism. Social institutions were arranged not simply in horizontal juxtaposition but also in a vertical manner, giving rise to a web of interpenetrations between levels, both as regards the various different nationalities and also as regards more specific local groupings.

This complexity of intervolvements led to some of the most striking political alliances and divisions in the Monarchy. Thus in Moravia, for example, Germans and Slavs lived in close interrelation, brought together most of all by the Catholic Church and by a widespread bilingualism – both of which served also to temper nationalist feelings in the population of Moravia as a whole. The Moravians indeed conceived their political allegiance almost entirely in dynastic and Austrian terms, and were consequently hardly susceptible to extraneous Pan-Slavist or Pan-Germanic influences. The inhabitants of Brünn, the Moravian capital, therefore tended to take their cultural bearings from Vienna, rather than from Prague, all ethnic and linguistic differences notwithstanding.

In Bohemia, on the other hand, Germans and Czechs intermingled hardly at all, the national (ethnic) division largely coinciding with a difference in religion and in social class. There were, accordingly, a significant number of Czech intellectuals in Bohemia, particularly after the Austrian Compromise with Hungary, who readily embraced Pan-Slavist ideology as a counterbalance to what they conceived to be an unjust treatment of the Czechs. Such intellectuals then formed the nuclei of political movements which, under the influence of England and France to which they became increasingly susceptible, served as important dissolutionary forces within the Empire.

Yet in Bohemia, too, there can be found examples of the horizontal and vertical interweavings that were characteristic of Austria as a whole. In 1868, after a state of emergency had been declared in Bohemia as a consequence of Czech protests against the subordination of the lands of the Bohemian Crown to the Viennese Parliament, Czech deputies walked out of the Lower House and embarked on a boycott of the Reichsrat which was to last all of fourteen years. This boycott was then joined by many Bohemian members of the Upper House, of whatever national origin, since they, too, regarded the terms of the Hungarian Compromise as a flagrant violation of the ancient rights of the Crown of St. Wenceslas.<sup>9</sup> National solidarity – bolstered, certainly, by a concern to prevent the erosion of privilege and influence – thereby prevailed over aristocratic loyalty to the Crown (and this among a Bohemian aristocracy which had, since 1620, included hardly a single family of genuinely Czech descent).

## **5. Virtues of Diversity**

It was therefore not merely a complex congeries of nationalities which made up the manifold character of the Austrian Empire. There were also shared allegiances among different social groups, allegiances cutting across national boundaries and making of Austria a political organism of a quite peculiar sort. One expression of this fact is that it is impossible to speak of ‘minorities’ within the Empire.<sup>10</sup> The various national units were not hierarchically organised or divided into dominant and subjugated groups; they were rather juxtaposed, in a complicated and sometimes delicate balance. And the nationalities were not separate units in any strict sense, but rather merged, in different ways, one into another. As Kolnai writes:

Human society is not composed of nations ... in the same clear-cut sense in which it is composed of individuals or, for that matter, of sovereign states. The spectrum of nationalities is full of interpenetrations, ambiguities, twilight zones. It follows that the conception of nationalism as a

universal principle, the conception of a 'just' or 'natural' order of nation-states is – in fact and in theory – pure utopia. There can be neither an order of states nor of frontiers in which there does not enter to a large extent the factor of arbitrariness, contingency and historical accident. Pretending to 'purify' the body of mankind – like other enterprises of a naturalist, pseudo-rationalist sort purporting to lay down 'evident principles' which generally prove to be illusory – means to push arbitrariness to its extreme limit (1946, p. 536).

Thus the "modern primitivism" which wishes to eliminate the factor of contingency from human life disregards the "unique tempering and enriching effect exercised on man by his symbiosis with nationalities other than his own" (Kolnai 1947, p. 645).

In his judgment about the "intrinsic superiority" of supranational orders, Kolnai is in fact following in the footsteps of St. Stephen, the first Hungarian King, who in the 11th century had advised his son Emmerich that he should not spare to invite foreigners into the Kingdom, on the grounds that "*unius linguae uniusque moris regnum imbecile et fragile est*" (a kingdom with but one language and one custom is weak and fragile).

This piece of medieval political expedience was in fact given a solid theoretical basis, by conservative and liberal thinkers alike, in the political philosophy of the 19th century. Thus in his essay on "Nationality" of 1862, Lord Acton points to the positive consequences of the lack of centralised hegemony which is vouchsafed by the presence of different nationalities within a single state. It provides, he says, "against the servility which flourishes under the shadow of a single authority, by balancing interests, multiplying associations, and giving to the subject the restraint and support of a combined opinion" (1862, p. 289).

Acton waxes almost lyrical in his description of the peculiar perfection which such a supranational entity may achieve:

If we take the establishment of liberty for the realisation of moral duties to be the end of civil society, we must conclude that those states are substantially the most perfect which, like the British and Austrian Empires, include various distinct nationalities without oppressing them. Those in which no mixture of races has occurred are imperfect; and those in which its effects have disappeared are decrepit. A State which is incompetent to satisfy different races condemns itself; a State which labours to neutralise, to absorb, or to expel them, destroys its own vitality; a State which does not include them is destitute of the chief basis of self-government. (1862, p. 298)<sup>11</sup>

And Acton was not the only thinker who, in a period when liberalism seemed to imply adherence to the principle of nationalism, tried to give a liberal justification of the supranational state. Thus the Swiss jurist Bluntschli, in an article of 1862, insisted that "the most evolved form of the state is not restricted to a single nationality, but combines different national elements in a common human order" (1862, p. 159).<sup>12</sup> Bluntschli recognised that the higher culture of a state cannot admit of being confined by the narrow straitjacket of a single nationality – an idea which is echoed by Hayek, from a different perspective, when he points out that

if we wish to find a high degree of uniformity and similarity of outlook, we have to descend to the regions of lower moral and intellectual standards where the more primitive and 'common' instincts and tastes prevail.<sup>13</sup>

Such ideas are entirely contrary to the spirit of German political thought and culture. German conservatism was indeed always nationally oriented, where Austrian conservatives could do no other than to recognise the benefits of a supranational order. Thus it was in particular German conservative thinkers, and especially those influenced by romanticism, who conceived the nation-state as an organic unity of the kind found in nature. Where thinkers such as Burke regard the unity of a people as the purely artificial outcome of historical and political factors, Fichte conceives the nation as a natural order, as a form of unity antecedent to any other forms of social or political contiguity or co-existence, so that the two concepts of state and nation come to be identified. The nation is treated as a natural entity based above all on linguistic unity, with the consequence that the language spoken by the inhabitants of any particular territory becomes

quite literally a matter of life and death, for the dilution of linguistic unity through alien admixture must take away the very ground of existence for the people concerned. Within each state, accordingly, cultural integrity and national authenticity must be achieved by excluding those who do not share the national language, and within the international order no state can claim recognition unless its population enjoys a single common language. It may be added that the later identification of the nation through biological or racial characteristics is only a variant on this same doctrine; it, too, entails conceiving of the nation as a natural, pre-political entity, independent of human will and artifice and of any subjective feeling of allegiance, and given the background of German nationalist ideology with its quest for the purity of a unified nation-state, it is little wonder that the German Reich of Bismarck showed even less understanding for the peculiar supranational character of contemporary Austria than did the other European powers.<sup>14</sup>

## 6. Racial Purity in Music

It is our thesis, now, that there are positive consequences of a supranational order, of an overlapping and interpenetration of racial and national groupings, which are not confined to the social and political sphere but manifest themselves also in the spheres of intellect and culture. We shall argue that these positive consequences arise first of all as a result of the fact that each of the various separate national groupings within Austria preserved its own culture and traditions, and also its own networks of cultural and intellectual relations with congenial forces and currents outside the Empire. But we shall argue that they arise also, and not less importantly, in virtue of a supervenient unity in the cultural and intellectual spheres: for there was something like an Austrian culture, or atmosphere, a common framework of thought and action which was made manifest, for example, in common architectural styles of public buildings<sup>15</sup> and was fostered by a constant interchange and resettlement of peoples, ideas and languages, from one corner of the Empire to the other.

In a short but important essay on “Race Purity in Music”, the Hungarian composer Béla Bartók considered the question: is racial purity favourable or unfavourable to musical development? The essay was written in 1942, in Bartók’s American exile, and it is clear already from the title that Bartók had more in mind than mere matters of musicology. Bartók had, as is well known, spent many years investigating the folk music of the regions of Central and Eastern Europe. The separate countries in these regions did not develop separate musical traditions. As Bartók himself wrote, “there was a continuous give and take of melodies, a constant crossing and recrossing which had persisted through centuries.” (1942, p. 30) When a melody – say that of the Rákóczi March – is carried from one culture to another in this way, it is not simply transmitted whole. It is affected on its journey, and on being inserted into the new cultural context, by a variety of factors having to do with disparities in the cultural stock of its successive host cultures, with differences, for example, in habits of rhythm and dance, and above all with differences of language:

When a folk melody passes the language frontier of a people, sooner or later it will be subjected to certain changes determined by environment, and especially by the differences of languages. The greater the dissimilarity between the accents, metrical conditions, syllabic structure and so on, of two languages, the greater the changes that fortunately may occur in the ‘emigrated’ melody. I say ‘fortunately’ because this phenomenon itself engenders a further increase in the number of types and sub-types. (1942, p. 30)

Thus it is not merely that the migration of folk melodies from one country to another leads to an enrichment of the music of the new host cultures. In the process of migrating, the melodies and other musical elements become themselves richer and more complex, sometimes to the extent that there become possible new types and varieties of music and new forms of musical creativity: “as a result of uninterrupted reciprocal influence upon the folk music of these peoples there are an immense variety and a wealth of melodies and melodic types. The ‘racial impurity’ finally attained,” Bartók concludes, “is definitely beneficial” (1942, p. 31).

This crossing and recrossing applies not only to melodies, of course, but to all the factors involved in musical activity. Bartók himself lays particular stress on the parallels between the development of arts such as music and the evolution of language. As he points out, English is impure in comparison with other Germanic languages; but it has precisely for that reason an incomparable elasticity and strength of expression. And in both cases an impurity – of the linguistic stock, or of the repertoire of musical elements – is beneficial rather than detrimental to the intellectual or aesthetic power of the whole.

Nor do these mutually beneficial influences apply to folk music (and to the wider folk culture) alone. The higher music of Austria, too, benefited from the continuous exchange of melodies and other musical elements and forms between one part of the Empire and another. Austria was, as Franz Werfel wrote, “the crossroads, the watershed of all the streams, the clearing-house of all the properties of the realm of music” (1937, p. 40). Thus Mahler’s symphonies drew much of their inspiration from Bohemian folk tunes, and already Beethoven had introduced Hungarian motifs into the *Eroica* and into the music written for Kotzebue’s *Saint Stephen*.

The Austrian musical tradition has often been described as being precisely averse to the emergence of distinctive national styles. Even at the end of the 18th century, when other countries had already long-established national musics of their own, Austrian music still adhered to a traditionalism of a supranational sort:

It was not through the formation of a musical ‘national style’ that the tradition of Austrian music constituted itself in the 18th century, but quite conversely: this tradition was constituted by an unwillingness to submit itself to the tendency towards national music; it was a tradition in which a political idea—the principle of a supranational ‘*Domus Austriae*’ – became significant for the history of music and led to far-reaching consequences (Dahlhaus 1980, p. 328).

Thus while characterisations such as ‘Zingarella’, ‘Alla Polacca’, ‘Alla Turca’, ‘All’ Ongarese’, were frequently used by the Viennese classical composers, no piece known in the musical literature has ever been designated ‘All’ Austriaca’. Hence it would be quite nonsensical to seek to individuate a history of Austrian music in abstraction from the music of Prague, Budapest or Milan. The structure of the Empire encouraged not only a continuous movement of composers and musicians across the borders of the various constituent ‘historico-political entities’; it fostered also a similar movement of musical forms and ideas—leading to that synthesis of styles of German, Italian and Czech origin which constitutes what is today called Viennese classical music.

## 7. Creativity and Aesthetic Value

It was in particular in the period extending from the last decades of the 19th century to the early 1930s that Austria manifested a veritable explosion of creativity. Vienna and Prague, Cracow and Lemberg, Buda and Pest nurtured a series of important developments, not only in music, literature and the visual arts, but also in logic and philosophy, in psychology and psychiatry, in medicine and economics, developments which have coloured subsequent thought and practice in these areas to an unparalleled extent. Our suggestion here is that Bartók’s ideas, when worked out in more detail, might provide us with a better understanding of this quite singular phenomenon and thereby also help us towards an understanding of what seem to be certain peculiar benefits of a supranational order.

What, then, are the characteristic features of an entity such as the Habsburg Monarchy which might be held to be particularly conducive to artistic or intellectual creativity? Before answering this question it is necessary to consider briefly what ‘creativity’ might mean. As Bartók’s essay suggests, the value of a work of art consists in a certain kind of complexity: not in any mere multiplicity of randomly associated parts, but in a complexity which might be called ‘organic’. This term is clearly metaphorical; it points, above all, to the fact that living organisms are able to achieve a unity of interdependence even in spite of what may be



a not easily fathomable diversity of parts. No part functions in isolation; each part interacts with every other part in such a way that a change in one makes a difference to all.

We owe the first rigorous formulation of this idea to the Austrian philosopher Christian von Ehrenfels, author of the essay “On ‘Gestalt-Qualities’” of 1890, a work which gave rise, especially through the work of Ehrenfels’ student Max Wertheimer, to the Gestalt tradition in modern psychology. As Ehrenfels writes, “on the basis of combinations of given elements” – for example of tones, or of melodies – “there is generated an inconceivable array of positive psychical qualities of the greatest significance. The thinker who organises psychical elements into new combinations does more than merely displace the component elements amongst themselves: he creates something new.” (Ehrenfels 1890, p. 36)

Later Gestalt psychologists devoted considerable efforts to the task of elucidating the concept of aesthetic value on a Gestalt-theoretical basis. Their efforts did not, as was initially hoped, lead to any calculus of value, to a theory of ‘aesthetic measure’. They did, however, lead to a number of value-theoretic insights of a qualitative or morphological sort. That is to say, the Gestaltists were able to establish, above all through their investigations of perceptual phenomena, that there were certain specific dimensions of order, certain general characteristics of different types of structure, which may be of relevance in the aesthetic sphere. Value in this sense can be identified in first approximation as a function of two different types of order. On the one hand are the various *formal* dimensions of order, of which the most important would be *unity*, *multiplicity*, and what we might call *fullness* or ‘*Prägnanz*’, dimensions which can be realised, in principle, in every sort of structure. On the other hand are certain material dimensions of order, each of which is capable of being realised only in structures of certain determinate sorts.

To take the formal dimensions first. Unity is a matter of the tightness, the integrity of a structure, of the high degree of interrelatedness of its parts. When an object is unified it can be said to hang together, be of one piece, contain nothing superfluous, as contrasted with that which is complicated or messy or disintegrated. Multiplicity is a matter of a structure’s having a richness of elements or a wide spread of parts, as opposed to that which is relatively meagre, barren, sparse. Fullness is a matter of the presence of internal contours and boundaries, of clear and distinguishable characters and forms, as contrasted with that which is amorphous or undifferentiated.

Clearly we have to do here not with three pairs of exclusive alternatives but rather in each case with an opposition of degrees. Further, the oppositions in question are themselves by no means easy to define or delineate, so that a truly satisfactory theory of formal aesthetic order would need to penetrate more deeply than the simple framework offered here.<sup>16</sup> That there is a basic idea to be captured can however be made clear if we imagine, say, a pattern of 1000 dots arranged in configurations of various different sorts. When set out in a line, the dots will exhibit a high degree of unity and multiplicity but a low degree of fullness; when configured at random, the dots will exhibit a high degree of multiplicity but a low degree of unity and fullness. Only when the dots are arranged together in what we would naively perceive as an aesthetically pleasing way is there achieved simultaneously a high degree in all these three dimensions.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to these formal or abstract dimensions of aesthetic order, however, there is also a range of material dimensions, dependent on the specific properties of given objects and of the perceptual modalities correlated therewith, on the environments in which these objects exist, and on the types of mental set or systems of expectation with which they are associated. We might consider, for example, the material dimensions of *meaningfulness* and *originality*, objects being more valuable, other things being equal, the more meaningful and original they are. Clearly the weight that is placed on these dimensions as moments of aesthetic value will vary greatly from one society to another. Further, such material dimensions, because they depend on the knowledge, experience and habits of the relevant community, will be subject to different kinds of evolution over time. Moreover, they will be realised not in isolation from the formal dimensions of value, but will interpenetrate therewith, so that we can affirm quite generally that the tendencies which determine what is experienced as ordered (‘clear’, ‘full’, ‘significant’, ‘pleasing’, ‘fitting’), will depend not merely on the specific mental acts and states brought by an observer to a particular object on a particular occasion, but also on his history and background and on other social

factors of this sort. Hence we can say that aesthetic value will at least to some extent reflect the degree of conformity of valued objects to pre-established traditions. And we can say also that the creation of such value can be facilitated by certain sorts of social and environmental conditions; it is these conditions that we wish to examine here.

## 8. Reference Systems and Traditions

It is of course a commonplace to say that aesthetic value rests on something like a harmony of opposing forces, on a 'unity in diversity', and that the artistic or intellectual fertility of a culture will be fostered – other things being equal – by a wide diversity of sources and influences, by a maximum variety of elements.<sup>18</sup> But the reader can with justice insist that a theory of Austria should yield more than the triviality – ridiculed already by Musil<sup>19</sup> – to the effect that it is a diversity of peoples in Austria which is responsible for the peculiar character of the culture of the Empire in the period which concerns us here. It is nevertheless true that there is a more than merely accidental connection between an ethnically and linguistically highly diverse society and a rich and creative cultural and intellectual life. To see precisely why this is so, it is necessary to distinguish two radically different sorts of property which may be possessed by the constituent parts of a complex structure such as a scientific theory or a work of art. Consider, for example, a melody, or an individual tone. On the one hand these will have properties in virtue of their specific role or function in a given piece of music. On the other hand however there are relatively intrinsic properties which the melody or tone will have in virtue of the fact that it belongs to or is constrained by specific larger *reference systems*. A tone is, for example, the *dominant* or *sub-dominant* of a given key; a melody is of this or that *rhythmic structure*, of this or that *form*, and so on. Melodic Gestalten in general have not merely contextual or ephemeral properties; they also have systemic properties, are ordered with other melodic Gestalten via fixed relations of opposition and complementarity. Words and sentences, similarly, have properties in virtue of their position in the relevant linguistic system, and not merely in virtue of their use in given utterances and on given occasions. Such reference systems – *Bezugs-systeme* in the Gestaltists' language – are in fact pervasive in all dimensions of human experience. Our various secular and religious calendars, the various national and cultural histories to which we belong, constitute a set of interlocking reference systems dividing up the order of temporal succession within which the events making up our personal biographies then find their place. The system of valuations reflected by market prices, geographical, social, legal and political divisions, traditions of gesture and dress, all constitute reference systems against the background of which specific Gestalten of a more or less ephemeral kind can come to realisation, whether these be individual messages or greetings, market transactions, or treaties in international law. Human learning and development consists to no small extent in the interiorisation of reference systems of these and other sorts, which are themselves interrelated in a multitude of ways.

The mental set and system of interrelated capacities which we bring to our perception (or creation) of works of art will be determined, now, by reference systems handed down through our previous experiences and through the history of the culture in which we live. The underlying objectual formation might be, for example, a collection of bangs and whistles; but what we hear, on the basis of a given mental set and of learned capacities for distinguishing and organising this totality of aurally transmitted information, is a *piece of music of a determinate form*, satisfying determinate rules and standing in determinate relations to other pieces of music in a common tradition. The perceptual and cognitive organising tendencies involved are related also to similar tendencies involved in our understanding of language, where our perception transforms noises or visible marks of certain kinds in such a way as to constitute phonemes, words, sentences, entreaties, prayers, and so on.

What we see or hear in whatever sphere depends, therefore, not merely on the stimulus conditions and on specific acts of perception, but also on our mental set and on associated learned capacities and skills. But

these in turn depend upon a network of wider socially established systems of reference, above all of a linguistic nature.<sup>20</sup>

Considerations of this kind will now lead us to place certain restrictions on the role of originality as a supposedly necessary moment of creativity. For they imply that any overemphasis on a view of art as a matter of completely novel creations must overlook what is most essential to the creative capacity of the individual artist. We can take our cue from a distinction suggested by Robert Musil between originality and individuality. “Clearly”, Musil writes, “one can talk about originality only where there exists a tradition” (Musil 1931, p. 1207). A literature consisting only of ‘original’ pieces would not *be* a literature, but neither would such pieces be truly original – for there would be no systems of reference against which they would stand out as such and in terms of which they could be read and interpreted.<sup>21</sup>

This calling into question of the role of originality does not, however, imply a simple disregard for the individuality of the artist. For it is through individuals, and exclusively through individuals, that traditions are appropriated and passed on. Indeed Musil sees the individuality of the artist as residing not primarily in his originality, but rather in the way in which he as an individual receives, takes in, describes, arranges, elaborates and reflects upon certain elements of the tradition in which he finds himself.<sup>22</sup> The artist must somehow mediate between working within an existing tradition and giving his creation the imprint of something singular and distinctive. Individuality and indebtedness to tradition thus become practically indivisible, and indeed constitute two inseparable moments of the creative process taken as a whole. This implies in turn that the process of creation is in a certain sense not an individual matter but such as to involve the whole fabric of society; it implies also that the conditions for the creation of original works of art (and, for example, of scientific theories) are not to be divorced from the conditions which govern the *reception* of the works in question.

Our claim, now, is that it is not simply the diversity of elements and of the ephemeral Gestalten within which these elements play a role, which is characteristic of true creativity – and more specifically of the creativity that manifested itself in supranational Austria – but rather the *merging and overlapping of entire reference systems* (customs, languages, traditions and practices), so that the given ephemerally created Gestalten should acquire new forms and meanings in virtue of the surrounding systems in which they have their place. The greater the extent to which there are interrelated reference systems at work, we might say, the more significant are the artifacts produced within such systems, and therefore also the greater are their chances of achieving high aesthetic value.<sup>23</sup>

This is more than a trivial adjustment of what we might call the *crude diversity theory of creativity*, according to which it is merely the juxtaposition of alien elements that is conducive to originality or artistic success. For where the fitting together of what are in effect mere mosaics of diverse elements may be a relatively trivial matter, the fitting together of entire reference systems – each typically existing on many different levels, on each of which incompatibilities may arise – is not something that can be achieved in general by any simple, deliberate process. (Consider, as a somewhat simplified example, the music of the Moravian composer Leoš Janáček, who drew much of his inspiration from Slavic folk music. The scores for Janáček’s operas were so much tied to the Czech sentence melody – with the main stress invariably on the first syllable and the secondary stress on the subsequent uneven syllables of words – that Janáček’s translator Max Brod had great difficulties producing a singable German version.) It seems, however, that the possibility of a reference system’s becoming channelled or communicated across cultural boundaries such that it can become fused with already established systems in a way that gives rise to new and fruitful consequences, is at least facilitated if the cultures involved are not merely to a degree contiguous but also part of some single overarching cultural whole. Where such a background whole exists – and exists in such a way that it does not stifle the various separate cultures that are maintained within it – then these cultures, or their associated reference systems and forms and groups of Gestalten, can to different degrees become merged or fused together or otherwise modified in aesthetically fruitful ways.

There are, in any event, only certain combinations of reference systems which will be capable of leading to a magnification of significance or complexity in a work of art or in an artistic style or genre *in such a way*

*that organic unity is preserved.* Thus a melodic or rhythmic pattern originating in Moravia, for example, or in Carinthia or Istria, could not – or at least not immediately – find itself at home in the folk music of Scotland or Japan. It could at best serve as an alien element or foreign body, deliberately selected for some specific artistic purpose. It may indeed be possible to set out certain rudimentary morphological laws governing such combinations, laws relating, for example, to the contiguity of the respective host systems or cultures, to the existence of a common fate among the cultures or systems combined, and to the existence of other, more all-embracing systems of customs or rules which would somehow supply a larger unity within which such combinations could occur.

## 9. Cultural Physiology

A melody is conveyed from one culture to another only in virtue of the movements of individuals and groups who carry with them a given cultural stock. We can indeed go further and affirm that it is only insofar as they are realised in the *physiology* of individuals that culturally effective reference systems can be said to exist at all.<sup>24</sup> The creative individual seems to be not someone who has a particular ability to tamper in a conscious way with existing systems of rules – rules which will in any case be typically unavailable to conscious reflection. Nor, *a fortiori*, is he someone who has an extraordinary capacity to think out new rules or practices for himself. Rather, he is an individual who has the capacity to absorb himself bodily in existing practices or reference systems to the extent that, as we might say, they become elastic in his hands. His particular creativity consists not only in his ability to tease out unforeseen possibilities of these practices, but also in the fact that he is able to immerse himself in *disparate* systems of practices in such a way that hitherto alien reference systems should become fused together in his creative activity. A fusion of this kind, if it is to give rise to successful works of art or to styles or forms which are truly novel, will to this extent not be the result of any deliberate process of thinking on the part of the creative individual. The latter is rather typically so completely immersed in the practices of his medium that he may remain unaware of the fact that a process of fusion, and the initiation of a novel practice, have taken place at all.<sup>25</sup>

Our thesis, now, is that the fusion of artistic and intellectual reference systems will be facilitated where conditions are such that given individuals can come to embody in themselves a multiplicity of reference systems which are otherwise disjoint. Such conditions will involve, e.g., a freedom of movement across national boundaries (across boundaries of cultural and ethnic diversity). They will involve a high degree of multilingualism, intermarriage and resettlement, and the existence of a plurality of competing cultural and intellectual centres, no one of which – as in the case of Paris in relation to metropolitan France and the Francophone colonies – enjoys a position of total hegemony.

The fusion of cultural and intellectual traditions and customs will be facilitated also where the separate cultures themselves enjoy a high degree of historical continuity, where the larger whole has come into existence not through violent political change involving qualitative and catastrophic leaps but through gradual historical changes of a sort which bring about an always partial and more or less provisional fusion of contiguous political entities.<sup>26</sup> The associated cultural patterns and institutions and the underlying social *mores* may thereby *grow together*, rather than being foisted upon each other from above.

The fusion of traditions that is conducive to cultural and intellectual creativity will, finally, be encouraged where the different overlapping nationalities and groups do not share equal levels of development.<sup>27</sup> Such unequal development supplies, as Acton notes, “a perpetual incentive to progress, which is afforded not merely by competition, but by the spectacle of a more advanced people” (1862, p. 296).<sup>28</sup> And of course the Habsburg state, which embraced not only the Vienna of Schubert and Mozart in the West but also primitive subsistence economies in Galicia and Bukovina in the East, manifested the widest extremes of poverty and wealth.

These considerations also suggest an explanation of the disproportionately high degree of entrepreneurial success exhibited by certain kinds of immigrant (and perhaps particularly by Jews). The immigrant, in working himself into the culture and environment which is to be his new home, will bring with him assumptions and capacities, will bring ways of seeing, an alien cultural physiology, derived from his native background. This overlapping of different ways of seeing, of different reference systems, will then favour not only entrepreneurial creativity, but also innovation and originality in general.

These remarks have quite special significance in relation to those native Austrian artists and intellectuals – particularly those who came to maturity after the dissolution of the Empire – who gained recognition only after leaving the country of their birth. The prophet, we might argue, is little honoured in his own country, because what he has to say is, to the ears of his fellow countrymen, merely platitudinous. It is only when he leaves his native environment that he *becomes* a prophet; for it is only then that his platitudes are put to the test by being incorporated into new and alien reference systems.

The French conservative Paul Claudel has pointed out, in an article on Austria of 1936, that the Monarchy was “a political system based on the differences, the liberty, the harmony among natural groups instead of on a political, social and linguistic homogeneity imposed on them by coercion” (1936, p. 1085). Claudel in fact concludes his article by commenting on the political moral of St. Stephen quoted above, transposing it to the cultural sphere: “Pauvre et débile en vérité est l’art qui ne vit que d’un seul sentiment et d’une seule idée” (An art which draws its inspiration from but a single feeling and a single idea is truly weak and fragile; 1936, p. 1088). The artistic and intellectual creativity of Austria was indeed to some extent encouraged not merely by differences in culture and level of development among its various groupings, but also by envy and by a host of mutual enmities, enmities which prevail even today. What is perhaps peculiarly unique about the Monarchy was that it did not seek, by drastic political and social transformations, to produce out of this mixture of peoples a single, homogeneous, national entity, with a single ethos and a single idea. It was not the purpose of the state to do away with the spark of difference, and even the spark of hate, among its peoples; rather, the state succeeded in maintaining a framework within which diversity was capable of being tolerated, almost as a fact of natural history.

## 10. Austria as a Weak Gestalt

The dominant view amongst the Western Powers around the turn of the century was distinctly antipathetic as far as Austria-Hungary was concerned. Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and later Woodrow Wilson, could not see how such a fragile and multifariously complicated pluralistic order could have a place in a Europe of tidy nation-states. Austria came to be described more and more as an anachronism, an anomaly, a structure no longer fitting into modern conditions of life. Both at home and abroad the idea was disseminated that the Empire was a weak Gestalt, that it was doomed to dissolution – though the prospect of dissolution was in fact conceived within the Empire always as a last and most desperate resort, not infrequently being conceived in the terms of an apocalypse, so that the energies of all but the most irresponsible forces in the Empire were directed to finding some means to hold its structure together.

Austria was not, however, as subsequent events proved, a weak Gestalt in the technical sense of the Gestalt psychologists; that is, it was not a structured whole of *natural parts*, each one of which is capable of being removed from the whole without detriment to itself and to its neighbours.<sup>29</sup> A weak Gestalt – for example a pile of bricks – is an assemblage in which weak coherence between parts is balanced by strong coherence within parts. But as we have seen, the various parts of the Empire were interleaved with each other in complex ways, and few of its constituent historico-political entities could be said to have manifested in its own right any strong internal coherence. The consequences of this interleaving can be seen when we examine the results of the process of dismemberment which took place in 1918. This gave rise to a family of separate political units, each enjoying certain characteristic features reflecting this process of dismemberment – certain ‘isolation properties’ (*Einzelgegenstandseigenschaften*) – depending not merely

on the peculiar features of the new environments into which the separate entities had come to be inserted, but also on what had been inherited from the old.<sup>30</sup>

To see what is meant by 'isolation properties', imagine that we isolate a group of tones which had previously been part of a melody. The tones are now not simply poorer by the properties they had in the context of the original melody. They exchange these properties for new properties, for example the property of being 'lost', of being given as figure, alone, against a ground of silence, or of being in need of completion (for example where the group in question ends on a leading note). Or consider the result of isolating some constituent fragment of a larger coloured figure. Here the coloured fragment, too, must appear in some specific way against a background of some sort, and then it may manifest itself either as incomplete, as 'lost' or 'homeless', as floating in space, or as having the character of an alien body smuggled into an environment in which it does not belong, as a disturbance in or defect of its environment.

Each of these various different forms of perceptual isolation has its analogue in the social and political sphere. Here, however, the results of isolation need not be treated from a purely synchronic point of view. Parts which have been subject to isolation and which manifest properties of dependence or incompleteness may grow through time into unified wholes in their own right, may become gradually merged into their new environment in such a way as to lose their character of being alien or stranded. Wholes may come to manifest a high degree of interpartial unity because their parts have grown together, for example as a result of sharing historically a common fate. Such diachronic factors may manifest themselves also on the subjective side: the experiencing subject may learn to accept the belonging together of parts which had previously seemed to be merely separate. Indeed this subject may himself be changed by the objects he experiences, so that he begins to see a whole where before there had been only isolated parts, because he himself has become caught up in its web.

Austria was not a weak Gestalt in the technical sense that it was a mere sum of readily isolable units. It was, however, a weak Gestalt in a somewhat different sense: like all social wholes, it was a *dependent* formation, i.e. a formation which depends for its existence on the subjective articulations of its members. In the case of a sentence or melody, the job of delineating, drawing together and making sense of a Gestalt is carried out by an external observer; in the case of a social whole however the job of articulation and integration is carried out *from within*, by the members of the whole themselves. Such articulation from within will be effected to different degrees by different groups, reflecting the relative predominance of these groups within the whole in question. And such articulation will typically be a matter not of isolated acts but of entire traditions, habits, institutionally established rules and interwoven processes of training, to the extent that the whole in question is kept in being from generation to generation in a way that is not fully intelligible to any single group of members. All politics and law, if they are to be preserved in authority, presuppose internal Gestalt articulations in this sense, which manifest themselves in feelings of respect or loyalty on the part of the constituent members. Yet clearly here, too, we can distinguish relatively 'weak' and relatively 'strong' dependent Gestalten, reflecting the extent to which the relevant articulating and integrating habits are well-entrenched or merely ephemeral or imposed from above. And then, in the weakest possible case, we have a weak Gestalt structure of a quite new kind, where the members of a social whole seek openly to destroy the Gestalt in which they live.

## 11. Epilogue: Competing Theories of Austria

The myth of imminent collapse has been encouraged in almost all the more recent literature on Austrian history and ideas. The undeniable artistic and intellectual creativity of the Habsburg territories in the late 19th century and since, has been seen not as evidence of the power and fertility of the Monarchy, but as the death-throws of its terminal neurosis. The creativity of the Austrian *fin-de-siècle* – as conceived on a somewhat facile picture of the creative mind – has been ascribed to the stimulatory consequences of decay and political collapse.

In the present essay we have sought to provide some sort of counterweight to this colourful and convenient fiction. It is of course true that Austria never found a political solution to the nationalities problem (or to the problem of minority extremist groups within the various constituent nationalities). Yet – or so we should like to suggest – the collapse of the Monarchy was due just as much to external machinations, and to an unfortunate war, as it was to its own internal weaknesses. The resilience of what we might call the terminal neurosis theory should, however, give us pause. For it reminds us that there is in fact a range of possible competing theories of the mechanisms underlying the phenomenon at issue, from the *terminal neurosis theory* at one extreme to the *parallel reference system theory* at the other. While we have been concerned here only with the latter, it is worth briefly setting out a list of its principal competitors, each one of which may be held to have isolated some grain of truth in what is, after all, a massively complicated phenomenon:

(i) *The External (or Irish) Theory*.<sup>31</sup> This sees the principal motor underlying the productivity and originality of Austrian artists and intellectuals as residing in the relations between Austria and her richer and more developed German neighbour. Acton, as we have seen, recognised the incentive to progress that is afforded “by the spectacle of a more advanced people”, and this idea can be applied not merely internally, to the relations between the various parts of Austria, but also externally, to the relations between Austria and Imperial Germany – just as it could be applied also to the relations between Ireland and England or between Canada and the United States. Common to all these instances is a language shared by two contiguous and more or less friendly nations separated by differences of economic or cultural development, facilitating a relatively free movement of certain sorts of human capital from the poorer to the richer society. Crudely expressed, the external theory consists in the thesis that the comparatively rich and developed cultural life of Germany provided an incessant temptation to artists and intellectuals in Austria, who were motivated to make themselves conspicuous (precisely through innovation or originality) in order to attract bids for their services from German scientific institutions and cultural entrepreneurs.<sup>32</sup> This thesis cannot, of course, do justice to every individual case. There are, however, enough examples of prominent Austrian artists and intellectuals who did indeed work their passage westwards, sometimes in a number of successive stages,<sup>33</sup> to show that the presence and attractions of Germany did indeed shift the margin of innovation in the Hereditary Lands to a not inconsiderable extent.

(ii) *The Political Sublimation Theory*. This theory (though not under this name) has been defended most vehemently by Carl E. Schorske and his disciples in a series of brilliant works on Austrian intellectual (and political) history in recent decades.<sup>34</sup> It consists in the thesis that the members of the bourgeois liberal generation coming of age in the Austrian *fin-de-siècle*, having been thwarted in the political aspirations instilled into them by their more politically influential fathers, were constrained to turn instead to cultural or intellectual activity; they were constrained, that is to say, to turn inward, where their accumulated energies could be spent in a relatively harmless way. The attractions of a theory along these lines are evident. For to the extent that the sources of creativity can be located in the social and political sphere, the intellectual and cultural history of the Empire comes to be integrated into the more solid world of political and economic history, leading to what may be truly fruitful hypotheses in relation to the phenomena at issue.

Here again, however, the theory in question can be held at most to point to certain factors which might have shifted the margin of innovation in a certain direction. For clearly there are many individual cases of creative artists and intellectuals born within the Empire in regard to whom it would be absurd to talk of frustrated political aspirations. The theory can in addition be criticised for its tacit adoption of the somewhat questionable thesis that it is to the realm of politics that the energies of the young, if unthwarted, will be most naturally directed. Its limitations can indeed be seen already in the fact that it has a no less intuitively convincing mirror-image in what might be called the *artistic sublimation theory*, consisting in a thesis to the effect that failed artists may turn to politics as a result of their failures in the artistic sphere (a notion which can be applied particularly neatly to at least one highly conspicuous native Austrian political figure of the 20th century).

(iii) *The Common Fate (or Turkish) Theory*. For historical reasons, having to do above all with her experiences in fighting off the Turk, Austria was marked by a deliberate striving for unity among large sections of her population, and by a characteristic conservatism, by a striving for assimilation, even among some of her most creative artists. This striving for cohesion – which finds parallels in certain phenomena in present-day Israel – manifested itself most conspicuously in the political sphere, but it may have exerted a not insignificant positive influence also in the spheres of intellect and culture. This is seen in the writings of Grillparzer and Sigismund Kémény, and can be detected also later in the work of Hofmannsthal and Roth. But it is especially in relation to the work of Kraus and Schoenberg that the power of the assimilatory drive makes itself felt, albeit on a more general plane. For the creative activity of Kraus and Schoenberg presents itself always as a conscious and explicit desire to work within historically given rules, and to bring them to perfection, never in the desire to rebel against or to break away from patterns and forms inherited from the past.

(iv) *The Crude Diversity Theory*. This theory has been mentioned already above; it consists in the thesis that the sheer diversity or multiplicity of available motifs and influences is conducive to creativity, so that the creative artist comes to be identified as the fashioner of new and ever more varied *mosaics* of diverse elements. The weaknesses of this theory as a theory of Austria are evident: every major culture involves some degree of diversity, and so the theory succeeds in isolating nothing that is peculiar to the Austrian phenomenon. We do not, however, rule out the idea that in certain circumstances – one thinks of the peculiar mixing together of aesthetic elements and styles which was characteristic of French painting in the early years of this century – the theory may have some application.

Of course, no adequate historical treatment of the Austrian cultural renaissance will operate exclusively within the terms of any single one of these alternative theoretical frameworks. We do however insist that, to the extent that historians wish to reflect at all upon the mechanisms which might have given rise to widespread social changes of the sort in question, they must take such theories seriously, or develop competing theoretical frameworks of their own. And such frameworks need not be examined exclusively from the point of view of their success in accounting historically for the changes in question; they may also – as in the present paper – be considered from a wider, philosophical perspective, so that one might establish to what extent they may throw light on the nature – and social and historical conditions – of creativity in general.

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## ENDNOTES

1. See Kann 1950, vol. I, ch. 1; for a more detailed history of the term ‘Austria’ see Zöllner (1965).
2. Thus Eisenmann, in his study on the Compromise of 1867, comes to the following conclusion: “In the expression Austria-Hungary the term Austria is not put in juxtaposition to the term Hungary, though it seems to be so to all appearances; but it includes it. Austria, in the official designation of the Monarchy, means all the possessions of the House of Austria as understood in the declaration regarding the creation of the dynastic title in 1804; and Austria-Hungary does not stand for Austria and Hungary, but for Austria, whose most notable part is Hungary” (1904, p. 493). ‘Austria’, as unmarked term, therefore stands to ‘Hungary’ as ‘man’ (in ‘mankind’, ‘Neanderthal man’, etc.) stands to ‘woman’, or as ‘English’ (in ‘English literature’, ‘English empiricism’, etc.) stands to ‘Scottish’ or ‘Irish’.
3. Thus, in the penultimate year of the Empire, Karl, in his capacity as Apostolic King of Hungary, appointed a new Hungarian Minister of Justice who was of the Jewish confession, allowing him to swear his oath of office upon the Thora.
4. Eisenmann (1904), p. 2.
5. For a literary description of this loyalty to the dynasty, and of the feeling of belonging to an “Austrian world”, see Roth (1984), particularly ch. IX.



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6. It was only in 1844 that the Magyar language gained recognition over Latin as the language of administration and of the schools. Non-Magyar peoples living in the Hungarian part of the Empire, particularly the Croats, were very much concerned about what they regarded as an inexorable process of Magyarisation, and pressed for the retention of Latin as the supranational language of administration and of Parliament.

7. The 'Great German' programme of including Austria (though not Hungary) in a unified German *Reich*, which was the paramount issue at Frankfurt, was opposed by the Czechs, whose moderate leaders preferred to keep the loose Habsburg structure within which they themselves were able to strive for greater autonomy. They were joined in these efforts by the Slovaks, who in their turn had no desire to be left stranded under Magyar rule. On Palacký's letter, see also Eisenmann (1904), pp. 95ff.; Kann (1950), vol. I, pp. 175ff.

8. Palacký also strongly rejects the republican system for the Habsburg lands, arguing that it would only lead to the dismemberment of Austria in the interest of a "universal Russian Empire", an outcome which he describes as "an incalculable and unspeakable disaster, a boundless calamity". "Imagine Austria dissolved into a number of republics and republiclets – what a welcome foundation for a Russian universal monarchy!" (1874, p. 152). Significantly enough, it is to this passage that the Czech emigré novelist Milan Kundera refers in an essay about Habsburg Austria's foregone opportunity of preserving a liberal, supranational political structure in central Europe. Cf. Kundera (1984), p. 33.

9. See also Droz (1960), pp. 147f.; Kolnai (1947), pp. 648f.

10. As Kolnai wrote in his essay "Les ambiguïtés nationales" (1946): "Imperial Austria, like Switzerland, notwithstanding the numerical disproportion of their different nationalities, did not have 'minorities' because they had no ruling nation [*nation d'état*]" (p. 544). See also Kolnai (1942) pp. 291f. and, for a more general theoretical treatment of these overlapping social affiliations and allegiances, Kolnai (1981).

11. Acton goes on: "The theory of nationality, therefore, is a retrograde step in history"; indeed it "is more absurd and more criminal than the theory of socialism" (1862, p. 300). It is worth pointing out here that Acton was writing at a time when Great Britain was entirely free of restrictions on immigration.

12. Cf. also the discussion of the pluralistic liberalism of Baron József Eötvös in Nyíri (1986).

13. (1944), p. 103. See also his (1948), pp. 28f., on the incompatibility of nationalism and 'true individualism'. What Hayek calls 'false' individualism manifests itself particularly in the worshipping of "original personalities", in the "cult of the distinct and different individuality" (1948, p. 26). It is, as Hayek points out, typical of Germany, where people have been "too unwilling voluntarily to conform to traditions and conventions" and so have supposed that social order can be achieved only through the power of a strong, centralistic government – a fact which may in part explain why the idea of a supranational Austria has always been particularly anathema to the German mind.

14. The inability to understand that a distinct historical development can suffice to constitute a nation is present even amongst German historians of the present day. See e.g. Diwald (1983), esp. pp. 127, 235.

15. The yellow ochre Habsburg civic buildings are still a predominant feature of many towns, especially in the former southern regions of the Empire. The architecture of Vienna, on the other hand, is characterised by the peculiar Viennese ability to fuse contrary styles, as for example in the complex of Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and Classicist elements which is the Hofburg.

16. On the possibility of such a theory see e.g. Ehrenfels (1890), Lord (1964), and Nozick (1981), pp. 415-36. The ideas presented in the text are a simplified version of the theory put forward by Rausch in his (1966) and summarised in Smith (1986a).

17. Robert Nozick captures something of this idea when he writes: "New value arises only in wholes, in totalities. The value of a whole may be greater than the sum of the values of its parts. Let 0 be a measure of

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degree of organic unity, appropriately scaled. The value of a whole will be some function of the value of its parts, and of the degree of organic unity of that whole. The simplest function will be additive: the value of X will be the sum of the value of X's parts and the degree of organic unity of X" (1981, p. 423).

18. Assertions such as this have not been universally accepted, however. Thus the theories of art of the German romantics stressed the moments of unity, of purity, of authenticity, in a way which left no room for the factors treated here.

19. See Musil (1919), p.1031.

20. 'Reference system' corresponds, in the terminology of Gestalt theory, to what T. S. Kuhn calls 'paradigm' (see Smith 1986a, § 12.1), and much of what is said here would perhaps bear comparison with what Kuhn has to say about the character of 'normal science', e.g. in his (1962).

21. Musil continues by referring to 'the systematic weakness of a literature . . . which expresses itself in a particularly lush flourishing of originality, and this includes also that supraindividual and collective originality which has recently been more common than any other and which has, in the disguise of a 'generation' or of an '-ism', led to considerable conceptual confusion' (1931, p. 1208).

22. The view that individualism is based on "isolated or self-contained individuals, instead of starting from men whose whole nature and character is determined by their existence in society" has been flatly condemned by Hayek as "the silliest of the common misunderstandings" (Hayek 1948, p. 6). As we have seen already in n. 13 above, it is especially in Germany, where the consequences of departure from 'rational' social norms are particularly feared, that this view has found acceptance.

23. Building on the writings of Wittgenstein and of the Hungarian art historian Arnold Hauser, J. C. Nyíri has developed ideas of this sort in the direction of a general theory of creativity, though without specific reference to the Gestalt-theoretical ideas exploited here. Creativity, Nyíri argues, consists precisely in the fusion or interaction in given individuals of conflicting systems of rules, customs and disciplines, a fusion of a sort which produces something intrinsically new, without however involving the deliberate breaking of rules or the deliberate cultivation of deviant social habits (as in some of the more trivial experiments of contemporary art). As the contrast between poetry with and without constraints of rhyme and metre shows, it is by no means clear that those forms of art which are produced against the background of a smaller number of pre-established frameworks are thereby the more creative. See esp. his (1978).

24. It is not necessary that these systems be articulate, and nor is it necessary that an individual be aware of them. Michael Polanyi has reminded us "that all thought contains components of which we are subsidiarily aware in the focal content of our thinking, and that all thought dwells in its subsidiaries, as if they were parts of our body" (1966, p. x). Cf. also Hayek (1962).

25. The study of such processes is the task of what may be called cultural physiology, which sees our knowledge, and in particular our practical knowledge, not principally as a matter of the conscious following of rules but rather as a complex web of skills, habits and reflexes which, through drilling and practice, becomes part of our bodily make-up as human beings. See the remarks in Smith (1986), § 7 and (1986b), § 6.

26. It is in this organic and gradualistic nature of the Empire that Franz Werfel locates the essential difference between the supranational structure of Austria and a multinational, dynamic and open society like the United States. Thus Werfel talks of "America the seething smelting-oven, and Austria the slowly absorbing and digesting soil. One process is mechanical, the other organic" (1937, p. 17). The United States is therefore "an empire not born but made". It is a consequence of this fact that people emigrating to the United States, if they wanted to get ahead economically and socially, had to give up their national identity, and all the inhibitions associated therewith, and become 'Americans'. The "slow-building quality of the Empire" (1937, p. 40), in contrast, permitted members of all nationalities to retain their regional and indeed national ties and identities and yet consider themselves at the same time to be Austrians.

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27. Thus Hungary, for example, was up to 1918 a more or less feudal society, while industry in Austrian Silesia and in the Hereditary Lands had already approached Western European levels of achievement.

28. According to Acton, an unequal development in different parts of a state also gives rise to an “impossibility for the State to rule all by its own will” and thereby provides “the fullest security for the preservation of local customs and ancient rights.” As Acton continues: “In such a country as this, liberty would achieve its most glorious results, while centralisation and absolutism would be destructive” (1862, p. 296).

29. This is in spite of the fact that Habsburg Austria was put forward as an example of a ‘weak Gestalt’ by Carl Stumpf, mentor and *éminence grise* of the Berlin school of Gestalt psychologists. See his (1939), p. 261.

30. On the theory of ‘isolation properties’ see Rausch (1964).

31. This theory, which draws on recent work on the economics of human capital, was expounded in detail by Smith in his paper “The Production of Ideas” of 1981.

32. It is not without significance in this context that, at the turn of the century, 90% of books written by Austrians were published in Germany, and that German universities were in this period at the very height of their power and influence, enjoying a virtual monopoly in certain areas of research. It must however be remarked that the University of Vienna, too, enjoyed an eminence of its own in areas such as medicine (and indeed philosophy).

33. Consider the fate of Husserl, Mauthner, Lask, or even Stegmüller. Particularly illuminating is the case of Mahler, who, after his earliest beginnings in Bohemia, moved via Bad Hall, Laibach, Olmütz, Kassel, Prague, Leipzig, Budapest, Hamburg, and Vienna, to his final winters in New York.

34 See e.g. Schorske (1979). The theory can be detected also in §§ 9-10 of Gershon Weiler’s paper in the present volume.

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