

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF
MODERN EUROPEAN THOUGHT

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VOLUME II:
The Twentieth Century

This second volume of *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought* surveys twentieth-century European intellectual history, conceived as a crisis in modernity. Comprised of twenty-one chapters, it focuses on figures such as Freud, Heidegger, Adorno, and Arendt, surveys major schools of thought including Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Conservatism, and discusses critical movements such as Postcolonialism, Structuralism, and Post-structuralism. Renouncing a single “master narrative” of European thought across the period, Peter E. Gordon and Warren Breckman establish a formidable new multi-faceted vision of European intellectual history for the global modern age.

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MODERN EUROPEAN THOUGHT

The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought is an authoritative and comprehensive exploration of the themes, thinkers, and movements that shaped our intellectual world from the late eighteenth century to the present. Representing both individual figures and the contexts within which they developed their ideas, this two-volume history is rich with original interpretive insight, and is written in a clear and accessible style by leading scholars in the field.

Renouncing a single “master narrative” of European thought across the period, Warren Breckman and Peter E. Gordon establish a formidable new multi-faceted vision of European intellectual history for the global modern age.

VOLUME I

The Nineteenth Century

EDITED BY WARREN BRECKMAN AND PETER E. GORDON

VOLUME II

The Twentieth Century

EDITED BY PETER E. GORDON AND WARREN BRECKMAN

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VOLUME II
The Twentieth Century

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Preface

When one steps back to reflect upon the historical course of modern European thought since the French Revolution, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the old master narratives have lost all credibility. It is one of the characteristics of the modern condition that our stories and conceptual schemes have grown increasingly pluralistic: fragmentation, not unity, is the sign of the modern. In this regard, cultural and intellectual activity followed a general trend of modernity toward greater differentiation of spheres and tasks. Relations between workplace and home, public and private, state and society, secular and sacred all changed as modern Europe redefined or created new boundaries between these domains. Likewise, modernity has witnessed an ever more complex division of labor. Just as much as other members of society, intellectuals and artists have been affected by these changes, which have drawn (or blurred) anew the lines between producers and consumers of ideas and between mental and manual labor, even while they have also spawned new subcultures of expertise and disciplinary practice. These larger societal conditions and the torsions they produced are an important factor in the extraordinary creativity of European intellectual life in all fields during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Political ideologies have multiplied, and so too have the various fields of philosophical, theological, and scientific inquiry. Intellectual and cultural movements have waxed and waned; various schools have come into being, declaring themselves as *avant-garde* before hardening into new orthodoxies. Intellectuals announce a breakthrough only to be overtaken in turn by new currents of restoration or rebellion; and yet even those phenomena that seemed to vanish without a trace have in fact left an enduring mark on future generations. Nothing is ever truly past. Our present intellectual and cultural life remains unintelligible without some awareness of the persistent force of debates, problems, and styles of thought that emerged over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Preface

The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought offers a capacious and detailed survey of this rich and varied intellectual terrain. It combines state-of-the-art research with accessible presentations that can serve as both touchstones for the seasoned scholar and points of entry for students both beginning and advanced. Individual chapters trace crucial movements and figures across a broad range of disciplinary fields and domains of thought; they do so with sensitivity to the complexities both of the internal debates and traditions of intellectual life and of the larger contexts within which writers and artists have pursued their work. The focus is on intellectual concerns that fall roughly into the domain of humanistic inquiry and artistic practice – questions of the self, knowledge, and truth, human nature, the political order, ethics, justice, religion, ontology, psychology, and the symbolic modes whereby humans represent their ideas and experiences. More or less absent are the natural sciences and medicine. While these did of course exercise an important influence, they have their own deep and complicated histories. Their inclusion might have toppled the scale of even the most ambitious compendium of European thought in this period. The two notable exceptions, however, are the Darwinian revolution and the twentieth-century revolution in physics, both truly paradigmatic shifts that found strong resonances in the broader culture. The focus is also narrowed to emphasize the major countries of Western and Central Europe, chiefly but not exclusively France, Germany, Austria, and Great Britain. These were the national cultures that, during the modern era, could be said to have exercised the greatest influence on the intellectual life of the European continent and beyond. But the volumes and chapters also recognize the many entanglements across time and space that must defeat any attempt to narrate a merely provincial history of European ideas. Especially in the modern era during the age of imperialism and decolonization, the intellectual history of Europe cannot be confined within the boundaries of a single nation or geography. Ideas travel, and they also travel back, enriched and transformed by their peregrinations around the globe.

Absent from *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought* is any master narrative that would tightly unify all of the numerous strands that thread through these volumes. If the French Revolution brought to an end the feudal age of absolutist monarchy, we would do well to recognize that in the history of ideas there is likewise no sovereign theme that wields all of the threads of intellectual history in its powerful hands. But differentiation does

Preface

not entail chaos. Even as we recognize the manifold of themes and ideas we also understand that nothing in intellectual history can remain wholly apart from the world. Amply present in this volume is an awareness of the irreducible complexity – the ambiguity but also the creativity – of European intellectual life during these two centuries, alongside a recognition that intellectual history shares in whatever has been good and bad in modern European history. As we embark on the twenty-first century we trust that the ideas of the past may still provide us in some modest way with guidance for the future no matter how formidable its challenges.