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The Cult of the Genius in Germany and Austria at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century

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In his 1918 monograph *Die Geniereligion* ("The Religion of Genius"), Edgar Zilsel, a philosopher of the history of science and a lecturer in adult education in Vienna, observed the following of his Austrian and German contemporaries:

[O]ur audience does not believe that there is anything wrong with admiring genius, in fact it seems to them to be the obvious thing to do. We do not see a problem in the notion of genius, our literature and our *zeitgeist* has completely appropriated it. There is not the slightest hint of alienation, let alone rejection. [...] Although we ourselves seem only partially aware of the extent of our admiration for genius, our notion of genius is of relevance to cultural historians; the full significance of such semi-conscious guiding concepts will only truly come to light with the benefit of time.¹

Zilsel, who was sympathetic to socialism, was concerned by what he described as "genius enthusiasm" and the "genius enthusiasts" who preached it (figure 8.1).

Part of the community of contemporary writers and intellectuals, he affirmed, had become willing victims of the cult of the individual personality and the "glory ideal," which they peddled in their works in a far from disinterested way. By declaring themselves connoisseurs of "genius" and awarding the title to specific historical figures, these writers vaunted their own importance. Zilsel mocked the pretensions of these petty "genius priests," who were in truth nothing but second-rate schoolmasters:

Here comes the modern minister of genius, a measure of merit ["Wertmaßstab"] in his hands, like a schoolmaster; anyone who can "discern" is a "genius," who gives priority to the mysteries of knowledge, a

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Geisteshelden.

Eine Sammlung von Biographien.

1. **Walther v. d. Vogelweide.** 2. Aufl. Von Prof. A. E. Schönbaum.
- 2/3. **Hölderlin. * Reuter.** 2. Aufl. Von Dr. Ad. Wilbrandt.
4. **Anzengruber.** 2. Aufl. Von Dr. Anton Bettelheim.
5. **Columbus.** Von Prof. Dr. Sophus Muge.
6. **Carlyle.** 2. Aufl. Von Prof. Dr. G. v. Schulze-Gaevernitz.
7. **Jahn.** Von Dr. F. G. Schultzeiß. **Preisgekrönt.**
8. **Shakspere.** Von Prof. Dr. Alois Brandl.
9. **Spinoza.** Von Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Volin.
- 10/11. 37/38. **Moltke,** 3 Bde. Von Oberstleutnant Dr. M. Jähns.
12. **Stein.** Von Dr. Fr. Neubauer. **Preisgekrönt.**
- 13/15. **Goethe.** Von Privatdog. Dr. Rich. M. Meyer. **Preisgekrönt.**
- 16/17. 27. **Luther. I. II, 1.** Von Prof. Dr. Arn. C. Berger.
18. **Lotta.** Von Minister Dr. Albert Schäffle.
19. **Darwin.** Von Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Freyer †.
20. **Montesquieu.** Von Prof. Dr. Alb. Sorel.
21. **Dante.** Von Pfarrer Dr. Joh. Andr. Scartazzini.
22. **Kepler. * Galilei.** Von Prof. Dr. S. Günther.
23. **Görres.** Von Prof. Dr. F. R. Seyp.
24. **Stanley.** Von Paul Reichard.
- 25/26. **Schopenhauer.** Von Konful Dr. Ed. Griesebach.
- 28/29. **Schiller.** Von Prof. Dr. Otto Harnack.
- 30/31. **Peter der Grosse.** Von Dr. A. Waliszewski.
32. **Cennyson.** Von Prof. Dr. Emil Koepfel.
33. **Mozart.** Von Prof. Dr. D. Fleischer.
- 34/35. **Lessing.** Von Privatdogent Dr. A. Borinski.
36. **Cizian.** Von Dr. Georg Gronau.
39. **H. v. Humboldt. * L. v. Buch.** Von Prof. Dr. S. Günther.

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In Vorbereitung: **Richard Wagner,** von Prof. Dr. Max Noth.

Figure 8.1 “Geistesheldenbiographien”—list of genius biographies from 1900. Robert Saitchick, *Genie und Charakter*. Shakespeare, Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Schopenhauer, Wagner (Berlin: Hofmann, 1900).

profound person [“tiefe Persönlichkeit”]; in contrast the remaining thinkers are relegated to the back seats in the philosophical classroom like mediocre pupils [“Dutzendmenschen”].²

Yet genius-enthusiasm was not only fodder for Zilsel’s ironic humor and an annoying aspect of the times, but also dangerous. The “religion-like nature”³ of the cult of genius, Zilsel asserted, fostered alienation, contempt of the masses, and the exclusion of the “Other.”⁴ Toward the end of *Die Geniereligion*, Zilsel

cautioned that “ignorance and strong prejudices” of the kind demonstrated by such contemporary admirers of genius as Houston Stewart Chamberlain would be “paid for with the happiness and blood of fellow men.”⁵ The dominance of the “notion of the genius personality and of profundity” indicated a “severe danger”⁶ for the age. Indeed, the racist, antifeminist, and anti-Semitic tendencies of the greater part of the writings of the time dealing with the question of genius can be interpreted as *one* foundational component for a range of political programs fostering violence. Radical National Socialists, among others, would seize upon these tendencies and put them into effect.

The object of Zilsel’s critical analysis—the figure of the genius—was virulently and obsessively discussed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That is the theme of this chapter, which focuses on genius research and literature, published in particular between 1890 and 1920, that conceptualized the “genius” as a controversial figure of knowledge and representation, employing the category of genius as what Zilsel described as a “semiconscious guiding concept” (“halb unbewusste Leitidee”). Although the cultural-historical discourse of genius can be traced back much earlier, the “genius” was increasingly conceived as a self-conscious object of modern epistemic interest and cultural and scientific inquiry from the middle of the nineteenth century, as the well-known work of such influential writers as Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson makes clear. Moreover, genius reflection and the research that blossomed around it was not cultivated as a single discipline, but rather found its way into diverse and quite extensive fields of knowledge and university departments, some of which were newly constituted or recently reformed at the time. These included religious studies, sociology, anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis and psychobiography, psychiatry/neurology/pathography, philosophy, literary criticism, sexual science, evolutionary theory, phrenology, craniometry, biology, and race-theory (including eugenics). In this chapter, the following questions will be traced from a constructivist and interdisciplinary perspective: what was “genius” and who earned this ennobling distinction? how was the “genius,” who was most often investigated only *post mortem*, conceptualized, represented, and interpreted? which strategic and political functions did this legitimizing heroic figure serve? and what role did the concept play with regard to the conditions of possibility and the self-image of the authors, literatures, cultures, and disciplines that negotiated its characteristics with such passion?

In responding to these questions, I will develop the thesis that invoking the abstract notion of genius had a twofold discursive and strategic function, serving the interests of those scholars and scientists who undertook genius research, while at the same time impacting the wider political and cultural sphere. On the one hand, there was a group of genius researchers who believed in the “genius” as a godlike savior, a redeemer of society, and a creator of culture. They included, among others, Hans Blüher, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Ernst Kretschmer, and Otto Weininger, and they imagined the genius invariably as white, male, and of European descent—singular, original, creative, inventive, self-taught as well as self-generating, autonomous,

and either inspired by the divine or godlike creatures themselves. Despite—or perhaps precisely because of—secularization, these authors believed in the “genius” as a redeemer and liberator of society, as Edgar Zilsel observed. Yet the characteristics attributed to genius reveal more about the visions of the authors themselves than about their putative topic of inquiry. The “genius” was imagined not just as the subject of inventive creativity—a view already common in various aesthetic perspectives around 1800—but the genius researcher now tried to figuratively blend or “bleed” into his research object.⁷ In some of the texts, the genius figure helped fragile and newly constituted or reformed academic disciplines construct their professional identity, legitimize their (often cross-disciplinary) methodologies, and reassure themselves of their own rational, intellectual, and creative powers by association with the qualities of so-called “great men of history” (“große Männer der Geschichte”), “eminences” (“Eminenzen”), “superlatives of mankind” (“Superlative der Menschheit”), “exceptional individuals” (“Ausnahmemenschen”), “intellectual leaders” (“geistige Führer”), “male heroes” (“Männerhelden”), and the like.

This is especially interesting because the “genius,” long seen as a cultic, mythic, and quasi-religious figure, had been demystified and debased in certain respects in the course of the nineteenth century by writers such as Moreau de Tours or Cesare Lombroso,⁸ who, in the light of the new medical and psychological sciences, had associated “genius” with mental instability, unworldliness, loneliness, melancholy, degeneration, and insanity. Some of the latter characteristics had, on a structural-symbolic level, a de-potentiating or feminizing effect on the imagined male gender of the “genius,” as manliness traditionally had been associated with intelligence and thereby mental stability, independence, assertiveness, and virility. The genius literature around 1900 ran counter to those sources that feminized the “genius” by combining it with degenerative decline. Instead, it re-masculinized the “genius” and reinvigorated its discursive potency as a leading figure.

On the other hand, a handful of thinkers, including Walter Benjamin, Jakob Wassermann, and Edgar Zilsel—all, not coincidentally, of Jewish heritage—described and criticized the “genius” in the context of wider socio-cultural problems, insecurities, and utopian beliefs. In their eyes, the genius knowledge of the time and the artificial “geniusification” of individuals were connected to mechanisms of exclusion and extremist ideologies of race and gender. Contemporary writing on genius, these authors observed, expounded antifeminist and anti-Semitic tendencies that from the 1900s onward merged more and more with ideologies of “Aryan” heredity and “racial hygiene” (“Rassenhygiene,” “Volks hygiene”)—for example, in the writings of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Ottokar Matura, Alfred Rosenberg, and Richard Wagner—and became increasingly entangled with intelligence research and fantasies of human breeding of the “highly gifted” of the “German Empire.” By the turn of the century, women and Jews were considered to be the “Others” in the prevailing Western genius formula, which emphasized the inherent superiority of white males.

Yet, on the whole, authors such as Benjamin, Zilsel, and Wassermann were a distinct minority. It was much more common to idolize and adore “geniuses” than to critically evaluate the rhetorical and biographical narratives related to them or to deconstruct the phenomenon of genius-admiration. Indeed, the overall atmosphere of the times was thick with “genius-fever,” which was fed by competition between multiple disciplines of knowledge, with each attempting to describe, define, interpret, and instrumentalize this miraculous figure as precisely as they could. At the same time, hundreds of biographies of “geniuses,” and high-circulation science publications on the problem of “genius,” impressed themselves on large sections of society.⁹ Most of these texts only dealt with surface matters—matters of biography and personality and *not* the genius’ achievements, artefacts, or writings. And while they alternatively admired and idealized, mystified and pathologized—resulting in varied, and sometimes contradictory, ascriptions—the overall effect of this diverse body of writing was to enhance the aura of genius and the genius figure.

The problem that the genius transcended

Apart from its specific role within the academic and intellectual constellation, the cult of the genius was a response to dramatic and wide-ranging historical changes and urgent sociocultural problems evident at the turn of the century. These included secularization and the corresponding tendency of re-sacralization amidst specters of social decline; democratization and the weakening of aristocracy; the impact of Darwinian and social Darwinian thought; the rise of male associations (“Männerbünde”);¹⁰ the so-called *Frauenfrage*, the first wave of the women’s movement and the erosion of gender as a category of knowledge; anti-Semitism; and the nationalistic question of breeding excellent offspring.¹¹ The genius figure provided a way to overcome or transcend these problems by means of what has been described as a “god-trick.”¹² That is, the genius was imagined and instrumentalized by genius-enthusiasts as a being in possession of infinite vision and omniscient perspective—a being objective and transcendent, patriarchal and authoritarian, like god. Associated symbolically with the rational, objective, neutral, and “asexual” (“Geschlechtslosigkeit”),¹³ and imagined as pure, superior, transcendent, and divine, the “genius” transcended social fissures and problems. This was true regardless of whether the genius was conceived as a self-generating hyper-individual (*sui generis* and self-made) initiating a line of descent of his own; as the “Aryan” new “son of humanity” (“Menschensohn”)¹⁴ who negates everything considered “Jewish and feminine”; a quasi-god who, by his creative work and his intelligence, surpassed corporeality and mortality; or as a model for an imagined “Aryan-Christian” charismatic leader. The “genius” in all these conceptions could be hailed as a being who towered above social problems, and who was said to be capable alone of providing blueprints for a better future. The genius figure, in short, operated conceptually as an invulnerable and transcendent player, who symbolized the desire to gain control of the trajectory of an increasingly complex society. As such, it was a secular substitute

for suppressed religious feelings and a collective fantasy of the possibility of overcoming and finding solutions to contemporary problems through creative and intellectual vision. “Genius,” in this context, incarnated the possibility of salvation, and the very word possessed a kind of mystical attraction. It served as what the philosopher of science and physician Ludwik Fleck described in the 1930s as a “thought-charm” (“eigentümlicher Denkzauber”), charged with sacramental power.¹⁵

“Genius,” as a scientific and literary-philosophical term, could not be contained by its rational-logical explanations, for the word and concept served a further symbolic function, suggesting an imagined ideal image of intellectual authority and at the same time of magic. Members of the scientific community and literary scene identified with and mirrored themselves in its self-made characteristics. The genius-word-charm (“Wortzauber”) helped, in this way, to constitute what Fleck described as a confined “thought-collective” (“Denkkollektiv”), which united participants in a particular “thought-style” (“Denkstil”), based on shared education, training, and traditions. Such thought-collectives were the product of “the circulation of ideas and social practices,” and rested on a certain unconscious conditioning of the scientists’ style of perception, thinking, and acting.¹⁶ In contrast to other “thought-collectives,”¹⁷ which had their own criteria to detect what counted as true knowledge or an exceptional idea, the genius thought-collective imagined itself as excellent, exclusive, and brilliant by virtue of its recognition of and participation in “genius.” Because the quasi-magical genius knowledge transcended disciplinary boundaries, it united theories of science, literature, and culture and bridged the gaps between different forms of knowledge. Those who succumbed to the “thought-charm” of the genius-notion were unified by a “collective mood”¹⁸ (“Kollektivstimmung,” “Stimmungskameradschaft”) that created a certain “intra-group mental solidarity” and helped to enhance the cohesion and promote the professionalization of research institutions. With Fleck, it is possible to appreciate the unconscious, subliminal messages guiding humanistic and literary practices. And this, in turn, allows us to better observe the cultish tendencies, the self-idealization, and limitations of those scholars and scientists participating in the study and worship of genius.

By referring to the “great men of history,” researchers tended to view themselves as ingenious. This was due to a process of “coloring” and transference of feelings (“Abfärben der Gefühle”)¹⁹ that had long been a part of the history of constructing the genius ideal, as Zilsel observed in 1918. Something of the “genius” seemed to rub off on those who studied and at the same time admired “genius,” taking on the shape of psychological or religious feelings like fear, respect, and awe. This phenomenon reached into the deepest layers of consciousness, manifesting itself in a particular kind of suggestive mood (“suggestive Stimmung”) that Zilsel compared invidiously to reasonable thinking:²⁰

Nothing is more opposed to this fuzzy transfer of feelings [“unscharfe Gefühlsübertragung”] than reason, which has its goals in precision, and

in the clear separation of everything that does not belong together. The “Abfärben” of feelings must thus disappear the more admiration is rationalized and replaced by value judgments. When we now want to start examining the genius ideal, we cannot allow ourselves an admiration that can “abfärben,” but will have to talk about values, that are no longer permitted to “abfärben,” and for which the artist and his work, enthusiasm and its goal are distinguished carefully from each other.²¹

As the passage intimates, those who in their own estimation best understood what “genius” was about—revealing its secrets and identifying its formulas—made pretensions to similar qualities themselves in what may be described as a process of self-invention or “self-geniusification.” In this way, researchers in the many disciplines that studied genius presented themselves as at once traditional and serious, innovative and original, free and independent, universal and at the same time compatible with particular social norms. They became “free riders” on the successful bandwagon of the “genius.” The coupling with the genius concept, in short, accelerated the social acceptance of research in the disciplines that studied it, which, in turn, gave greater credence to the political implications that attended the genius discourse.

Stellar genius: Natural metaphors

In his seminal 1957 essay, “Licht als Metapher der Wahrheit” (“Light as a Metaphor for Truth”),²² Hans Blumenberg pointed to the nexus between light metaphors and the semantics of truth in Christian and Gnostic knowledge. According to Blumenberg, the metaphor helped to give form to understanding, recasting what were originally aesthetic-sensuous perceptions as theological propositions. The move, which transformed nonconceptual (“absolute”) metaphors into consolidating *termini technici*, entailed a considerable loss of complexity, clearness, and substance. This is exactly what happened to the language of genius. The notion of genius took on a particular semantic “coloring” that opened up discursive perspectives and spaces, shedding former layers of meaning while retaining and adopting others.²³

The transformation of the concept of genius around the end of the seventeenth century, from a quality that one possessed to something one was, marked the historical turning point at which human beings began to see themselves as self-luminous, possessing a luminosity of the mind that radiated charisma and impact in the world: “[Man] becomes, himself, the principle of a structural formation that emanates from within him,” Blumenberg observed. “And by realizing himself as *sapiens*, he gains that emanative and world-moving force: self-realization becomes a condition for world-realization.”²⁴ In scientific and literary narratives from around 1900, the “genius” was associated repeatedly with metaphors from the realm of nature and cosmic space. This had the effect of naturalizing, essentializing, and ontologically verifying the particular content that the object of research, the “genius,” was supposed to embody. The “genius” was like a volcano that erupted at irregular intervals

or continually spewed forth. As the psychologist Johannes G. Thöne pointed out in the 1920s:

Geniuses can be compared to volcanoes. Just as some volcanoes are “burnt out” after one single eruption, *some geniuses also suffer a similar “burnout” after one singular achievement.* [...] Other geniuses, like more active volcanoes, continue to produce results for a second or third time, and there are even a few (such as Goethe, Beethoven, Bismarck) who *continue producing great results for most of their lives.*²⁵

The image of the volcano combines the two elements, fire and earth. Through the use of this metaphor, certain periods of achievement in the life of a “genius” and corresponding age-groups of “geniuses” can be determined and explained. Just as volcanoes become inactive, geniuses can “burn out” (“verglühen”).²⁶ By orienting “geniuses” rhetorically with nature, authors insisted on the naturalness of their power without feeling the need to explicate this proposition in further detail. The “soft” semiotics of genius metaphors and their openness to interpretation could thus be transformed into “hard” stable knowledge about the “genius” and his specific characteristics.

The amalgamation of the “genius” with unspoiled nature was further reinforced via astral metaphors, along with metaphors of light and fire. In the metaphorology of genius research, the “genius” was often a figure who revealed human longing for transcendence and who initiated a rhetorical connection to the stars. In numerous texts, the “genius” was imagined as global and universal and providing sunlight and the light of stars to humankind. Via metaphorization, the “genius” opened up an infinite and inapprehensible stellar “potential space.” The Germanophile racist writer Chamberlain pictured the “genius” as a “personality in its highest potentiality.”²⁷ Elsewhere, he employed the Promethean metaphor of a torch:

In recent years it has been discovered that in the depths of the ocean, to which the sunlight does not penetrate, there are fishes which light up this world of darkness electrically; even thus is the dark night of human knowledge lighted up by the torch of genius. Goethe lit a torch with his *Faust*, Kant another with his conception of the transcendental ideality of time and space: both were creators of great imaginative power, both were men of genius.²⁸

Similarly, from the time of the foundation of the “Reich” (*Reichsgründung*) and well into the twentieth century, Otto von Bismarck was celebrated in the German-speaking world as the “lodestar” or “guiding star” (“Leitstern”).²⁹ The association of light and “genius” was ubiquitous and long-lived. In a text from 1927, for example, the Austrian author Stefan Zweig employed astral metaphors in connection with his “heroic” view of history:

But if a genius arises in art, he outlives his times; if such a critical moment occurs in the world, it is decisive for decades and centuries. Just as the

electricity of the whole atmosphere is concentrated in the tip of a lightning rod, an immeasurable number of events then come together in the narrowest span of time (“Sternstunde der Menschheit”).

Such dramatically concentrated, such fateful moments, in which a decision that transcends its own time is compressed into a single date, a single hour, and often only a minute, are rare in the life of an individual, and rare in the course of history. I have attempted here to call to mind a few such starry moments—I have called them that because, like glowing and immutable stars, they shine through the night of transitoriness—from the most diverse times and places.³⁰

The “genius” represented a light source and a source of illumination, who made visible the hidden and unseen, while simultaneously, as Thomas Macho explains, laying claim to metaphysical enlightenment himself.³¹ Or, to invoke the work of Mitchell Ash, one can speak of the genius concept as a “metaphorical sealant” (“metaphorischer Kitt”), a kind of cement that ensures all knowledge connected and bound to him is verified, naturalized, and displayed as “uniquely thinkable” (“einzig denkmöglich”).³²

Sexualized genius: Reproductive and familial metaphors

One of the core aspects of genius discourse was the rhetorical dimension of gender and sexualization. With deep roots in the history of the genius concept, which from Classical times had been associated with notions of male begetting and birth (the very word “genius” derives from the Latin *gignere*, *generare* or *genere*, meaning to father, beget, or give birth), this dimension was closely connected to ideas of male procreation, “spiritual begetting” (“geistiges Zeugen”),³³ and the strength to engender philosophical thoughts.³⁴ Rudolf Steiner wrote in 1900: “Genius is all about creating, producing and propagating... In essence, ingenuity is intellectual procreation.”³⁵ “The artist’s works are his children; they preserve his place in posterity,” another author observed typically, presenting the “genius” as simultaneously barren and fecund.³⁶ In her 1939 doctoral thesis *Wahrsinn oder Wahnsinn des Genius?*, the medical scientist and cultural anthropologist, Helga Baisch, struck a similar note: “Ingenuity is paid for with vitality. Nature wants works from geniuses and not children... Extraordinary people... cannot produce both children and masterpieces.”³⁷

Even though in most contexts of the period around 1900, “genius” implied biological maleness by definition, “geniuses” could incarnate aspects of a mixed gender identity. Hence, “genius” seemed to provide a solution for the male crisis caused by eroding gender boundaries in the context of first-wave feminism: it was simultaneously hyper-male *and* a sexual hybrid. Thus, in a number of genius narratives concerning the question of gender—for example, in writings by Helga Baisch, Johannes Barolin, Johann Wilhelm Ritter, Jakob Wassermann, and Otto Weininger³⁸—the self-procreating, and at the same time anti-familial, “genius” was depicted on a structural level as androgynous.

In this way, “genius” was represented as an autonomous vanishing point, which transgressed and unified the binary gender poles. Frequently, “genius” was associated with such contrasting features and characteristics as “hysteria,” hermaphroditism, frigidity, hyper-virility, and impotence within the same narrative context.

Nevertheless, in numerous texts, the genius formula was constructed as purely male, in contrast to the idea of a blending of masculine and feminine parts in the single person of the “genius.” Precisely because the nexus with femininity challenged the purely masculine position of the “genius” in the two-sex model and made its gender-specific classification porous, in parallel, it was reinforced even more resolutely. (The male-formula was the basis for its separation from the “feminine” and the “Jewish,” aiming at a socio-political exclusion of real persons, women and Jews, from the community of potential “geniuses” and broader intellectual circles.) Symptomatic of the conceptual and political exclusion of the “feminine” was a rhetoric laden with reproductive and familial metaphors. Authors invoked intellectual (in-)fertility,³⁹ “mental pregnancy,” “spiritual creation,” and “spiritual children” while writing of men as “pregnant with knowledge.”⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin diagnosed these gendering metaphors as a sexualization and eroticization of the spiritual (*Vergeschlechtlichung des Geistigen*). Ironically, the excluded “feminine” enabled the “resur-/erection” of ingenuity and intellectual powers. The semantics of genius adhered to a rhetorical—and in the bisexualization of the “genius,” to some extent also a conceptual—inclusion, but a factual exclusion of the “feminine” and those associated with it. In his early writings, Benjamin acknowledged that the excluded “female,” whose very existence as a discursive marker embodying sexuality, materiality, and finiteness, served as a guarantor for the “asexuality of the spiritual” (“*Geschlechtslosigkeit des Geistigen*”).⁴¹

The symptomatic manifestation of the excluded “feminine” in language must be seen in the context of a much older repression. The etymological origins of the word *genius*, to repeat, are sexually coded, deriving from a family of words that refer to sexual or phylogenetic procreation, production, generation, creation, and the act of giving birth. The semantic connection between genus, genealogy, genesis, and genius, not surprisingly, manifests itself in gendering metaphors. In his 1916 essay “Sokrates,” Benjamin criticized this phenomenon in the course of his reinterpretation of the monologues of the Platonic Socrates in terms of the “terrible domination of sexual views in the spiritual.”⁴² Benjamin read Socrates against the grain and emphasized—instead of the maieutic talents that were traditionally associated with this character—his male “know-it-all” attitude that, according to Benjamin, presented itself as an “erection of knowledge”⁴³ (“*Erektion des Wissens*”) and left no space for spiritual “conception” (*geistiges “Empfangen”*). Benjamin used the “genius” as a figure in order to criticize gendered discourse and culture more broadly. He reformulated the commonly male-coded concept of genius (associated with penetration, procreation, and power) by stressing its feminine reproductive attributes such as receptivity, passivity, and silence. “Just

as immaculate conception is for the woman, the rapturous notion of purity, so conception without pregnancy is most profoundly the spiritual mark of the male genius.⁴⁴ Even if Benjamin substituted one gesture of sexualization with another—by speaking of an “erection of knowledge” in reference to Socrates’ methods of interrogating his partners in dialogue—he succeeded in rewriting the former genius conception by feminizing it and repressing the male dogma.

The religion of genius

With Friedrich Nietzsche, Blumenberg, and René Girard, one can argue that the gradual disappearance of god and the divine in a secularized modernity prompted, in turn, a heightened need for religion.⁴⁵ In Blumenberg’s eyes, secularization meant a “reassignment (*Umbesetzung*) of a position that had become vacant, but could not be eliminated as such.”⁴⁶ Sacred elements in a community that now understood itself as secularized were no longer interpreted as signs of continuity and certainty but were given “reassigned functions” in a system of meaning (“umbesetzte Systemfunktionen”) in the “process of epochal change” (“Prozeß des Epochenwandels”).⁴⁷ At the same time, allegedly secular discussions still often referred to Christian or other religious concepts, such as angels, demigods, and religiously inspired leaders. And so the already well-established symbolic and rhetorical linkage of the concept of genius to religious metaphor and imagery was revitalized and given new energy. The genius figure was described in a range of metaphors that touched on different aspects of the divine, ranging from images of Biblical salvation to visions of apocalypse. Scientific, belletristic, and biographical writings adopted the rhetoric of the sacred; and in an era of apparent godlessness, exceptional historical personalities were re-sacralized as secular apostles, prophets, and saints.

Part of the religious potential of the “genius,” as one could derive from Blumenberg, is to aggrandize the re-sacralization of the profane. Secular religions practiced in scientific and literary arenas—such as the religion of genius—borrowed and transmuted central elements of monotheistic religions of the book, such as the longing for salvation and redemption, and the desire for life after death. The “genius” was addressed as a godlike being, a demiurge, or Christlike figure who, at the same time, labored in the pursuit of modern science and knowledge.

The creation of new gods to serve as descendants of more traditional gods and religious figures, or as replacements for aristocratic leaders, was criticized by Hirsch and Zilsel in their respective publications, *Die Genesis des Ruhmes* (1914) and *Die Geniereligion* (1918), which appeared one after the other immediately before and after World War I.⁴⁸ They are two of the most sensitive, skeptical, and critical responses to the exclusive notion of “genius” and genius-admiration written in the early twentieth century. With slightly differing tools and terms, their analyses referred to the sociological, empirical, and cultural-historical aspects of the cult of personality, for

which Zinsel coined the term “Geniereligion.”⁴⁹ Allegedly scholarly examinations and biographical descriptions of the “genius,” he argued, explicitly and implicitly referred to religious and metaphysical categories. For example, the genius literature repeatedly alluded to the fraternization of dead “geniuses,” who in the afterlife met in a celestial community,⁵⁰ linked only by the posthumously conferred identification of “genius.” Frequently, these were men who had gone unrecognized and underappreciated in life, working in loneliness and sacrifice, yet who served in death as paragons of earthly existence. “After all,” Zinsel declared, “posterity does not recognize an already existing significance but first *creates* it itself.”⁵¹ He added that “[t] here is a certain connection between the irrational genius-cult’s belief in posterity and the rational and enlightened idea of progress: both interpret progress in time as an increase in value; one has the impression that the passage of time enriches the culture and amends the verdict on the deceased.”⁵² And he was insightful about the process by which fame—a sort of secular canonization—was manufactured retrospectively to serve the uses of the present:

In the genesis of posthumous fame [...] numerous, totally accidental circumstances play a significant role, including serendipity, influential benefactors and enthusiastic disciples. [...] The personal idiosyncrasies, artistic and philosophical qualities of the famous and influential dead are the focus of posterity; they are mentioned in numerous texts, yet at the same time transformed and reinterpreted or distorted depending on the disposition of posterity.⁵³

According to Zinsel, the discursive existence of the “genius” functioned on the basis of religion-dogmatic conditions and the postulated belief, admiration, and enthusiasm of the idolizing group. Zinsel described the “Geniereligion” as a response to de-sacralizing trends, as at once a conscious and unconscious (textual-)strategy, created mostly by male scholars and researchers, to justify anti-egalitarian politics and metaphysics. Zinsel was opposed to the latter, favoring principles of rationality, practicality, and objectivity. Yet in some ways these same principles prevented him from grasping the typical characteristics of the cult of the genius: its sentimentality and subjectivity as well as the need of its followers to evaluate (and give value to) the surrounding world (“*Wertungsbedürfnis*”).⁵⁴

Hirsch and Zinsel, just like successors such as Wilhelm Lange-Eichbaum and Axel Gehring, treated the deification of historical personalities as a serious sociocultural and pedagogical problem of great political relevance. The cultural, political, and literary instrumentalization of the cult of genius, they believed, was irrational and dangerous. In their opinion, human beings relinquished their agency in surrendering themselves to genius admiration, lowered their self-esteem, and relegated themselves to serving as mere reflections of the genius’ glory.

Collective genius: Race and gender

Increasingly in the 1920s and 1930s, certain aspects of the genius formula merged with the racist and bio-political imperatives of social exclusion and control, including demarcations based on classification and typification. In the first part of his 1903 monograph *Geschlecht und Charakter (Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles)*,⁵⁵ Otto Weininger assumed that every human being, male or female, was born as a “bisexual” (potentially with parts from both sexes). In this way did he seem to soften the strictly polar biological matrix of the two-sex model and transform it into a model of “intermediate forms” (“Zwischenformen”). However, he cast the “feminine” and the “masculine” into the “corset” of ideal principles (via abstraction, he immunized himself against objections in terms of the real-politic “game of the sexes”), and only the “male” was granted a positive image. In the second part of his book, moreover, Weininger revised his only ostensibly progressive idea on the bisexual nature of the sexes, referring to psychological and characterological criteria in order to determine who was “male” and who was “female.” In his misogynistic investigation, the “feminine” merged on the symbolic level with the “Jewish” and both were harshly discredited.

Weininger’s cult of the (male) genius was born on the back of others, namely, women and Jews, whom he deemed representative of the whole “irreligious saeculum” and charged with a deficit in belief. Both were placed at the bottom of Weininger’s schematic pyramid that was built to give orientation regarding superiors and inferiors in society. At its top, Weininger located Jesus of Nazareth, who in narrative terms had been depicted as a “genius” in numerous biographies of the time.⁵⁶ Weininger saw in Jesus an ideal individual, who had progressed several steps up the pyramid scale and who succeeded in overcoming his own Jewishness in order to become the independent founder of a religion (“Religionsstifter”). “Metaphysically, the only purpose of the Jewish character is to serve as a pedestal for the founder of a religion.”⁵⁷ The latter represented a special kind of being who, in Weininger’s genius-metaphysics, even transcended the category of the ordinary “genius.”

[T]he founder of a religion is the greatest genius. He has achieved what the most profound thinkers of humankind have only presented as a possibility, with hesitation, in order to preserve their ethical outlook and to avoid having to abandon the *freedom of choice: the complete rebirth of the human being*, his “regeneration,” the total reversal of the will.⁵⁸

Elsewhere, Weininger employs a light metaphor in reference to the “founder of a religion”: “He ascends from the night to the light, and his most ghastly horror is that of the night in which he has so far lived blindly and comfortably.”⁵⁹

In addition, Weininger projected the genius-figure onto a collective image of a “new humankind” (“neue Menschheit”) of defeminized, desexualized, and disembodied men, in which not only the individual but also the whole nation should evolve into an extraordinary collective subject, a great collective “genius.” Similarly, in the wider political arena, the vision of the male “Aryan-Christian” genius was not limited to single individuals. From at least the time of the publication of Chamberlain’s 1898/99 monograph *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (*The Foundation of the Nineteenth Century*) and Weininger’s *Geschlecht und Charakter* (1903), genius discourse was bound up with fantasies of human breeding, which became more and more relevant for the conceptualization of the German collective body. Even though this ran contrary to its popular contemporary encoding, the genius formula, originally based on singularity, rarity, and exclusiveness, was gradually applied to the ideal of an “Aryan” body of the German people (“Volkskörper”) that, in turn, ought to be held up by singular “geniuses.” According to Chamberlain, the “right” race, namely the “Aryan,” could transform a “man of pure origin” (“edelgezüchteter Mensch”) into a “genius” who surmounted the whole of humankind.⁶⁰

Race lifts a man above himself: it endows him with extraordinary—I might almost say supernatural—powers, so entirely does it distinguish him from the individual who springs from the chaotic jumble of peoples drawn from all parts of the world: and should this man of pure origin be perchance gifted above his fellows, then the fact of Race strengthens and elevates him on every hand, and he becomes a genius towering over the rest of mankind, [...] because he soars heavenward like some strong and stately tree, nourished by thousands and thousands of roots—no solitary individual, but the living sum of untold souls striving for the same goal.⁶¹

The chemist and Nobel laureate Wilhelm Ostwald discussed the problem of scientific creativity in his 1909 study of geniuses in the sciences, *Große Männer*. He asked how “geniuses” could be bred and cultivated, and how parents could be preconditioned to be able “to procreate a genius.” Universities should serve as “breeding institutions” (“Züchtungsanstalten”) for geniuses to come.⁶²

Such literature urged that particularly valuable individuals—those with a potential for “genius”—should be invested in for the benefit of the community. The idea of promoting highly talented German offspring, by means of selecting gifted young people to breed “geniuses,” found its expression in texts like Albert Reibmayr’s *Die Entwicklungsgeschichte des Talentes und Genies* (1908), Flügge’s *Rassenhygiene und Sexualethik* (1924), Kretschmer’s *Geniale Menschen* (1929), and Matura’s *Das Deutsche Genie* (1941).⁶³ Invoking the intellectual potency or capacity of unborn children would protect society from the decay it feared. Evident in this literature was a major fear of pathological anomalies and concerns about the extinction of “German geniuses.”⁶⁴

Theorists were fascinated by the prospect of racial- and social-hygienic programming, which culminated in the chimera of a race of genius, predicated on the demographic control of “racial mixing.” And though some authors continued to subscribe to the nineteenth-century view that individual genius was a form of pathology—a view evident in Flügge’s writings, among others—the “genius” could also represent the idea of a healthy, “Aryan” creative German people (“Volk”). The “genius” descended from its pantheon to serve, in German educational establishments, as a model of normality. The spiritual fertility that was named “genius” would protect the German nation from disease and any other dysfunction.

This newly inflamed striving for genius and ingenuity lent itself well to a fascist human armaments program that was optimized in terms of racial heredity (“Reinrassigkeit”). In alignment with National Socialism, moreover, genius discourse fused with the *Führer*-principle, criticized so incisively by Max Weber in his writings on “charismatic authority” (“charismatische Herrschaft”). The sociologist Theodor Geiger analyzed this emphatic genius discourse in his “*Führer und Genie*” (“*Führer and Genius*”) of 1926–1927 as a response to the scientific objectivation of the world.⁶⁵ The public cherished personalities whose history and achievements were structured by popular myths and legends, not reason and science. They did not want to be led *by* the great man but *to* the great man.⁶⁶ Genius concepts in the Weimar Republic were conducive to the pursuit of “self-incapacitation,”⁶⁷ ceding power to political authorities and “genius leaders.”

At the same time that the exceptional “genius” was exalted, the so-called normal humans (“Normalmenschen,” “Menschen der Mitte”) were devalued.⁶⁸ The categories of the “Jewish” and “feminine” counted as “non-genius,” and the genius discourse helped to present this as a natural fact. Alfred Rosenberg, who adopted Chamberlain’s concept of the dominance of the “Nordic-Atlantic race” over the “Jewish-Semitic” peoples, was convinced that Jews were not able to create valuable artistic artefacts or to found a state. He was interested in creating a “pure race” (“reine Rasse”) that would be superior, “folkish” (“*völkisch*”), healthy, and culturally pristine. Rosenberg associated the idea of a genius German people with the support of talents and “great men,” while extinguishing everything identifiable as “Jewish.” The NSDAP-party platform, published in 1920, was edited and introduced by Rosenberg in this 1943 version:

Great men are the most valuable asset of the “Volk” or nation. When such talents are unable to flourish, it shows that conditions are extremely unfavorable [volksfeindlichsten] (unless the nation is totally incapable of producing great men). No nation can do without its leading minds [führende *völkische* Intelligenz] without ceasing to exist as a “Volk.” Such men are the bloom of the nation, the [...] embodiment of what is called the soul of the people. Nurturing this mental power [geistigen Energien] should be a self-evident duty of the state. [H]owever, certain conditions need to be in place to make this development possible. After the termination of the

domestic political battle, the complete elimination of the Jewish elements in all cultural institutions, schools, universities, academies etc. needs to be demanded. [...] The German state will support the advancement of intellectual powers and character attributes in every way possible [...] insofar as they are healthy.⁶⁹

Under National Socialism, talent could only be located in “non-Jewish” males, who should strive to become “great men” or “geniuses” if possible, furthering folkish intelligence (“völkische Intelligenz”) and the “German renaissance” (“deutsche Wiedergeburt”).⁷⁰

Conclusion

As a project of knowledge and object of inquiry around the turn of the twentieth century, the “genius” was impossible to complete, for the category was not bounded by its own characteristics; the “genius” was never a discrete figure. Rather, “genius” inserted itself into the formation of late modernity as a complex phenomenon of overlapping processes, such as the differentiation and profiling of academic disciplines, and the interdependence of (pseudo-) religion, culture, science, power, and politics. This chapter has focused on the question of why researchers from various disciplinary perspectives, as well as nonacademic researchers, writers, and, intellectuals of the period, debated the question of genius in long and elaborate texts. Why, in short, was “genius” a favorite theme? The answer is as broad as it is intricate. The “genius” was an important figure of reference not only on the sociocultural level but also on the scientific level. Genius served to legitimize the thought, intelligence, and *esprit* of authors who gave it scholarly and scientific significance, while helping to build up certain academic disciplines and research institutions in the way that a figurehead does. Those undertaking new forms of research and investigation employed genius discourse as a means to reassure themselves of their own intellectual prowess and creative capacities. The genius figure was a device used to guard against institutional insecurities that accompanied disciplines and their researchers in the process of self-construction.

The epistemological characteristic of the genius theme was that the “genius” as an object of empirical research could not be accessed directly, but only in terms of the genius’ *œuvre*, (auto-) biographies, letters and personal testimonies, photographs, and the like. This was due to the fact that, in most cases, fame was a *posthumous* phenomenon and the incidence of “genius” only occurred rarely. Therefore, genius research worked most often with dead “geniuses,” who had lived their lives in the past. Individual researchers worshipped their own favorite “ensemble of geniuses.” “Genius” was an abstract term, a virtual and theoretical invention, whose existence, characteristics, and behavior were assumed hypothetically in order to explain certain extraordinary empirical observations or to indulge wishful thinking. In other words, the “genius” was resurrected and brought back to life in the

cultural-historical present, created or revitalized by writing and talking about him. Dead “geniuses” were animated, for example, through multiple biographies, which transformed them into living memories promising revelation and truth.

The genius figure occupied what was virtually a magic or cultic point in a relationship of tension between modernization, secularization, formal rationalization, cultural differentiation, and humanistic and literary profiling. Each new context of knowledge or appropriation of genius discourse resulted in another metamorphosis of the genius figure, who could appear as a dignified, celebrated, glorified, and admired super-individual, but who could also go unrecognized, misjudged, or despised. As a bisexual or pathological figure, the “genius” embodied the “Other” of science, while simultaneously confirming its maleness, objectivity, independence, purity, asexuality, and transcendence. Wishes, myths, and ideals, along with fantasies and fears were anthropomorphized in the “genius.”

The popularization and legitimation of the genius formula had powerful political effects, serving to justify and facilitate strategies of exclusion aimed particularly at women and Jews, while enhancing the prospect of rule by extraordinary or charismatic authority. As such, the genius discourse of the early twentieth century must be analyzed as a manipulative and ideological tool of power and a catalyst for growing racial-political power structures in the context of German and Austrian fascist tendencies. It simultaneously reflected the frictions between an older literary-aesthetic (romantic) discourse of genius, national myths, fantasies of universalization, the constitution of new scientific and cultural knowledge, and the attempt to guide the “higher” development of human civilization through population policy. This may have increased the production of knowledge around the question of genius and enabled intellectual and cultural self-affirmation, but it also raised the danger of hubris, political asymmetries, and hastened what Zilsel described 96 years ago as society’s “delivery” or “discharge into inhumanity” (Entladung in “Unmenschlichkeit”).⁷¹

Notes

1. Edgar Zilsel, *Die Geniereligion. Ein kritischer Versuch über das moderne Persönlichkeitsideal, mit einer historischen Begründung*, ed. and intro. Johann Dvořák (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990 [1918]), 51–53. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the German are my own.
2. Edgar Zilsel, *Die Entstehung des Geniebegriffes. Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Antike und des Frühkapitalismus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1926), 232.
3. Zilsel, *Die Geniereligion*, 53.
4. *Ibid.*, 51.
5. *Ibid.*, 233.
6. *Ibid.*
7. The cult of the genius in the early twentieth century differs from the well-known genius aesthetics of the *Sturm-und-Drang* period and the Romantic era of the early 1800s. See Ina Schabert, ed., *Autorschaft. Genus und Genie in der Zeit um 1800* (Berlin: Schmidt, 1994); Günter Peters, *Der zerrissene Engel. Genieästhetik und literarische Selbstdarstellung im*

- achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1982 [1981]); Christina Juliane Fleck, *Genie und Wahrheit. Der Geniegedanke im Sturm und Drang* (Marburg: Tectum, 2006). The romantic universal genius ["Universalgenie"] around 1800, in literature, poetics and philosophy was associated with such keywords as nature, the mystical, spirituality, sovereignty, authorship, autonomy, obsession, emotion, imagination, individuality, sensitivity, and androgyny.
8. Cesare Lombroso, *Genio et follia. Prelezione ai corsi di antropologia e clinica psichiatrica presso la R. Università di Pavia* (Milano: Tip. e Libreria di Giuseppe Chiusi, 1864); Cesare Lombroso, "Genius and Degeneration," *Psychological Review* 2, no. 3 (1895 [1894]): 288–90; Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours, *La Psychologie morbide dans ses rapports avec la philosophie de l'histoire, ou De l'influence des névropathies sur le dynamisme intellectuel* (Paris: Victor Masson, 1859).
 9. Central writings of the genius research of the era that enjoyed an extremely high circulation include Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter. Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung* (Munich: Matthes & Seitz, 1997 [1903]) [Rep., 1st edition: Vienna: Braumüller. K. u. K. Hof- und Universitäts-Buchhändler]; Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Jubiläumsausgabe (Munich, 1940 [1898]); Ernst Kretschmer, *Geniale Menschen. Mit einer Portraitsammlung* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1931 [1929]).
 10. Hans Blüher, *Die deutsche Wandervogelbewegung als erotisches Phänomen. Ein Beitrag zur Erkenntnis der sexuellen Inversion* (Berlin-Tempelhof: Weise, 1912). Cf. Julia Barbara Köhne, *Geniekult in Geisteswissenschaften und Literaturen um 1900 und seine filmischen Adaptionen* (Vienna/Cologne/Weimar: Böhlau, 2014), esp. ch. 2, sect. 1: "Religiosität und Genie bei Hans Blüher," 134–86.
 11. I treat each of these themes in detail in Köhne, *Geniekult*, esp. 361–400.
 12. Donna Haraway has coined the term "god-trick" in another context to describe the illusion of infinite vision, of an objective-transcendent perspective that claims truth in the sciences, a patriarchal-authoritarian, hierarchical point of view when looking at research objects, which she describes as "seeing everything from nowhere." See Donna Haraway, "The Persistence of Vision," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 2002; 2nd edition), 678–84, here 678.
 13. Walter Benjamin, "Socrates" [1916], in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1: 1913–1926, *Walter Benjamin*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press 2002 [1996]), 52–54, here 53.
 14. Hans Blüher, *Die Aristie des Jesus von Nazareth. Philosophische Grundlegung der Lehre und der Erscheinung Christi* (Prien: Kampmann & Schnabel, 1922 [1921]), 80.
 15. Ludwik Fleck, "The Problem of Epistemology" [1936], in *Cognition and Fact. Materials on Ludwik Fleck*, ed. Robert S. Cohen and Thomas Schnelle (Dordrecht, Boston et al.: D. Reidel Publishing, 1986), 79–112, here 99–100, see also 80, 81: "We lack the possibility of formulating the intellectual personality of old thinkers: in the history textbooks they are geniuses, but when reading their own works we often find primitive thinking, unsettled views and naive theories."
 16. Cf. also Sylwia Werner and Claus Zittel, "Einleitung: Denkstile und Tatsachen," in Ludwik Fleck, *Denkstile und Tatsachen. Gesammelte Schriften und Zeugnisse*, ed. Sylwia Werner and Claus Zittel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2011), 9–38, here 18–19.
 17. Fleck: "The Problem of Epistemology," 81: "What truth (or 'lofty truth') is for one of them, is a 'base invention' (or naive illusion) for the other."
 18. Fleck, "The Problem of Epistemology," 89, 101: "The force which maintains the collective and unites its members is derived from the community of the collective mood. This mood produces the readiness for an identically directed perception, evaluation and use of what is perceived, i.e. a common thought-style."
 19. Zilsel, *Die Geniereligion*, 106.
 20. *Ibid.*, 105, 107.
 21. *Ibid.*, 107.
 22. Hans Blumenberg, "Light as a Metaphor for Truth: At the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation," in *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, ed.

- David Michael Levin; trans. Joel Anderson (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), 30–62.
23. Cf. Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997 [1960]).
 24. Blumenberg, "Light as a Metaphor for Truth," 51.
 25. Johannes G. Thöne, *Menschen, wie sie sind. Versuch einer modernen Charakterkunde* (Hamburg: Alster, 1925), 151–52.
 26. Alexander Bartl, "Vom Dienstmann zum Popstar. Zur Darstellung Mozarts bei Karl Hartl und Milos Forman," in *Genie und Leidenschaft. Künstlerleben im Film*, ed. Jürgen Felix (St. Augustin: Gardez!, 2000), 129.
 27. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols., trans. John Lees (New York: John Lane, 1912) [*Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 1898/9], II, 434.
 28. *Ibid.*, I, xc.
 29. Hans Schleier, "Überlegungen zur historischen Biographie um die Jahrhundertwende in Deutschland," in *Historiographieggeschichte als Methodologiegeschichte. Zum 80. Geburtstag von Ernst Engelberg*, ed. Wolfgang Küttler and Karl-Heinz Noack (Berlin: Akademie, 1991), 81–87, here 81.
 30. Stefan Zweig, *Decisive Moments in History: Twelve Historical Miniatures*, trans. Lowell A. Bangerter (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1999), 5–6.
 31. Thomas Macho, *Vorbilder* (Munich: Fink, 2011), 213–14, 223.
 32. Mitchell G. Ash, "Die Wissenschaften in der Geschichte der Moderne." Antrittsvorlesung, Vienna, April 2, 1998, in *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 10 (1999): 105–29, here 113.
 33. Ludwig Flüge, *Rassenhygiene und Sexualethik. Psychoanalyse und hysterophiles Genie—Das Interesse des Staats an der Sexualethik—Rassenbiologie und Sport* (Berlin: Deutsches Literarisches Institut, 1924), 17; Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter*, 423.
 34. Concerning the cultural-historical linkage between biological procreation and intellectual creation, see Christian Begemann and David E. Wellbery, ed., *Kunst—Zeugung—Geburt. Theorien und Metaphern ästhetischer Produktion in der Neuzeit* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2003).
 35. Rudolf Steiner, "Der geniale Mensch," *Magazin für Literatur* 69, no. 19–20 (May 12 and 19, 1900): 422–32.
 36. Georg Lomer, "Vom Doppelgeschlecht des künstlerischen Menschen," in *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Homosexualität* XIII(4), ed. Magnus Hirschfeld (Leipzig: Max Spohr, 1913), 378–506, here 484–85 [first published in *Gegenwart*, January 8, 1912].
 37. Helga Baisch, *Wahrsinn oder Wahnsinn des Genius? Sinn und Grenzen der pathographischen und psychographischen Methodik in der Anthropologie des Genius* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius, 1939), 47, 49.
 38. Cf. for example: Johannes C. Barolin, *Inspiration und Genialität* (Vienna and Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller and Universitäts-Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1927), 22, 11; Jakob Wassermann, *Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude* (Munich: dtv, 1994 [1921]), 64; Johann Wilhelm Ritter, ed., *Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers*. Re-edited by Friedrich von der Leyen (Leipzig: Insel, 1946 [1810]), fragment 495, 55; Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, ed. Daniel Steuer with Laura Marcus; trans. Ladislaus Löb (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005), 199: "Earthly fatherhood is as deficient in value as motherhood. It is immoral [...]"; Jakob Wassermann, *Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude* (Munich: dtv, 1994 [1921]), 64.
 39. Kretschmer, *Geniale Menschen*, 111.
 40. Benjamin, "Socrates," 53.
 41. *Ibid.*: "In a society of males, there would be no genius; genius lives through the existence of the feminine. It is true: the existence of the feminine guarantees the asexuality of the spiritual in the world [...W]herever this knowledge concerning the feminine prevails in the world, that which belongs to genius is born. [...] How the mere exist-

- ence of the female guarantees the asexuality of the spiritual remains the greatest secret.”
42. Benjamin, “Socrates,” 54.
 43. *Ibid.*, 53.
 44. *Ibid.*
 45. Friedrich Nietzsche, “125. Aphorismus: Der tolle Mensch,” in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: de Gruyter, 1999 [1882]), 481ff; René Girard, “The Founding Murder in the Philosophy of Nietzsche,” in *Violence and Truth. On the Work of René Girard*, ed. Paul Dumouchel; trans. Mark R. Anspach (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988 [1985]), 227–46.
 46. Hans Blumenberg, “‘Säkularisation.’ Kritik einer Kategorie historischer Illegitimität,” in *Die Philosophie und die Frage nach dem Fortschritt*, ed. Franz Wiedmann and Helmut Kuhn (Munich: Pustet, 1964 [1962]), 240–65, here 241.
 47. Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988 [1974]), 88.
 48. Julian Hirsch, *Die Genesis des Ruhmes. Ein Beitrag zur Methodenlehre der Geschichte* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1914). See also Zilsel, *Die Entstehung des Geniebegriffes*.
 49. Cf. Darrin M. McMahon, *Divine Fury: A History of Genius* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 189–227.
 50. Zilsel, *Die Entstehung des Geniebegriffes*, 83–92.
 51. Zilsel, *Die Geniereligion*, 74.
 52. *Ibid.*, 70, 72.
 53. *Ibid.*, 75.
 54. *Ibid.*, 195.
 55. Weininger, *Sex and Character*.
 56. Cf. Köhne, *Geniekult*, ch. 1: “Biographisieren: Genie—Leben—Schreiben,” 58–113.
 57. Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 299.
 58. *Ibid.*, 297.
 59. *Ibid.*, 421.
 60. Jochen Schmidt, *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens in der deutschen Literatur, Philosophie und Politik 1750–1945*, vol. 2: *Von der Romantik bis zum Ende des Dritten Reiches* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985 [2. Auflage 1988, 3. verbesserte Auflage 2004]), 213–15, 225. Cf. Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 320 or: Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, 269.
 61. Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, 269.
 62. Wilhelm Ostwald, *Große Männer. Studien zur Biologie des Geistes* (Leipzig: Akademische, 1909), 324, 412–15.
 63. Albert Reibmayr, *Die Entwicklungsgeschichte des Talentes und Genies* (München: J. F. Lehmann, 1908).
 64. Ottokar Matura, *Das Deutsche Genie. Neue grundlegende Forschungsergebnisse über Zahl, Vorkommen und Artenreichtum genialer Menschen im völkischen Staat* (Vienna: Österreichischer Landesverlag, 1941).
 65. Theodor Geiger, “Führer und Genie,” *Kölner Vierteljahreshefte für Sozialwissenschaften* 6 (1926/27): 232–47.
 66. *Ibid.*, 244.
 67. Schmidt, *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens*, vol. 2, 195–198.
 68. In the following passage of Fleck’s “The Problem of Epistemology,” 103, he describes the phenomenon of contrasting the crowd with the élite (or the genius, one might add): “[I]n those communities in which the position of the crowd is weaker than that of the élite, the latter tends to maintain distance and becomes isolated. It stresses the supranatural origin of the ideas it represents, and its significance requires obedience and docility. The criterion of truth and acceptance is found in some single master, often a mythical one. In such communities, ceremonials and dogma develop. They are more or less precisely limited and conservative: their ideal lies in the past [...] Examples of such a community are the majority of religious communities.”

69. Alfred Rosenberg, ed. and intro., *Das Parteiprogramm. Wesen, Grundsätze und Ziele der NSDAP* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1943; 25th edition), 34. By 1943, the program was already in its 25th edition, and had been printed over a million times. The word "Volk" specifically refers to the German interpretation of *Volk* from the Völkish movement, with both its romantic focus on national identity and folklore and its stress on the "unpolluted race."
70. Ernst Piper, *Alfred Rosenberg. Hitlers Chefideologe* (Munich: Blessing, 2005), esp. 179–212, 202.
71. Zilsel, *Die Geniereligion*, 233.