

German Incertitudes, 1914-1945: The Stones and the Cathedral

Klemens von Klemperer



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The history of modern Germany has all too readily been seen in terms of an historical process that inevitably led to the horrors of National Socialism. As there are no certitudes in life, however, so there are none in German history. In this book, historian Klemens von Klemperer focuses on what he terms the German Incertitudes--namely, the tensions between a realistic acceptance of disenchantment with the modern world, and an insistence upon reenchantment. Exploring this tension through a critical assessment of the ideas and writings of major German thinkers, von Klemperer seeks to account for both the achievements and the failings of German thought, society, and politics as responses to the challenge of modernity in the first half of the 20th century.

In addition to individuals such as Nietzsche, Weber, Spengler, Jünger, Bonhoeffer, and Heidegger, the author considers broader movements and ideas such as the concept of Gemeinschaft and the German expressionists, all in the wider context of Western intellectual currents, Rather than belaboring presumed German deviance from the European norms, von Klemperer explores the reasons why the sense of crisis in the face of modernity was singularly acute among Germans, he traces a spectrum of reactions extending from an acceptance of modern disenchantment to the quest for reenchantment which found an extreme manifestation in National Socialism.

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