CHAPTER 3

A case study of emotion in culture: German *Angst*

1 "Angst" as a peculiarly German concept

"Angst" is a peculiarly German concept. The fact that this word has been borrowed and is used in English for a different range of situations, highlights the *sui generis* meaning of the German *Angst*. Consider, for example, the following sentence from an English novel: "community was replaced by the fleeting, passing contacts of city life; people came into the university, and disappeared; psychiatric social workers were appointed, to lead them through the recesses of their angst" (Bradbury 1975: 64). As this example illustrates, *angst* in English suggests an existential condition which seems to have to do with a long-term state of deep-seated anxiety and alienation rather than with what is normally called *fear*. The German word closest to the English *fear* is not *Angst* but *Furcht*; and it is noteworthy that it was not *Furcht*, but *Angst*, with its very distinct semantics and its great salience in German culture, that was felt to be needed as a useful loan word.

As is often the case with loan words, however, the English word *angst* does not mean exactly the same as its German source, but reflects those aspects of the meaning of the German *Angst* which are particularly striking from an Anglo point of view: its indeterminacy and its "existential nature". In German, one can speak of "Existenzangst" (cf. e.g. Jaeger 1971: 26) or of the "existentielle Angst" (cf. e.g. Nuss 1993: 189) and "existentielle Ängste" (plural; see e.g. *Langenscheidt's Großwörterbuch* 1993: 308). In English, the loan word *angst* seems to have absorbed the meaning of these collocations, and seems to refer inherently to an "existential *Angst*" ("existentielle Angst") rather than to *Angst* as such. English *angst* reflects the links between the German *Angst* in general and existential insecurities and concerns – links extensively explored by German philosophers, and in particular, by Martin Heidegger.

In David Lodge's novel *Therapy* (1996: 43) the following dialogue takes place:

> "Cheers, darling. How's the knee?"
> I told her it had given me one bad twinge today, in the train.

> "And how's the Angst?"
> "What's that?"
> "Oh, come, sweetheart! Don't pretend you don't know what Angst is. German for anxiety. Or is it anguish?"
> "Don't ask me," I said. "You know I'm hopeless at languages."

Later on, the hero is reminded of this dialogue and of the question "How's the Angst?" and he looks the word up (pp. 63–9).

> I was slightly surprised to find it in my English dictionary: 1. *An acute but unspecific sense of anxiety or remorse.* 2. (*In Existentialist philosophy*) *the dread caused by man's awareness that his future is not determined, but must be freely chosen.* I didn't fully understand the second definition – philosophy is one of the bigger blank spots in my education. But I felt a little shiver of recognition at the word "dread". It sounds more like what I suffer than "anxiety". Anxiety sounds trivial, somehow. You can feel anxious about catching a train, or missing the post. I suppose that's why we've borrowed the German word. *Angst* has a sombre resonance to it, and you make a kind of grimace of pain as you pronounce it.

Let us begin our exploration of the German *Angst* by comparing the use of *Angst* and *Furcht*. In German speech, *Angst*, in contrast to *Furcht*, is a very common word. According to a frequency dictionary of spoken German (Ruoff, 1981), *Angst* occurs 52 times in a corpus of half a million running words, whereas the verb *(sich) fürchten* occurs only 4 times, and the noun *Furcht* does not occur at all.

The main semantic difference between *Angst* and *Furcht* has undoubtedly to do with the basic "indeterminacy" of *Angst*, reflected in the fact that one can say *Ich habe Angst*, "I have *Angst*", without having to specify the reasons for that *Angst*, whereas one cannot normally say *Ich fürchte mich* (roughly "I am afraid") without specifying what one is afraid of. In English the sentence *I am afraid*, without a complement, is not unacceptable, but it sounds elliptical, and it invites the question "What are you afraid of?" But the German sentence *Ich habe Angst* does not sound elliptical at all, rather like the English sentence *I am depressed*. Of course a person's depression has some reasons, but the sentence *I am depressed* is perfectly self-contained semantically, without any further expansion.

Angst, one can say, is a "state", like depression, and the compound word *Angstzustand*, "a state of Angst", is commonly listed in German dictionaries. *Fear*, on the other hand (or being *afraid*), is not a "state", it is either a feeling, or a disposition to a feeling, linked with a thought about someone or something.

According to Bernard Nuss (1993: 193) a state of "Angst" was widespread in Germany in the seventies: "It was an epoch when millions of

Germans would say simply "Ich habe Angst", without even trying to specify the nature and cause of this *Angst*."[1]

According to Nuss, various specific justifications for that widely prevailing "Angst" could be offered, but they were all different expressions of the same underlying "Angst" rather than different underlying reasons; and those justifications were shifting:

> After the euphoria of the fifties and the sixties, there was a time when the Germans feared (had *Angst* of) everything possible: nuclear power, the oil sheiks, the unemployment, the Japanese, rockets, environmental pollution, the police state, the future . . . Every time one danger was overcome, another one would emerge and become entrenched in their mind (Nuss 1993: 193).[2]

Duden's (1972) dictionary of German defines *Angst* not only as "mit Beklemmung, Bedrückung, Erregung einhergehender Gefühlszustand [angesichts einer Gefahr]", ("an oppressive emotional state linked with nervous agitation") [in the face of a danger], but also as an "undeutliches Gefühl des Bedrohtseins", "a vague feeling of threat". The modifier "undeutliches" ("vague") again suggests some indeterminacy not so much of the feeling itself as of the perceived threat; at the same time, the characterization of *Angst* as "an emotional state" suggests an emphasis on what is happening to the experiencer rather than on the experiencer's thoughts directed towards some particular target.

Indeed, according to a number of commentators, the German *Angst* is, essentially, a "nameless *Angst*", or *Angst* linked with the human condition as such rather than with any specific dangers. Nuss (1993: 188–9) writes about it as follows (with reference to two characteristic figures from German literature, Georg Büchner's Lenz and Woyzeck):

> Uncertainty generates *Angst*. The more Germans are confronted with uncertainties, the more reason they discover to be worried. In this way, the feeling of *Angst* spreads further and further and engenders in some people a permanent state of *Angst*. It is nourished by a thousand trifles which gradually swell to form a constant sense of threat, against which it is impossible to struggle.
>
> For a German, the endless silence, which chokes Lenz, and the horror experienced by Woyzeck, express, in a striking way, the nameless *Angst* that is felt by every human being and that one can never quite grasp. It is omni-present, because everything represents a danger, so that one is nowhere really safe. The German fears not so much physical danger (he is by nature brave), or the various vicissitudes of life . . . as the unknown. Not to know what will happen, not to know clearly what problem one has to deal with, not to know one's opponent, this evokes much more *Angst* in him than a real danger.[3]

The key elements suggested by Nuss' (1993) analysis of *Angst* have to do with the unknown (*das Unbekannte*) and with the ubiquity and

inescapability of (undefined and obscure) danger. Using the metalanguage of universal semantic primitives, we could represent these elements in the form of the following prototypical thoughts:

> I don't know what will happen
> bad things can always happen to me

2 Heidegger's analysis of "Angst"

The diffuse, indeterminate expectations of "bad things" in general, linked with the German *Angst* have been given a particularly strong emphasis in the writings of the German existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger, who complained that the concepts "Angst" and "Furcht" are usually not distinguished from one another and that "als Angst bezeichnet wird, was Furcht ist, und Furcht genannt wird, was den Charakter der Angst hat" ("Furcht is described as Angst, and *Angst* is called *Furcht*"; Heidegger 1953[1926]: 185). In Heidegger's own philosophy – strongly influenced by that of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard – the concept of "Angst" plays a particularly important role, as does also the distinction between "Angst" and "Furcht". (On this point, too, Heidegger followed Kierkegaard, for whom the concept of "Angst", embodied in the Danish word *angest*, played an essential role.)

> The only threatening which can be "fearsome" and which gets discovered in fear, always comes from entities within-the-world . . .
>
> *That in the face of which one has anxiety* [das Wovor der Angst] *is Being-in-the-world as such*. What is the difference phenomenally between that in the face of which anxiety [*Angst*] is anxious [*sich ängstet*] and that in the face of which fear is afraid? That in the face of which one has anxiety [*Angst*] is not an entity within-the-world. Thus it is essentially incapable of having an involvement. This threatening does not have the character of a definite detrimentality which reaches what is threatened, and which reaches it with definite regard to a special factical potentiality-for-Being. That in the face of which one is anxious [*Angst*] is completely indefinite. Not only does this indefiniteness leave factically undecided which entity within-the-world is threatening us, but it also tells us that entities within-the-world are not "relevant" at all. Nothing which is ready-to-hand or present-at-hand within the world functions as that in the face of which anxiety [*Angst*] is anxious. Here the totality of involvements of the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand discovered within-the-world, is, as such, of no consequence; it collapses into itself; the world has the character of completely lacking significance. In anxiety [Angst] one does not encounter this thing or that thing which, as something threatening, must have an involvement (Heidegger 1962[1926]: 230–1).[4]

The key elements in Heidegger's theory of *Angst* are the "Unbestimmtheit" of the "Bedrohung" (that is, the "indeterminacy" of the "potential dangers"), and the independence of the state of "Angst" of anything that may actually happen: it is not the thought of any specific events (real or potential) which causes the state of "Angst", but the very nature of the human condition, the very fact of human existence "in the world".

If we wanted to translate Heidegger's ideas into the language of semantic primitives we could say, once again, that the underlying hidden thought on which "Angst" is based is this: "bad things can always happen to me". It is not the thought of some particular "bad things" which causes "Angst" but the deep-rooted sense that "bad things can always happen to me" (for they are inherent to "being-in-the-world"). What these things are is unknown and unknowable ("unbestimmt"). Heidegger's notion that the human existential condition consists in a "Un-zuhause-sein", a "not-being-at-home", can be loosely paraphrased by saying that the world is not a safe place and not a predictable, familiar place. This again can be reduced to the semantic components suggested earlier:

> I don't know what will happen
> bad things can always happen to me

Of course Heidegger's philosophical speculations were aimed at the "phenomenon of Angst" rather than at the German word *Angst* as such. It seems clear, however, that in his analysis Heidegger was guided, to some extent, by the meaning of the German word *Angst*, and by the German lexical distinction between *Angst* and *Furcht* (as Kierkegaard was guided by the meaning of the Danish word *angest*, and by the lexical distinction between *angest* and *frygt*).

It should be added that Heidegger is by no means the only German philosopher for whom "Angst" is an important concept. Furthermore, "Angst" plays an important role also in the writings of various German theologians, and theologians-cum-philosophers such as, for example, Paul Tillich. Since Tillich – a German refugee in America – wrote in English (polished, he says, by his American friends), he talked about "Angst" using the English word *anxiety*, but he was aware that his own use of *anxiety* was an extension modelled on the German (and Danish) *Angst*. For example, he wrote (1957: 34–5):

> Man is not only finite, as is every creature; he is also aware of his finitude. And this awareness is "anxiety." In the last decade the term "anxiety" has become associated with the German and Danish word *Angst*, which itself is derived from the Latin *angustiae*, "narrows." Through Søren Kierkegaard the word *Angst* has become a central

> concept of existentialism. It expresses the awareness of being finite, of being a mixture of being and non-being, or of being threatened by non-being. All creatures are driven by anxiety; for finitude and anxiety are the same. But in man freedom is united with anxiety. One could call man's freedom "freedom in anxiety" or "anxious freedom" (in German, *sich ängstigende Freiheit*).

But to what extent do Heidegger's (and other German philosophers' and theologians') speculations about "Angst" reflect the meaning of the German word *Angst* as it is used in everyday speech?

3 "Angst" in the language of psychology

Before we turn to the use of the German word *Angst* in everyday language, we should note that this word plays an important role in the language of psychology, and that German psychologists speak routinely about *Angstneurose* and *Angstpsychose*, using the word *Angst* in a sense very close to that attributed to it by Heidegger. As noted, for example, by the Duden dictionary (1972: 188): "in der Fachsprache der Psychologie wird öfter zwischen 'Angst' als unbegründet, nicht objektbezogen, und 'Furcht' als objekt-bezogen differenziert" [in the specialist language of psychology, a distinction is often drawn between "Angst" as something that has no reason and no object, and "Furcht" as something which does have an object'.]

In psychology, the distinction between *Angst* and *Furcht* (and also *Schreck*, "fright") was first introduced, and given a great deal of attention, by Freud, who clearly believed, however, that it was grounded in ordinary language: "I think *Angst* relates to the state and disregards the object, while *Furcht* draws attention precisely to the object. It seems that *Schreck* . . . lays emphasis . . . on the effect produced by a danger which is not met by any preparedness for anxiety [Angst]. We might say, therefore, that a person protects himself from fright by anxiety [*Angst*]". (Freud 1963[1917]: 395).

According to Duden (1972), however, the distinction between "Angst" and "Furcht" drawn by psychologists is not drawn by the ordinary language: "in der Allgemeinsprache ist die Differenzierung nicht üblich" ("in ordinary language there is no such differentiation").

But does this mean that in ordinary German there is no semantic difference between *Angst* and *Furcht* at all? And if there *is* a difference, is this difference quite unrelated to the distinctions drawn in the writings of Heidegger and in the technical language of psychology? Both these propositions seem inherently unlikely.

It is true that the differences between *Angst* and *Furcht* as used in everyday language are not as sharp as Heidegger's discussion might

suggest, and that sometimes the two words seem to be used interchangeably. For example, Ratinger (1968: 246–7) not only calls loneliness ("die Einsamkeit") "a region of *Angst*" ("die Region der Angst"), but also says that "the fear (Furcht) of loneliness is the *Angst* of a being that can only live together with others" ("die Furcht der Einsamkeit ist die Angst eines Wesens, das nur im Mitsein leben kann").

What is even more confusing is that in theoretical discussions *Furcht* can also be used to refer to existential fears unrelated to any particular dangers. Ratinger's discussion of *Furcht* is a good example of this:

> When a child goes alone at night through a forest in the dark, he is afraid, even if one demonstrates to him quite convincingly that he has nothing to fear. Once he is alone in the dark and feels utter loneliness, fear arises, the typical human fear, which is not a fear of something, but fear as such. A fear of something specific is basically harmless, it can be banished once one removes the object in question. For example, if someone is afraid of an aggressive dog, one can quickly straighten things out by putting the dog on a leash. Here we encounter something much deeper: a person in a state of ultimate loneliness is afraid not of something specific that could be shown to be groundless; rather, he experiences the fear of loneliness, a mysterious exposure of his own being, which cannot be overcome by rational means (Ratinger 1968: 246).[5]

It is interesting to note, however, that even in this discussion of "objectless *Furcht*" Ratinger uses repeatedly the phrase "die Furcht der Einsamkeit" ("the fear of loneliness, the fear linked with loneliness"), whereas the word *Angst* appears throughout this discussion without modifiers, as simply *Angst*, not "die Angst der Einsamkeit".

In fact, in Ratinger's discussion of an "objectless Furcht" a specific thought *is* clearly present: "I am all alone" (in the case of the child, "it is dark and I am all alone"). Thus, *Furcht* may have no particular object and yet be linked with a specific thought (e.g. "I am all alone"). A semantic difference between *Furcht* and *Angst* is still possible, for *Angst* may have not only no particular object but also be linked with no specific thought. The fact that *Angst* is more readily used without modifiers than *Furcht* suggests that while both *Furcht* and *Angst* can be thought of as objectless they are nonetheless not synonymous.

It is also noteworthy that the word *Angst* (but not *Furcht)* appears in countless titles of popular books belonging to the self-help genre. Some examples among recent publications are:

1. Eugen Bisser 1986, *Überwindung der Lebensangst. Wege zu einem befreienden Gottesbild. Erlösung von existentiellen Grundängsten*. ("Overcoming the *angst* of life. Ways to a liberating image of God.") Don Bosco Verlag.

2. Klaus Lange 1996, *Bevor du sterben willst, lebe! Auf der Reise nach innen verwandelt sich die Welt. Von Todessehnsucht, Krankheit, Schuldgefühlen, Angst und Einsamkeit zu Weite, Leichtigkeit, Freiheit und Vertrauen*. ("Before you die, live! During a journey inwards the world changes. From deathwishes, illness, feelings of guilt, *Angst*, and loneliness, to a feeling of space, lightness, freedom and trust.") Kreuz Verlag.
3. Verena Kast 1995, *Angst: Facetten eines Weges aus Angst und Symbiose*. ("*Angst*: ways out of *Angst* and symbiosis.") Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.
4. Jürgen Schutz (ed.) 1995, *Angst: Urgefühl*. ("*Angst*": a primeval feeling."). Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.
5. Gerhard Stöcker 1996, *Angst, laß nach! Wieder Lust am Leben finden. Umfangreicher Ratgeber bei allen Angstzuständen*. ("*Angst*, let go! How to find again joy of life. A comprehensive guide for all states of *Angst*.") Augsburg: Pattloch Verlag.

It would be difficult to maintain that titles of such books, aimed at the general reader, are totally divorced from the understanding of *Angst* in ordinary language. The fact that in everyday language, too, people can talk of "existential" *Angst* or "metaphysical" *Angst* confirms the close links between the technical and the everyday sense of the word. One example from a contemporary novel:

> Eine kleine metaphysische Angstwelle lief durch ihn hindurch. (Schwanitz 1995: 332)
> "A small metaphysical wave of *Angst* ran through him."

In fact, careful examination of linguistic evidence shows that in everyday speech *Angst* and *Furcht* do not have the same range of use (although their ranges overlap), and that the differences between their respective ranges are indeed related to the distinction drawn by Heidegger and by the technical language of psychologists. Let us review here some of these differences.

4 *Angst* in everyday language

In this section I will summarize, in the form of eleven points, the linguistic evidence for the everyday concept of *Angst* as outlined in this section.

1. As mentioned earlier, the expression *Angst haben* "to have *Angst*", is often used without any complements, as in the following example from a novel (Noll 1993: 104):

> Außerdem hatte ich grauenhafte Angst. Ich konnte mich im Augenblick überhaupt nicht zusammennehmen. "In addition I had a terrible *Angst*. I simply couldn't pull myself together."

Both the adjective *grauenhaft* ("terrible") and the following sentence indicate that the speaker is focussing on her inner state, and not on any thought about some particular danger. On the other hand, the noun *Furcht* or the verb *sich fürchten* are normally not used in this way. One can say "Ich habe Furcht vor dem Tod" ("I'm afraid of death") but hardly "Ich habe Furcht" or "Ich fürchte mich". With the non-reflexive verb *fürchten* an object is grammatically obligatory; with the reflexive verb *sich fürchten* an object is not obligatory in the same sense, but if this verb is used without an object the grounds for the feeling are usually made clear by an adverbial phrase or clause, as in Ratinger's own example about the child in the forest, or as in the following sentence from *Langenscheidt' Großwörterbuch* (1993):

> Das Kind fürchtet sich im Dunkeln.
> "The child is afraid in the dark."

It is also noteworthy that sentences with *Angst* are more acceptable than those with *Furcht* (or *sich fürchten*) in situations where the cause of the feeling is explicitly presented as unknown:

> Ich hatte Angst, ich wußte nicht wovor und warum.
> "I had *Angst*, I didn't know why or of what."
>
> ?Ich fürchtete mich, ich wußte nicht wovor und warum.
> "I was afraid, I didn't know why or of what."

Furthermore, *Angst* is often described as a subconscious feeling of which the experiencer herself (himself) is not even aware, as in the following sentence:

> Wie der Tod nicht aufhört zu existieren wenn wir nicht an ihn denken, so auch nicht die Angst. (Fritz Riemann, a motto in Schutz 1995.)
> "Just as death does not cease to exist when we don't think about it, neither does *Angst*."

2. The noun *Angst* is often used in the plural, and German dictionaries list expressions such as *in tausend Ängsten schweben* and cite many sentences with the plural form *Ängste*, both old and recent. For example:

> die Wolga hier hat nicht so viel der tropfen[6] als ängste mir an meine seele klopfen. (Fleming: 486, in Grimm and Grimm 1854: 358)
> "The river Wolga doesn't have as many drops of water as these *ängste* which come knocking at [the door of] my soul."
>
> Ihre Ängste vor einer verstrahlten . . . Umwelt sind eklatant (Wiener 1; in Duden 1993).
> "Their fears (Ängste) of a radioactively contaminated environment are striking."

The fact that *Angst* is frequently used in the plural and that people

speak about "a thousand *Ängste*" supports the view that *Angst* focusses on a more general state of "Bedrohtsein" (existential threat) rather than on any specific danger. By contrast, *Furcht* is normally not used in the plural at all.

3. The dative construction "mir ist angst" or "mir ist angst und bange" suggests that the concept of "Angst" focusses on the subjective state of the experiencer rather than on the someone or something linked with that state (cf. e.g. "mir ist kalt" "I'm cold", "mir ist übel" "I feel sick").

4. The compound nouns *Angstzustand/Angstzustände* ("a state of *Angst*") and *Angstgefühl/Angstgefühle* ("a feeling/feelings of *Angst*") suggest that *Angst* is a state which can be considered independently of its external target.

5. The common adjective *angstvoll* (roughly, "nervous/anxious") and the adverb *ängstlich* ("nervously"), which describe a psychological state without reference to its cause or to the accompanying thought, point in the same direction. For example:

> Und so anmutig und jung, aufgeregt und angstvoll stieg ich am Samstag die ausgetretenen vier Steinstufen hinauf und schellte einfach an seiner Tür. (Noll, 1993: 53)
> "And so graceful and young, excited and nervous [*angstvoll*] I climbed on Saturday the worn out four stone steps in front of his door and simply rang the bell."

6. It is also interesting to compare the two symmetrical adjectives *furchtlos* ("fearless") and *angstfrei* ("angst-free"): the first implies that one does not betray "Furcht" (roughly, fear) in external situations in which other people could be expected to do so, whereas the second implies that one is, roughly speaking, free of anxieties, and does not refer to any external situations at all. It hardly needs to be added that **angstlos* and **furchtfrei* do not exist at all.

7. The imagery of *Angst*, often presenting it as "sitting inside" a person's body (e.g. *jemandem sitzt die Angst im Nacken*; see e.g. Duden 1972: 188) is consistent with the view of *Angst* as an enduring internal state, not necessarily linked with any conscious thoughts about particular targets.

8. The verb derived from *Angst*, *sich ängstigen*, refers clearly to a persistent state of inner turmoil (anxiety), rather than to a feeling linked with a particular thought. In this respect *sich ängstigen* can be compared to the English expression *to be anxious* rather than to the verb *to fear* or the expression *to be afraid of*. The clear difference in meaning between the verbs *sich ängstigen* and *sich fürchten* helps to see better the less obvious difference between the nouns *Angst* and *Furcht*: *sich ängstigen* implies that one can find no peace (because of an inner turmoil), whereas *sich fürchten* has no such implications and refers simply to a feeling caused

by a thought. The *WDG* (1964–77) dictionary of German cites, for example, the following sentence: "ein böser Traum hat mich beängstigt" ("a bad dream has brought *Angst* over me"). This sentence does not mean that the speaker is thinking about a dream and fears something because of this, but rather, that the dream itself has brought with it a certain mood and has set off a troubled inner state.

9. The word *Angsttraum* cited by many German dictionaries points in the same direction: it describes a certain type of dream, identifiable in terms of, roughly speaking, its mood, and not its content. Duden's (1972: 139) dictionary defines an *Angsttraum* as a "mit Ängsten verbundener Traum", "a dream linked with *Ängste* (plural)". The dictionary mentions the word *Alptraum* "nightmare" in this connection, but an *Alptraum* has a describable content (so much so that a real-life situation can be called, figuratively, an "Alptraum"), whereas an *Angsttraum* is quite vague (hence the plural *Ängste* in Duden's definition): it is an "atmospheric" kind of dream rather than a dream with a clear structure of events or thoughts.

10. The word *Angst* is more acceptable than *Furcht* in contexts where it is not clear at all what kinds of danger are being considered. For example, in the situation of anxiety (and related feelings) before an exam a sentence with the phrase *Angst haben* is much more acceptable than one with the verb *sich fürchten* (the noun *Furcht* is not acceptable in this context at all):

(a) Er hatte Angst vor der Prüfung.
"He had *Angst* of the exam."
(b) ?Er fürchtete sich vor der Prüfung.
"He was afraid of the exam."

If, however, the word *Prüfung* "exam" is replaced with the word *Hund* "dog" both *Angst haben* and *sich fürchten* are perfectly acceptable:

(c) Er hatte Angst vor dem Hund.
(d) Er fürchtete sich vor dem Hund.

Presumably, the reason is that in the case of a dog the nature of the danger is quite clear (one doesn't want to be bitten), whereas in the case of an exam, one doesn't know what will happen, and the situation is stressful even if one is not expecting to fail.

11. In situations in which the phrase *I'm afraid* can be used in English with reference to a known fact, in German only *ich fürchte* can be used, not *ich habe Angst*:

I'm afraid that's true.
Ich fürchte, das stimmt.
*Ich habe Angst, das stimmt.

5 Defining *Angst*

What, then, is the meaning of the word *Angst*? Is the definition suggested by Heidegger's speculations, or by the psychologists' use of the term, acceptable for the everyday use of the word, or does it need to be somehow modified, and, if so, how?

My own conclusion is that while the meaning of *Angst* in everyday language is not identical with that of the *Angst* of psychologists and philosophers, the core components are the same, and that basically the distinction between *Angst* and *Furcht* drawn by Heidegger applies to everyday language too. In support of this conclusion, I will first propose two explications and then discuss the differences between them as well as some apparent counterexamples. To facilitate the comparison, I have put the distinguishing part of the two explications in capital letters.

Angst (e.g. *X hatte Angst vor dem Hund/vor der Prüfung*)
(a) X felt something
(b) sometimes a person thinks FOR SOME TIME:
(b') "I DON'T KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN
(c) MANY BAD THINGS can happen to me
(d) I don't want these things to happen
(e) I want to do something because of this if I can
(f) I don't know what I can do"
(g) because of this this person feels something bad FOR SOME TIME
(h) X felt something like this

Furcht (e.g. *X fürchtete sich vor dem Hund/*vor der Prüfung*)
(a) X felt something
(a') BECAUSE X THOUGHT SOMETHING ABOUT SOMETHING
(b) sometimes a person thinks ABOUT SOMETHING:
(c) "SOMETHING BAD can happen to me BECAUSE OF THIS
(d) I don't want this to happen
(e) I want to do something because of this if I can
(f) I don't know what I can do"
(g) WHEN this person thinks this this person feels something bad
(h) X felt something like this
(h') BECAUSE X THOUGHT SOMETHING LIKE THIS

If we now compare the explications of *Angst* and *Furcht*, we will note the following differences.

First, *Angst* is defined only via a prototypical scenario, and no thoughts are attributed to the experiencer: when one has *Angst* one feels LIKE a person does who thinks certain thoughts, and one doesn't necessarily think these thoughts oneself. This explains why one can feel *Angst* without knowing why one feels *Angst*. But one cannot feel *Furcht* without knowing what is the object of that *Furcht*, and so the explication of *Furcht* does attribute certain thoughts to the experiencer.

Second, the phrase MANY BAD THINGS in the explication of *Angst* differs from its counterpart SOMETHING in the explication of *Furcht*. This, too, accounts for the greater indeterminacy of *Angst* and for a more generalized sense of threat (*Bedrohtsein*); it also accounts for the use of the plural *Ängste*. It will be noticed that the phrasing "many bad things can happen", used in the explication of *Angst* proposed here, differs from the phrasing "something bad can always happen" used in the earlier discussion. This change has been introduced to cover the fact that while in its everyday sense, *Angst* is somewhat indeterminate ("*undeutlich*"), it is not quite as indeterminate as the philosopher's, or the psychologist's, "*Angst*". The word "always" implies an inescapable existential condition, the word "many" does not imply quite that, although it does go beyond the specificity of the singular ("something bad can happen to me").

Third, the subcomponent FOR SOME TIME in the explication of *Angst* accounts for its durative aspect, that is, for its "state-like" or "process-like" character.

Fourth, the explication of *Angst* includes the component I DON'T KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN, which accounts for the far greater uncertainty of *Angst* and for the inappropriateness of the word *Angst* in contexts where little or no uncertainty is involved.

Fifth, the distinction between BECAUSE OF in the explication of *Angst* and WHEN in the explication of *Furcht* accounts for the fact that in the case of *Angst*, a feeling can endure much longer than any underlying thoughts, whereas *Furcht* suggests a feeling coextensive in time with the thought. For example, it would be odd if the word *Angst* were replaced by *Furcht* in the following example (from Duden 1993):

> blieb Lea ein Gefühl der Bedrohung, das . . . Angst [?Furcht] auslöste.
> (Ossowski, Liebe ist kein Argument (Duden 1993: 357))
> "Lea was left with a sense of some threat, which triggered Angst."

Thus, *Angst* differs in meaning from *Furcht*, and everyday *Angst* is not as different from the *Angst* of psychologists as Duden's (1993)

dictionary implies. It is true that *Angst* in the everyday sense of the word can, like *Furcht*, be "objektbezogen", e.g.

(i) Sie fürchtete, daß sie ihren Job verlieren würde.
"She feared that she would lose her job."

(ii) Sie hatte Angst, daß sie ihren Job verlieren würde.
"She had *Angst* that she would lose her job."

Is the use of *Angst* in sentences of this kind consistent with the analysis proposed here? Or should we rather admit that in this kind of context *Angst* (*haben*) and *fürchten* mean exactly the same?

Despite appearances, I do not think that the sentences mean exactly the same. Sentence (i) focusses on the thought: "I can lose my job", whereas sentence (ii) focusses on the subject's emotional state:

(i) "She thought: "I can lose my job"
when she thought this, she often felt something bad because of this

(ii) "She felt something bad (for some time)
she felt it because she thought: "I can lose my job"

Sentence (i) refers primarily to a thought, although it presents this thought as accompanied by a feeling. By contrast, sentence (ii) refers to a feeling, although this particular sentence presents this feeling as triggered by a thought. This focus on the emotional state is particularly clear in sentences in which the state is described in detail in various ways, as in the following two sentences:

> Gleichzeitig aber klapperten mir alle Knochen vor Angst, wenn ich an die Konsequenzen einer erfolgreichen Auferstehung dachte. (Noll 1993: 202)
> "At the same time all my bones rattled with fear [*Angst*], when I thought about the consequences of a successful resuscitation."

> Ich war halbtot vor Angst, daß auch mein Koffer inspiziert würde. (Noll 1993: 207)
> "I was half-dead with fear [*Angst*] that my suitcase too could be inspected."

It is true, then, that in everyday speech *Angst* can be presented as linked with a particular thought, that is as something that is "objekt-bezogen"; but when it *is* linked with a particular thought, *Angst* can still be thought of as a particular emotional state – a kind of state that is linked with uncertainty and with a sense of vulnerability.

In some contexts, when the feeling is linked with a specific thought, the difference between *Angst* and *Furcht* doesn't seem to matter much and native speakers may not be immediately aware of it. But there are many other contexts where the difference clearly does matter, and the linguistic facts discussed in this chapter provide sufficient evidence for different conceptual structures.

The fact that *Angst* is a basic German word (whereas *Furcht* is not) shows that the conceptualization encoded in *Angst* is particularly salient in German culture. This is consistent with the special place given to "Angst" in German philosophy and psychology and also with the special importance attached to this concept both by German writers (recall book titles such as *Angst: Urgefühl*, "Angst: a primeval feeling") and by outsiders commenting on German culture in a comparative perspective.

6 The German *Angst* in a comparative perspective

If one looks at the concept of "Angst" and its salience in German culture from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural point of view one can't help being baffled by it. Most, if not all, languages appear to have a "basic" emotion term linked with the thought "something bad can/will happen to me" (cf. chapter 7). For example, English has the noun *fear* (and the adjective phrase *to be afraid*); French, the noun *peur* (and the verbal expression *avoir peur*); Italian, the noun *paura* (and the verbal expression *avere paura*); Spanish, the noun *miedo* (and the verbal expression *tener miedo*); Russian, the noun *strax* (and the verb *bojat'sja*); and so on.

In German, the noun closest in meaning to those listed above is *Furcht*, and the verb, *sich fürchten*. One might have expected, therefore, that these words would play a comparable role in German to that played by their closest semantic equivalents in the other languages mentioned. In fact, of course, this is not the case.

German–English dictionaries usually link the German word *Angst* with the English word *anxiety* or with a multi-word gloss starting with the word *anxiety*. On the other hand, *Furcht* is usually glossed with the word *fear*, or with a sequence of alternative glosses headed by *fear*. Conversely, the English word *anxiety* is normally glossed by English–German dictionaries with the word *Angst*, or with a series of glosses starting with *Angst*, while *fear* is glossed with the word *Furcht*, or with a series of glosses starting with *Furcht*. Similarly, dictionaries usually pair *Angst* not with *peur*, *paura*, *miedo*, or *strax*, but rather with *angoisse*, *ansia*, or *trevoga*, that is, with words closer in meaning to the English *anxiety* than to the English *fear*.

In a sense, then, one might say that the semantic distinction between *Furcht* and *Angst* drawn by the German lexicon is analogous to the distinctions drawn between *fear* and *anxiety* by English, between *peur* and *angoisse* by French, or between *strax* and *trevoga* by Russian. As we will discuss later, the meanings of the words in question are not identical, but the distinctions can nonetheless be said to be broadly analogous; and it is interesting to note that these distinctions have often been treated in the literature as identical, and also that considerable importance has been attached to them – by philosophers, psychologists, historians, and others.

For example, the eminent French historian Jean Delumeau (1978: 15) draws what he calls a fundamental distinction ("la distinction fondamentale") between "peur" and "angoisse" (in the English version, "fear" and "anxiety"), which he links with a distinction between specific fears ("les peurs particulières") and a climate of fear ("un climat de peur"). In Delumeau's view, the fact that the accumulation of various collective fears in Europe from the time of the Great Plague to the religious wars created a climate of fear, provides an important clue to the understanding of the history of Western civilization.

> "Specific fears": that is, "named fears". Here, the distinction established by psychiatry at the level of the individual between fear and anxiety, confused by traditional psychology, may become applicable on a collective level. For it is a matter of two poles around which words and mental facts gravitate which are both related and yet different. Apprehension, fright, terror, dread belong more to fear [*la peur*]; uneasiness, worry, melancholy, more to anxiety [*l'angoisse*]. The former is related to something known, the latter to the unknown.
>
> Fear has a specific object which one can confront. Anxiety does not and it is experienced as a painful expectation of a danger all the more frightful for not being clearly identified: it is a feeling of global insecurity. Consequently, it is more difficult to bear than fear . . . Since it is impossible to preserve one's internal balance when confronted over a period with a floating anxiety which is infinite and unidentifiable, it is necessary for a person to transform it and to fragment it into specific fears. "The human spirit manufactures fear permanently" in order to avoid a morbid anxiety which would lead to the annihilation of the self. (*Delumeau 1978: 15–16*)[7]

But if the conceptual distinction between, roughly speaking, *angoisse* (anxiety) and *peur* (fear) is so important (in philosophy, in psychology, and in history), how is it possible that a concept closer to *angoisse* (namely, "Angst") has come to occupy such an important place in German language and culture, over and above the concept of "Furcht", given that the opposite appears to be the case in most other languages and cultures, in Europe and elsewhere? Once again, we must conclude

that there is something special about the German "Angst", something, therefore, that requires a special explanation.

I believe that a key to such an explanation can be found in the observation that while the German situation is indeed special (as compared with, for example, French, Italian, Spanish, or Russian), it is apparently not unique in Europe: an analogous situation appears to obtain in Danish, and perhaps in the other Scandinavian languages as well. The common denominator appears to be provided by the predominant religious tradition: the countries in whose languages a concept closer to a cross between "anxiety" and "fear" appears to be more salient than a concept closer to simply "fear" or "fright" are all predominantly Lutheran. Since, however, I cannot engage here in a detailed discussion of the relevant lexical data from Scandinavian languages, I will simply submit that it may pay to explore the possibility of there being a link between "Angst" (the German *Angst*) and the language and thought of Martin Luther; and in what follows I will try to do so.

7 Luther's influence on the German language

Luther's contemporary, Erasmus Alberus, said that Luther was "the father of the German language" ("*linguae Germanicae parens*"), and to a large extent this opinion has been shared by later generations. It is generally accepted that the newly invented printing press played an essential role in the popularization of Luther's writings, which "achieved a dissemination beyond anything that had ever happened before" (Keller 1978: 355). Luther wrote and wrote, the presses printed and printed, and the nation read, studied, and often learnt by heart – thus absorbing both the message and the language.

> In 1520 his famous treatises *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation* and *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* started a flood of German theological writing. Tracts, treatises, sermons, missives, dialogues, and pamphlets of abuse, condemnation and exhortation, poured from the printing presses. And there was above all else: the German Bible. The history of the German language took a new turn: the printed German written language reached every corner of the German-speaking countries and influenced and shaped the political destiny of the entire nation. (Keller 1978: 356)

One of the first serious grammars of German, written by Johannes Clajus and published in Leipzig in 1578, was based on Luther's writings: *Grammatica Germanicae linguae ex bibliis Lutheri Germanicis et aliis eius libris collecta*, and the influence of Luther's writings on the standardization of the German literary language and the development of

German literature is indisputable. To quote one German scholar (Bach 1965: 259–60):

> A work of the linguistic power of Luther's Bible which circulated in many thousands of copies throughout Germany, including the Catholic regions, and which coming at a time of rapidly expanding literacy was not only read but often also learnt by heart. Such a work could offer a firmer basis for a common national language than the languages of the state administration or the printing offices. (Bach 1965: 259–60)[8]

According to Jacob Grimm, often proclaimed to be the founder of German linguistics, the later flowering of German literature was possible only thanks to Luther's work, and the tenor of Grimm's remarks is typical of that of other authoritative commentators as well:

> Because of its almost miraculous purity and because of its deep influence, Luther's German must be considered the core and the fundament of the new German language. Whatever can be said to have nursed this language, whatever rejuvenated it so that a new flowering of poetry could result – this we owe to nobody more than to Luther. (Grimm 1882[1822]: 11; quoted in Erikson 1958: 227)

What had the greatest impact was – it is widely accepted – Luther's translation of the Bible, on which were also based the Catholic translations of Hieronymus Emser, Johann Eck, and Johann Dietenberger. The assessment given by Chambers and Wilkie's (1970: 42) *Short History of the German Language* illustrates well the general opinion on this point:

> the richness of vocabulary, the felicity of idiom, and the vigour and directness of style which characterize all his works – Bible and hymns, catechism and sermons, expository and polemical tracts – mark a new beginning in the development of the German language. In particular, his masterly translation of the Bible, which in the four intervening centuries has been read and studied and learnt by heart more than any other German book, has had a profound and incalculable stylistic influence – to say nothing of its spiritual effect – on every generation of speakers and writers until our own day.

Luther's translation of the Bible is also widely believed to have determined, to a large extent, the lexicon of the standard language. Its impact was not only lexical but also semantic. Significantly, "Many of Luther's own personal word creations have become part of the standard vocabulary" (Keller 1978: 449). Keller notes also new meanings due to Luther's influence, commenting that "The semantic aspect of the lexicon tends to reflect the great cultural and spiritual movements of

an age as well as internal structural changes on the plane of meaning'' (p. 452).

What is particularly interesting from the point of view of the history of ''Angst'', is that the expression *angst und bange* is listed as one of those whose spread was influenced by Luther, alongside some other expressions referring to emotions, such as *Hoffnung und Zuversicht* (''hope and confidence'') and *bekümmern und vexieren* (''afflict and disturb'') (Keller 1978: 449). Luther's creativity and impact in the area of the language of emotions has also been noted by other writers. For example, Chambers and Wilkie (1970: 42) comment that ''Among his many gifts he had a remarkable feeling for the manifold variety of language and for its emotional nuances''.

Clearly Luther's possible influence on the semantic history of ''Angst'' should be considered against the background of this general assessment of the role of his writings in general.

8 Eschatological anxieties of Luther's times

It seems to be generally accepted that – like many of his contemporaries – Luther believed in, and lived in imminent expectation of, the end of the world and the ''Last Judgment''. Discussing ''the great eschatological anxieties'' of the epoch, which ''had a profound impact on the collective mentality'', the eminent ''historian of fear'', Jean Delumeau (1978: 211) quotes Hugo Wölflin's observation, made in connection with Dürer's works, that a sense of the end of the world was at that time present in everyone's mind, and he observes:

> The birth of the Protestant Reform cannot be understood if it is not placed in the atmosphere of impending Doomsday which existed at the time in Europe and especially in Germany . . . Luther was haunted by the idea.

Like many other writers, Delumeau notes that ''Luther's enormous popularity strengthened the conviction, already widely held, that the end of the world was near'' (p. 216), and he discusses the key role of the invention of print in this regard:

> Luther . . . believed in the imminence of the Last Judgement; and the printing presses spread his works so widely that he is certainly one of the key contributors to the general expansion of eschatological fears, at least in the countries which opted for protestantism. (p. 210)

Discussing the colossal popularity of Luther's Bible and the impact of Dürer's apocalyptic engravings which illustrated it, Delumeau (1978: 210) points in particular to the conjunction of the planets in 1524 and 1525, which created a collective panic and alarmed both Luther and

Dürer, and he observes that the Protestant Reform was both an outcome of the deep eschatological ferment of the times and an important factor in its growth and expansion.

Thus, while eschatological fears were common in Europe in the 16th century, and the beginning of the 17th century, they were especially strong in Protestant countries and, in particular, in Germany. Delumeau (1978: 228) notes, for example, that of the 89 eschatological works included in Georg Draudius' catalogue in Frankfurt in 1625, only one was written by a Catholic author, whereas 68 were Lutheran, and 20 were by Calvinist authors.

In another work, Delumeau (1990: 527) points out that "throughout the sixteenth century, Lutheran discourse was laced with eschatological forecasts", and that, for example, Osiander "wrote an entire book (published in 1544) to demonstrate that by any method of calculation, the end of the world can be fixed for no later than 1672". It is this belief in the approaching end of the world which caused "the Protestants' indignant rejection of Pope Gregory XIII's calendar reform, which to them proved that the Pope did not believe in the end of the world" (p. 527).

Delumeau (1978) notes also that what applied to the fear of Judgment Day applied also to the (closely related) fear of Satan. "In Luther, there lived both a fear of the devil and a certainty that the final cataclysm was already on the horizon" (1978: 237), and the printing presses spread these fears both in learned volumes and in innumerable popular publications. The very success of Luther's works ensured that "Dr Martin communicated his fear of the devil to hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of readers" (1978: 239). As a result (asks Delumeau rhetorically), "how could have Germany of the sixteenth and beginning of seventeenth centuries not trembled from those two interrelated terrors?" (1978: 237). And thus, "demonic literature" replaced in 16th century Germany the popular medieval genre of the lives of the saints (1978: 239). It has been calculated (he reports) that in one decade 1560–70 one hundred thousand copies of works on the demon world were released in Germany, and that in the last twelve years of the century the story of Faust alone went through no less than 24 editions.

Delumeau points out in this connection a comment made in 1561 by a contemporary witness, André Musculus, who observed that "In no country of the world does the devil exercise a more tyrannical power than in Germany" (1978: 240). In the light of such observations, it seems remarkably fitting that the legend of Faust, born in Germany, should have come to occupy such a central and symbolic place in German culture.

9 The meaning of *Angst* in Luther's writings

Before we can assess Luther's impact on the formation and/or spread of the modern German concept of "Angst" we need to know how exactly Luther used the word *Angst*.

The "Theological German Vocabulary" based on quotations from Luther's Bible (Mosse 1955) glosses *Angst* as "anxiety, fear, distress", and includes as "synonyms" *die Furcht* "fear", *die Herzensangst* "the *Angst* of the heart", and *die Seelenangst* "the *Angst* of the soul".

This gloss suggests that the meaning of *Angst* in Luther's writings was probably different from its present-day meaning. For example, *Harrap's German and English Dictionary* (1963) glosses *Angst* (in English) as "fear, fright, dread; mental anguish; anxiety; Psy: angst". The range of suggested senses is similar, but the focus seems to have shifted from something more like "anxiety" and "distress" to something more like "fear". This impression is confirmed by the fact that earlier German dictionaries tend to emphasize anxiety in the first instance: for example, *Flügel's Complete Dictionary of the German and English Language* (1845: 32) glosses *Angst* as "anguish; anxiety; agony; pangs (of death); fear, terror" (with "fear" at the end rather than at the beginning); and Grimm and Grimm's (1854: vol. 1, p. 358) dictionary entry on *Angst* reads: "*angst* ist nicht bloss mutlosigkeit, sondern quälende sorge, zweifelnder, beengender zustand überhaupt" ("*Angst* is not just a lack of courage but tormenting worry, and a general state of oppressive doubt").

Some modern German dictionaries posit two separate meanings for *Angst*, one focussed more on a vague state of anxiety, and another, closer to "fear" (as in the English word *fear* or in the German word *Furcht*). For example, *Langenscheidt's Großwörterbuch* (1993) offers the following two definitions of *Angst* (supported by a putative difference in grammar):

> 1. *Angst* (pl. *Ängste*): Zustand von jemandem, der bedroht wird oder sich in Gefahr befindet ("a state of someone who is threatened or finds himself in danger").
> 2. *Angst* (only Sg.): die ernsthafte Sorge, daß jemandem etwas Schlimmes passiert, daß man jemanden/etwas verliert ("a serious worry that something bad will happen to one, that one will lose someone or something").

While both these putative meanings refer, in their own way, to the thought: "something bad will happen to me", the first postulated meaning focusses on the experiencer's state, whereas the second focusses more on the thought itself and the feeling caused by it.

But in Luther's writings, *Angst* is not invariably linked with the

thought "something bad will/can happen to me" and in his translation of the Bible *Angst* is not used to translate the Latin words *timor* (noun) and *temere* (verb) or the Greek words *phobos* (noun), *phobeomai* (verb) (roughly, "fear"). Instead, Luther uses for this purpose the noun *Furcht*, and the verb *sich fürchten* (and in some contexts, *erschrecken*). Some examples:

1. Fürchte dich nicht, Maria.(Lk. 1, 30, Luther NT, p. 131)
   Do not be afraid, Mary (NEB, p. 93)
   ne timeas, Maria! (NTL, p. 152)
   mē phobou, Mariam (GENT, p. 151)
2. Sie fürchteten sich aber (Lk. 8, 25, Luther NT, p. 155)
   In fear and astonishment they said to one another (NEB, p. 111)
   timentes (NTL, p.182)
   phobetentes (GENT, p.182)
3. Fürchte dich nicht, du Tochter Zion! (John. 12,15, Luther NT, p. 240)
   Fear no more, daughter of Zion (NEB, p. 175)
   Noli timere (NTL, p.291)
   mē phobou (GENT, p. 291)
4. Es kam über alle Seelen Furcht an (Act. Ap. 2, 43, Luther NT, p. 269)
   a sense of awe was everywhere (NEB, p. 200)
   Fiebat autem omni animae timor (NTL, p. 326)
   egineto de pasē psykhē phobos (GENT, p. 326)

Furthermore, Luther uses consistently the word *Furcht (die Furcht Gottes, die Furcht des Herrn, Gottesfurcht)* for the "fear of God" (Mosse 1955: 46).

Thus, the Latin word *timor* and the Greek *phobos* were normally translated in Luther's Bible by *Furcht*, not by *Angst*. *Angst* was normally used to translate other words: the Latin words *pressura*, *angustia* and *tribulatio*, and the Greek words *stenoxoria*, *tlipsis*, and *synokhē*, all of which had meanings corresponding, roughly, to those of English words such as *affliction* or *distress*. Some examples:

Pressura

1. In der Welt habt ihr Angst (Joh 16, 33, Luther NT, p. 251)
   In the world you will have trouble (NEB, p. 183)
   In mundo pressuram habetis (NTL, p. 304)
   Greek: *tlipsis* (GENT, p. 304)

2. Ein Weib, wenn sie gebiert, so hat sie Traurigkeit, denn ihre Stunde ist gekommen. Wenn sie aber das Kind geboren hat, denkt sie nicht mehr an die Angst um der Freude willen, daß ein Mensch zur Welt geboren ist. (Joh. 16, 21, Luther, NT p. 250)
   A woman in labour is in pain because her time has come; but when the child is born she forgets the anguish in her joy that a man has been born into the world. (NEB, p. 182)
   Mulier, cum parit, tristitiam habet, quia venit hora eius; cum autem pepererit puerum, iam non meminit pressurae propter gaudium quia natus est homo in mundum. (NTL, p. 302)
   Greek: *tlipsis* (GENT, p. 303)

Angustia

3. Wer will uns scheiden von der Liebe Gottes?
   Trübsal oder Angst oder Verfolgung . . . ? (Rom. 8, 35, Luther NT, p. 354)
   Then what can separate us from the love of Christ?
   Can affliction or hardship? (NEB, p. 267)
   Quis nos separabit a caritate Christi?
   Tribulatio an angustia? (NTL p.424)
   Greek: *tlipsis* (GENT, p. 424)

4. Den ich schrieb euch aus grosser Trübsal und Angst des Herzens mit viel Tränen. (II Kor. 2, 4, Luther NT, p. 402)
   That letter I sent you came out of great distress and anxiety; how many tears I shed as I wrote it! (NEB, p. 305)
   Nam ex multa tribulatione et angustia cordis scripsi vobis per multas lacrimas. (NTL, p. 475)
   Greek: *synokhē* (GENT, p. 475)

5. Die Angst meines Herzens ist gross; führe mich aus meinen Nöten! (Psalm 25:17; Luther, Werke vol. 10/1, p. 176)
   The troubles of my heart have enlarged,
   Oh bring me out of my distresses. (NKJV, p. 549)
   Tribulationes cordis mei multiplicatae sunt, de necessitatibus meis erue me. (Luther, Werke, vol. 10/2, p. 205)

Tribulatio

6. Wenn mir angst ist, so ruffe ich den HERRN an, und schrey zu meinem Gott, so erhöret er meine stim von seinem Tempel, und mein geschrey kompt fur in zu seinen Ohren.

(Psalm 18, 6: Luther, Werke, vol. 10/1, p. 149)
In my distress I called upon the LORD,
And cried out to my God;
He heard my voice from his temple,
And my cry came before him, even to his ears. (NKJV, p. 545)
In tribulatione mea inuocaui Dominum, et ad Deum meum clamaui. Et exaudiuit de templo sancto suo uocem meam, et clamor meus in conspectu eius introiuit in aures eius. (Luther, Werke, vol. 10/2, p. 201)

Looking at the semantics of the word *Angst* in a broader historical perspective, it would seem that Luther constitutes a turning point in a shift from a meaning close to "distress" and essentially unrelated to "fear" (or "Furcht") to a meaning much closer to "fear" (or "Furcht"), though still different from it and bearing distinct traces of the earlier meaning.

Schematically the history of *Angst* can be rendered in three stages:

1. Old High German: *Angst* means (according to the *Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch* (1968)) "seelische Bedrängnis, Erschütterung", that is, "affliction, anguish" (*Gegensatz zum Begriff des "Friedens"*, an opposite of the concept "peace"); "Sorge, quälende innere Unruhe" ("a worry, a tormenting inner turmoil, anxiety"); "Leid, schmerzvolle Bedrückung" ("suffering, painful oppressive feeling").

2. Luther's language: *Angst* seems to mean, essentially, the same as in Old and Middle High German (and is used for translating *pressura*, *angustia*, or *tlipsis* "affliction", rather than *timor* or *phobos* "fear"), but is often used in contexts suggesting anxiety about the future, and therefore shifts – in connotations if not in actual meaning – in the direction of "fear" (or *Furcht*).

3. Present-day language: *Angst* has lost its original meaning of, roughly speaking, "distress, inner turmoil, anguish", and has come closer to "fear" (or *Furcht*), preserving, however, some components of the older meaning.

Since *Angst* has come to mean something closer to "fear" (*timor/phobos*) than to "affliction" (*pressura/tlipsis*), it is hardly surprising that in contemporary (late twentieth century) German translations of the Bible *Angst* has often been used as a translation equivalent of the Latin *timor* and the Greek *phobos*, that is to say, in passages in which Luther used *Furcht*. Two examples:

Ich fürchtete mich vor dir, denn du bist ein harter Mann. (Luke 19, 21, Luther NT, p. 189)
Ich hatte nämlich Angst vor dir, weil du ein strenger Mann bist. (NGÜ(L), p. 73)
I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. (NEB, p. 135)

Und da ihn die Jünger sahen auf dem Meer gehen, erschraken sie und sprachen: Es ist ein Gespenst! und schrien vor Furcht. (Matt. 14, 26, Luther NT, p. 43)
Als sie ihn auf dem Wasser gehen sahen, wurden sie von Furcht gepackt.
"Es ist ein Gespenst!" riefen sie und schrien vor Angst. (NGÜ(M), p. 40).
When the disciples saw him walking on the lake they were so shaken that they cried out in terror: "It is a ghost!" (NEB, p. 27)

But given the central role that Luther's translation of the Bible played in German culture, it is hardly surprising that his use of the word *Angst* has also found its way into modern translations, and that in these translations, too, one often finds the word *Angst* in contexts where, for example, in English translations *anxiety*, *distress*, or *trouble* (rather than *fear*) are used (and in French translations, *l'angoisse* rather than *peur*). One example, from Psalm 25 (17):

Die Angst meines Herzens ist gross:
führe mich aus meinen Nöten! (Luther, Werke, vol. 10/1, p. 176)

Mein Herz wird immer mehr von Angst gequält; befreie mich von jedem Druck! (*Die Bibel*, p. 499)

The troubles of my heart have enlarged,
Oh bring me out of my distresses. (NKJV, p. 549)

Mes angoisses m'envahissent;
dégage-moi de mes tourments. (*La Bible*, 1988, p. 813)

We can say, then, that in modern German translations of the Bible the word *Angst* replaces two different words from Luther's Bible, which for Luther had very different meanings: *Angst* ("affliction/distress") and *Furcht* ("fear"). But the meaning of this new word *Angst* doesn't correspond exactly to either of those two words (as they were used by Luther). Rather, being a descendant of the two, it is a new concept, whose identity reflects its complex – and unique – past.

Most importantly, what can be said about *Angst* as used in modern German translations of the Bible, can also be said about its use in

contemporary German language in general: being a historical descendant of *Angst* "affliction/distress", which has drifted in the direction of *Furcht* "fear", the modern German *Angst* is a new concept, whose identity reflects its past.

10 Martin Luther's inner life and its possible impact on the history of *Angst*

Erich Fromm's famous – and admittedly hostile – characterization of Luther saw the key to his personality as lying in "Angst" – and in the quest for something that could quench it. According to Fromm (1980a [1941]), "he [Luther] was a man driven to despair, anxiety and doubt [*Angst und Zweifel*] and at the same time by . . . an ardent wish for certainty" (1980a[1941]: 65). His whole attitude towards the world was "one of anxiety and hatred" (1980a[1941]: 66), and his "need to conquer the unbearable doubt" led him to a "compulsive quest for certainty" (1980a[1941]: 66). "He was tortured by doubts as only a compulsive character can be, and was constantly seeking for something which would give him inner security and relieve him from this torture of uncertainty . . . His whole being was pervaded by fear, doubt [*Angst und Zweifel*] and inner isolation, and on this personal basis he was to become the champion of social groups which were in a very similar position psychologically" (1980a[1941]: 56).

Other writers on the subject don't necessarily attribute to Luther "hatred towards the world", but they do seem to agree with Fromm as far as "anxiety" is concerned. Dalbiez (1974) not only attributes to him a "neurose d'angoisse très grave" (p. 332; "a serious anxiety neurosis") linked with "l'angoisse morbide de culpabilité" ("a morbid guilt anxiety") and "un sentiment morbide de culpabilité d'une extreme violence" (p. 12; "a morbid sense of guilt") but goes so far as to "sum up" Luther in the words "pour moi, Luther n'est qu'angoisse" (p. 24; "for me Luther is nothing but anxiety").

The most striking pieces of evidence adduced by Dalbiez include the description of Luther's acute anxiety attacks given by his fellow reformer Philip Melanchton, the other famous "*praeceptor Germaniae*", ("teacher of Germany"), Luther's own vivid description of states of anxiety caused by a sense of sinfulness, and the record of his suicidal tendencies (related to the same sense of sinfulness) contained in Luther's *Tischreden* and other writings. Thus, Melanchton (1939: 158) reports:

> Often, when he was thinking attentively about the wrath of God, or about some startling examples of divine punishment, he would be

> suddenly struck by such terror as to almost lose consciousness. I myself have seen him suddenly struck by such consternation whilst taking part in some doctrinal debate, that he had to go to an adjacent room to lie down, where he would pray and intermittently repeat: "God has locked all people in sin in order to show mercy to everyone". He first experienced this intense terror in the year when a friend of his was killed in an accident . . .
>
> In the meantime, he pored over the sources of divine doctrines, the writings of the prophets and apostles, in order to better understand God's will and to nourish his fear and his faith with solid testimony. He was impelled to undertake this study by his sufferings and his fears.

Luther's own description of anxiety reads as follows:

> I, too, have known a man who said he often suffered great affliction, very briefly but with such infernal intensity that neither tongue nor pen could describe it, nor any who had not experienced it believe it; had these sufferings been yet more intense or had they lasted half an hour or even one tenth of an hour, the man would have perished and his bones would have turned into ashes.
>
> God would appear then to be terribly angry, and with him, the whole creation. And then there would be no escape, no consolation, neither inside nor outside, but only this universal accusation. And then the man would say, crying, this verse: "I've been rejected far from your eyes". And he wouldn't even dare to say: "God, don't punish me in your fury" (Ps. VI, 7). At this moment, mirabile dictu, the soul cannot believe that it can never be redeemed or that the punishment can never be completed. And yet this punishment is eternal and the soul cannot regard it as temporary, so it is left with the sole desire to be helped, and with a horrible moan, but it doesn't know where to ask for help. (Dalbiez 1974: 339)

The passage of the *Tischreden* relating to Luther's (alleged) suicidal tendencies reads:

> Mr Leonhard, pastor of Guben, said that when he was a prisoner, the devil maliciously tormented him, laughing heartily when he took a knife in his hand, and saying to him: "Well, kill yourself!" And often he had to throw the knife away. Similarly, when he saw a piece of thread on the floor he would gather up enough of it to make a cord with which to hang himself. And he (the devil) had pushed(?) him to the point that he was no longer capable of reciting "The Lord's Prayer" or of reading the psalms, as he normally did. And then doctor Luther replied: "It has happened to me too, that when I had a knife in my hand such bad thoughts would come over me that I couldn't pray and the devil would chase me out of my room." (p. 355)

According to Dalbiez (1974), this testimony of the pastor Leonhard is supported by Luther's own references to suicidal tendencies (described in the third person) as a consequence to which thinking about one's sinfulness may easily lead (if one doesn't have a strong enough and

constant enough faith in Christ's redemptive power). To illustrate:

> To look at the sin in your own heart is a sacrilege. For it is the devil, not God, who locates the sin there. You must look at Christ, and when you see your sins fixed there, you will be safe from your sins, death, from the hell . . . A great effort is necessary to grasp these things by faith and to believe them to the point of being able to say: "I have sinned and I have not sinned", so that one can win over one's conscience, this powerful master who has often pushed people into despair, leading them to a knife or a rope. (*Esaïam prophetam Scholia* ch. 53; quoted in Dalbiez 1974: 352)

The subject of Luther's personality is of course a controversial one, and I have no intention of trying to get involved in this controversy here. As far as the subject of "Angst" is concerned, however, certain points do seem to emerge quite clearly.

First, Luther's life was marked by intense spiritual suffering – by an inner affliction and distress – and this suffering is reflected in his writings. Second, from Luther's translation of the Bible we know that Luther's word for affliction and distress was "Angst" (his translation equivalent of the Latin words *pressura*, *angustia*, and *tribulatio* and the Greek words *stenoxoria*, *synokhē*, and *tlipsis*). Third, nobody doubts that Luther's suffering was linked with his faith in God, his passionate need to be certain of his salvation, and his overpowering sense of sinfulness (human in general and his own in particular). Fourth, since for Luther the prospect of his salvation was linked with God's judgment, and since he thought that this Last Judgment was imminent, his distress at the thought of his sinfulness was inextricably linked with an intense anxiety over his eternal destiny. Fifth, since for Luther salvation depended on faith, and only faith, the very doubts which tormented him seemed to stand between him and his salvation; and so his present anguish was inseparable for him from anxiety over the future (a possible future hell was inseparable from what he called the "hell" experienced here and now).

There are reasons to think, then, that for Luther, the two phenomena – distress (inner suffering in general) and anxiety about the future in particular – were inextricably connected. When he used the word *Angst* (or the phrase *angst und bange*), it meant in his speech what it meant in the language of the time, that is, something like "distress in general", but he often used it in contexts which implied, roughly speaking, not only distress but also anxiety (rather than any other kind of affliction). In his writings, as in his life and his teaching, therefore, the two concepts ("affliction" and "anxiety") came to be closely related.

To put it differently, there was no greater suffering for Luther than uncertainty about one's eternal fate – and since he talked and wrote incessantly about the subject it is likely that his general word for

something like "affliction", namely *Angst*, became tinged with connotations of something like "anxiety". This, in turn, is likely to have set off a semantic shift, of a very familiar nature, a kind of semantic narrowing (cf. Stern 1965[1932]), from "affliction" in general to affliction caused by uncertainty about the future, that is to say, to a kind of cross between "affliction" and "anxiety".

In addition to eschatological anxieties (which, given Luther's conception of eschatology, were also existential anxieties), there is another vital ingredient in Luther's theology which is consistent with the concept of "Angst": the idea that a man quite literally *can't do anything* which could improve his eschatological prospects. For salvation depends exclusively on faith, not on anything that one might do. Our own efforts to live well, to do "good things", can get us nowhere. To quote one (Lutheran) commentator, Althaus (1966: 245–6):

> Justification, and therewith all of salvation, is given to men through faith alone, *sola fide*. For justification and salvation depend only on God's mercy; and this can be received only in an act of faith. Man's ethical activity and "works" have no place here. They can neither cause nor preserve salvation for us. It is only through faith that we are preserved to eternal life.

Thus, the existential uncertainty ("I don't know what will happen to me) [after I die]", the eschatological fears ("many very bad things can happen to me"), and the theology of "faith alone" ("I can't do anything [to cause these bad things not to happen]") form a conceptual whole which is remarkably congruent with the German concept of "Angst" as it subsequently evolved.

Given the wide dissemination of Luther's writings, their great popularity, and their unquestioned impact on the German language, Luther's use of the key word *Angst* was likely to have an impact on the use of this word in German in general, and is more than likely to have contributed to the semantic shift which has demonstrably taken place: "affliction" (1000–1600), "affliction/anxiety" (1600–1900), "anxiety/fear" (1900–2000).

But of course labels such as "affliction", "affliction/anxiety", "anxiety", and "anxiety/fear" are only very rough approximations. A more precise statement of these meanings, as well as further arguments in their support, will be offered in the next section.

11 Luther's possible role in the shift from *Angst* "affliction" to *Angst* "anxiety/fear"

As we have seen, Luther didn't use *Angst* as a quasi-synonym of *Furcht* (as, for example, modern translations of the Bible often do), but rather in a more general sense of, roughly speaking, "distress". But the

contexts in which he used the word *Angst* had to do, typically, with death, sin, and the danger of hell, and they exuded anxiety. One example is provided by Luther's translation of Psalm 116, where the expression *angst der Hellen* appears:

> Stricke des *todes* hatten mich umbfangen,
> Und *angst der Hellen* hatten mich troffen,
> Ich kam inn jamer und not. (Luther, Werke, vol. 10/1, p. 489)
>
> "The pains of death encompassed me,
> And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me;
> I found trouble and sorrow." (NKJV, p. 602)

Luther used here the expression *Angst der Hellen* (with *Angst* as a plural), to translate a Hebrew phrase rendered in the Vulgate as *pericula inferni* ("dangers of hell"), and in the English New King James Version as "pangs of Sheol". An even more characteristic example is furnished by Luther's famous hymn "In the midst of life we are":

> Mitten wyr im leben sind
> mit dem *tod* umbfangen
> Wen suchen wir der hulffe thu
> das wyr gnad erlangen?
> Das bistu alleyne.
>
> Mitten hyn dem *tod* anficht
> uns der *Hellen* rachen,
> Wer will uns aus solcher not
> freh und ledig machen?
> Das thustu Herr alleyne.
>
> Mitten hyn der *Hellen angst*
> unser *sund* uns treyben,
> Wo soln wyr denn flihen hyn
> da wyr mugen bleyben?
> Zu dyr herr Christ alleyne. (Luther, Werke, vol. 35, p. 454)
>
> "In the midst of earthly life,
> Snares of *death* surround us;
> Who shall help us in the strife
> Lest the Foe confound us?
> Thou only, Lord, Thou only.
>
> In the midst of *death's* dark vale
> Powers of *hell* o'ertake us,
> Who will help when they assail,
> Who secure will make us?
> Thou only, Lord, Thou only.
>
> In the midst of *hell*-born woe

All our *sins* oppress us,
Where shall we for refuge go,
Where for grace to bless us?
To Thee, Lord Jesus, only."

In the standard modern German version, the phrase rendered here as "hell-born woe" is "der Hölle Angst" (Polack 1942: 420), which of course suggests (to modern readers) the fear of hell, whereas in Luther's original version, the phrase "der Hellen angst" suggested indeed something closer to torment and "woe".

It is hardly surprising that in discussing this hymn, Althaus (1966: 410) describes it as expressing "anxious questions and prayers" and as voicing "anxiety [faith] feels when it confronts God in death". Luther used in the hymn the word *Angst*, but even though the word as such meant for Luther "affliction" rather than "anxiety", given the context, an interpretation in terms of "anxiety" is perfectly natural. The collocation *der höllen angst*, "the *angst* of hell" (to which I will return later), is particularly symptomatic in this respect: for Luther, it meant the "torment of hell" rather than the "fear of hell", but the image of the "gaping jaws of hell" (awaiting the sinner) exudes anxiety. (The phrase "snares of death" used in the standard English version of the hymn is less vivid than the original phrase "der Hellen Rachen", and Althaus' (1966: 406) version, "hell's jaws gaping at us", better preserves the tone of the original.)

Another very characteristic example of the link between *Angst*, *death*, *God's judgement*, *devil*, and *hell* in Luther's writings is provided by the hymn described as "a piece of Luther's autobiography" (Oberman 1983: 330) and referring to his illness:

Dem Teufel ich gefangen lag
im Tod war ich verloren,
mein Sünd mich quälte Nacht und Tag,
darin ich war geboren.
Ich fiel auch immer tiefer drein,
es war kein Guts am Leben mein,
die Sünd hatt' mich besessen.

Mein guten Werk' die galten nicht,
es war mit ihn' verdorben;
der frei Will haßte Gotts Gericht,
er war zum Gut'n erstorben;
die Angst mich zu verzweifeln trieb,
daß nichts denn Sterben bei mir blieb,
zur Höllen mußt ich sinken.

"Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay,
Death brooded darkly o'er me,

Sin was my torment night and day,
In sin my mother bore me;
Yea, deep and deeper still I fell,
Life had become a living hell,
So firmly sin possessed me.

My own good works availed me naught,
No merit they attaining;
Free will against God's judgment fought,
Dead to all good remaining.
My fears increased till sheer despair
Left naught but death to be my share;
The pangs of hell I suffered."
(Translation from Lutheran Hymn Book 1961: 281)

Here, Luther is speaking of "Angst" in the sense of torment and anguish (once again, with reference to hell), but the English version of the hymn renders this "Angst" as "fear". This is not inconsistent with the general atmosphere of Luther's hymn but does not represent accurately its exact meaning.

One can understand, then, why Mosse's (1955) dictionary based on quotations from Luther's Bible should assign to Luther's *Angst* not one but three glosses: "anxiety, fear, distress". The word's invariant in Luther's speech appears to have been "distress" rather than either "anxiety" or "fear"; but since, typically, the word is used in contexts inspiring fear and exuding anxiety, its very meaning may seem to be somewhat indeterminate and to span a wider range of emotions than it actually encoded.

The difficulty in sorting out the semantic invariant of *Angst* from the implications induced by the context is reflected, in an interesting way, in a controversy between the editor of the Middle High German dictionary (1854) Georg Friedrich Benecke and the brothers Grimm, the editors of the monumental dictionary of modern German published some decades later. In essence, Benecke emphasized the difference in meaning between the Middle High German *angst* (roughly, "affliction") and its modern meaning (roughly, "anxiety/fear"), whereas the brothers Grimm were inclined to see some mixture of "affliction" and "fear" (or "anxiety") in both the earlier and the later meaning. Thus, Benecke wrote:

> The modern German *angst*, with which we usually link the concept of lack of courage, does not correspond at all to the old *angest*, or only incidentally. *angest* refers to a state, in which one feels that one is surrounded by trouble and danger, even when one tackles them with the greatest courage, or endures them calmly. The heroes in the

> "Nibelungen" have plenty of *angest* [trouble/danger], but they have no *angst* [fear]. (Benecke 1854: vol. 1, p. 43)[9]

The brothers Grimm disagree:

> Benecke exaggerates the supposed difference in meaning between the Middle High German *angest* and the modern German *angst*. Why shouldn't today, too, some things arouse *angst* in a warrior without causing him to show the slightest cowardice? . . . *angst* is not simply a lack of courage but a tormenting worry, a general state of oppressive doubt. (Grimm and Grimm 1854: vol. 1, p. 358)[10]

But the account of the Grimm brothers fails to explain why Luther never used *Angst* to translate *timor* or *phobos* ("fear") and why he only used it to translate *pressura*, *angustia*, and *tribulatio*, or *tlipsis* and *synokhē* ("affliction/distress"). By contrast, Benecke's hypothesis does explain this fact – and at the same time it is not inconsistent with the Grimms' observation that nineteenth century *Angst* means not just "fear" but rather, roughly speaking, something between "fear" and "distress". (See also Dietz 1870.)

The evolution in the meaning of the compound word *Höllenangst* ("hell-*angst*") is particularly revealing in this respect. In modern (twentieth century) German this word is generally taken to refer to the "fear of hell" (i.e. fear that one might go to hell). In Luther's language, however, (as pointed out earlier) *Höllenangst* (or *der Höllen angst*) referred to the "torments of hell".

In fact, long before Luther and long after Luther, the torments of hell were described in German as the "angst of fire", as the following examples illustrate:

> der wirt schuldig zu der angst des feuers
> "he will deserve the *angst* of fire" 1382;
> (quoted in Reichmann 1989: 1190)

> Da liegt er [Satan] in dem Flammen-Meere,
> Ihn foltern ewig Angst und Pein.
>
> "there he (Satan) lies in a sea of flames,
> tortured eternally by *Angst* and pain"
> (Goethe; quoted in the *Goethe Wörterbuch* 1966: 57)

The editors of the Goethe dictionary comment in this connection that "angst" was understood as a "symptomatic experience of hell" ("als symptomat. Erleben der Hölle"). Luther's references to the "angst of fire" or to the "angst of hell" should be seen in this perspective.

As noted, for example, in Reichmann's (1989) "Frühneuhochdeutsches Wörterbuch", in pre-modern German *angst* was associated, in particular, with Christ's suffering before his death ("Passio Christi,

Todesangst Christi", p. 1190), and with religious and didactic use of language ("religiöse und didaktische Texte", p. 1191). But for Luther, thoughts about death (including Christ's death) were inextricably linked with thoughts about God's judgment and the possibility of eternal damnation.

The characteristic link between "Angst", "Todesangst" (present also in Jesus' agony), and "Höllenangst", which came to be associated with Lutheran theology in general, is clearly articulated in Paul Tillich's discussion of this concept (rendered by him in English as "anxiety"):

> If man is left to his "having to die," the essential anxiety about nonbeing is transformed into the horror of death. Anxiety about nonbeing is present in everything finite. It is consciously or unconsciously effective in the whole process of living. Like the beating of the heart, it is always present, although one is not always aware of it . . . The dramatic description of the anxiety of Jesus in having to die confirms the universal character of the relation of finitude and anxiety.
>
> Under the conditions of estrangement, anxiety has a different character, brought on by the element of guilt. The loss of one's potential eternity is experienced as something for which one is responsible in spite of its universal tragic actuality. Sin is the sting of death, not its physical cause. It transforms the anxious awareness of one's having to die into the painful realization of a lost eternity. (Tillich 1957: 67–9)

But to appreciate the full force of Luther's references to *Höllenangst* we must take into account Luther's theology and, in particular, Luther's eschatology, and we must pay attention to the fact that for Luther hell was not just a matter of a person's possible eternal future, but also very much a matter of a person's spiritual distress in the present. To quote Asendorf's (sympathetic) account of Luther's eschatology:

> The Last Judgment will not happen at some distant point in time; rather, it is one's immediate present. One's conscience is hell. The Judgment, wrath, sin and death are all present at the same time . . . When we feel our conscience, then we feel hell and we think we are lost for all eternity. (1967: 57)

> [it was pointed out that] through a bad conscience hell, that is the eschaton itself, is thrust into this life, in such a way that impotent curses raised towards God are no more than an expression of utter separation from God and of utter despair. Here, the person experiences, in pain, what it means to be remote from God's visage; as Luther himself had fully experienced, before he chose the path of the Reform. The borders to the eschaton are open. One suffers God's eternal judgment here and now. (1967: 59–60)[11]

Thus, for Luther, "Angst" was very much linked with the idea of hell, but not just in the frightening images of a place of eternal damnation; rather, and above all, with "hell" as intense anguish suffered here on

earth and linked with a subjective experience of God's wrath and rejection. It is hardly surprising that given this conception of "hell" and this conception of "Angst", the notions of "anguish" and "anxiety" became closely linked in Luther's writings, and – one must hypothesize – in Luther's spiritual and linguistic heritage in Germany. The fact that we can see traces of this heritage not only in Germany but in other Lutheran countries as well, lends additional support to this hypothesis. The importance of "angst" in Danish language and philosophy (recall Paul Tillich's remarks quoted earlier) is relevant here.

It is also interesting to note Luther's use of the words *Hölle* and *infernum* (Latin for hell) as labels for pain and anxiety, as in his 1527 letter to Melanchton, written when he [Luther] seemed to be mortally ill:

> For more than a week I have been thrown hither and thither in death and hell, I felt beaten throughout my whole body, all my limbs were trembling. Driven by floods and storms of despair and blasphemy against God, I all but lost Christ. But thanks to the prayers of the faithful, God started to show me mercy and to tear my soul from the bottom of hell. (Luther quoted in Oberman 1983: 335)[12]

Speaking of the "Angst" which Luther showed on this occasion (when he thought he was on his deathbed), a sympathetic commentator, Oberman (1983: 335), remarks:

> It was not the encounter with death which caused him so much *Angst* and fright. Physically, Luther improved quickly, as he reports. What he experienced on the outbreak of the sickness as an attack of the devil, was only to come into full swing as his health improved. Nor was he tormented by any doubts about the truth of the Gospels. What worried him [caused him *Angst*] was the question whether he himself could hold on to this truth. (Oberman 1983: 335)[13]

Since for Luther salvation (and heaven) depended on faith alone, the doubt which he experienced (not a doubt about God but a doubt about his own salvation) was for him, by his own testimony, a source of intense torment and anxiety – of "hell" – not in a modern metaphorical sense of the word, but in a literal sense: to feel that one was cut off from God was for Luther what he understood by "hell". Anguish and anxiety were for him one: "infernal anguish" and "fear of hell" were one and the same thing.

Thus, the semantic shift from *angst* "anguish" to *angst* "anxiety/fear", which took place in the German language at some time between the sixteenth century and modern times mirrors a synchronic shift which we can observe in Luther's own language and thought: a shift from *angst* as a translation equivalent of the Latin words *pressura*, *angustia*, and *tribulatio* ("anguish/distress") to *angst* as a word associated with anxiety-inspiring thoughts about death, the devil, and hell.

12 The great social and economic anxieties of Luther's times

In the view of many historians, the times when Luther lived were marked by a wide-spread anxiety, linked with the dissolution of feudalism in Europe and the birth pains of capitalism. In the words of Erich Fromm (1980a [1941]: 67), "the old order was breaking down. The individual had lost the security of certainty and was threatened by new economic forces, by capitalists and monopolies; the comparative principle was being replaced by competition". This state of affairs led to wide-spread anxiety [*Angst*]:

> The breakdown of the medieval system of feudal society had one main significance for all classes of society: the individual was left alone and isolated. He was free. This freedom had a twofold result. Man was deprived of the security he had enjoyed, of the unquestionable feeling of belonging, and he was torn loose from the world which had satisfied his quest for security both economically and spiritually. He felt alone and anxious. (1980a[1941]: 85)
> (Er fühlte sich nun allein und war voller Angst. Fromm 1980b: 275)

Again and again, the word *Angst* reappears in Fromm's discussion of those times as a key word. Fromm asks: "What is the connection of Luther's doctrines with the psychological situation of all but the rich and powerful towards the end of the Middle Ages?" (1980a [1941]: 67). And he replies that the new religious doctrines carried a special appeal to the urban middle class, to the poor in the cities, and to the peasants, "because they gave expression to a new feeling of freedom and independence as well as to the feeling of powerlessness and anxiety [*Angst*][14] by which their members were pervaded" (1980a [1941]: 53). Luther's picture of man mirrored (Fromm remarks), these people's dilemma: "Man is free *from* all ties binding him to spiritual authorities, but this very freedom leaves him alone and anxious [*angsterfüllt*]" (Fromm 1980a [1941]: 68; 1980b: 264). I will adduce a few more quotes highlighting the psychological climate at the end of the Middle Ages which helps to explain the birth of the concept of "Angst":

> the new religious doctrines not only gave expression to what the average member of the middle class felt, but, by rationalizing and systematizing this attitude, they also increased and strengthened it. (1980a[1941]: 87)

> Protestantism was the answer to the human needs of the frightened, uprooted, and isolated individual who had to orient and to relate himself to a new world. (ibid. p. 87)

> It was also satisfying psychologically, since such action answered the needs and anxieties of this new kind of personality. (ibid p. 89)

> This free, isolated individual is crushed by the experience of his individual insignificance. Luther's theology gives expression to this feeling of helplessness and doubt. (ibid p. 69)

> [They] were an answer to psychic needs which in themselves were brought about by the collapse of the medieval system and by the beginnings of capitalism . . . freedom *from* the traditional bonds of medieval society, though giving the individual a new feeling of independence, at the same time made him feel alone and isolated, filled with doubt and anxiety [*Angst*] (ibid. p. 89)

Thus, "Angst" plays in Fromm's analysis a crucial role, representing as it were a meeting place of history and theology.

13 Uncertainty vs. certainty, *Angst* vs. *Sicherheit*

According to some commentators, the salient role of the concept "Angst" in German culture is linked with the cultural value of "certainty", of knowing exactly what one should expect and what one should do. As Bernard Nuss (1993: 188–9) put it in the passage quoted earlier, "[for Germans] uncertainty generates *Angst* . . . Not to know what will happen . . . arouses [in Germans] much more *Angst* than a real danger".

Nuss' remarks about the value of "certainty" in German culture tally with comments on the importance of certainty that one encounters in the writings of many German scholars. One characteristic example is provided by the following passage from a foreword to a popular book on theology, with the characteristic title "Vergewisserung" ("acquisition of certainty" or "becoming certain"):

> "I am certain!" – Is this a sentence from our time? . . . It seems that nowadays certainty is more rarely found, and that searching for it requires a greater effort. But who would really forsake certainty? To be certain: of oneself, of one's goals, of another person – and above all: of one's own beliefs – this is necessary for life. It is impossible to live in uncertainty. Even the more or less trivial uncertainties of everyday life are difficult to bear. Often they make us ill, and in this way demonstrate how much people suffer from them. Uncertainty in the basic questions of life threatens life itself. (Rössler 1979: 6)[15]

As the above quote illustrates, the adjective *gewiß* can be matched with the English adjective *certain*, and the noun *Gewißheit*, with the noun *certainty*. The adjective *sicher*, in one of its meanings, can be regarded as an equivalent of *gewiß*, and the noun *Sicherheit*, as an equivalent of *Gewißheit*. (As *Langenscheidt's Großwörterbuch* (1993) puts it, *Gewißheit* means "das sichere Wissen in bezug auf etwas = *Sicherheit*", i.e. "a certain knowledge about something, that is, *Sicherheit*".)

The following sentence from a novel illustrates the use of the word *sicher* in the sense of *gewiß*.

> *Mag sein, daß Ivy mich liebte. (Sicher war ich bei Frauen nie.)* (Frisch 1969: 43)
> "Maybe Ivy loved me. (With women, I was never certain.)"

In addition, however, both the adjective *sicher* and the noun *Sicherheit* are widely used in German in a sense which, roughly speaking, combines the ideas of "certainty", "safety", and "security". *Langenscheidt's Großwörterbuch* (1993) defines this second sense of *sicher* as follows: "vor Gefahren oder Risiken geschützt < ein Versteck, ein Weg, ein Arbeitsplatz, ein Einkommen" ("protected from dangers or risks < a hiding place, a road, a job, an income"). If something is "sicher" in this second sense, one can be certain that one can rely on it and that nothing bad will happen to one because of that. This meaning of *sicher* is so salient and so important in German culture, that the adjective *sicher* in this sense has become semi-grammaticalized and is used widely in compounds such as *diebessicher* "thief-proof" or *fälschungssicher* "secure against forging" (of a document, for example, a passport). Langenscheidt's dictionary describes this use of *-sicher* as "very productive".

To appreciate the differences between the meaning of the German words *sicher* (adjective) and *Sicherheit* (noun) and any English words with which they may be compared, consider the following two German sentences:

> (i) Erwähnen möchte ich noch, daß ist nicht weiß, ob ich vor Verzweiflungsanfällen sicher bin. (Hahnemann, 1995: 61)
> "I would also like to mention that I don't know whether I am certain/secure from attacks of doubt." (not acceptable in English)

> (ii) Wer in seinem Schicksal einen Sinn sieht, der kann versuchen, ein Lebensprinzip zu finden, durch das er Sicherheit für sich selbst, für die anderen und für die gesamte Welt, in der er lebt, gewinnt. (Harder 1995: 69)
> "He who sees a meaning in his life [fate] can try to find a life-principle, through which he can win *Sicherheit* [certainty/security] for himself, for others, and for the whole world in which he lives."

What these sentences clearly show is that *Sicherheit* (in the sense in which it is used here) means neither "certainty" nor "security" but, as it were, a combination of the two: a kind of security which is found in certainty.

To be *sicher* in that characteristically German sense does not mean to be immune from dangers but rather to be, so to speak, free from *Angst*; it implies not only that one is safe, but also that one can be *certain* of being safe. To put it differently, *Sicherheit* is an opposite of both danger

and doubt: it suggests a deeply satisfying sense of being free from danger and doubt at the same time.

The semantic relations between the concepts under discussion ("doubt", "certainty", "safety", "security", *Sicherheit*$_1$ and *Sicherheit*$_2$) can be clarified by means of explications formulated in the Natural Semantic Metalanguage. Thus, the meaning of the English word *doubt* (and the German word *Zweifel*) can be portrayed as follows:

doubt (e.g. I doubt it that X happened)
I can't think: "I know that X happened"
I think: "maybe it didn't happen"

The meaning of the English word *certainty*, and of the German word *Gewißheit* (and also one meaning of *Sicherheit) can be represented as, essentially, an opposite of doubt:*

certainty/Gewißheit/Sicherheit$_1$ (e.g. I am certain that X happened)
I can think: "I know that X happened"
I don't have to think: "maybe it didn't happen"

The concepts of "danger" (in German, *Gefahr*) and "safety" (no exact equivalent in German) can also be represented as opposites:

safety (e.g. person X is safe)
I know something about person X
because of this I can think:
"nothing bad will happen to person X
this is good for X"

danger (e.g. person X is in danger)
I know something about person X
because of this I cannot think:
"nothing bad will happen to person X"
I have to think:
"something bad can happen to person X
this is bad for X"

The English word *security* implies, so to speak, more than *safety*, because it promises that not only "nothing bad WILL happen (to someone or something)" but that "nothing bad CAN happen (to someone) because of [something]". But the German word *Sicherheit* (in the relevant sense, *Sicherheit*$_2$) promises even more than *security*: not only CAN

nothing bad happen to one if one has that "Sicherheit", but one can be CERTAIN that nothing bad can happen to one:

> *security* (e.g. security screen, security lock)
> people can know something about X
> because of this, people can think:
> "if person Y has object X nothing bad can happen to this person
> because of this, if Y has X, it is good for Y"
>
> *Sicherheit*$_2$
> person Y knows something
> because of this, person Y doesn't have to think:
> "I don't know what will happen
> maybe something bad will happen to me"
> person Y can think:
> "I know that nothing bad can happen to me"
> this is good for person Y

The concept of "Sicherheit$_2$", combining, as it were, the ideas of "certainty", "safety", and "security", is widely regarded as a key German value (cf. e.g. Syberberg 1995: 122), and as a positive counterpart of "Angst". The key role that the word *Sicherheit* plays in German advertising (including permanent signs displayed over shops and businesses) provides some evidence for this perception, as do various linguistic facts, such as the wealth of derivates and compounds involving this concept, including, for example, the verbs *sichern*, *sicherstellen*, and *sichergehen*. For example (taken from *Langenscheidt's Großwörterbuch* 1993), the sentence:

> Wir müssen sicherstellen, daß nicht noch mehr Vogelarten aussterben.
> "We must ensure that no more bird species die out."

means that we must do something so as to be certain that some bad thing will not happen. Similarly, the phrase:

> die Tür durch ein doppeltes Schloß gegen Einbruch sichern
> "to secure the door against a break-in by a double lock"

means that if one does this to a door one can be certain because of this that nothing bad will happen to that door (no one will be able to break in). And the sentence:

> Sie wollte sichergehen und fragte deshalb noch einen Arzt.
> "She wanted to run no risks so she asked another doctor for a second opinion."

means that the person in question wanted to do something thanks to which she could be certain that something bad would not happen to her.

The notion of "Sicherheit" is also linked with the specifically German ideal of "Geborgenheit" (from *geborgen* "sheltered"), that is, of being in a place where one can feel safe and protected (that is, so to speak, a feeling of being in a place where one doesn't have to feel *Angst*). This in turn is related to the specifically German concept of "Heimat" – that is, roughly, "homeland, or home region, seen as a place where one was a child and where one could feel safe and protected". (For detailed discussion, see Wierzbicka 1995e and 1997a.)

German–English dictionaries often translate the word *Geborgenheit* as "safety" or "security", but in fact the concept of "Geborgenheit" is quite unique and there is no word for it in English. Roughly speaking, it stands for a feeling of existential security (rather like *Angst* stands for a feeling of existential insecurity); and it could never be used with reference to such practical matters as, for example, "safety pins" or "security belts". On the other hand, it is perfectly suited to talk about a more or less mythologized native country, that is, *Heimat*.

As is often pointed out in the abundant literature on "Heimat", the very word *Heimat* suggests something like a lost paradise, the only place where one could feel "Geborgenheit" and be free of "Angst". If *Angst* represents, as Heidegger put it, a state of *un-zuhause-sein* ("not being at home"), *Heimat* represents a metaphorical (and metaphysical) "Zuhause", that is, "home". To quote Nuss (1993: 178):

> Through such images there arises for the Germans a state of "Geborgenheit", in which, as in the bosom of one's family, one is no longer exposed to the vicissitudes and dangers of life. The worst thing that can happen to a German is to lose his *Heimat*. Then it seems to him that he has been robbed of his very soul.[16]

Thus the concept of "Angst" is not only language- and culture-specific, but occupies moreover an important place in a whole network of language- and culture-specific concepts. It is closely related to other independently identifiable cultural attitudes and cultural values; along with *Sicherheit*, these values include *Ordnung*.

14 Certainty and *Ordnung*

In addition to the basic dictionary equivalents of the English words

certain and *certainty* (*gewiß* and *Gewißheit*, *sicher*$_1$ and *Sicherheit*$_1$), German has also four "special", highly colloquial words implying certainty: *bestimmt*, *genau*, *klar*, and *Bescheid*. The very frequent use of these words in everyday conversation appears to confirm the great salience of the value of "certainty" in German culture. I will discuss these words briefly one by one.

Bescheid is a common colloquial word, which, however, has no equivalents in other European languages. According to Duden's (1981) dictionary, the noun *Bescheid* comes from the verb *bescheiden* as used in "Amtssprache" (the language of bureaucracy), whose meaning is given as "jemandem behördlicherseits eine Entscheidung über etwas mitteilen" ("to inform someone of a decision taken by the authorities"). In its colloquial use, however, *Bescheid* refers simply to a desirable state of knowing "with certainty" how one should proceed in a given situation. *Langenscheidt's Großwöterbuch* (1993) defines this concept as "eine erwartete Information über etwas" ("expected information about something") and illustrates it with the following examples:

> Sag mir bitte Bescheid, ob du zu meiner Party kommen kannst!
> "Tell me please *Bescheid* if you can come to my party."

The bureaucratic meaning of *Bescheid* provides a clue to its everyday meaning. The official sense of the word implies that to know what I have to do, I have to know something "with certainty", and that I can only know it if some official body tells me what this body has decided. The everyday sense of *Bescheid* has a reduced but clearly related meaning:

> I want to know something "with certainty"
> when I know it, I will know what I have to do
> I can know it if someone else says something to me about it

The adverb *bestimmt* (homophonous with the past participle of the verb *bestimmen*) is described by Langenscheidt (*Langenscheidt's Großwörterbuch* 1993) as a synonym of *gewiß* "certain/certainly" and is given two definitions: (1) "used to indicate that one holds something for very probable"; and (2) "without doubt, with absolute certainty". The illustrative sentences are:

> Du wirst bestimmt Erfolg haben bei deiner Arbeit!
> "you will certainly achieve success in your work!"
>
> Weißt du das bestimmt?
> "You know this for sure?"

The dictionary notes also the common everyday collocation *ganz bestimmt* "quite certainly" ("for sure"). A nice example of this phrase used in combination with the word *geborgen*, "emotionally and existentially sheltered", that is with reference to the ideal of *Geborgenheit* is provided by the following aphorism by the Lutheran pastor and resistance hero Dietrich Bonhoeffer (quoted in Claessen 1995: 38):

> Von guten Mächten wunderbar geborgen
> erwarten wir getrost, was kommen mag.
> Gott ist mit uns am Abend und am Morgen
> und ganz bestimmt an jedem neuen Tag.
>
> Wonderfully sheltered (*geborgen*) by Good Forces
> comforted we await whatever might befall us.
> God is with us by morning and by evening.
> And quite certainly (*ganz bestimmt*) through each new day.

Genau is, in its primary sense, an equivalent of the English word *precise*. But it is also frequently used in another sense, as in the sentence (from *Langenscheidt's Großwörterbuch* 1993):

> Wißt ihr schon Genaues über den Unfall?
> "Do you know anything definite about the accident yet?"

Langenscheidt's Großwörterbuch (1993) distinguishes also several other senses, including the one illustrated by the following phrase: "sich etwas genau merken", which it glosses as "bewußt and konzentriert" ("consciously and with full concentration"). The dictionary also notes the common conversational exclamation *genau*!, used "to confirm, answer a question in a positive way" or "to confirm a supposition". What these different uses of *genau* have in common (apart from the sense "precisely") is something like the combination of "good" and "certainly". An "emphatic confirmation" conveys something like "good, certainly", and "focussed, conscious, concentrated observation" allows one to come to have "good and certain" knowledge. In both cases the idea of "certainty" seems clearly involved.

The word *klar* means, above all, "clear", but it has also developed uses which relate it to certainty. *Langenscheidt's Großwörterbuch* (1993) recognizes these links explicitly when it glosses the colloquial expression *(Na)klar*! as "selbstverständlich, sicher" ("of course, certainly"), and also when it glosses the expression *über etwas klar/im klaren sein* ("to be clear about something") as "etwas genau wissen und deshalb sicher darüber urteilen können" ("to know something exactly and therefore be able to judge about it with certainty"). In fact, even the common conversational phrase *Alles klar*! (lit. "all clear") suggests not only that

"now I know" or "now I understand [what you mean or what you know]" but also, and even especially, that "now I have no doubts", that is "now I am certain I know all I need to know".

Thus, German has a number of language-specific conversational routines which seem to reflect a special interest in "certainty", and a special importance attached to it.

It has often been said that German culture is characterized by a "Vorschrifts- und Ordnungsethos" (Hentig 1996: 59), that is, an ethos based on regulations and the notion of "order", and it is tempting to think with Nuss (1993) and others that the apparent German predilection for regulations and strict order is related to the value of "certainty". The numerous regulations and prohibitions characteristic (according to most observers) of German life can be seen as a secure framework reducing the uncertainty of life and, hopefully, the accompanying *Angst*. As Nuss (1993: 195) put it, "It is clear in daily life what an incessant struggle the Germans unconsciously lead to eliminate their tacit fears [*Ängste*, pl.]. Both materially and psychologically, they have a need to live in a secure/certain framework."[17]

These ideas are certainly consistent with the ubiquitous *Verboten* ("Prohibited") signs (cf. Wierzbicka 1998a), which may indeed have something to do with the cultural value of *Sicherheit* ("certainty/security"), as well as the central value of *Ordnung* ("order"). To quote Nuss (1993: 123) once more:

> For Germans, it is indispensable to have *Ordnung* (order) and to live in a world governed by *Ordnung*. In fact, only *Ordnung* is able to secure them an inner peace. For the head to be able to function in an orderly fashion and for the soul to be able to feel free, the body has to live in an ordered framework. The German cannot bear it when he cannot "find himself" – among his objects and in his thoughts, in his profession as in his emotional life. He likes clear relationships. He wants to know where he stands and how he should proceed. He is a creature of habit and he would like to see everything precisely regulated. The unknown oppresses, even frightens him. He has a need to investigate and to mark out the terrain where he moves. Only when this has happened, does he feel safe/secure/certain.[18]

15 Conclusion

Fear is supposed to be a fundamental human emotion – an emotion determined by human biology, not by culture (see, e.g. Kemper 1987; Plutchik 1994). But in the German intellectual tradition, and also in the prevailing German "naive" psychology, it is not fear (or, in German, *Furcht*) which is widely regarded as a "primeval" feeling (an *Urgefühl*), but something that the Germans call "Angst", and for which English

and most other European languages don't have any equivalent.

In this chapter, I have tried to show that the concept of "Angst" to be found in German psychology, philosophy, and theology is rooted in everyday language, and that it is actually quite close to the concept of "Angst" with which ordinary speakers of German operate on a daily basis. I have also tried to trace the origin of the peculiarly German concept of "Angst", in the spiritual, cultural, and linguistic legacy of Martin Luther.

Having explored Luther's own use of the word *Angst*, and the kinds of context in which this word appeared in Luther's religious writings, I have proposed that there may be a link between Luther's theology and the emergence of the new concept of "Angst" – a concept different from that encoded in the sixteenth century word *Angst* but which may have been suggested by the contexts in which this word tended to appear in Luther's voluminous and hugely influential writings.

On a more general level, I have tried to show that the concept of "Angst" is a cultural creation, and that the boundaries between "different emotions" such as "Angst", "anxiety", or "fear" are in the eye of the beholder – the collective beholder – defined above all by a given language. This doesn't mean that these boundaries between "different emotions" are not real: they are real, but they are imposed by different cognitive scenarios with which the words in question are associated, and the cognitive scenarios themselves are shaped not just by universal human biology but by culture, which in turn is shaped by history, religion, and way of life.

Above all, I have tried to show that by studying the semantic system of a language in a rigorous way and in a coherent methodological framework, we can both reveal and document the cultural underpinnings of emotions – even the most elusive and unfathomable ones such as *Angst*.