German Cosmopolitan Social Thought and the Idea of the West

There has been considerable interest in recent years in German social thinkers of the Weimar era. Generally this has focused on reactionary and nationalist figures such as Schmitt and Heidegger. In this book Austin Harrington offers a broader account of the German intellectual legacy of the period. He explores the ideas of a circle of left-liberal-cosmopolitan thinkers (Troeltsch, Scheler, Tönnies, Max Weber, Alfred Weber, Mannheim, Jaspers, Curtius and Simmel) who responded to Germany's crisis by rejecting the popular appeal of nationalism. Instead they promoted pan-European reconciliation based on notions of a shared European heritage between East and West. Harrington examines their concepts of nationhood, religion and "civilization" in the context of their time and in their bearing on subsequent debates about European identity and the place of the modern West in global social change. The result is a groundbreaking contribution to current questions in social, cultural and historical theory.

AUSTIN HARRINGTON is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Leeds. His other publications include *Modern Social Theory: An Introduction* (2005), *Art and Social Theory* (2004) and *Hermeneutic Dialogue and Social Science: A Critique of Gadamer and Habermas* (2001).

Advance praise for *German Cosmopolitan Social Thought and the Idea of the West*

'This is a significant book that questions the received view about classical social theory. With considerable erudition and a careful reading of a wide range of the most important thinkers in early twentieth century Germany, Harrington shows that these theorists had already anticipated some of the ideas that are more commonly associated with contemporary thought. He also demonstrates that the traditional view of the decline of cosmopolitanism needs to be revisited.'

Gerard Delanty, University of Sussex

'Germany and the West remains an important topic, although fortunately the time of confrontation is over. This book, by re-evaluating the writings of liberal German social theorists, recalibrates the image of German intellectual history before Nazism, and teaches us the contemporary relevance of their attempts to combine universality and particularity in an appropriate manner.'

Hans Joas, Humboldt University, Berlin and University of Chicago

'A masterful re-interpretation of universalist moral visions expressed during Germany's Weimar Republic. Harrington is unapologetic in his championing of cosmopolitanism against its stalwart sceptics and is unflinching in his defence of this vision's viability in the face of its well-meaning but pessimistic doubters. The book will take an important place in the study of Weimar culture and its legacies, and in contemporary debates over the normative dimensions of globalization.'

John P. McCormick, University of Chicago

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Voices from Weimar

Austin Harrington

University of Leeds

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Preface

During the past decade I taught for seven years at two universities in cities of the former East Germany: at the University of Erfurt in the state of Thüringen and at the European University in Frankfurt an der Oder in the state of Brandenburg, on the German-Polish border.

In 2005, when I first started at these posts, I remember thinking a little about a title of an autobiography by the German-Jewish émigré sociologist, Reinhard Bendix, published in 1986: *From Berlin to Berkeley*. In 2005 I did not move from Berlin to Berkeley. I moved from a post-doctoral position I had been holding at that time at the University of California, Los Angeles, in Westwood, to Erfurt – a medium-sized German city ten kilometres distant from the famously small historic city of Weimar. I remember musing at that time that if I had wanted to write a memoir of my travels up to this point I might have called it: *From Westwood to Weimar*.

Unlike Bendix and others of his age, I moved back from West to East, back from the furthest edge of the West on the Pacific Coast to the forested hills of a Germany very different from the one he had known. In a historical as well as very literal sense – back from Bendix's pre-1938 German past, back through the time zones, and back against the direction of the rising sun – my return flight over the Atlantic felt like a trip "back to the future".

And it was a rough landing, this return. After a year in sunny Westwood, with film crews constantly visible next door in Hollywood, I began work at a campus that had once been a communist teacher training college – and in accordance with standard procedure I had to sign documents certifying that I had not previously been a member of the Stasi.

I could see that Erfurt was a robust and resilient city, not badly damaged in the war and superlatively equipped with public infrastructure, thanks to massive German federal investment since reunification in 1990. Crime, poverty and income inequalities were not high, and certainly nowhere on the scale of some American and British problem cities. Social safety nets were and are good, cultural events well funded; and there is a rich and proud sense of history. Meister Eckhart preached in Erfurt in the Middle Ages, and Napoleon met Alexander I of Russia in October 1808 at the Congress of Erfurt (to which Tolstoy refers at

the start of Part 3 in Book 2 of *War and Peace*) on the same famous occasion on which the Emperor met Goethe and conversed at length on *The Sufferings of Young Werther*.

Yet both Erfurt and Frankfurt an der Oder struck me, as they will probably strike any visitor today, with a haunting appearance of depopulation. In both cities, a youthful, able-bodied core of the population seemed largely absent. Since reunification, Frankfurt an der Oder – not to be confused with its much larger and richer Western eponym on the river Main – has shrunk by 30 per cent, due to westward out-migration and low birth rates; and in Erfurt, elderly and retired people are by far the dominant demographic group. This includes the many daytime coachloads of elderly tourists taking a circuit tour of the Goethe and Schiller residences in Weimar, the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt where Luther lived for six years, and the Nazi concentration camp at nearby Buchenwald.

In 1998 the German government established a research centre and graduate school in the social sciences in Erfurt, to be called the Max-Weber-Kolleg für kultur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Studien – after the famous German sociologist, born in Erfurt in 1864. The Kolleg continues to flourish today and has succeeded in its mission of attracting regular groups of international scholars to the city, able to raise the intellectual profile of a region of general social disadvantage. But tensions have existed, with some local authorities keener on seeing the funds spent on more basic functions of tertiary education for students from the region, and the Kolleg has perhaps had trouble competing with other more glamorous "institutes of advanced study" on the international circuit, in places west of the former Iron Curtain.

My flight from America reinforced for me some hard social realities about our so-called globalized world in these regards, as I saw them. I knew these realities already but only the shock of my landing fully brought them home to me. First and foremost was and is a fact that the vast majority of economic migrants on the global stage today continue to move from East to West and from South to North, rather than from West to East or from North to South. Hundreds of thousands of well-educated, English-speaking Germans and other Europeans seek work and professional advancement in the Anglosphere, but few Americans or Britons such as myself seek these opportunities in Germany or Europe. And far more Germans of the former East move to the West than vice versa. The great drift of global professional migration remains uni-directional; and this holds not only for migration *into* the West but also for migration *within* the West too – for migrants from the West's many own socially depleted zones, from its many own internal East Germanies, its many own internal Erfurts and lesser Frankfurts. The fantasy of unlimited global interconnectivity and multi-polarity holds in this regard too.

I have benefited enormously in work on this book from help and support from numerous individuals and institutions. First and foremost I must thank the Max-Weber-Kolleg für kultur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Studien at Erfurt, directed during the years I worked there by Hans Joas. I especially thank Hans Joas for his unwavering support and constructive criticism of my work throughout my time there. I also thank two other readers of an earlier version of this book, submitted in 2009 as the text of my German *Habilitation*: Klaus Lichtblau and Donald N. Levine. I particularly thank Bettina Hollstein, administrative director of the Kolleg (and scholar in her own right), who continually assisted me personally on numerous important matters. And I thank Gangolf Hübinger for the invitation to teach in a guest position at the European University in Frankfurt an der Oder in 2008–10.

In 2002–03 I held a Jean Monnet Fellowship at the European University Institute in Florence. I thank the Institute for this opportunity as well as my host for that year, Peter Wagner.

In 2003–04 I held a Fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation at the Humboldt University of Berlin. I thank the Humboldt Foundation for this opportunity as well as my warm-hearted host at the Humboldt University, Hans-Peter Müller.

Throughout my years in Germany I met dozens of colleagues to whom I am grateful for all kinds of leads, prompts, references and useful lines of inquiry. I thank: Jens Brockmeier, Winfried Brugge, Robin Celikates, Hermann Deuser, Joachim Fischer, Gregor Fitzi, Moritz Föllmer, Friedrich Graf, Gerald Hartung, Matthias Jung, Hans Kippenberg, Wolfgang Knöbl, Volkhard Krech, Hans-Peter Krüger, Il Tschung Lim, Michael Makropoulos, Ingo Meyer, Thomas Meyer, Christian Papilloud, Otthein Rammstedt, Lutz Raphael, Andreas Reckwitz, Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, Wolfgang Reinhard, Birgit Schäbler, Magnus Schlette, Matthias Schlossberger, Hans-Georg Soeffner, Helmut Staubmann, Stephan Steiner, Daniel Suber and Patrick Wöhrle.

In 2008 Paul Michael Lützeler and Jürgen Habermas both read a version of the *Habilitation* manuscript I sent them at that time. I thank them both for generously sending me some comments, and I particularly thank Jürgen Habermas for encouraging me to work harder on a line of argument I seek to develop against some of his positions, including his own generally more negative view of the progressive political achievements of German non-socialist intellectuals under the Weimar Republic.

In 2004–05 I held a position in the Global Fellows Program of the International Institute of the University of California, Los Angeles, directed at that time by Ronald Rogowski. I thank Ronald Rogowski for this invitation, and I thank Douglas Kellner, Anthony Pagden and Brian Walker for conversation and support. I particuarly thank Perry Anderson and Rogers Brubaker for pertinent comment.

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