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978-0-521-48803-7 - Habermas: An Intellectual Biography
Matthew G. Specter
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HABERMAS: AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

This book follows postwar Germany's leading philosopher and social thinker, Jürgen Habermas, through four decades of political and constitutional struggle over the shape of liberal democracy in Germany. Habermas's most influential theories – of the public sphere, communicative action, and modernity – were decisively shaped by major West German political events: the failure to denazify the judiciary, the rise of a powerful constitutional court, student rebellions in the late 1960s, the changing fortunes of the Social Democratic Party, NATO's decision to station nuclear weapons in Germany, and the unexpected collapse of East Germany. In turn, Habermas's writings on state, law, and constitution played a critical role in reorienting German political thought and culture toward a progressive liberal-democratic model. Matthew G. Specter uniquely illuminates the interrelationship between the thinker and his culture.

Matthew G. Specter is Assistant Professor of History at Central Connecticut State University. He has published in the journals *Modern Intellectual History* and *The European Legacy* and has presented his work at Harvard's Center for European Studies, the National Humanities Center, the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and the American Historical Association, as well as to audiences in Vienna, Frankfurt, Berlin, Cortona, and Haifa. Professor Specter received a Ph.D. from Duke University, and previously held the position of Postdoctoral Fellow at George Mason University.

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“This is an original work of the first importance both for our understanding of Habermas – one of the most important European philosophers and political theorists of the twentieth century – and the political-intellectual history of the West German republic. In addition, it is an exemplary work of intellectual history; it shows convincingly how the disciplinary approach can reveal meanings and dimensions of a highly abstract body of thought that a purely conceptual interpretation inevitably misses.”

– Gerald Izenberg, Washington University in St. Louis

“This is a remarkable piece of work. No other book has situated Habermas’s thinking within its intellectual-historical context as deftly and with such sophistication. Specter digs widely and deeply into the German-language writings of Habermas’s interlocutors (as well as his named and often unnamed adversaries) in each of postwar Germany’s periods of crisis. His argument for a continuity (traceable through attention to the law) in Habermas’s corpus is courageous and convincing.”

– John P. McCormick, University of Chicago

“I have found Matthew Specter’s *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography* immensely rewarding. By showing how deeply Jürgen Habermas was implicated in debates over constitutional and legal theory in West Germany from the mid-1950s onward, Specter has given me a far clearer understanding than I was previously able to muster of a figure who has a strong claim to being the most important political thinker of the second half of the twentieth century – and of today as well. This is contextualizing intellectual history of the best kind. Specter never treats Habermas’s interventions as mere ‘discourse.’ On the contrary, he enters into the substance of the theoretical issues that Habermas has addressed. Indeed, his own clear voice can occasionally be heard as he enters into a discreet and respectful dialogue with a man who did much for the transformation of German public culture in the years since 1945.”

– Allan Megill, University of Virginia

“For lawyers, Jürgen Habermas is a political authority. His work symbolizes the change from ‘state’ to ‘constitution,’ from the ontological system of values to processuality, pluralism, and discourse. Matthew G. Specter pictures the ‘political Habermas’ and gives us a fascinating panorama of the intellectual scene in Western Germany on its way to ‘normality.’”

– Michael Stolleis, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University Frankfurt

“This book offers an eye-opening and richly historical account of the dominant intellectual figure of the Federal Republic. It enriches our understanding of Habermas, by placing him as part of the ongoing struggle to create a democratic Germany.”

– Adam Tooze, Yale University

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521738316

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First published 2010

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Specter, Matthew G. (Matthew Goodrich), 1968–
Habermas : an intellectual biography / Matthew G. Specter.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-48803-7 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-73831-6 (pbk.)

1. Habermas, Jürgen. I. Title.

B3258.H324S66 2010

193–dc22

[B]

2010027358

ISBN 978-0-521-48803-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-73831-6 Paperback

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*For three great teachers – Tom de Zengotita, Frank Moretti,
and Roman Zwarycz.*

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Acknowledgments

The intellectual, professional, and moral support of friends and colleagues on both sides of the Atlantic over nearly a decade has sustained and enlivened my work on this book. The book began as a dissertation at Duke University and it is to Malachi Hacohen, my mentor in the Duke History department, to whom I owe my deepest debts on this project. His intellectual and political passion, personal gentleness, and high integrity made him a superb mentor and professional model. I was also extremely fortunate to have the unstinting support over many years of the other members of my dissertation committee at Duke: Claudia Koonz, Anthony J. LaVopa, and William M. Reddy. Claudia's vigorous and detailed critiques of draft chapters of the dissertation were a great gift. Tony LaVopa's teaching, advice, and leadership role in the Triangle Intellectual History Seminar shaped my development as a historian. To him and the other coordinators of the Triangle Intellectual History Seminar, I owe a major part of my graduate education and professional development. Bill Reddy's courses oriented me to the major methodological and historiographical issues in the study of modern Europe, and offered an inspiring model for combining history and theory. Special thanks are also due to the two wonderful assistants to the Director of Graduate Studies I was fortunate to know during my time at Duke: Judy Martin and Revonda Huppert. For material support during the writing of the dissertation, I must thank numerous departments and agencies at Duke: the Department of History, for a multiyear departmental fellowship; the Center for European Studies; and the Graduate School for a summer international research grant. I would also like to thank the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of the German Social Democratic Party for a doctoral fellowship that supported research in Berlin, the International Center for Research in Cultural Studies (IFK) in Vienna for a residential fellowship, and the American Council on Germany for the

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2004–05 Dr. Richard M. Hunt Fellowship for German History, Politics, Culture and Society which I held at the Max Planck Institute for European Legal History in Frankfurt.

For a wonderful 2003–04 year as a Junior Research Fellow at the IFK in Vienna, I want particularly to thank Lutz Musner, its associate director, and the IFK's amazing, wonderful staff – Viola Eichberger, Petra Radecki, Eva Cesciutti, Brigitte Bargetz, Daniela Losenicky, and Romana Riedl – for creating such an inviting, lively, and warm environment in which to work. Conversations with senior and research Fellows Cornelia Vismann, Thomas Elsaesser, and Omer Bartov were particularly helpful. To all the “juniors” of 2003–04, a warm thank you for an unforgettable year of comradeship.

I am very grateful to Jürgen Habermas for his willingness to answer my questions on several occasions in person and in writing. Thanks are due also to members of Habermas's legal theory group who allowed me to interview them: Ingeborg Maus, Lutz Wingert, Klaus Günther, and Günter Frankenberg. Alfons Söllner was my first German sponsor and a source of great guidance. Ulrich Preuss, Ingeborg Maus, Detlev Horster, and Jürgen Seifert showed interest in my project in its earliest stages. Michael Stolleis, Cornelia Vismann, Ellen Kennedy, Alfons Söllner, Norman Birnbaum, Felicia Kornbluh, Nader Vossoughian, Doug Casson, Joel Revill, and Seth Rogoff all read and commented on early versions of dissertation chapters.

By far the best part of writing a book is the personal relationships that form in the process. For spirited conversations about Habermas, and German political thought generally, the most memorable and enjoyable were those I had with Hauke Brunkhorst and David Rasmussen at the Inter-University Consortium in Dubrovnik; with Cornelia Vismann in Vienna and Frankfurt; with Ulrich Preuss in Cortona; with Manfred Gangl, Alexander Kalyvas, and Christoph Moellers in Flensburg; with Detlev Horster and Jürgen Seifert in Hannover; with Anne Fritz Middelhoek in Berlin; and with Jeffrey Herf and Anson Rabinbach in Vienna. Thanks also to Joachim Perels, Micha Brumlik, and Thomas Henne for a discussion of militant democracy over dinner in Frankfurt; to Mattias Iser for sharing his paper on constitutional patriotism with me; to Bruno Schoch and Nicole Deitelhoff of the Institute for Peace Research in Frankfurt for an in-depth discussion of Habermas and the German peace movement in the 1980s; to Michael Stolleis for

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the warm welcome he extended me at the Max Planck Institute in 2004–05 and for several very helpful lunchtime conversations on my work; and to Thomas Henne of the Max Planck Institute for discussions of German constitutional law in the 1950s. Also warm thanks to Axel Honneth, Eva Illouz, Russell Miller, Regina Kreide, and Adam Tooze for their interest and suggestions. My editor at Cambridge University Press, Eric Crahan, made valuable suggestions for revisions and has guided the project expertly from the beginning. Celebrated German photographer Barbara Klemm generously donated the use of her photograph for the book's cover.

Revisions of the manuscript began during my 2005–08 tenure as a Postdoctoral Fellow in the history department at George Mason. For their support of my teaching and research at that time, I thank in particular T. Mills Kelly, Jack Censer, Mack Holt, Marion Deshmukh, Brian Platt, Randy Lytton, Chuck Lipp, Allan Tulchin, Chris Hamner, Steve Harris, Josh Arthurs, John Berndt Olsen, and Rebecca Scales. While in Washington, D.C., from 2005 to 2008, I especially enjoyed the intellectual camaraderie afforded by Claudia Verhoeven, Andrew Zimmerman, Johanna Bockman, and Andrew Rubin. Audiences at the Intellectual History Seminar at the National Humanities Center in the spring of 2006, as well the Mid-Atlantic German History Seminar at the German Historical Institute in the spring of 2007, provided useful input on Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. McKay Duncan and Hillary Ellison afforded me a summer research grant, which was much appreciated.

For their insight, encouragement, and friendship, I wish to thank, from my years in Durham, North Carolina, Dr. Roni Cohen, Dr. Susan Head, Jennifer Perlmutter, Fiona Barnett, Vince Brown, Jake Selwood, Ann Claycombe, Elisa Slattery, Munis Faruqui, Lisa Lee, Katja Altpeter, Doug Casson, Natania Meeker, Seth Rogoff, Joel Revill, and Rick Sawyer; from Vienna, Margarethe Szeless, Nadja Hahn, Roman Widholm, and Nicole Scheyerer; and from Frankfurt, Cornelia Vismann, Sebastian Martin, and Veronika Müller.

Since the fall of 2008, I have been a professor in the history department at Central Connecticut State University, and I'm delighted to acknowledge my colleagues there for the warm welcome and practical support I have received. In particular I wish to thank Dean Susan Pease for granting research reassigned time in the fall of 2008 and Louise Williams for serving as my faculty mentor since my arrival at CCSU.

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This book is dedicated to the three extraordinary teachers who introduced me to Western philosophy and social thought at the Dalton School in New York City. For my introduction to the field of European intellectual history, I am pleased to acknowledge three wonderful and inspiring teachers from my undergraduate education at Harvard and Brown: John McCole, Chris Waters, and Mary Gluck. Friends Andrew Rubin, Michael Behrent, Liz Weinstock, and Nicole Barrett and my brother Evan Specter were always there for me, even when we were separated by oceans. I also acknowledge the love and support of my maternal grandparents, Matthew Brown and Edna Goodrich Brown. Above all, I am grateful to my extraordinary parents, Patricia and David, who first nurtured my passion for learning, always showed pride in me, and never doubted that the work I had chosen was valuable and important.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the tremendous contributions and sacrifices made in the last year by my wife, Marjan Mashhadi, for the sake of my book. She read every version of the final drafts, made countless suggestions for improvements to the writing, and aided me with the thankless task of the index. I thank her for her love, friendship, and hard work, and I mark our first wedding anniversary with the completion of this book. As we enter the next chapter of our life, I embrace her.

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