

H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXII-21

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INTRODUCTION BY MICHAEL C. BEHRENT, APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

What sustains democracy? Operating under the assumption that laws and institutions alone cannot found popular government, political theorists have probed this question for centuries. They intuited that democracy, if it is to be viable, needs democrats—that is, individuals whose character and affects dispose them to democratic processes.

Political philosophers have proposed any number of candidates for the value or trait without which democracy cannot exist. From Niccolò Machiavelli to Maximilien Robespierre by way of Baron Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Jefferson, the classical republican tradition claimed that a free constitution is inoperative without virtue, as only virtuous citizens can be entrusted with the public weal. A different theoretical tradition emphasizes the centrality to democracy of sociability and an inclination to form associations. Though this position partially overlaps with the former, it places the accent less on moral purity than on the practical expertise required to work with others to achieve common ends. The pioneer of this insight was Alexis de Tocqueville, who, in *Democracy in America*, observed that in “democratic countries the science of association is the mother science,”¹ because it is by participating in professional organizations or even local clubs that one acquires the knowhow to act democratically.

Till van Rahden, in his important new book, offers a third perspective. Drawing on extensive research on the public culture of the early German Federal Republic, van Rahden argues that in order to understand how democratic practices took root in Germany, in the wake of their near obliteration under National Socialism, we must understand how a new *Lebensform* or “way of life” arose in German households, as family relations were reconceived in egalitarian terms. Specifically, his book explores debates that took place as democracy began to permeate West German life during the postwar years in legal and religious settings that challenged the longstanding notion that fathers should be conceived as a kind of household monarch (see chapter 3, “Das Lächeln der Verfassungsrichterin”). Van Rahden references Lynn Hunt’s well-known study of familial and gender discourses during revolutionary France, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, a work that invoked Sigmund Freud’s term for a common fantasy he had encountered, in which individuals imagine their ideal family.² The German family romance of a democratic family unit that dispensed with authoritarian fathers and validated gender equality was not only realized, van Rahden argues, but played a significant role in transcending the cultural remnants of the *Führerprinzip*, most notably during the Oedipal revolt of 1968 (the subject of chapter 4, “Eine Welt ohne Familie”).

The premise of van Rahden’s thesis—that democratic political inclinations are nurtured by family relationships—has of course been by intuited earlier democratic theorists. Struck by the fact that American families had been reduced to the purely utilitarian function of child-rearing, de Tocqueville concluded that in the United States, “the family, in the Roman and aristocratic signification of the word, does not exist.” “[F]rom the moment when the young American approaches manhood,” he observed, “the bonds of filial obedience are loosened day by day.”³ In the wake of the Second World War, the British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott maintained that “the innate democratic factor” in any society “derives from the working of the ordinary good home,” and specifically from parents who were capable of instilling in their children the autonomy required to participate in democratic politics.⁴ More recently, the American linguist Georg Lakoff has explained political polarization in the United States as being reducible to competing conceptions of family relationships: the “strict

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 492.

² Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

³ De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 558.

⁴ D. W. Winnicott, “Some Thoughts on the Meaning of the Word Democracy,” *Human Relations* 3:2 (1950):175-186, at 186.

father” model embraced by conservatives, on the one hand, and the “nurturant parent” framework espoused by liberals, on the other.⁵ What makes van Rahden’s work original is his account of the growing public recognition of the importance of family relations to the cultivation of democratic instincts in a specific national context. In van Rahden’s work, we see, in a sense, a society psychoanalyzing itself, grappling with its ‘daddy issues’ as the root-cause of its political predicament and undertaking, by way of consequence, a reform of its domestic relations for the express purpose of forging a more democratic polity.

The reviews in this roundtable probe the connection van Rahden posits between family life and democracy on grounds that are at once empirical and theoretical. A first set of questions relates to van Rahden’s assumptions about the relationship between the private and public realms. The reviewers question just how much explanatory power the private sphere, in the contexts van Rahden examines, ultimately has. James Chappel wonders if the story van Rahden tells about the relationship between family and democracy could not be told just as well by considering relations in the workplace, which Chappel calls “that other site of explosive tension in which codes of authority were constantly negotiated.” In a similar vein, Donna Harsch maintains that while debates over family relationships were undoubtedly important, other factors, which are rooted in Germany’s deeper political history, cannot be overlooked when explaining the Federal Republic’s democratic success: earlier German democratic traditions (notably during the Weimar Republic), the prohibition of extremist politics, and the country’s relative ethnic and religious homogeneity.

Jakob Norberg invokes Theodor Adorno to flip the terms of van Rahden’s hypothesis: for the Frankfurt School theorist, the German legacy of authoritarianism was not the result of overly powerful fathers, but rather of the dissolution of bourgeois family structures. For Adorno, National Socialism’s pathological character lay in its immature attraction to fantastical father figures rather than an overdeveloped superego. Norberg also wonders whether the development of family structures really tracks democracy’s growth: the increasingly fluid contemporary family, he observes, has “not been straightforwardly accompanied by a corresponding consolidation and vivification of democracy.” Domestic equality, in short, does not necessarily imply stronger democracy.

Another set of questions relates to van Rahden’s core contention—to which he returns in his response to the reviewers—that democracy must be understood as a “way of life” or *Lebensform*. This claim is, in part, a theoretical intervention in the philosophical debate over democracy’s nature. Van Rahden notes that contemporary German thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas have tended to equate democracy with rational principles rather than sentiments or passions (*Leidenschaften*). Van Rahden writes: “[Immanuel] Kant, and not [David] Hume, emerged as the fixed star of German moral philosophy after 1945” (46). German democratic theory notwithstanding, van Rahden shows that Germany’s actual development as a democratic society is better explained by a predominantly American tradition, rooted in pragmatism, which defines democracy as a distinct way of living and behaving. A classic statement of this view is Sidney Hook’s 1938 essay “Democracy as a Way of Life.”⁶ In his author’s response, the conclusion van Rahden draws from this literature and his own research is that democracy depends on “cultural forms and social spaces” offering “the chance to experience freedom and equality in everyday life in a sensorial way.” Consequently, we should focus “less on how democracy works” and more on “what democracy feels like.” Herein lie the stakes of *Lebensform* as a concept: not only does it straddle public and private realms, it also deploys a “language of weak normativity that allows us to explore questions of moral history while avoiding strong moral judgements that languages of values and norms draws upon.”

Van Rahden’s case for democracy as a “way of life” is compelling, as the reviewers unanimously agree. Yet it also raises some thorny questions. First, how different are norms from “ways of life”? Hook considers three “values” to be constitutive to the “democratic way of life”: the dignity of the individual, equal opportunity, and the value assigned to difference and

⁵ George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁶ Sidney Hook, “Democracy as a Way of Life,” *Southern Review* 4 (1938): 45–57, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/interwar/hook.htm>.

uniqueness.⁷ These norms may mold behavior, but they are norms all the same. The line between “how democracy works” and “what democracy feels like” thus proves difficult to trace, no doubt because how democracy feels has much to do with how democracy works. Harsch glosses van Rahden’s description of democracy by calling it a “method by which conflict and controversy over values or interests are continually (re)negotiated by players who have equal rights to participate in the process.” One doubts that Habermas would find much to quibble with in this claim. Second, what is the connection between ‘ways of life’ and psychological dispositions? Though van Rahden has much to say about family relations, he does not fully tease out its implications for character formation in quite the way that, say, Adorno does, which is one of the reasons for Norberg’s reservations about the book’s argument. Are there psychological habits that are necessary to democracy that are something more than mere norms? (For what it is worth, Winnicott considers “maturity” to be essential to genuinely democratic decision-making).⁸

In his response, van Rahden emphasizes that his book’s subtitle—“*eine gefährdete Lebensform*”—should be translated not as an “endangered,” but as a “fragile way of life.” “Instead of obsessing about how democracies die,” he contends, “it might prove more useful to explore what keeps them alive.” At a time when many are justifiably worried about democracy’s future prospects, van Rahden’s important essay provides compelling evidence of how ordinary people can revise their conduct and values along democratic lines.

Participants:

Till van Rahden teaches modern and contemporary history at the Université de Montréal where he held the Canada Research Chair in German and European Studies from 2006 to 2016. He is interested in the tension between the elusive promise of democratic equality and the recurrent presence of diversity and moral conflicts. His publications include *Jews and other Germans: Civil Society, Religious Diversity and Urban Politics in Breslau, 1860-1925* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008) as well as four co-edited volumes: *Juden, Bürger, Deutsche: Zur Geschichte von Vielfalt und Differenz 1800-1933* (Tübingen: MohrSiebeck, 2001), *Demokratie im Schatten der Gewalt: Geschichten des Privaten im deutschen Nachkrieg* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), *Autorität: Krise, Konstruktion und Konjunktur* (Paderborn: Fink, 2016), and *Emanzipation und Recht: Zur Geschichte der Rechtswissenschaften und der jüdischen Gleichberechtigung*. (Frankfurt/M.: Klostermann, 2021). Currently, he is a fellow at the *Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen* in Vienna.

Michael Behrent is an associate professor of history at Appalachian State University. He teaches European intellectual history and works on French political thought and Michel Foucault.

James Chappel is the Hunt Family Assistant Professor of History at Duke University. He is currently researching the familial history of democracy, particularly as it relates to old age.

Donna Harsch is a social and political historian of twentieth-century Germany who has published on German Social Democracy, gender relations and the family in the German Democratic Republic, and health policy in East and West Germany. Most recently, with Karen Hagemann and Friederike Brühöfener, she edited *Gendering Post-1945 German History: Entanglements* (Berghahn Books, 2019). She is working on a book-length comparative study of infant mortality and efforts to reduce it in the German Democratic Republic and Federal Republic of Germany, 1945 to 1990.

⁷ Hook, “Democracy as a Way of Life.”

⁸ Winnicott, “Some Thoughts on the Meaning of the Word Democracy,” *passim*.

Jakob Norberg is an Associate Professor of German Studies at Duke University. He is the author of *Sociability and Its Enemies: German Political Thought After 1945* (Northwestern University Press, 2014). *The Philologist King*, a book on the political thought of the brothers Grimm, is currently under review.

REVIEW BY JAMES CHAPPEL, DUKE UNIVERSITY

In March 2020, Chancellor Angela Merkel gave a televised address to the German people about the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ It was quite different from those given by other leaders, as the historian Ian Beacock pointed out.² Merkel did not use the language of war, nor did she seek to undercut public health authorities in the name of economic recovery. Instead, she used the language of democracy. The pandemic, she insisted, should be confronted democratically, following the logic of shared governance and mutual responsibility. We are citizens of a democratic republic, she reminded listeners. We are in this together.

It might seem surprising that Germany has offered the most clearly democratic response, at least rhetorically, to the crisis. Germany's experience with democracy, even after 1945, has been checkered. Some scholars in recent years have focused on its limits and weaknesses. Karrin Hanshew's *Terror and Democracy in West Germany*, to take one example, argues that Germans did not fully accommodate themselves to liberal democracy until the later 1970s, as leftists and conservatives alike faced the specter of domestic terrorism with the Red Army Faction [RAF].³ Germany, from this perspective, has only been truly democratic since the time of the Carter administration. And yet, from a global perspective, it is hard to see Germany as anything other than a success story. Compared to other newly minted postwar democracies like Japan, India, and Israel, it is a site of tolerance, peace, and steady constitutional governance. And compared to other democracies today, including those in Europe itself, Germany is a beacon. This is not to discount the threat of illiberalism, especially with the rise of the right-wing Alternative for Germany [AfD]. But it is to remind us that, in a post-Cold War world in which democracy is everywhere under assault, Germany's strengths are just as interesting, and probably more so, than its weaknesses.

While most analysts of Germany see it as a test case for how democracy can collapse, others have used it to understand how it can survive—and what it is in the first place. This is the perspective that Till van Rahden adopts in this slender volume, simply called *Democracy: An Endangered Form of Life*. Van Rahden is himself German, but has long taught in Montreal, itself a cosmopolitan and polyglot city. He thus carries, in his bones and in his prose, the ethos of exchange and encounter that he sees as crucial to the democratic experiment. I use the word “ethos” pointedly, because van Rahden does not see democracy as, first and foremost, a form of parliamentary government. He does not even see it, as Jürgen Habermas and others might, as a form of public disputation about public things.⁴ He sees it, instead, more like Merkel seems to: as a form of living with one another, even and especially in private.

The story of German democracy has been told, and retold—what else could there be to say?⁵ The innovation in van Rahden's account is that he focuses on the evolution of private life, and especially family life. After all, we spend far more time at home and in school than we do in the public square: it stands to reason that democracy, insofar as it exists at all, must exist there. The history of the German family has been told before, too, both as a matter of social history and of legal

¹ Tagesschau, “Coronavirus: TV-Ansprache von Kanzlerin Merkel,” 18 March 2020, <https://youtu.be/TgC2TzvIRY8>.

² Ian Beacock, “Germany Gets It,” *The New Republic* April 2020, <https://newrepublic.com/article/157112/germany-gets-coronavirus>.

³ Karrin Hanshew, *Terror and Democracy in West Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).

⁵ This literature is massive, and spans the centuries, but for an introduction, see Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Konrad Jarausch, *After Hitler: Re-Civilizing Germans*, trans. Brandon Hunziker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

history.⁶ Van Rahden, though, wants to explore the history of morals as it befits a democracy: through public debate about those very themes, taking place in movies and books but most prominently in massively widespread periodicals, and often religious ones, that shaped the way everyday Germans imagined their roles as fathers, mothers, and children. These sources have been relatively untapped, and the gambit of the book is that they tell us something new, and something important, about German democracy.

Van Rahden's story is divided into three parts. The first covers the immediate postwar period, when in his telling the German public was not prepared for, or even interested in, democracy in his sense. To prove his point, he quotes from American occupiers and returning émigrés, all of them concerned that Germany could not change, so quickly, from fascist to democratic. After all, as van Rahden points out, fascism had its own ethos: the task was not to replace amorality with morality, but rather to replace a deeply engrained fascist morality with a distinctly democratic one. This process would require education and time; it would require changes in the way Germans thought about themselves and each other, and the way that schools and popular culture guided them to do so. None of this could happen quickly, and none of this could happen through American proclamation.

The second part of van Rahden's story concerns the 1950s and early 1960s. This period is often remembered, in Germany as in the United States, as a period of bland conformity, political moderation, and economic expansion. And yet more recent scholarship has revised our understanding of these pivotal years.⁷ The turmoil of the later 1960s, it appears, was in many ways continuous with earlier developments. Van Rahden wants to rehabilitate this period as a sort of laboratory for democratic living. He shows this in two basic ways. He pays attention, first, to the development of law, focusing on the gradual demolition of legally-enshrined patriarchal authority in the family. At the beginning of this period, men in Germany, as in many places, had the unquestioned right to make family decisions, about children's education for instance, even in cases where the mother disagreed. This represented, in miniature, the kind of absolute sovereignty that was meant to be foreclosed in a democracy. As such, those rights were chipped away by judges, creating at the family level the sorts of democratic living that were meant to be pursued by the nation as a whole. Van Rahden does not think that law itself is enough to create a democracy. He pays greater attention, therefore, to the evolving culture of the family, as tracked in debates about paternal authority in social scientific and, especially, religious texts. He finds that, well before the famed Oedipal furor of 1968, when so many German youths turned on their parents and excavated their Nazi pasts, Germans were beginning to rethink the unquestioned authority of parental figures, and especially of fathers. Fathers were being urged to create more democratic households, in which mothers could have equal authority and in which the very idea of 'authority' could be recast as an outcome of loving conversation and compromise.

The third part of van Rahden's book, and argument, concerns the rebellions of 1968 and their aftermath. Again, this story has been told and retold, but attention has focused most prominently on the Third Worldist ambitions of the students, and also on their eventual affection for terror.⁸ Van Rahden tracks, instead, the persistent critique of the family unit that was voiced by leading student radicals, and also the institutional afterlives of that critique in the 1970s, most notably in childrearing communes and anti-authoritarian kindergartens, known as *Kinderladen*. In van Rahden's view, these phenomena represent the unfolding, and perhaps overextension, of the logic of democratization that had taken root after the war. If the 1950s and 1960s were devoted to democratizing authority, the radicals of the '68 generation were committed, at their most extreme, to uprooting it entirely—abolishing the family, rather than reforming it. These sorts of experiments have been roundly critiqued, even by observers who are largely in sympathy with their goals (the codes of sexual

⁶ For one sterling example, see Robert Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁷ For an American version of this argument, see Jennifer A. Delton, *Rethinking the 1950s: How Anticommunism and the Cold War Made America Liberal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁸ Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

pedagogy for children, especially, are horrifying by contemporary standards).⁹ And yet van Rahden shows, too, that they had positive consequences for German education and for German families, and, cleansed of their excesses, that they continued the important work of expanding the principle of democracy into German homes, and German hearts.

No book could tackle so grand a theme, in so few pages, without raising a great many questions. I'll focus here on two, in the interest of pursuing a dialogue with the author. The first is probably the most unfair, even if it arises naturally from an American reader. I had a sense in my reading that van Rahden had avoided the most challenging kinds of cases. This is a vision of democracy from the middle out, as it were: as viewed by bourgeois nuclear families. But shouldn't the investigation of democracy begin from the margins? With the prisoner, the homosexual, or, in Germany's case, the Jew? This seems like a welcome and increasingly commonplace style of analysis in the American context, and I wonder about the decision to forego it here. I can imagine that a homosexual German from the 1950s, for instance, would not have felt many benefits from the democratization process described. It might be that the democratization process of the period did not include him, or other minority groups—but in that case, should this not be an important component of our own analysis?

My second question concerns the location of democracy. In the introduction, van Rahden defends his decision to tell a moral history of democracy, focused on the passions: one that would follow in the wake of David Hume, not that of Immanuel Kant. This decision could lead in multiple directions, given that these sorts of passions are omnipresent. I wondered especially about the decision to focus on the family rather than the workplace: that other site of explosive tension in which codes of authority were constantly negotiated. The stories seem rather similar in the German case. Van Rahden quotes theorists for whom “co-determination” [*Mitbestimmung*], the term normally reserved for amicable workplace relations, should also be used to understand and organize the family (40). The turn of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) away from labor militancy coincided in interesting ways with the Christian Democrats' shying away from familial militancy. And yet a focus on the workplace might have led to a different story, and one that ties the history of democracy more closely to questions of political economy. The final chapter of the book presents an elegiac portrait of neoliberalism in modern Germany, symbolized by the hollowing out of the public spaces that allowed democracy to flourish. It is unclear, though, how we are meant to link the neoliberal present with the other chapters, which focus on the 1940s to the 1970s. Many critics have argued that the '68ers, in their concern for individual autonomy, paved the way for neoliberalism: is this the type of argument that van Rahden hopes to make? A focus on the family makes such a story plausible, perhaps, in a way that a focus on the workplace, which is more clearly subject to transnational and global pressures, might not.

It should be clear that there is much to like about van Rahden's account. This is the work of a master historian, deeply concerned about the fate of democracy and admirably willing to write a relatively short and wide-ranging book about what, in his view, that story has been. For readers of H-Diplo, it might be the method more than the specific German findings that are of interest. Democracy promotion, or at least maintenance, is of concern to all of us, but it does seem as though many have lost a sense of what, precisely, we are trying to defend and why. Van Rahden reminds us that we are not trying, only, to salvage civil rights and freedom of the press—although those of course matter a great deal. We are trying, too, to pursue a democratic form of private living, in which equality between the generations and the genders can be realized. This allows us to see how, for instance, #metoo and the struggle for transsexual rights are inescapable elements of the struggle for democracy itself—if, indeed, it is to be worth saving.

⁹ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

REVIEW BY DONNA HARSCH, CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

Till van Rahden has written a timely book. What inhabitant of the United States, Germany, Brazil, Italy, India, Hungary, the United Kingdom, Poland, Turkey, France, Hong Kong—I could go on—does not now fret every day about the fragility or, indeed, the endangerment of democracy? Instead of stoking anxiety about democracy’s future, *Demokratie: Eine gefährdete Lebensform* aims to provide hope. Democracy is fundamentally a way of life, van Rahden argues, one that is bolstered by simple and persistent speech and daily acts that are inclusive and accepting of disagreement and difference. His book presents a philosophical argument for democracy as a *Lebensform* and supports it with interesting, often surprising evidence from West German discourse about democracy in the 1950s and 1960s. Rather than a study of democracy’s decline or demise, he offers a case study of its emergence after the bloody defeat by foreign powers of a genocidal dictatorship.

The book opens with a brisk, erudite overview of classic and modern theories of democracy. Democracy, van Rahden reminds us, is notoriously difficult to define. The concept encompasses many, sometimes conflicting, emphases, variations, and combinations (such as equal, free; communal, individual; direct, representative; social, political, liberal, radical). With telling, often amusing, quotes, he provides the flavor of unending European and American debates about democracy and the demos. While he recognizes the significance of thorny issues such as shared norms or morality, he sets aside such questions in favor of a practical and dynamic definition. Drawing, especially, on the reflections of Sidney Hook, he suggests that democracy is a means, not an end.¹ It is a method by which conflict and controversy over values or interests are continually (re)negotiated by players who have equal rights to participate in the process. This method, he argues, applies not only to politics but to private life, especially the family. Thus, he concludes, democracy is a way of life. It emerges from and is constituted by forms of behavior, styles of communication, and mundane interactions which implicitly recognize the equivalent standing of all members of the community to engage in these deeds and discourse.

Van Rahden turns to an impressively heterogeneous collection of print sources to illustrate the intense and widespread angst among postwar essayists and journalists about the undemocratic attitudes of Germans in the wake of National Socialism. Although he features quotations from commentaries published by well-known national newspapers, he particularly highlights observations and viewpoints buried in obscure regional and local newspapers. He discusses evidence of democratic worry and advice in business journals, trade union periodicals, Catholic and Protestant publications, magazines for teachers, parents, and members of the Border Control. As authors took the pulse of democracy, he suggests, they simultaneously strengthened it by modeling civic discourse and commending political diversity to ordinary people. With, again, an excellent eye for evocative language and the unexpected perspective, he paints in broad strokes a colorful canvas of arguments touting democratic mores as the basis of a democratic state.

Van Rahden uncovers and analyzes an unanticipated pattern of association in public discourse: the family and democracy. In the 1950s, the right of the father to decide questions about children’s upbringing and education was a topic of impassioned parliamentary and public debate in the Federal Republic (FRG). With support from Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, the Christian Democratic Party, and the upper echelons of the West German Catholic Church, the “paternal deciding vote” was upheld in an equal rights law passed by the Bundestag in 1957, only to be struck down by the Constitutional Court in 1959. Van Rahden’s local sources reveal that, yes, editorials in conservative dailies denounced this ruling as a death blow to Christian values and the family. Yet, as his sources also show, authors writing in Catholic lay publications as well as in a variety of local, associational, and educational magazines reacted positively to the court’s decision. An oft-expressed reason they supported it was their belief that an authoritarian family was incompatible with a democratic polity. The wife’s/mother’s right to share decision-making about childrearing with the husband/father would encourage democratic habits within the family—not only between husband and wife but between father and child. The assumption that family relationships represented and modeled political relationships, van Rahden suggests, foreshadowed two theories

¹ Sidney Hook, “Democracy as a Way of Life,” *Southern Review* 4:1 (1938): 45–57.

associated with West German radical politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s—the condemnation of the German patriarchal family as a cradle of fascism, and the feminist revelation that ‘the personal is political.’

In Chapter Four, van Rahden turns to that politically-fraught era and its struggles over social and political democratization. This chapter too places the discourse about the family at the center of the analysis. The New Left, he notes, began with a slashing critique of the authoritarian family but quickly moved on to a radical rejection of the nuclear family per se. New Leftists and feminists—true believers in living, dynamic, daily, often contentious democracy—created communes that shared childrearing. They also set up storefront preschools, staffed by the parents themselves, which recognized children’s right to self-actualization and to challenge adults. Van Rahden again presents unexpected data on the tenor and composition of reactions to communes and *Kinderläden*. Local and regional bourgeois publications and the national liberal media were friendlier to these radical forms of everyday life and childrearing than one would expect given the political polarization of the era and the antagonism of the conservative press and, especially, the notorious *Bild-Zeitung*. As earlier, editorials and reportage recognized the importance of democratizing private relations, were intrigued by the critique of the small family as essentially undemocratic and, most surprisingly, entertained the positive value of a communal way of life that was sexually free and generationally egalitarian.

Van Rahden is to be commended for placing gender and generational relations at the center of his argument about democracy as a way of life. He demonstrates convincingly that in the 1950s, West Germans from many political camps believed that a democratic way of life was fundamental to political democracy and saw the family as a key institution in fostering democratic mores and relations. His evidence and analysis contribute to ongoing scholarly debates about West German society and political culture in the 1950s. He demonstrates convincingly that the establishment of a stable parliamentary democracy in the aftermath of a violent populist dictatorship did not represent a “political miracle” (54) dropped from above but a work in progress forged by concern about democracy, debate about how to create it, and commitment to democratic methods in the small and the large. He also contributes to historical interpretations of ‘1968.’ He reinforces feminist scholarship that sees the family and gender relations as central to discourse about democracy in the FRG.² He provides novel evidence in support of the increasingly accepted view that “1968” is a poor synecdoche for West German democratization and liberalization. The mass mobilizations and demands for wider and deeper democracy did not surge up suddenly from a flat, dull sea but were the foamy crest of a gradually intensifying wave comprised of many liberalizing currents within society, the media, politics and the law, and public discourse.

After presenting an upbeat story about democracy’s emergence in the FRG, van Rahden closes with a cautionary tale. The concluding chapter argues that public infrastructure —libraries, parks, pools, and transportation—is a symbol and an incubator of the democratic way of life. All members of the community can use these spaces equally. In doing so, they live democracy, enjoying the space as individuals while also learning to follow explicit and implicit rules of behavior so that everyone can benefit from the public place and the service it provides. He illustrates this thesis with a well-chosen microhistory of the rise and fall of a public swimming pool in Offenbach. With much public fanfare, in 1961 the city opened a community pool. The mayor spoke, other public officials joined him, and a large audience applauded them and the new pool. Fast forward three decades—and the pool had fallen into decay. The deindustrialized but still populous city did not have the tax base to repair the pool, so its site was incorporated into the grounds of a luxury hotel. Van Rahden warns that privatization, tax cuts, and the interests that promote them undermine democratic infrastructure, and, thus, erode

² See, for example,, Christiane Kuller, *Familienpolitik im föderativen Sozialstaat. Die Formierung eines Politikfeldes in der Bundesrepublik 1949-1975* (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2004); Katharina Karcher, *Sisters in Arms: militant feminisms in the Federal Republic of Germany since 1968* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017), 21-27; 30-31; Christina von Hodenberg, *Das andere Achtundsechzig. Gesellschaftsgeschichte einer Revolte* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2018); Belinda Davis, *The Internal Life of Politics: Extraparliamentary Opposition in West Germany, 1962-1983* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), and contributions to Karen Hagemann, Donna Harsch, and Friederike Brühöfener, eds. *Gendering Post-1945 German History: Entanglements* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2019).

democratic mores. As throughout the book, van Rahden makes his case about public space and democracy eloquently and with empirical evidence drawn from a hitherto untapped source.

I learned a lot from Van Rahden's articulate and charming brief for the democratic *Lebensform* as crucial to democracy. Yet I found it somewhat frustrating. The final chapter's discussion of public amenities seems to come out of the blue, focusing as it does on a different category or dimension of a democratic way of life than do earlier chapters. They explore the contemporary discourse about interpersonal relations and attitudes and are largely centered on private life in the family. The last chapter deals with a material condition of the democratic way of life and is concerned with public space. Certainly, both categories can be part of a democratic *Lebensform*. Yet I missed an argumentative framework about how the author chose his categories and about their relationship to each other. Moreover, the last chapter is the only one that considers the context of the emergence of a democratic way of life. Earlier chapters analyze discourse about the family and democracy as if developments in the family and in family law were free-floating, rather than anchored to other developments in society, the economy, and politics. Van Rahden acknowledges that the Cold War, the division of Germany, and economic prosperity played a role in fostering or stabilizing democracy, but notes that this background is not part of his story. Yet the last chapter suddenly incorporates economic and political interests into the analysis. He thus contextualizes seems to assume that the decay of democratic public spaces but does not do so for the spread of democratic mores. I appreciate that van Rahden did not intend to write an exhaustive history of the roots and development of West German democracy, but would have liked him to give us some sense of the circumstances that accompanied the expansion and stabilization of a democratic *Lebensform* in the aftermath of National Socialism's war of conquest and slaughter.

In addition to an expanding economic pie, several postwar domestic conditions arguably contributed to West Germans coming round to a democratic way of life. First, the political and intellectual leaders in what became West Germany accepted parliamentary democracy. More importantly, they did not suddenly come to Jesus, as it were, but came out of one or another democratic political milieu. Before the Nazis came to power, Germany was home to millions of democrats, including social democrats and political democrats. Unfortunately, by 1930, they probably comprised a minority of the citizenry; many of them did not appreciate the importance of democratizing private life; and any number— not to speak of their political and social organizations—tolerated or went over to the Nazis before or after 1933. Still, after 1945 West German politicians, intellectuals and ordinary citizens could draw on strong and diverse traditions of social and political democracy. Could one argue that this well of democratic political experience and commitment laid the foundation for rising recognition of the importance of a democratic *Lebensform* as much as vice versa?

Second, the spectrum of political debate and organization was considerably narrower than before 1933. Both the far right and the far left were delegitimized and/or banned and/or in exile (Nazi leaders) or East Germany (Communist leaders). Did the virtual silence in the 1950s of those who rejected liberal democracy allow its supporters to focus on democracy as a way of life rather than be taken up with defending it as a political system?

Last but not least, Nazi racism and genocide not only denaturalized, exiled, and slaughtered German Jewry but also laid waste to cultural and religious diversity in Germany. West Germany was a culturally and ethnically homogenous Christian land until at least 1960 (when the number of Turkish guest workers began to rise). Even in apparently stable democracies, as we well know, the ethnic and religious majority has always found it particularly hard to accept the equality and freedom of racial/ethnic and religious minorities. Even men and women who practice some semblance of a democratic family life can be deeply hostile to cultural and ethnic diversity. Did the absence of minority communities in the 1950s make it easier for West Germans to accept the minor diversities and nonconformities of everyday life and, thus, to lay the foundations of a democratic way of life?

A good book must be clearly argued and enjoyable to read. Hopefully, it is also enlightening. In the best cases, it provokes the reader to think long and hard about the problem at hand. Van Rahden's essay on democracy has all these qualities. I recommend it not only to students and scholars of modern German history but to everyone interested in how to nurture democracy.

REVIEW BY JAKOB NORBERG, DUKE UNIVERSITY

In his new book on postwar democracy in Germany, the historian Till van Rahden distills a mini-sequence of ideas that guided democratization efforts in the Federal Republic in first three decades after the Second World War: To have a democracy, you have to have democrats, and to have democrats, you have to raise them.

The formal requirements of democracy were not entirely alien to the postwar German population. Most Germans were likely quite familiar with some basic features and procedures of modern democracies, such as periodic general elections, party organization, and political campaigns. But it was doubtful, commentators claimed, whether they were democrats in the sense of being genuinely willing to recognize everyone as formally equal, allow government critics to articulate their arguments in public debates, acknowledge a permanent opposition as legitimate, or support civil rather than military or quasi-military leadership. In 1961, for example, the young Jürgen Habermas characterized West Germany as an “electoral monarchy [Wahlmonarchie]” still susceptible to fascist temptations (59). The Germans, so it was suspected, were still more accustomed to commands rather than open-ended debate, and preferred submission to glorified authorities rather than drawn-out processes of collective decision-making. To function over time, the reinstated democracy needed real democrats, just as any game, understood as a bundle of rules, needs proficient and committed players.

This widely shared postwar worry about the actual substance of democracy in Germany became manifest, van Rahden points out, in a proliferation of calls for “democratic virtues” or a “democratic ethos” (27). As recent history had demonstrated, having a democracy was not sufficient; the citizenry had to be infused with a “democratic spirit,” develop a “democratic attitude,” or be immersed in a “democratic culture” (27 and 32). The cardinal insight of the postwar period, one that van Rahden quite explicitly endorses, was that democracy was not merely a political system, but a collective form of life, a “*Lebensform*” (32). The political system of democracy rested on preconditions without which it would collapse into a new dictatorship or at least remain inert, with conformist citizens moving as a herd toward a more authoritarian-style regime.

Once the commentators started speaking about those vital preconditions for democracy in greater detail, however, the picture often became a little blurrier. It is easier to specify the rules of democratic procedures than it is to specify the character of the ‘democratic *Geist*’ or the ‘democratic form of life’ that somehow support the collective adherence to those procedures. For what, really, are the preconditions of democratic practice? Habits, conventions, behaviors, values likely provide support in the population, but perhaps they are not so easy to determine exhaustively, let alone engineer.

It is not entirely impossible to identify at least some plausible traits of a genuinely democratic practice: A democrat has to believe in some minimal equality among people, because every member gets one vote, despite any disparities in education or resources; a democrat has to accept the existence of people who think differently, because there are going to be a plurality of groups with different agendas within the *demos*; and a democrat has to have faith in the fairness and dependability of the institutionalized process through which one of those agendas is adopted at the cost of others.

Yet van Rahden’s stimulating book is ultimately not a work of political theory, but of history. He does not set out to eliminate the slightly fuzzy content of ideas like democracy as a ‘form of life’ for the sake of clarity, but rather seeks to capture and contextualize the phrase as an index of widespread concern with future politics in a particular society. By looking broadly at the vocabulary and tenor of a whole societal discourse as it emerged in ceremonious speeches, newspaper editorials, news magazine articles, dictionary entries, as well as popular self-help manuals and even cookbooks, van Rahden recovers the earnest, even anxious wish to reintroduce democracy to Germany and really make it stick.

And the German postwar intelligentsia did seem to converge on a solution: to make democracy more robust, German society would have to train democrats. Specifically, children would need models of democratic practice, which meant that the family had to be reformed. To the list of phrases such as “democratic spirit” and “democratic culture,” van Rahden adds yet another circulating formulation, which was a little more specific and targeted, namely “democratic fatherhood” (80). For democracy to take hold, the German father had to shed authoritarian reflexes and become a more democratic figure. The

shared narrative behind this widespread preoccupation with family politics went roughly like this: the German father had culturally and legally occupied the role of the uncontested decision-maker, a mini-monarch or a mini-dictator who raised his children sternly or even with a studied coldness, obviously not shying away from physical punishment. According to this diagnosis, the German family had been an all-too dependable institution of discipline, with a pipeline from the family home to the military barrack; German children had learned how to follow orders. A warmer, friendlier, more relaxed father figure, who, very importantly, would model equality by making shared decisions with a wife whom he acknowledged as a partner rather than subordinate, could contribute to the early democratic formation of the children. Democracy crucially required a new kind of fatherhood. In the late nineteen sixties and seventies, van Rahden then shows, this call for a demilitarized paternal figure was replaced by a more radical and utopian anti-authoritarianism with the end goal of abolishing the family altogether. The nuclear family unit—now cast as intrinsically repressive by some pedagogues and activists—should be replaced with the commune.

Till van Rahden's reconstruction of this powerful cultural narrative and its transformation over the postwar decade is perceptive and persuasive, and a pleasure to read. But is this 'German theory' of the need for democratic fatherhood convincing? Can democracy be prepared within the family in the way suggested by postwar reformers?

As is to be expected, not everyone agreed at the time. Even a voice with the most impeccable anti-authoritarian credentials, the sociologist and philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, expressed some skepticism, or at least added a few nuances to the narrative. To establish an authentic democracy in Germany, Adorno believed, individual subjects had to act and think as autonomous beings, which was a difficult feat in a society socioeconomically dominated by large, bureaucratic corporations and state agencies and culturally dominated by commercial entertainment. In this context, Adorno maintained, the contemporary intellectual must first and foremost become a pedagogue intent on facilitating the formation of independent selfhood, and such formation must begin early. But Adorno's knowledge of Freudian psychoanalysis kept him from arguing for radically reduced parental authority. In a series of radio conversations with the lawyer and educational researcher Hellmut Becker held in the late sixties, Adorno suggested a number of measures for early childhood socialization.¹ While he demanded the elimination of brutalizing violence to children, he did not necessarily argue for more permissive child-rearing. Compliant children, Adorno said, typically grow up to become more independent and questioning adults, since they have had the opportunity to successfully internalize authority, whereas undisciplined children often come to suffer from a lack of impulse control and be more likely to remain in need of external, repressive measures during their later lives. The dissolution of parental authority would not generate a successfully democratized society since children need active formation; to treat the immature as if they were already mature would hardly facilitate their maturation.

Nor did Adorno quite believe in the continued existence of a patriarch, the main target of postwar familial reform. Germans had indeed become known for authoritarianism, but this was, according to Adorno, paradoxically a recent outcome of a destabilized bourgeois patriarchal family structure, which had triggered a frantic search for surrogate authorities. Germans had fanatically worshipped Adolf Hitler, Adorno wrote in 1959, but the image of the fascist leader possessed no particularly "fatherly traits";² the popular adulation of the *Führer* was, to Adorno, not exactly an extension of an already eroded conservative authoritarianism into the realm of politics, but more a symptom of destabilized family relationships and a search for idols in a country that had experienced industrial modernity as a shock. Adorno worried less about traditional authority than the desperate, even lethal reaction to its collapse.

I do not invoke Adorno to criticize van Rahden's book in any way. On the contrary, van Rahden's expertly reconstructed debates on authority within the family reveals that Adorno was very much a representative of a fairly coherent postwar

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit: Vorträge und Gespräche mit Hellmut Becker 1959-1969*, edited by Gerd Kadelbach (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970).

² Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 9.2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 377. My translation.

pedagogical debate. Against the backdrop of van Rahden's study of democracy, it becomes clear that one of early Federal Republic's most high-profile intellectual figures participated in the very same discussion as the period's journalists, educators, therapists, and reformers who were concerned with familial life in relation to the health of the polity; the highbrow was continuous with the middlebrow.

But van Rahden's book does not only want to be a contribution to the scholarship on postwar German history. It advertises itself as a book on democracy as a collective form of life at risk, not as a more focused study of debates about family structure in West Germany of the nineteen fifties, sixties, and seventies. In translation, the title reads: *Democracy: An Endangered Form of Life* – the place (Germany) and period (postwar) are not announced on the front page. What binds the particular historical material and the more general intellectual and political ambition together in this case is the interest in the preconditions of democracy. In the introduction, van Rahden notes how democracy seems to be losing some of its self-evidence and attraction in the contemporary moment. Once broadly supported traditional parties are bleeding voters, a once integrated societal debate has fractured into intensely antagonistic discourses, and, one might add, less democratic countries no longer look to Western democracies as models of good governance. Democracies are sinking a little in status. In this situation, van Rahden claims, it can be instructive to revisit an earlier historical moment in which people understood that the vigor of a democracy as a political system depended on the vitality of a collective life oriented toward its maintenance. Contemporary democracy cannot be restored by us simply continuing to hold elections, follow campaigns, let majorities choose leaders etc. – we could end up as some kind of zombie democrats. Instead, democracy has to be refreshed through a renewed reflection on and commitment to the attitudes and values that underpin it, such as recognition of equality, tolerance of difference, and shared trust in procedures.

Interestingly, though, van Rahden calls for a return to an earlier, more acute awareness of the socio-cultural preconditions of democracy without wanting to resurrect the particular debates about patriarchy and family structure that the book's longest chapters cover. At the end, it even seems as though the story of family structure and family policy begins to diverge from the story of democracy. The former narrative seems pretty positive: after the softening of patriarchy in the fifties and sixties and the more bizarre episode of impractical commune utopianism in the seventies, the legal and sociopolitical climate of the last few decades has gradually allowed for a more pluralistic family life in Germany. People are free to divorce more easily, same-sex couples are free to marry, and the entire debate about families is organized more resolutely around the needs and wellbeing of children rather than parental authority. For a liberal democrat, this all seems good. Yet this pluralization in the realm of family has not been straightforwardly accompanied by a corresponding consolidation and vivification of democracy, at least not according to van Rahden: democracy remains an 'endangered form of life,' despite a series of advances in family policy. Does this mean that further progress in the realm of the family does not automatically lead to further democratic vitalization? One could insert many different stories in the space between the two claims about contemporary society, one about the continuing sociocultural pluralization and one about the less than fully vigorous democracy, but I will refrain from doing so. Instead I will note that van Rahden, when he arrives to our day, in some ways ends with a question rather than a thesis: how do we remain democratic?

 RESPONSE BY TILL VAN RAHDEN, UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

“What Democracy Feels Like: A Response to My Critics”

The mark of public life in a cosmopolitan republic is “unsociable sociability,” Immanuel Kant noted in 1784.¹ As citizens of a democracy, we move in and out of social circles and distinct milieus where we encounter strangers, not friends.² Some encounters are amicable, others prickly. The art of sharing public spaces is a never-ending project. As democratic citizens we face what Arthur Schopenhauer called the porcupine dilemma which he used to illustrate the Kantian concept:

On a cold winter’s day, a community of porcupines huddled very close together to protect themselves from freezing through their mutual warmth. However, they soon felt one another’s quills, which then forced them apart. Now when the need for warmth brought them closer together again, that second drawback repeated itself so that they were tossed back and forth between both kinds of suffering until they discovered a moderate distance from one another, at which they could best endure the situation.—This is how the need for society, arising from the emptiness and monotony of our own inner selves, drives people together; but their numerous repulsive qualities and unbearable flaws push them apart once again. The middle distance they finally discover and at which a coexistence is possible is courtesy and good manners. [...] Of course, by means of this the need for mutual warmth is only partially satisfied, but in exchange the prick of the quills is not felt.³

At its best, the republic of letters is similar. I owe a huge debt to James Chappel, Donna Harsch, and Jakob Norberg, three colleagues whose work I admire greatly, for their generosity but mostly for their prickly, provocative, and thoughtful criticism. In sum, the three reviews provide an introduction to whatever merits my book on democracy as a fragile way of life may have and especially a balance sheet of its weaknesses. In the following, I cannot do justice to their criticism. Instead I will address a misunderstanding that the title of my book encourages, and then I will focus on four points the reviewers raise that strike me as central to contemporary controversies over democracy as a way of life in North America as well as in Europe, and perhaps elsewhere.

To translate the title of the book, *Demokratie: Eine gefährdete Lebensform*, into English, invites a misunderstanding. To me, democracy is not “endangered,” let alone an endangered species, as the three reviewers assume. It is not threatened by extinction, but it is *gefährdet* in the sense of fragile. The German title challenges a view that has come to dominate scholarly conversations after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its many satellite states, namely that democracy is the default system of government in a modern society. The field of transition studies that emerged after 1989 explored how liberal democracies and market economies could be established. Once post-Communist countries had embraced Western democracy, these theories assumed, liberal democracy would resemble a perpetual motion machine—a clearly defined model of government

¹ Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim,” in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and James Schmidt eds., *Kant’s Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9-23, quotation: 13.

² Jacob T. Levy, “Against Fraternity: Democracy without Solidarity,” in Keith G. Banting and Will Kymlicka, eds., *The Strains of Commitment. The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 107-124.

³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena, Vol.2*. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Schopenhauer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 690-691.

that could be exported almost anywhere.⁴ Its history therefore merited little attention. For every analysis of how democracies came to be and, more importantly, how they survived, we have countless studies that explore the origins of fascism and other form of tyranny and despotism.⁵

If we are all democrats now, we have lost sight of the banal reality that liberal democracy is inherently fragile. Both as a system of government and as a way of life, liberal democracy is more unlikely and more fragile than a monarchy or a dictatorship. “There need not be much integrity for a monarchical or despotic government to maintain or sustain itself,” Montesquieu noted in the *Spirit of the Laws*, first published in Geneva in 1748: The “force of laws, in one, and the prince’s arm, in the other, are sufficient to direct and maintain the whole: but, in a popular state, one spring more is necessary, namely, *virtue*.”⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau echoed such thoughts in *The Social Contract*, published in 1762. There is “no Government as subject to civil wars and intestine turmoil as Democratic or popular Government,” the Genevan philosopher argued “because there is none which tends so strongly and so constantly to change its form, nor any which requires greater vigilance and courage to maintain in its form.”⁷ Such nods to Montesquieu and Rousseau may be timely in 2020 when most recent books on democracy revolve around the question of how democracies degenerate and die. Once we acknowledge that democracy is inherently fragile, we can cultivate a level-headed prudence rather than fueling a sense of despair. Instead of obsessing about how democracies die, it might prove more useful to explore what keeps them alive.

Highlighting the fragility of democracy draws attention to a set of simple questions: What are the cultural and social preconditions of democracy? How can we strengthen and renew them? Which ways of life make for a political culture that allows democracy as a system of government to flourish?

⁴ For an early attempt to explore the dilemmas involved see Will Kymlicka and Magda Opalski eds., *Can Liberal Pluralism be Exported? Western Political Theory and Ethnic Relations in Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). More recently Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, *The Light That Failed: A Reckoning* (London: Allan Lane, 2019).

⁵ See, inter alia: Martin Conway, *Western Europe’s Democratic Age, 1945–1968* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 18, 20; Volker R. Berghahn, “Recasting Bourgeois Germany,” in Hanna Schissler ed., *The Miracle Years. A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 326-340, especially 326. In the Federal Republic of Germany scholarship on the history of democracy often focused on the history of electoral assemblies and party politics. Much credit here belongs to the *Kommission für Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien*, founded in 1952. According to the proceedings of its second meeting, the *Kommission’s* aim was “den historisch-politischen Studien neue Werte zuzuführen, das Ansehen der parlamentarischen Vertretungen in der Bundesrepublik zu erhöhen, die Teilnahme der Bevölkerung und insbesondere der akademischen Jugend am politischen Leben Deutschlands zu vermehren und damit die deutsche demokratische Grundordnung zu festigen.” The *Kommission* continues to publish outstanding work; the latest study of close to two hundred books in its flagship series *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien* is Claudia C. Gatzka, *Die Demokratie der Wähler: Stadtgesellschaft und politische Kommunikation in Italien und der Bundesrepublik 1944-1979* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2019). The latest volume of the *Handbuch der Geschichte des deutschen Parlamentarismus* is Marie-Luise Recker, *Parlamentarismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2018).

⁶ Charles de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 22.

⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 92.

Such questions are elusive. If one surveys decades of scholarship on “civic culture” and “civil society,” many studies end up focussing on liberal values, democratic norms, and a specific moral and ethical consensus as the foundation of a democracy.⁸ In the German context, the most influential thinker to highlight the nexus between morality and liberal democracy is Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde. The legal theorist famously noted that the “liberal secular state lives on premises that it cannot itself guarantee.”⁹ A similar concern about secularism and its discontents is central to Charles Taylor’s idea of the “social imaginary.” A democracy, he argues, is in need of a normative consensus based not on abstract Rawlsian reasoning but on lived experiences, social imaginaries in other words, that allow citizens to embrace democratic principles such as solidarity and equality.¹⁰

By speaking of democracy as a way of life, as a *Lebensform*, I hope to suggest why Böckenförde’s fears may prove exaggerated and why Taylor’s emphasis on shared morality is more problematic than is usually assumed. Conversations about the role of forms, style, and manners for democracy as a way of life may contribute to a more subtle understanding of democratic foundations than these theories can provide. To emphasize form over substance helps to allay contemporary anxieties about the moral basis of democracy. More importantly, questions of style may help us in our attempts to square the multicultural circle and to navigate the tension between equality and difference.

Before addressing the reviews directly, it might be useful to lay out the key arguments of the book concisely. The concept of *Lebensform* is indebted to a strand in political theory that views democracy as a way of life. I draw on the ideas of pragmatist thinkers such as Jane Addams, John Dewey, Sidney Hook, Horace Kallen, or Richard Rorty as well as those of transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson or Walt Whitman.¹¹ Whatever its past and present shortcomings, the intellectual life in the American republic has proved a more fertile ground for such controversies than Europe.¹² That said, the concept of *Lebensform* is also part of transatlantic exchanges. New World conversations drew on European legacies. As a moral category, the idea of *Lebensformen* dates back to Greek and Roman antiquity where the concept of *Bioon paradeigmata* or *Forma vivendi* was used in the singular and defined the one (and only) way of leading a good life.¹³

⁸ Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Filippo Sabetti, “Democracy and Civic Culture,” in Carles Boix ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007) 340-362.

⁹ Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, “Die Entstehung des Staats als Vorgang der Säkularisation,” *Staat, Gesellschaft, Freiheit: Studien zur Staatstheorie und zum Verfassungsrecht* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976), 42–64, quotation: 60.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) 23.

¹¹ Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1902); John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems: An Essay in Political Inquiry* (New York: Holt, 1927); Sidney Hook, *Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy, and Freedom: The Essential Essays* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002); Horace M. Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1924); Richard Rorty, “The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy,” *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 175-196; Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Political Writings*. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); John E. Seery ed., *A Political Companion to Walt Whitman* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010).

¹² Judith N. Shklar, *Redeeming American Political Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) is particularly useful. I have also learnt much from intellectual historians such as Angus Burgin, John Higham, David Hollinger, or James Kloppenberg. For recent scholarship see the journal *American Political Thought*, which was established in 2012.

¹³ Arno Borst, *Lebensformen im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Propyläen-Verlag, 1973) 16; this remarkable book has been translated into Italian (Napoli: Guida, 1990) and Chinese (Xin bei: Fan shi shu wu wen hua shi ye you xian gong si, 2011), but not into English.

By the time the term entered the vocabulary of modern philosophy, it had become a halfway house between a fully developed moral or ethical ideal and an unconscious routine in our daily lives, for instance in Wittgenstein's analogy between "language games" and "forms of life" in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Arno Borst's work here is fundamental. "Ever since humans have lived together, they have made use of social customs," the historian of medieval cultures noted in 1973:¹⁴

There have been forms of life before antiquity and there will be after modern times. But their effect and estimation differ across the ages. Sometimes history disrupts how people reciprocate in everyday life and tears apart the social fabric; then forms of life are no longer taken for granted, instead they are elevated to the level of morality and overestimated. Usually, however, history takes place outside the daily behavior of men towards each other and covers up the social fabric; then forms of life seem all too natural and are underestimated as life's humdrum routines of banality.

The concept of *Lebensform* in other words does two things: it offers a language of weak normativity that allows us to explore questions of moral history while avoiding strong moral judgements drawn from languages of values and norms; and it serves as an over-arching concept that bridges the divide between the public and the private—a divide that is central to liberal democracies.

With this in mind, we can return to the question of democratic theory and revisit simultaneously Böckenförde's fears and Taylor's emphasis on shared morality. To privilege forms over substance is to emphasize rules, manners, and conventions over shared values. If a genuinely pluralist liberalism is justified in putting moral incommensurabilities first, the premises cannot be found in the realm of ethics. A republican constitution, as Immanuel Kant was the first to point out, would have to work not just for a nation of angels but also for a nation of devils. It might therefore be more fruitful to focus less on the civic virtues and moral convictions citizens hold and to instead analyze how they articulate their ethical sentiments and fears in public. If liberal democracy is as much a way of life as a system of government, it would be short-sighted to focus only on civic virtues, shared values, and a common social imaginary. If we understand diversity as the inevitable effect of individual freedom, if we put moral incommensurabilities and questions of cruelty at the heart of our understanding of democracy, we can fret less about values or social imaginaries and can focus instead on exploring which forms, styles, and aesthetics help stimulate, sustain and revive democracy as a way of life.¹⁵

Forms, not norms, are crucial here. Those who view cultural homogeneity as a prerequisite for liberal democracy overlook the fact that a specifically democratic form of civic cohesion emerges not from harmony, but rather from discord and strife. Our ability to accept moral dilemmas that we cannot solve but only navigate, our capacity "to grasp what we cannot embrace,"¹⁶ presupposes forms and conventions, rules and procedures that allow us to live with deep pluralism.

Reflections on ways of life, and questions of style and democratic spaces allow us to hone our appreciation of the cultural and social foundations of democracy. No matter how stable a democratic government and a constitutional order may seem, without ways of life that allow for and encourage democratic experiences it will wither and perish. To argue that liberal

¹⁴ Borst, *Lebensformen*, 20-21, quotation 20; G. Mittelstädt, "Lebensformen," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Sonderausgabe, vol. 5 (Darmstadt: WBG, 2019), 118-119; J. F. M. Hunter, "'Forms of Life' in Wittgenstein's 'Philosophical Investigations,'" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 5:4 (1968): 233-243. For thick normative takes that draws on Hegel's notion of "ethical life" (*Sittlichkeit*), see Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), and Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

¹⁵ Judith N. Shklar, "Putting Cruelty First," *Daedalus* 111:3 (1982): 17-27; eadem, "The Liberalism of Fear," *Political Thought and Political Thinkers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1-19.

¹⁶ Clifford Geertz, "The Uses of Diversity," *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 68-88, quotation: 87

democracy requires that citizens also cultivate, shape and renew specific habits of the heart, a democratic ethos in quotidian encounters, presupposes a democratic commons, in other words the maintenance of cultural forms and social spaces that offer everyone the chance to experience freedom and equality in everyday life in a sensorial way. In short, to explore democracy as a way of life is to focus less on how democracy works and more on what democracy feels like.

Against this background, I would like to address four specific criticisms that the reviews raise.

First, as James Chappel notes, the book focuses on the family and neglects other sites where citizens have negotiated authority such as in the workplace. If all keywords of modern politics are essentially contested, the concepts of authority and the idea of employee participation in corporate culture, codetermination (*Mitbestimmung*) that is, are particularly enigmatic. Both are rather recent, hard to grasp, deeply problematic, yet almost everywhere.¹⁷ The assumption that the concept of patriarchy served as a contagious metaphor that helped challenge authoritarian hierarchies in various areas of society informs my work on the tension between authority and democracy. My interest in the decline of deference and my focus on the elusive quest for a democratic form of authority draw on recent work on education and popular culture, on the art of democratic deliberation, the role of the military, as well as studies of the philosophical foundations of democracy in postwar Europe.¹⁸ It is indeed unfortunate that the related concepts of codetermination and social partnership have yet to receive the attention they deserve.¹⁹ A focus on the elective affinities between these keywords might prove particularly fruitful. Many advocates of codetermination such as the young Jürgen Habermas denounced authoritarian forms of

¹⁷ Leonard Krieger, "The Idea of Authority in the West," *American Historical Review* 82 (1977): 249-270; Catherine Newmark, *Warum auf Autoritäten hören?* (Berlin: Bibliographisches Institut, 2020); eadem and Hilge Landweer eds., *Wie männlich ist Autorität? Feministische Kritik und Aneignung* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2018); Oliver Kohns et al. (eds.), *Autorität: Krise, Konstruktion und Konjunktur* (Paderborn: Fink, 2016).

¹⁸ Hans-Peter Schwarz, "Der Geist der fünfziger Jahre," *Die Ära Adenauer: Gründerjahre der Republik, 1949-1957*. Geschichte der Bundesrepublik vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1981), 375-464; Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Nina Verheyen, *Diskussionslust: Eine Kulturgeschichte des 'besseren Arguments' in Westdeutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010); Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Kaspar Maase, *BRAVO Amerika: Erkundungen zur Jugendkultur der Bundesrepublik in den fünfziger Jahren* (Hamburg: Junius, 1992); Hanna Schissler ed., *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Daniel Fulda et al. eds., *Demokratie im Schatten der Gewalt: Geschichten des Privaten im deutschen Nachkrieg* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010); Sonja Levsen, *Autorität und Demokratie: Eine Kulturgeschichte des Erziehungswandels in Westdeutschland und Frankreich, 1945-1975* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2019).

¹⁹ For exceptions that prove the rule see: Werner Milert and Rudolf Tschirbs, *Die andere Demokratie: Betriebliche Interessenvertretung in Deutschland, 1848 bis 2008* (Essen: Klartext, 2012); Sean A. Forner, "Intellectuals and the People: Conversation Forums and West German Democracy in the 1950s," in Jennifer M. Kapczynski and Caroline Kita eds. *The Arts of Democratization: Styling Political Sensibilities in Postwar West Germany* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, forthcoming); Jörg Neuheiser, "Postmaterialismus am laufenden Band? Mitbestimmung, Demokratie und die 'Humanisierung der Arbeitswelt' in den Konflikten zwischen 'plakat'-Gruppe und IG Metall bei Daimler-Benz in Untertürkheim," in Knud Andresen ed., *Der Betrieb als sozialer und politischer Ort* (Bonn: Dietz, 2015), 99-114; Bernd Zielinski, "Sur les origines historiques et théoriques de la codétermination dans les entreprises allemandes," *Le mouvement social*, 250 (2015): 97-114.

industrial relations as “patriarchal-familial workplace loyalty” (*patriarchalisch-familiäre Werkverbundenheit*), thereby conflating a repressive family with repressive labor relations.²⁰

Yet my book’s focus on the “Family Romance” of Germany’s democratic moment, to borrow Lynn Hunt’s phrase, is intentional.²¹ Between the 1940s and the 1970s, the family was foundational to controversies about democracy as a way of life, both as the quotidian reality Germans lived in and as a powerful fantasy of the good life they lived by.²² Controversies over the family and democracy involved commentators from all walks of life and from all political parties, conservatives and progressives, the left and the right, liberals and traditionalists, feminists and defenders of patriarchy. In the late 1940s, many viewed the family as a *Stabilitätsrest* (a remnant of stability) in a world of chaos: in the early 1950s it became a key symbol for the return to a well-ordered society, and throughout the postwar period it was central to struggles over gender equality and forms of education that were thought to produce mature citizens in a vibrant democracy. In fantasies of both nuclear families and patchwork families, the figure of the loving father was emblematic in the search for a democratic family, which is not surprising given the centrality of the *pater patriae*, the *pater familias* and the Heavenly Father not just to monarchical or aristocratic, but also to republican and democratic conceptions of legitimate power.²³

Equally intriguing, to move to my second response to these reviews, is Chappel’s question of whether the history of postwar democracy is best understood from the margins. The key, I would argue, is who we listen to most carefully and whose voices we invest with authority. The book’s long quotations are almost all by outsiders: Jewish émigrés such as Hannah Arendt, Siegfried Kracauer, or Amos Elon; rémigrés such as Theodor W. Adorno, Gerhard Leibholz, or Helmuth Plessner; feminists such as Erna Scheffler; rebel Catholics such as Karl Borgmann or Ruth Dirx; or, finally, eccentric Social Democrats such as Waldemar von Knoeringen. Their perceptive observations often reflected their marginality. To be homeless and a stranger makes for a distinct view of reality, Siegfried Kracauer noted, an ability to “see something of both sides.”²⁴ What’s more, questions of marginality and deviance are central if we aim to explore the place of moral passions and fears within a history of democracy. A key example here is the liberal critique of criminal law which was first articulated in the 1950s and culminated in major reforms between 1969 and early 1975. Key advocates for reform included Theodor W. Adorno, who

²⁰ Jürgen Habermas, “Der Mensch zwischen den Apparaten,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 6/7 September 1958, 48; see also Maxim Fackler, “Millarden-Schätze unter feuerroter Erde. Erkundungsfahrten durch den Kongo (III),” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 9 February 1960, 3; Maxim Fackler, “Weiß und schwarz [editorial],” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 12 April 1960, 1.

²¹ Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

²² For similar obsessions in the American context see: Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017); Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, revised and updated ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Joanne Meyerowitz ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Fred Matthews, “The Utopia of Human Relations. The Conflict-Free Family in American Social Thought, 1930-1960,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 24 (1988): 343-362, as well as Christopher Lasch’s bestselling study *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

²³ Gordon J. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes especially in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975).

²⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, *History: Last Things before the Last* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; reprinted Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1995), 84. On the ongoing relevance of Kracauer’s theory of history see Jacques Revel, “Siegfried Kracauer et le monde d’en-bas,” in *Siegfried Kracauer, L’histoire : des avant-dernières choses* (Paris: Stock, 2006), 7-42, and Till van Rahden, “Lumpen sammeln: Mit Siegfried Kracauer im Dickicht des 19. Jahrhunderts,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 307 (2018): 319-340.

was particularly proud of his role in these reforms, or Fritz Bauer, the Chief Prosecutor of the State of Hesse, a Jewish *rémigré* who was rumored to be gay at a time when homosexuality was illegal.²⁵

As Donna Harsch reminds us, it is impossible to understand the search for democracy in the postwar Germanies without acknowledging the legacy of the Weimar Republic, a point that leads me to my third response. It is not just that the collapse of Germany's first democracy cast and continues to cast a long shadow over postwar politics, I would argue.²⁶ It is more important to note that the short-lived republic served as a laboratory that resulted in a rich repertoire of democratic languages, forms, and experiences. Without the legacy of Weimar democracy that was mostly kept alive by *émigrés*, few of the democratic experiments in the Federal Republic would have been possible. If the postwar years were a time of "multiple restorations," this includes a legacy of democratic culture, full of contradictions and promise.²⁷ Many of the protagonists in my book drew on the lessons and legacies of the Weimar era. Erna Scheffler's struggle against patriarchy and for meaningful gender equality drew on feminist arguments from the early Weimar Republic.²⁸ A similar case can be made for controversies over legitimate forms of authority in education and child-rearing, even if, as Jakob Norberg notes, such rediscoveries of progressive traditions were often full of paradoxes. The Weimar years saw many theoretical and practical attempts to strengthen less hierarchical forms of authority. A worldly curiosity marked such debates; John Dewey's hefty tome on *Democracy and Education* came out in a German translation in 1930. While much of this intellectual ferment only survived in exile, large parts of the Weimar legacy were rediscovered in the postwar years, be it Dewey's thought or that of Georg Kerschensteiner on authority and progressive education.

In short, I would emphasize that Weimar's polyphonic theories of democracy, which were forged from interwar polemics, shaped postwar struggles over the meaning of popular sovereignty, liberal constitutionalism and democratic culture.²⁹ This

²⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, "Keine Angst vor dem Elfenbeinturm. An Interview," *Der Spiegel*, 5 May 1969; Werner Päckert, "Fritz Bauer und die Reform des Strafvollzugs," in Katharina Rauschenberger ed., *Rückkehr in Feindesland? Fritz Bauer in der deutsch-jüdischen Nachkriegsgeschichte*, (Frankfurt: Campus, 2013), 203-213; Petra Gödecke, "Die Strafrechtsreform zwischen Vergeltung und Resozialisierung, rigider 'Sittlichkeit' und vorsichtiger Toleranz," in Jörg Requate ed., *Recht und Justiz im gesellschaftlichen Aufbruch 1960 - 1975* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2003), 261-273.

²⁶ Andreas Wirsching et al eds., *Weimarer Verhältnisse? Historische Lektionen für unsere Demokratie* (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2018); Udi E. Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Noah B. Strote, *Lions and Lambs: Conflict in Weimar and the Creation of Post-Nazi Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); Sebastian Ullrich, *Der Weimar-Komplex. Das Scheitern der ersten deutschen Demokratie und die politische Kultur der frühen Bundesrepublik 1945-1959* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009).

²⁷ Jeffrey Herf, "Multiple Restorations: German Political Traditions and the Interpretation of Nazism, 1945-1946," *Central European History* 26 (1993): 21-56.

²⁸ Marie Munk, *Vorschläge zur Umgestaltung des Rechts auf Ehescheidung und der elterlichen Gewalt nebst Gesetzesentwurf* (Berlin: Herbig, 1923); Marion Röwekamp, "'Männer und Frauen haben grundsätzlich die gleichen staatsbürgerlichen Rechte: Weimar – Meilenstein auf dem Weg zur Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter?'" in *Die Weimarer Verfassung, Wert und Wirkung für die Demokratie* (Erfurt: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2009), 235–264; generally: Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Renate Bridenthal et al. eds., *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

²⁹ Peter C. Caldwell, *Popular Sovereignty and the Crisis of German Constitutional Law: The Theory and Practice of Weimar Constitutionalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); David Dyzenhaus, *Legality and Legitimacy: Carl Schmitt, Hans Kelsen, and Hermann Heller in Weimar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jens Hacke, *Existenzkrise der Demokratie: Zur politischen Theorie des Liberalismus in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018); Ellen Kennedy, *Constitutional Failure: Carl Schmitt in Weimar* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Clara Maier, "The Weimar Origins of the West German Rechtsstaat, 1919–1969," *The*

includes household names such as Hans Kelsen and Carl Schmitt; theorists who are almost forgotten such as Gerhard Anschütz or Moritz Julius Bonn; and scholars who explored the elusive nexus between democracy and aesthetics such as Ernst Cassirer, Siegfried Kracauer, Helmuth Plessner, Aby Warburg. A key figure here is Hermann Heller, who shared Kelsen's Habsburg background and sensitivities. His work on the social preconditions of popular sovereignty is central for our understanding of democracy as a way of life. Article 20 of the Basic Law drew on Heller's concept of a *sozialer Rechtsstaat* that combined the idea of the rule of law with that of the welfare state. The "basic problem of all politics is the following," Heller argued in 1928: "how this unity of territorial decision is established and maintained [...] amid the plurality of those acts of will that constitute it [...]. This universal unity of territorial decision is of necessity grounded in the 'sociable-unsociable nature' of human beings—in both their essential characteristics of diversity [*Verschiedenheit*] and sociability [*Geselligkeit*]." Yet if Heller saw social homogeneity as the prerequisite for democracy, he quickly added that it "can never mean the abolition of the necessarily antagonistic social structure. The peaceful community free of conflict and the society without domination can be meaningful as prophetic promises. But as a political aim this way of bringing a community of saints to earth [...] denatures the religious as well as the political sphere. Social homogeneity is always a social-psychological state in which the [...] oppositions and conflicts of interest appear constrained by a consciousness and sense of the 'we,' by a community will that actualizes itself. This relative equalization of the social consciousness has the resources to work through huge antithetical tensions, and to digest huge religious, political, economic, and other antagonisms."³⁰ Long after Heller's death in 1934, his argument that a certain degree of "social homogeneity" embodied in a robust welfare state is the prerequisite that allows citizens to navigate the antagonisms that characterize a pluralist democracy has provoked many controversies and misunderstandings.³¹ In his reflections on the preconditions of democracy, Böckenförde equates cultural with social homogeneity, thereby neglecting Heller's pluralist intuitions and his keen sense of the inevitability of conflict and strife.

It is true, as Harsch puts it, that some Germans did not "suddenly come to Jesus." The democratic miracle of the postwar decades is not just the result of the benevolent tutelage that accompanied the Allied political, economic, and military presence during the period of the Cold War. True, the allies took on the role of probation officers who patiently guided postwar Germans in their quest to embrace democracy as a way of life. That said, many postwar German democrats used allied tutelage as a vehicle to restore the legacy of Weimar Republic. In the immediate postwar years, however, few under the age of thirty had any recollection of Weimar democracy. As teenagers and young adults, Germans had grown up as part of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community); dictatorship and total war, racism and genocide had colored their daily lives. The success of liberal democracy in the wake of Nazism was anything but a foregone conclusion. Some feared a resurgence of fascism, others authoritarian dictatorship, and most anticipated political chaos.³² On March 30, 1944, Thomas Mann penned a letter to Erich Koch-Weser, a friend from his Munich student days and a fellow émigré who had belonged to the ever-shrinking minority of left-liberal deputies in Weimar Germany's parliament. Mann had few hopes for the future: "Today, Germany is a degenerate, storm-ridden, thoroughly adventurous, revolutionary country used to all the horrors of a bellicose history-making society." In light of the interwar crisis of democracy, he envied those with the courage "to vouch for

Historical Journal 62 (2019): 1069-1091; Michael Stolleis, *A History of Public Law in Germany 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³⁰ Hermann Heller, "Political Democracy and Social Homogeneity (1928)," in Arthur Jacobson and Bernhard Schlink eds., *Weimar: A Jurisprudence of Crisis* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2000), 256-265, quotations 257, 261 (translation modified).

³¹ Ingeborg Maus, "Hermann Heller und die Staatsrechtslehre der Bundesrepublik," in Christoph Müller and Ilse Staff eds., *Staatslehre in der Weimarer Republik: Hermann Heller zu Ehren*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), 194-220.

³² Conway, *Western Europe's Democratic Age*, 13.

Germany's democratic future." Personally, he would never return to Germany, and he was barely able to fathom the idea of even a visit: "*Mir graut davor*" -- "I shudder at the thought of it."³³

My fourth response is to agree with Harsch that we need more attention to how Weimar democratic experiments and the legacy of the Weimar Republic shaped or haunted postwar Germans' search for democracy. Yet, it strikes me as not particularly useful to read the contemporary crisis of liberal democracy, whether in Europe or in North America through the lens of Weimar. As Eliane Glaser notes, "in reaching back" to the interwar period, "we neglect the more immediately relevant question of what has happened over the past four decades, during which time global capitalism has been eroding our democracy and society, while formerly left-wing and social democratic parties have stood on and watched."³⁴ Even if my knowledge of economic history is limited, I agree with Chappel and Harsch that an analysis of the cultural and aesthetic foundations of democracy needs to engage scholarship on political economy. Since the 1970s, the economic and material context for liberal democracy has changed dramatically. The magic formula to make sense of the economic, material, and political changes is, of course the concept of neoliberalism.³⁵

Yet, whatever its merits, the concept of neoliberalism strikes me as too comprehensive and broad, too neat and tidy for a subtle analysis of the contemporary infirmity of democracy. As an overarching concept, the term neoliberalism covers too much and explains too little. Instead, it might prove more fruitful to break down what we have come to understand as the rise of neoliberalism into distinct, concrete phenomena that have led to the general neglect of democracy as a way of life. We have witnessed, for example, a growing disdain for deficit spending and the obsession with balanced budgets that have fueled austerity politics. Then there is the uncanny transformation of market economies into market societies in which everything has a price.³⁶ As the digital economy has taken hold, public life has become increasingly polarized. Instead of engaging in democratic discord and debate, many citizens now spend their public lives in digital echo chambers where they cultivate their political instincts and passions in moral and ideological bubbles.

Finally, there is the most curious phenomenon of them all: how the idea of deregulation and, most importantly, the gospel of efficiency have eroded the foundations of democracy as a way of life. By definition, the institutions that make up the democratic commons are not meant to be efficient. They are public goods. A kindergarten or a school, a public library, a museum or a municipal theatre, a community college or university, a municipal swimming pool, a public playground and a park, all of these marks of a vibrant public life are inherently inefficient. All of these institutions and places are costly and serve no economic purpose, the argument goes; in fact, considerations of efficiency undermine their democratic potential. Adam Przeworski has famously defined democracy as "organized uncertainty."³⁷ If that is true, what democracy needs most is a spirit of playful inefficiency, whereby public goods, a democratic commons, and shared spaces of aesthetic experiences enable us to fill the idea of a society of free and equal citizens with life and meaning.

³³ Thomas Mann to Erich Koch-Weser, March 30, 1944; Bundesarchiv NL Erich Koch –Weser N1012/221; reprinted in "Wir vom Bundesarchiv," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 45, 22 February 2003, 36.

³⁴ Eliane Glaser, "Folk Politics: How Close to Death is Democracy?" *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 January 2019.

³⁵ Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Thomas Biebricher, *The Political Theory of Neoliberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018); Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2014).

³⁶ Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

³⁷ Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13.