

Oliver Cnyrim. *Aspekte eines konservativen Weltbilds: Hermann Wagners Staats- und Gesellschaftslexikon (1858/59-1867).* Ludwigshafen am Rhein: Llux Datenverarbeitung, 2005. 401 pp. EUR 48.50, paper, ISBN 978-3-938031-15-5.

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In this book, Oliver Cnyrim sets himself the task of "analyzing the *Staats- und Gesellschaftslexikon* [SGL] as a conservative answer to the challenges of modernity" (p. 7). Though aimed at illuminating the "conservative *Weltbild* [ideology]" during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, this is not a reductive reading of what, in the past, was all too easily referred to as a *Weltanschauung* (worldview). Rather than assume the protean character of designations like liberal and conservative, Cnyrim strives to show how these facets of the nineteenth-century political imagination unfolded in tandem, mutually influencing as much as maligning one another. Indeed, one of his most valuable insights is to stress how the encyclopedic impetus behind the SGL was a tactic unabashedly copied from liberal foes. Rather than merely cede the battle over modern ideas to liberal organs, like Brockhaus's *Conversations-Lexicon*, the SGL actively struck back not by merely conforming to the genre, but rather populating its pages with decidedly different content. Unlike older forms of *Geistesgeschichte* (intellectual history), moreover, Cnyrim's does not focus on thinkers and their thoughts, preferring instead to embed the discursive tenets of conservatism in their broadly institutional, political, and ideological contexts. The result is an image of an innova-

tive and supple conservatism, not to be identified with the interests of any one group, like the Junkers, or other advocates of absolutism. In this regard, Cnyrim offers a compelling account of pragmatic realists eager to seize the advantage in the ideological struggles of the nineteenth century. The book is organized around two main sections, the first detailing the circumstances surrounding the emergence of the SGL, and the second consisting of a survey of topics covered by the lexicon itself.

The contextual thrust behind the first section, which consists of four short chapters, is to introduce the reader to the people and personalities involved in the SGL. Two personalities loom large for Cnyrim, namely, the Prussian lawyer, politician, and one-time editor of the *Neue Preussische Zeitung* (*Kreuzzeitung*), Hermann Wagener, who undertook the difficult task of publishing the SGL; and the theologian, historian, and biblical critic, Bruno Bauer, its chief editor. According to Cnyrim, it was Wagener's connections with the Prussian nobility that helped him find support and a ready audience for the SGL, while Bauer gave scholarly credibility to the project. Even though it is difficult to determine just which articles Bauer wrote, since entries appeared anonymously, Cnyrim credits Bauer with a good deal of influ-

ence over the content of the lexicon. Like other comparable lexica, anonymity was thought to lend objectivity to the SGL, and Cnyrim's comparison of the SGL with other significant encyclopedias and lexica is very informative. An important genre, these reference works helped shape the reading public in the nineteenth century. While they were always more tendentious than their efforts at objectivity might at first sight reveal, collectively, they expressed the emergent middle-class (*bürgerlich*) tendency to seek timely, relevant information and answers to questions in an increasingly dynamic world. For some Prussian conservatives, this project was in itself too liberal an endeavor, giving credence to the priority of new ideas over stable traditions. By overcoming these objections, however, Wagener and the SGL effectively conceded the fact that ideas had to be ratified in the public sphere, no matter the potential for calling into question accepted truths. The realization of the project, whose first volume appeared in April 1859, also had to overcome numerous delays and financial difficulties. Defeated in the elections of 1858, Wagener suffered personal financial difficulties that were only resolved when he was able to recoup back pay from the *Kreuzzeitung*. It was only this infusion of funds that finally allowed Wagener to meet his obligations to contributors and the printer of the SGL. Cnyrim closes the first section with a useful overview of how the SGL was reviewed in the pages of contemporary journals, like the *Berliner Revue*, *Historisch-Politische Blätter*, and the *Kreuzzeitung*. He does this to make the point that, while liberal ideas continued to dominate the public sphere, even after the revolutions of 1848-49, there were still decidedly different regional and ideological inflections in the extant print culture that should not be overlooked. In this context, the appearance of a conservative lexicon was part of a more general variegated landscape, and not an unexpected or atypical event.

In the next section, Cnyrim presents a rich cross-section of topics covered in the SGL.

Grouped under the chapter titles "Foundational Ideas," "State," "Society," "Culture," and "Religion," it is unclear, at least to this reader, whether the subsections in each chapter always reflect actual entries in the SGL. All the same, Cnyrim does a good job of sketching the ideology that readers encountered in the SGL, from the ground up, beginning with basic assumptions about the human person, then progressing through increasing levels of abstraction to the realms of culture and religion. Although one might easily object that this placement of culture and religion suggests their being epiphenomenal to more basic legal and political realities, Cnyrim consistently thwarts this critique by elaborating the decisive ways that conservatives were forced to recast their appeal to religion in view of the demise of absolutism and its legitimation by means of "divine right." Preeminent here was the fact that the SGL appealed more often, if vaguely, to "Christian principles" and sought "secular" arguments for the legitimating authority in the state (p. 156). So too, it is significant that Cnyrim pays significant attention to how the SGL sought to meet the burden of the "die Freiheit der Wissenschaft," without forgoing its basic critique of the political implications of this posture (p. 96). Thus, according to Cnyrim, two considerations served to check the quality of contributions: namely, the political orientation of the contributor, and the degree to which his theories or research conformed to the conservative position.

It is impossible to cover all of the different aspects of the SGL, or Cnyrim's analysis of it; nonetheless, one especially important focus is the attitude towards the state, and its organs. In the wake of the revolutions of 1848-49, both liberals and conservatives shared the desire for a strong state. To be sure, many in the latter camp might have longed for a more distant form of absolutism, but Cnyrim shows how conservatism was beginning to reorient itself during this period, embracing organicism and rejecting the personal primacy of kings. Appealing to Isaiah Berlin's conception of

"negative" freedom, Cnyrim argues that conservatives had learned to accept, and appreciate a vision of the appropriate limits of state power (p. 163). Precisely because they had experienced the consequences of having had their privileges, rights, and power sacrificed in the name of a "higher" ideal, conservatives were sympathetic with the otherwise liberal emphasis on strong, but limited, state power. These similarities notwithstanding, Cnyrim shows how the SGL appealed to Julius Stahl's political theory to craft a slightly different conservative approach to the question of state power. By arguing that German monarchs possessed a distinct constitutional prerogative to represent the *Volk*, as well as the state, he forecloses any easy conclusion that liberalism had somehow carried the day after 1848. All the same, Cnyrim concedes that the variety of new approaches failed to produce a "big synthesis" around which conservatives could unite (p. 161). Indeed, he concludes that "political theory in the SGL was multi-layered and even at times contradictory" (p. 146).

Cnyrim's decision to parallel, in essence, the encyclopedic format of the SGL provides a solid, if kaleidoscopic, perspective for investigating the various topics. At the same time, however, it also hinders him from a more far-reaching, and perhaps unified, grasp of what might be termed the conservative imagination. This approach stems no doubt in large part from his own methodological grounding in conceptual history, and Cnyrim cites both the Cambridge School and the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* as methodological touchstones for his work. But it leaves him at a disadvantage for pursuing a more synthetic work-up of conservatism in the manner of James Sheehan's treatment of liberalism.[2]

It might also be noted that, while he pays due consideration to the changing role of religion as it emerges in the SGL, it is unfortunate that he does not pay closer attention to the various ways in which Catholics, too, were advancing innovative

rejoinders to the major issues of the day. The *Historisch-Politische Blätter*, which Cnyrim occasionally references, was itself conceived as a timely instrument for defending Catholic interests in the wake of the uproar surrounding the *Kölner Wirren*.^[1] And a growing literature on the Catholic revival has done much to show how Catholics were also eminently interested, and capable, of tackling modern challenges in ways that can hardly be called reactionary. But this minor point notwithstanding, Cnyrim has made an important contribution to the historical and social context of the SGL, and helped paved the way for a new level of scholarship on the role of encyclopedias in the nineteenth-century struggle between emergent ideologies.

Notes

[1]. Bernhard Schneider, *Katholiken auf die Barrikaden? Europäische Revolutionen und deutsche katholische Presse 1815-1848* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998).

[2]. James Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999).

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