

Useful German words - and a new one

The German language provides English speakers with some excellent words for which we have only awkward phrases, including:

- [Schadenfreude](#) - joy in the misfortune of others
- [Realpolitik](#) - power politics based on expediency not ethics
- [Weltschmerz](#) - 'world pain' or feeling of melancholia about the world
- [Zeitgeist](#) - spirit of the age
- [Übermensch](#) - the Nietzschean superman, a man having overcome the frailty of the human condition
- [Vergangenheitsbewältigung](#) - coming to terms with the past (added 2012)

To these staples of North London conversation, must now be added...

- **Denkverbot** - a prohibition against thought

Use spotted in an article in this week's edition of the *The Economist* on whether Germany should rethink its nuclear power phase out: "*there should be no denkverbot ('thought embargo')*" says Bernd Arts of the Atomforum in Berlin.(see [article](#))



But what a great word, and with such widespread application covering much of what happens in the workplace, a lot of politics, all of religion, most entertainment and much human behaviour. The formal meaning is an imposed prohibition - like suppression of intellectuals by Stalin or Pol Pot. But it can be used for a culture (for example the civil service culture of conformity and lazy consensus); a doctrinaire belief system (for example religious 'faith' or unthinking belief in supernatural explanations for natural phenomena); or merely a collective behaviour - like a determination amongst the guests at a dinner party to avoid serious subjects of conversation in case someone is embarrassed.