The newcomers to the Federal Republic of Germany, the Ausländer, have slowly made their mark on their adopted society, beginning with their contributions to the economy and expanding gradually to the cuisine, the urban landscape, and even the literary and cinematic scene. It was only a matter of time before they would become a presence—if a largely mute one—in the rough and tumble of politics and even in the saturnine world of political theory. And so it has come to pass. Today, those who concern themselves with the theory and practice of German politics can, in their pleas, proposals, critiques, and apologia, no longer avoid the challenge posed by the presence of ethnic and cultural plurality in the bosom of the body politic. Politicians and pundits alike have been obliged to confront the problems posed by diversity and to integrate their responses into their broader political perspectives and platforms.

An important venue in which this shift has occurred has been in talk of the republic. Since the founding, 53 years ago, of two modern, self-proclaimed German republics, and especially in the decade since the two merged into one, a persistent feature of German political discourse has been debate about the meaning of this central term in the historical political lexicon. Much of the discussion has centered on the relative merits of republicanism,\(^1\) understood as a normative program for realizing, or maintaining,
the republic. This is not to say, however, that there is a single established
d Doctrine or position in contemporary debates that might justly lay claim to
the mantle of republicanism, for the diversity of stances that are associated
with the republican ideal is striking. Jürgen Habermas, for example, criticizes
one genre of republicanism thus:

... [C]ontemporary republicans tend to give [political discourse] a communi­
tarian reading. It is precisely this move toward an ethical constriction of politi­
cal discourse that I call into question. Politics may not be assimilated to a
hermeneutical process of self-explication of a shared form of life or collective
identity.2

Here, striking an opposing note, is Dieter Oberndörfer:

Nation stands for the particular, by way of which states distinguish themselves
from one another; Republic, by contrast, for the cosmopolitan foundations of
the modern constitutional state, for universally valid human rights, and for the
derivation of the rights of citizens from the nature of the human being... In the
republic, cultural values are interpreted, accepted, or rejected by each individ­
ual. The culture of the republic is thus unavoidably a mixture of diverse and
frequently conflicting goods and values. The pluralism of the republic is limited
only by the norms of the constitution and their legal and political order.3

As these statements, with their contrasting emphases on substance and form,
suggest, "republic" and "republicanism" are flexible terms that function as loci
for a range of normative interpretations of political life in Germany. In this
respect they are akin to other such elusive terms as "citizenship," "democracy,"
and "nation"; also like these terms, however, their meaning is by no means infi­
nitely malleable. While both labels are applied in more or less official settings,
with greater or lesser precision, cynically or hopefully, and bearing more or less
theoretical freight, they retain, all the same, a modicum of solidity and speci­
ficity. How the republic is conceptualized in German debates reflects, in the
first place, the received contexts of historical traditions and ongoing debates.
At the same time, theorizing about the republic constitutes a distinctive frame­
work for creative thought in response to new issues, whether they be posed by
globalization, technological shifts, evolving patterns of social organization, or,
as in the present case, increasing cultural diversity. In this forward-looking
sense, the notion of the republic is a tool for elaborating, discussing, and eval­
uating theses about how common life should be shaped.

Of the manifold arenas in which the language of the republic has been
marshaled, none perhaps has been so prominent as the debate about divers­
ity. The unplanned crystallization of ethnically non-German minorities has