

THE HABERMASIAN MOMENT

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AMONG SPOKESMEN FOR THE Post-Marxist Left, Jürgen Habermas (1923–) may be the most prominent and, in his own country, the most honored. An advocate of “militant” democracy since the 1950s, he has defended his persuasion in the international press, in multiple books and articles, and as an academic lecturer.

Habermas proclaims himself the proud heir of the American reeducation of the Germans that took place after World War I. Despite his rise in the *Hitlerjugend*, a distinction shared with other scholars who have been equally intent on breaking with the German past, Habermas had moved into the anti-German Left by the early 1950s. He regarded what the Germans had suffered during and after the War as fully deserved, and spoke of his country’s unconditional surrender as a “liberating experience.”¹

HABERMAS’S EARLY WORK

Notwithstanding his reputation as a socialist and as an apologist for the Communist German Democratic Republic, Habermas has been

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¹On Habermas’s greater tendency to assign collective guilt to the German people for their authoritarian past than was evident in the older generation of the Critical Theorists, see Wiggershaus (1987, pp. 135–38). Jäger (2003) makes the point that by the time of his death in 1969, Adorno had carried his “anticapitalist negativity” as far as he could. Others would then adapt his method to new objects of attack. In Habermas’s case, Adorno’s repugnance for nations as “anachronisms that are resistant to Reason” would take the form of German self-rejection. Habermas’s association with the *Hitlerjugend*, an experience he shared with two other outspokenly Teutonophobic historical scholars, Fritz Fischer and Walter Jens, might have contributed to this propensity.

reticent about a program of sweeping economic reconstruction for the West Germans.

Die Dialektik der Rationalisierung

His first major publication, which came out in *Merkur* in 1954, “Die Dialektik der Rationalisierung,” was an extended critique of consumerism that incorporated themes from the antimodernist Right as well as from the Frankfurt School, which had been reestablished in postwar Frankfurt in 1950. Habermas’s (1954, pp. 701–24) youthful commentary took aim at advanced industrial societies for refusing to “place limits on technical organization in order to permit natural and social forces to express themselves.” Although Habermas’s work reprises the theme of “alienation” found in the young Marx, it also makes references to Martin Heidegger’s existential philosophy and to Arnold Gehlen’s sociobiological examination of human institutions. (Both points of reference in Germany at the time were clearly associated with the German national right, though not necessarily with the Nazis.)

The influence in Habermas’s early commentary of Theodor Adorno’s and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002) is too obvious to be ignored. Like this socially radical work of the 1940s, Habermas’s critique attacks industrial and capitalist modernity, which is blamed for a wide range of emotional and social ills. Although the Enlightenment supposedly created the conditions for a scientific rationalist understanding of society, it also helped unleash economic and cultural forces that are enslaving Western man.

Habermas’s attempt—at least implicitly—to wed progressive, anticapitalist sentiments with a rejection of bourgeois institutions and thought patterns was surely noticed by at least one graying radical. Soon after the publication of this essay, Adorno invited Habermas, who was then finishing graduate studies at Göttingen, to join him as a collaborator at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt. A novel feature of Habermas’s (1954, p. 723) essay was its focus on industrial affluence as a form of “compensation” for human self-alienation. It keeps making the point that “consumption is being turned into a substitute for what humans lose as a result of technical progress.”²

Student und Politik

But such cultural observations do not necessarily lead in the direction of socialist projects. Moreover, a long evaluation of political

²Also see Wiggershaus (2001, pp. 601–03).

attitudes among German university students that Habermas helped Adorno put together in 1957 has few prescriptions that are recognizably socialist. Although abounding in moral righteousness and praise for the American reeducation of his countrymen, which Habermas suggests did not go far enough, *Student und Politik* only touches on economics tangentially, by venting disdain on moneyed interests for standing in the way of political equality (Adorno and Habermas 1961). Habermas castigates German students for not being sufficiently attuned to this problem and, in many cases, voting for the center-right Christian Democrats. Nonetheless, it is not clear what kind of economic revamping he had in mind for removing a hated capitalist past. Habermas laments the mediating role played by state bureaucrats in a defective German democracy, but he neglects to come up with other, more “democratic” organizational forms that might change this situation.

Most important is the emphasis placed here on evaluating student responses in a way that might show who is “democratic” or “authoritarian.” Only 171 respondents participated in the survey originally done for *Student und Politik*, a figure that two years later, after heavy criticism, was expanded to 550. Despite the apparent preponderance of those who endorsed democratic institutions, of the 52 respondents initially classified as having democratic tendencies, only 6, by Habermas’s most demanding standards, were classed as truly democratic. When students were reexamined on the basis of “democratic and authoritarian potentials,” as viewed by Habermas and his co-investigators, only 9 percent were thought to exhibit a “democratic disposition”—as opposed to 16 percent who were assigned an authoritarian one. Both the ideologically colored understanding of the key terms and the unwillingness to allow empirical facts to guide the investigation raise questions about the survey’s value. Indeed, Horkheimer quarreled with Adorno about whether to publish this study under the Institute’s aegis, a difference that grew even more intense when, in 1958, Habermas hoped to replace philosophy with a historical view aimed at reforming popular consciousness along socialist lines. Habermas raised the need for a “revolutionary change” in the public’s perception of democracy, as a preliminary step toward moving beyond the “bourgeois” foundation of the German Federal Republic.³

³This argument pervades Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchung zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (1962), a work originally submitted as a Habilitationsschrift at the University of Frankfurt.

Dogmatismus, Vernunft und Entscheidung

But these desired changes pertained to consciousness more than to economic revolution and, according to intellectual historian Ernst Topitsch (2003, pp. 93–130), had little to do with empirical proofs. In Frankfurt School fashion, Habermas dismisses the accumulation of observations and research data as mere “positivism.” By the 1960s, what shaped his critical commentary were the avoidance of empiricism, the Left’s identification with moral purity, and the demand for contrition by the Germans for their fascist past.

In his 1963 essay “Dogmatismus, Vernunft und Entscheidung,” Habermas dwells on the unacceptable costs of living and thinking with “scientific method.” This fate blinds us to the “relation between theory and practice that relates to the tradition of great philosophy and to a good, proper, and true communal life for individuals and citizens” (Habermas 1963, p. 243). Even more relevant, this “scientization of our society” impedes our freedom, for “the experience of emancipation requires critical insight into power relations whose objectivity continues to be accepted until we can see through these relations.”

In place of empirical investigation, Habermas calls for a “theory” predicated on “experience” or “practice,” a form of “communicative activity [*kommunikatives Handeln*]” that clarifies questions and brings about “understanding [*Verständigung*].”⁴ But the possible consequences of this turn are not really clarified. Once cut adrift from the methods of investigation he rejects, explains German philosopher of science Gerard Radnitzky (2004, pp. 45–46), Habermas is forced to anchor his “theory” in his own privileged conscience.

HABERMAS AND THE NEW REVISIONISM

In the next thirty years, he looked for a fit between the view of moral reason taught by Immanuel Kant, as a behavioral compass operating independently of empirical circumstances, and depth psychology. Habermas liked to talk about rationally formed moral rules, while pointing grimly to the irrational causes of social behavior. What was irrational is apparently whatever did not correspond to his sense of democratic reform.

At the same time, he adorned his conception of “communal understanding” with what Topitsch considers a religious mystical element. It is one that Habermas might have taken from his German Pietist ancestors, who had settled near his birthplace in

⁴His plea for a “nonscientific” communicative method is first fully revealed in Habermas (1964, pp. 336–59).

Gummersbach in northwest Germany. Although Habermas takes pains to distance himself and his hypothetical community of rational speakers from Christian metaphysics, Topitsch correctly notes that he presents a social drama centered on a fall from grace and a quest for redemption (Radnitsky 2004, pp. 93–130). He speaks about how

positivism, historicism, and pragmatism each breaks loose under the impact of science being reduced to the productive force of an industrial society. A particularized reason is brought down to the level of subjective consciousness, whether as the power to verify hypotheses empirically or as historical understanding, or as a pragmatic social constraint. A disinfected reason has been cleansed of enlightened volition and has emptied itself of its own life. And this despiritualized but haunted life becomes an arbitrary one once it seeks to make decisions. (Habermas 1969, p. 239)

Habermas offers himself as the spiritual guide for those brought to this pass, but since he establishes the nature of “democratic” discourse, he is also allowed to violate its first rule. The intended discourse is to be *herrschaftsfrei*, that is, without the control of one participant by another. Yet, Habermas apparently reserves the right to suppress dissent when it suits him. Thus, in 1986, in the German “historians’ controversy,” historians Ernst Nolte, Michael Stürmer, Andreas Hillgruber, and Rainer Zitelmann undertook to “contextualize” the Nazi period in ways that displeased Habermas. These scholars maintained that the Nazi oppression of Jews and Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union had to be understood against the background of interwar German reactions to Communist violence. Middle-class Europeans, and particularly Germans, felt threatened by Communist revolution, which they associated with Soviet mass murder. They also noticed the disproportionately high rate of Jews involved in Communist rule, including the operation of the Soviet secret police. All of these associations made them ripe for a dictatorship that declared war on Communism and international Jewry (Nolte 1987b, 1987c, and 1990, pp. 83–135).

Prescinding from the question of historical accuracy, which does not seem to enter Habermas’s discourse, we might note his heated efforts to drive away the new “revisionism.” Between 1987 and 1990, in a series of broadsides, he explained that these “revisionists” had “dangerously” equated Stalin’s crimes with those of Hitler. They had thereby lapsed into what he called an “*Aufrechnungsansatz*,” diverting attention toward Communist crimes in order to play down German iniquity. Such ideas went against the “reeducation” that the Germans enjoyed during the Allied Occupation, but which the avoidable catastrophe of the Cold War had then interrupted. Although Habermas (1987, pp. 243–45) did not call for a total prohibition on the expression

of such views, he insisted they should be confined to “specialized scientific journals” that would not reach the public.⁵ Topitsch makes the point that his own first publication, a study of Thucydides that included barbed references to the Third Reich, came out in an arcane journal that Germany’s totalitarian government had not bothered to close down (Radnitzky 2004, pp. 131–37).

Immanuel Geiss (1988, p. 62), a historian long on the left, reacted to Habermas’s warnings with expressions of irritation:

For someone who runs around lecturing to the rest of us about discourses, political culture, and enlightenment, one would expect him to show at least minimal respect for the conditions without which neither democracy nor science can survive. Rarely has a philosopher so thoroughly contradicted himself as Habermas did during this “historians’ controversy.”

Although Geiss deserves praise for his valorous defense of intellectual freedom, Habermas was not behaving inconsistently when he excluded unwelcome debate. Never does he claim that he wants exactly those liberal freedoms embraced by Geiss, nor is he dedicated to that process of verification applied in the physical and natural sciences. Habermas’s method is to accord legitimacy to communicative activities that he considers properly “emancipating” and which are conducive to regret over Germany’s tortured history.

As a discussion leader, Habermas is looking for ways to resume the German reeducation associated with the postwar years. He has no patience for any “contextualization” of Nazism that does not lead to the desired educational end. Such a false “contextualization” cannot encourage, from his way of thinking, a definitive break from the bourgeois or pre-bourgeois society that had made possible Nazi atrocities. (Whether or not what Habermas wants us to think can be causally demonstrated is, to put it bluntly, beside the point.) Thus, in a reflection on the *Historikerstreit* in 1990, Habermas lashes out at those “neo-historicists” who had reconceptualized the Holocaust as being unwilling “to cooperate in the overcoming of the paralysis of political culture.” Their conceptual defect was to exhibit “a primitive trust in terms of history and tradition.” But because of the Holocaust, “a conscious life is no longer possible without distrust toward continuities that assert themselves without being questioned and which receive their validity by being taken for granted” (Habermas 1996, p. 149). What stands out here is how a debate about overlapping totalitarian systems has been turned into an excuse to condemn scholars

⁵For a less vitriolic criticism of Nolte’s contextualization, see Gottfried (1993, pp. 88–93).

for not “overcoming the German past.” Ernst Nolte responded that a refutation should demonstrate that his scholarship is wrong. It should not assault his character merely because he had failed to endorse someone else’s political project.⁶

WISSENSCHAFTEN AND REVISIONISM

A final point relates to Habermas’s use of the term “revisionist.” His critics have made the point that all structured quests for knowledge, what the Germans style “Wissenschaften,” require a reexamination of beliefs that may turn out to be false or only partially valid. It is doubtful that one can be a real scholar by the received standards without being open to, and even welcoming, the possibility of “revision.” Why, then, should Habermas be treating this concept when applied to modern European history as an act of moral irresponsibility? There are two answers.

Habermas’s Didactic Approach

First, Habermas explicitly rejects “Wissenschaft” unless it incorporates his interests, which are unmasking bourgeois manipulations of “public opinion” and rooting out elitist and nationalist attitudes. From the early 1950s onward, he went to war against empirical methodology or any traditional means of filtering and verifying data that did not satisfy his political criteria. What he wanted to see achieved were the teaching of history with a “practical purpose” and a discussion centered on consensus among well-intentioned democrats. In short, there is no reason to attribute to him methodological or moral inconsistency merely because of his repugnance for historical revision.

Against the background of this Post-Marxist irrationalism, it might be instructive to look at like-minded Americans welcoming Habermas into the “project of building a community through intersubjective reason.” Thus, Berkeley professor David Hollinger applauds Habermas’s work in Germany, which parallels that of Richard Rorty and Martin Jay in the U.S., to move beyond ethnic division by universalizing

⁶For his conclusive statement on Habermas and other hostile critics, see Nolte (1987a). Like Geiss and other historians who criticize Habermas’s contributions to the *Historikerkreis*, Nolte does not grasp how pitifully little the task of verification matters for Habermas. Driving political concerns, which have been recast as self-evident moral values, have taken the place of *wissenschaftliche Methode*. See Gottfried (2002, pp. 78–100) and Kailitz (2001).

“our” democratic egalitarian ethos through immanent critique and the expansion of “human rights” culture as far as social circumstances permit it to spread. (Hollinger 1995, p. 115)

The gray eminence of this blending of multiculturalism and human rights, Richard Rorty, finds much in Habermas to applaud, but worries that their shared admirers might confuse distinctive positions. Habermas goes too far in insisting that it is

essential to a democratic society that its self-image embody the universalism and some form of the rationalism of the Enlightenment. He thinks of his account of “communicative reason” as a way of updating rationalism. (Rorty 1989, p. 17)

Unlike Habermas, Rorty wishes to allow “nonuniversalist” and “poeticized” interests to coexist with rational universalism, albeit only as a strategy for dealing with one’s finitude.

In the end, however, Rorty (1989, p. 68) no less than Habermas wishes to push humanity into

replacing both religious and philosophical accounts of a suprahistorical ground or an end-of-history convergence with a historical narrative about the rise of liberal institutions and customs—the institutions and customs that were designed to diminish cruelty, make possible government by consent of the governed, and permit as much domination-free communication as possible to take place.

Such a move requires a “shift from epistemology to politics,” which the American pragmatist and socialist John Dewey would advocate, but “from which Habermas hangs back.” As a stubborn rationalist, Habermas would not give up “the transcendental moment of universal validity” to notice the historical process through which “liberals” must work to make their ideas prevail (Rorty 1989, pp. 69, 82–84).

Habermas is fortunate in his putative American critics, who happily hide his blemishes or else share them to such a degree that they no longer stand out. Neither a universal form of reasoning nor liberalism in the classical sense informs Habermas’s didactic approach to evaluating facts. Believing, as he does, that people should be made to think politically like himself, and that the discussion-masters have to set limits on “domination-free discourse” lest it stray into “nonuniversalist” opinions, Habermas has problems with independent thinking, nonpolitically correct rationality, and limited government.

Whether or not these are the highest human goods, one might expect Habermas, who claims rhetorically to believe in them, to pay at least minimal attention to the practice of uncensored discourse. But, like Rorty, he is overwhelmed by an obtrusive finality. The quest for an egalitarian community, stripped of national and ethnic pasts,

does not incline either one of them toward open discussion. Guided democracy or democratic centralism may be the closest they can come to a “domination-free” exchange of opinions.

Revisionism and Fascism

Second, “revision” is now a codeword on the Post-Marxist left for being politically incorrect, which means expressing “fascist” ideas. It does not refer exclusively to those who challenge the established account of the Holocaust, but has been extended to those who are transmitting a historical narrative that might weaken our resistance to “fascist” threats. Thus, in France, “revisionist” is routinely applied to those who dwell on Soviet crimes, or who question the mounting charges made against ordinary (typically Catholic) French people as being active or at least acquiescent collaborators in the Vichy regime. Solzhenitsyn is classified as a “revisionist” author because he makes the Soviet experiment look bad, thereby undermining the case for a uniquely evil Nazism—and for a uniquely evil Right, or for what is considered the “Right” at a particular moment.

The judgment of the Post-Marxist Left does not single out those who deny Hitler’s crimes, and it certainly is not a factual refutation. Rather, it is a political theological assessment, which means that anyone presumed to be guilty will be kept out of polite company, and, indeed, in a properly run progressive regime, could land up in jail or forced rehabilitation. The deafening enthusiasm that Habermas and Adorno have, on occasion, shown for communists as antifascist educators gives their game away completely.

Holocaust Denial

Finally, it should be noted that a charge often coupled with “revisionism,” denying or understating Nazi uniqueness (*Einzigartigkeit* or *Einmaligkeit*), is something that hardly ever takes place (Radnitzky 2004, pp. 45, 46).⁷ This crime exists for the Post-Marxist Left as an

⁷This critical point is central to Kosiek’s work *Historikerstreit und Geschichtsrevision* (1989), which explores the war against “historical revisionism” as thought control. In this polemical exchange, the “antifascists” draw fevered comparisons between politically incorrect scholarship and the crime of “Holocaust denial.” Since one side appeals to historical-scientific ideals and the other to sentiments, particularly historical guilt and the preferential right of designated victims, there is no way that opponents here can meaningfully communicate. Those who invoke “historical science” may not always offer airtight proofs, but those who argue against them are stifling questions that are considered ideologically unacceptable. See a discussion of this problem of noncommunication in Gottfried (1999, pp. 1–19, 144).

object of imprecatory rhetoric and as a plan for social reeducation. All atrocities are “unique” in the sense that they occur within individual contexts and feature specific malefactors and victims. Stating that particular massacres resemble each other or that one mass killing may have led to another one is an assertion that may be questioned or affirmed, but which does not negate the particularity of any specific atrocity.

The German “revisionists” may have carried the causal connection that they highlight too far, but this methodological defect does not mean that these “revisionists” were “Holocaust-deniers” or “Holocaust-trivializers” in the manner in which the Post-Marxist Left trivializes Communist massacres. That unsurpassably antibourgeois Left has become a rallying point in Europe for those who shrug at the human costs of Communism. And these deniers are arrogant enough to accuse those who observe this concealment of refusing to face the right-wing past. By means of the “antifascist” card, Habermas and his devotees have succeeded in manipulating what in Europe today is the only permissible political and moral conversation.

KAILITZ ON THE HISTORIKERSTREIT

A book that treats this theme, but not with sufficient critical rigor, is *Die politische Deutungskultur im Spiegel des Historikerstreits* by German political scientist Steffen Kailitz. Kailitz’s (2001, pp. 32–70) book traces in detail the political events leading up to the *Historikerstreit*, including:

- the attempt by Helmut Kohl after his accession to the chancellorship in 1982 to foster a more positive view of the German past than the one allowed by the democratic Left;
- the visit in 1985 by Ronald Reagan, which was advertised as a healing mission, to the Bitburg cemetery, a place that contained the remains of SS officers;
- the subsequent speech by German President Weizsäcker dwelling on “German personal guilt” for the Holocaust; and
- “democratic right” publications representing the contextualization of the Nazi past.

Kailitz insists that the two warring sides were closer together politically than was either side to the “extreme left” or the “extreme right.” They were also equally committed to the *Westbindung*, by which is meant not only Germany’s alliance with Western Europe

and the U.S., but, even more importantly, a belief in the “values of the American and French Revolutions.” If Kailitz is correct, both “right democrats” and “left democrats” favor with equal resoluteness a break from German political traditions which they find almost uniformly reprehensible.

Kailitz expresses concern that Habermas, Wolfgang Mommsen, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, and other paradigmatic left democrats have read too much into Nolte’s attacks on leftist totalitarianism and into his comparison of Nazi to Soviet crimes. What they overlook is the “deep gulf” that separates Stürmer and Nolte from “radical right” thinkers, with whom “they share few if any significant areas of agreement.” Thus, while Nolte hopes to see Germany become “an ordinary Western democracy” without the oppressive weight of inherited guilt, far-right historian Karlheinz Weissmann encourages the Germans to rethink “the idea of a mission.” Weissmann suggests, in ways that supposedly point back to German aggressions of an earlier age, that his country may still “have tasks to fulfill that have not been vouchsafed to other nations” (Kailitz 2001, p. 299, quoting Weissmann).⁸

What Kailitz properly recognizes is that the taking of sides in the *Historikerstreit* was about controlling political culture through the construction of a relevant past. In this undertaking, the Left was better organized academically and journalistically, and appealed effectively to the sentiment of collective German guilt, which German educators have relentlessly instilled for decades. The young political scientist also notes the unwillingness of the German establishment Left to discern any glaring evil in Communist societies, particularly Stalinist Russia and the German Democratic Republic, unless pushed to the wall. The pertinent statements ascribed to Habermas, which attack Germans who notice Soviet and East German tyranny, speak volumes about declared “anti-antitotalitarians.”

A German leftist quirk that Kailitz also reveals, perhaps more than he intended, is to seize on what accentuates German guilt for European wars in the pre-Hitlerian past (whence the eager acceptance among German intellectuals of the Fischer thesis, which argues

⁸Weissmann’s response to the debate does not show the suggested hint of anticonstitutional extremism. See Weissman (1996). Weissmann’s (2001) book is a compendious history of Germany written from a nineteenth-century left-liberal perspective. On pp. 188–209, he argues for the right of the Germans and of other European nations to preserve their national character threatened by Eurocracy and multicultural reeducation. There is nothing distinctively right wing about this short history, except for the mostly implicit critique of multiculturalists and professional Teutonophobes.

for Germany's sole culpability for World War I). Such demonization has been used to dramatize the need for a divided East German Communist state and for a Soviet empire in the East.

Despite his studied effort to appear equidistant between the warring schools of thought, Kailitz (2001, pp. 308, 19) makes us conclude that the blurring of "the border between intellectual inquiry and the political terrain" is the fault of one side more than the other. His middling pose is part of a game that must be played by *Doktoranden* seeking to finish their degree at German universities while writing on forbidden subjects. Not surprisingly, we learn that this volume is a "tightened and revised dissertation that was originally submitted [at Chemnitz] in 1999" (Kailitz 2001, acknowledgement page).

Allowing myself the pleasure of being a noninvited reader of his thesis, I might be permitted to raise some reservations about his premises. The notion of the *Westbindung*, which Kailitz accepts as a touchstone of the Good, may be more rhetorical than instructive. The German academic Left, which claims to honor this Western connection, generally supported the Communists or were neutralists during the Cold War. Today they oppose, rightly or wrongly but certainly overwhelmingly, the American and British war efforts in Iraq. From the 1950s on, the *Westbindung* mattered far more to the German Center Right than to Habermas and his crowd. The pro-Western position that the Center Right embraced in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s usually entailed a devotion to Christian civilization and to some form of nineteenth-century constitutional liberalism. Moreover, the Western alliance until recently was bottomed on the crusade against Communist totalitarianism, a mission that the leftists whom Kailitz (2001, pp. 156–76) quotes wanted no part of.⁹

Further, contrary to Kailitz, one might wonder why German constitutional liberals would have any use for the French Revolution, which unleashed murder and mayhem across Europe. In recent decades, even French historians have begun to rethink this bloody experiment in global governance, one that began ominously with the murder of over 100,000 French subjects (mostly women and children) in Brittany and the Vendée.

Kailitz also creates the impression that Nolte, Stürmer, and the other "right democratic" historians all agree with Fischer, Wehler, and Winkler on the validity of the Fischer thesis. He cites no evidence, however, that they accept this thesis about the continuity of

⁹A work that provides considerable insight into the Postwar Christian Democratic mindset, as reflected in its first national leader, is Bösch (2001).

German war aims and the overlap of German racist ideology in the two wars.¹⁰

Finally, it is doubtful that the moral symmetry between left wing and right wing extremisms that Kailitz wishes us to find really exists. The “right wing extremists” held up to ridicule, Rolf Kosiak and Karlheinz Weissmann, are traditional German national liberals who are protesting the threats in their society to constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. Both critics have warned against the assaults on academic research coming from the German Left, and particularly from its proponents of violence and political suppression against dissenters. The references to a “German task” in Weissmann are so remarkably vague that it is hard to justify Kailitz’s unfriendly, and perhaps downright malicious, construction. Talk about national tasks can allude to a wide range of projects which do not have to involve geopolitical expansion.

What is more relevant is figuring out why Germans have less right to a “national task,” besides obligatory self-mortification, than do other countries, including those that are more likely to be aggressive. Why do the Americans, for example, have an imprescriptible right to reeducate other countries or to export “global democracy” by force? And why are the French allowed to boast of their revolutionary mission, given the embarrassing fact that they inflicted millions of European deaths during their missionary activities between 1792 and 1815?¹¹

Let me also ask why the “left democrats,” in Kailitz’s eyes, are nonextremists, despite their blatant disregard and even defense of the Communist mission, which brought about even more political murders than those perpetrated by the Nazi government. Kailitz does state that these democrats were critical of the Communists, but does not provide a scintilla of proof for his assertion. “Democratic” has for him the same semantic magic as “Christian” might have had for French peasants in the Middle Ages. There is no reason in his mind to challenge the democratic or classical liberal credentials of those who bear his term of honor, particularly once he has conferred it.

Indeed, it might be downright impertinent to suggest that Weissmann believes in liberal constitutional government far more than does Habermas. As far as I can tell, the “left democrats,” with

¹⁰For Nolte’s pre-Fischerian view of the outbreak of World War I as the result of national rivalries and diplomatic breakdown, see Nolte (1998, pp. 535–37, 732).

¹¹On the human and material costs of the French revolutionary experiment for Frenchmen, see Secher (2003) and Chaunu (1998).

few notable exceptions, do not balk at the suspension of intellectual freedom, inasmuch as they consider intensively policed speech necessary to fight “fascists” and “Holocaust revisionists” (Gottfried 2002, pp. 47–49, 88–94). But since Kailitz is lucky enough not to be taking my oral exams, he will not have to respond to my presumptuously insensitive reservations.

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