

Natascha Doll. *Recht, Politik und 'Realpolitik' bei August Ludwig von Rochau (1810-1873): Ein wissenschaftsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Politik und Recht im 19. Jahrhundert.* Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2005. 205 S. EUR 39.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-465-03427-8.

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The Real Story of Realpolitik

Along with “angst,” “blitzkrieg,” and “schadenfreude,” *Realpolitik* is one of those German words that has come into English usage. In spite of its familiarity, however, the origins and connotation of the phrase remain, to most people, including most historians, rather obscure. Natascha Doll’s short biography of the inventor of the phrase, Ludwig August von Rochau, and her analysis of his contemporary intellectual context, a revised version of her legal history dissertation, is a welcome introduction to the topic. Although neither going very deeply into Rochau’s life history nor the contemporary context of his ideas, the work clarifies a number of points about his life and work and stimulates a host of questions and possibilities for further scholarship.

Rochau was born in north Germany in 1810, the illegitimate son of a Braunschweig *Bürgertochter* and an officer of the Braunschweig Hussars. He studied law at several German universities, but never concluded his studies, due to an increasing involvement in radical politics that culminated in participation in the Frankfurt *Wachsturm* of 1833. He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to life imprisonment, but succeeded in fleeing in 1836. Rochau spent the next ten years in Parisian exile, earning his living as a freelance author and journalist. Returning to Germany in 1846, he worked both as a journalist and occasionally as the editor of a number of moderate liberal newspapers over the next few years. Rochau was a member of the pre-parliament in 1848, but was unable to secure election to the Frankfurt National Assembly.

His celebrated book, the *Grundsätze der Realpolitik* (1853), one of eleven books he wrote, appeared in an otherwise obscure period of his life, when he was living in Heidelberg. Rochau was one of the founders of the *Nationalverein* and editor of its weekly newsletter from 1860 to 1865. The second, expanded edition of his book on *Realpolitik* appeared in 1869, the same year in which he became a deputy to the North German Reichstag, following a bye-election. Rochau was also elected to the first German Reichstag in 1871, as a National Liberal, and continued his activities as author and parliamentarian until his death of a stroke in 1873.

Rochau’s book, with its renunciation of the failed idealism of *Vormärz* liberalism and of the revolution of 1848 and its call for a politics based on facts and on the realities of power, is usually seen as part of a conservative turn for German liberalism and the middle class that supported it, a resigned articulation of liberal and middle-class inability to achieve the goal of national unity. Instead, liberals would have to look to the power of the Prussian state to realize their aspirations, thus pre-figuring their enthusiastic endorsement of Otto von Bismarck’s policies of blood and iron in the following decade. Doll argues, quite convincingly, against this view. While Rochau did disparage an idealistic politics and praise the realities of power, his choice of facts and realities of power included “bourgeois consciousness” (*bürgerliches Bewußtsein*), the “idea of freedom” (*Freiheitsgedanke*), a “sense of the nation” (*Nationalsinn*), the “idea of equal rights for all peo-

ple,” the “spirit of political parties” and the “press” (p. 45). Far from accepting the defeat of idealistic demands of Vormärz and 1848 liberalism, Rochau rephrased them as realities of power, reasserting these demands in the language of the 1850s era of reaction. Indeed, he was asserting that such a reactionary era could not be permanent, or even of long duration, since it went against these realities of power.

The author goes on from these observations to place Rochau’s ideas in contemporary context. She argues that the greatest similarity to Rochau’s works can be found in the later writings of Auguste Comte, with their positivist evocation of the factual and the belief, shared with Rochau, that political institutions should be a reflection of social forces. Rochau, as Doll notes, was one of the relatively few mid-nineteenth-century German authors familiar with French social and political thought in general—he had even written a book about Charles Fourier’s ideas while living in Parisian exile—and with Comte, in particular. By contrast, she suggests that efforts to describe Rochau as a follower of Hegel are of dubious validity.

Looking about at Rochau’s German contemporaries, Doll notes that a number of post-mid-century writers, including Lorenz von Stein, Ferdinand Lassalle, Friedrich Julius Stahl, and Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, shared Rochau’s disparagement of political idealism and his understanding of political and legal institutions as a result of the realities of power emerging from social structures. They generally rejected, however, Rochau’s moderate liberalism and his support for a constitutional monarchy with a legislature elected by a property franchise. *Vormärz* political theorists, especially the two leaders of south German liberalism, Carl von Rotteck and Karl Theodor Welcker, shared Rochau’s vision of a society of property owners and a constitutional government with a distinct division of powers between a monarchical executive and an elected legislature. Rotteck’s and Welcker’s support of political contract theory and Rousseauvian ideas of natural rights was very different from Rochau’s conception of political institutions reflecting the actual state of social forces.

Doll perceives the greatest similarities to Rochau’s ideas in the mid-century political historians Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann, Georg Waitz, Johann Gustav Droysen, and Heinrich von Treitschke, all of whom saw politics as a field for empirical observation and the product of historical evolution, rather than as deriving from the logical development of abstract postulates. Even

here, though, she notes a number of differences, such as Dahlmann’s and Droysen’s emphasis on ethical principles as the basis of politics as opposed to than Rochau’s insistence on social forces, or Treitschke’s later anti-semitism, which stood in strong contrast to Rochau’s support for the emancipation of the Jews and the recognition of their legal equality with Christians.

Doll’s discussions of Rochau’s ideas and their relationship to those of his contemporaries is generally quite convincing, but as I read them, a host of questions came to mind that the book left unanswered. Some concern Rochau’s personal biography. Even skeptics of psychohistory cannot help but wonder about the influence of Rochau’s family circumstances on his ideas—his illegitimate birth, as well as the fact that he bore his father’s name, but was raised entirely by his mother and her family and had no contact with his father. Although the author has compiled a detailed bibliography of Rochau’s very extensive political commentaries, the relationship between this writing and his treatise on *Realpolitik* goes unexplored. Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte’s seizure of power was, apparently, a considerable influence on Rochau, but we learn little in detail about this relationship. One would also like to know how Rochau reconciled his belief in the power of the middle class and its nationalist sentiments with his later passionate support for the policies of Bismarck.

The author’s account of the relationship of Rochau to his contemporaries also leaves some questions open. Her basic working method is to compare Rochau’s comments on a topic with those of other writers. We almost never see Rochau’s opinions of other writers or their opinions of him. It may be that such opinions were hard to find, and that, as Doll suggests, Rochau was something of an outsider, with less impact on his contemporaries than usually believed. If that was the case, then how did *Realpolitik* become such a phrase to conjure with?

Finally, the broader intellectual and political context of Rochau’s work is somewhat neglected. The post-mid-century turn toward positivism, one of the staples of nineteenth-century European intellectual history, does not receive much mention. Christian Jansen’s excellent recent study of the post-1849 careers of the extreme left deputies of the Frankfurt National Assembly, with its observations about the turn to *Realpolitik* of supporters of all political tendencies, not just moderate liberals, does not even appear in the book’s bibliography.[1]

These objections might seem, in some ways, unfair to the author, who is a legal historian and whose interests

lie chiefly in developing Rochau's theoretical contributions to the development of constitutional law. The problem with this aspect of the book, though, is that Rochau was a journalist and commentator, not a theorist or systematic thinker. Often, the author must end her investigations, such as the one about whether Rochau was, in fact, an adherent of natural law theories, with the conclusion that his writing was too vague to be able to tell. Here, it seems likely that an analysis focusing more on the use of metaphor and symbolism, and less on logical consistency, might have yielded more fruitful results.

This book is certainly a quite useful contribution to the political and intellectual history of the era of the *Reichsgründung*. Doll's conclusion that Rochau's understanding of *Realpolitik* was more a way to rearticulate the ideals and aspirations of pre-1850 liberalism in a post-mid-century environment, and less a capitulation of

these ideals before the power of the Prussian monarchy, corresponds nicely with many recent works that emphasize the continued self-awareness and self-assertion of German liberalism through the decade of the 1870s. At the same time, the distinct personal contours of Rochau's life and work within the broader stream of liberal thought and political action become clear. Yet a more detailed biography of Rochau and an analysis of his thought using some of the newer methods of intellectual and cultural history could take us a good deal further. The ability to evoke such a criticism is, of course, a strength of the book, and any more extensive future investigations will have to take Doll's work as their starting point.

Note

[1]. Christian Jansen, *Einheit, Macht und Freiheit. Die Paulskirchenlinke und die deutsche Politik in der nachrevolutionären Epoche 1849-1867* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2000).

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