

Rebecca Heinemann. *Familie zwischen Tradition und Emanzipation: Katholische und sozialdemokratische Familienkonzeptionen in der Weimarer Republik.* München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2004. 349 S. EUR 34.80, cloth, ISBN 978-3-486-56828-8.



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Rebecca Heinemann includes two very different discussions in this study of the concept of the family in the Weimar Republic. The first two-thirds of the text are concentrated on a crucial point of contention between the Catholic Center Party and the Social Democrats in the creation of the Weimar constitution. The first purpose of the work is to detail how these two groups tried to define the family in its fundamental form and function and, more importantly, how they hoped to strengthen the family in the new post-war world. The second focus is the debate over population politics (*Bevölkerungspolitik*) or the ideas of eugenics or racial hygiene. Heinemann points out that these ideas had a long history within Germany, although they are most often linked to their use under the National Socialists.

The end result of these two discussions is a text that does not surprise the reader with insights into Center or Social Democratic politics. It does, however, isolate the parliamentary debate between the parties so one can easily see, in this one example, the crux of the differences that could not and would not be bridged by either side.

The irreconcilable concerns of these two groups over the meaning and function of the family in the Weimar era were used by increasingly conservative forces to argue for the eugenic policies that would develop at the end of the republic.

Heinemann begins with a look at the historical overview of how the Center Party and Social Democrats defined family. The core concepts identified in part 1 are repeated throughout the rest of the book and will come as nothing new to anyone who has studied the social policies of either group. Catholics defined family in traditional and conservative terms, harking back to medieval constructs of the function of the family (based on marriage and the concept of gendered private and public spheres) as the bedrock of social order and spiritual strength. Social Democrats drew on Enlightenment ideas of the preeminent rights of the individual which, they said, bourgeois materialism had subordinated to the needs of the economic and political interests of the modern industrial world. This section focuses on the late nineteenth century, when industrial modernization and its attendant problems--as social observers of the

time saw them--meant that the family was under threat and in serious danger of destabilization and demoralization as measured by marriage and birth rates. The coming of war in 1914 worsened the pressures on the family and made the focus on the family in the National Versammlung and then in the Reichstag even more critical. The costs of the war in terms of both population losses and the loosening of morals led the two parties to look to the family as a source of growth and security in the postwar world.

Parts 2 and 3 focus on the political debates about the family that surrounded the Weimar constitution and which led to a decided shift in constitutional thought. Here Heinemann brings an interesting perspective to the Weimar constitution as she points out that the Weimar legislators identified the family as the cornerstone of the state. Thus, Heinemann shows, the Weimar constitution moved away from the Enlightenment's identification of the rights and responsibilities of the individual and toward the construct of the family (as the foundation of the community) as the most important thing that the state should guarantee and promote. The two sides of the debate are predictable. Heinemann presents first the Catholic views and then a shorter discussion of the views of the Social Democrats, point and counterpoint. The conservative views of Catholics and the Center Party come up short against those of the socialists. The weakness of the book's discussion lies in the narrow parameters used to define the family and the parliamentary debate. It is unclear whether the limited parameters were those set by the legislators and social commentators themselves, or if Heinemann chose to limit the facets on which she focuses. The primary factors are limited to the meaning and status of marriage, the rights and responsibilities of parents in raising children, the issue of divorce and--most hotly debated--the questions relating to the legal status and financial rights of illegitimate children and single mothers.

The debates over education and child welfare (*Jugendfürsorge*), which were especially divisive throughout the Weimar Republic, are not part of Heinemann's discussion. Abortion and contraception, also widely debated, are touched on only briefly. Heinemann focuses primarily on the use of marriage and birth rate statistics by various political figures and social commentators as they argued their views, particularly in the journals and periodicals of their respective parties and associations. There is no sense of the reception the arguments received in the general public, specifically how or whether marriage or birth rates were affected by a constitutional affirmation of the centrality of family to the welfare of the state. Disagreement within the two parties, such as occurred among the women representatives of the Center Party, is acknowledged but passed over quickly; the prevailing (predominantly male) arguments are the centerpiece. Heinemann concludes that neither side was prepared to concede or compromise, so that there was no development of a real policy that could defend or even define the meaning and function of the family. The lack of resolution opened the door for the natalist and eugenicist policies that would begin to be advanced during the republic.

Heinemann uses the debates over marriage and birth rates to set the stage for what seems to be her primary target, the long story of the development of the eugenic or racial hygiene concepts that are often tied more immediately and directly to the Nazi regime. The final section of the book is a consideration of that history, which Heinemann clearly shows began well before World War I. Concerns about population decline--especially the decline of the "right sort" of population, in neo-Malthusian terms--were widespread throughout Europe at the turn of the century. Heinemann again compares the Catholic and Social Democratic perspectives on the question of eugenics and shows that both sides were opposed to the more Malthusian ideas of racial hygiene, although for different reasons. Catholics could not accept any

sort of selectivity when it came to encouraging population growth, while the Social Democrats saw any eugenic policies as being directly aimed at their working class constituency. In the end, however, the author concedes, that small ground of agreement was not enough to unite the two sides in opposition to the radical policies being advanced by the far right parties. The Center and the Social Democrats saw things from different sides of the equation, and family policy would not find a middle ground. The discussion of the long course of development of eugenic and racial hygiene ideas provides a more complete picture of those policies. However, this discussion is not linked sufficiently to the book's title subject: the two parties' debate over the concept of the family.

This book fits in with the social sciences work of Werner Conze, Detlev Peukert, and others. Heinemann does not intend it to be part of the history of women's rights and political engagement, well covered by scholars like Claudia Koonz and Julia Sneeringer. She also only gives a nod to the scholarship that deals with the issues of child welfare and education debates (such as that of Ann Taylor Allen, among many others), and to the issue of women's sexual freedom as discussed in particular by Atina Grossman. Heinemann's work is useful for the new interpretation it puts on the shift in constitutional thought in the Weimar era. Its isolation of the polarized discussion over the meaning and purpose of the family illustrates once again the underlying tension that would prevent compromise on even the most fundamental social issues and would contribute to the ultimate end of the Weimar government.

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