

## The Study Group on Germany: Exploring the Transatlantic Dynamics in an Exile Debate of the 1940s

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“... exile has cast you and me into countries that are more than a geographical background for abstract analyses. We have become embroiled in social realities, the peculiarities of which render them neither identical nor at all incomparable to our home world.”<sup>1</sup>

Many of the intellectuals who fled National Socialist persecution after 1933 sought refuge across the Atlantic. For these refugees, the United States became not only a safe haven, but also the necessary social reality and intellectual space in which to seek answers to pressing European questions. One of the effects of this intellectual migration, previously neglected by researchers, was the mingling of past experiences of the refugees with their new impressions of the American society.<sup>2</sup> This article aims at depicting different aspects of transatlantic dynamics that took form in the statements and publications of the refugee intellectuals explicitly, as well as between the lines.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cited from a letter of Adolph Lowe to Paul Tillich, written in 1936 and reprinted in Claus-Dieter Krohn, *Der philosophische Ökonom. Zur intellektuellen Biographie Adolph Lowes* (Marburg: Metropolis, 1996), 203, translation here by Wendy Anne Kopisch. An earlier version of this article was first published in German, see Almut Stoletzki, “The German Problem. ‘Deutschland’ und der ‘Westen’ im Exildiskurs der 1940er Jahre,” in *Moving (Con)texts. Produktion und Verbreitung von Ideen in der globalen Wissensökonomie*, eds. Johannes Angermüller et al. (Berlin: logos, 2011), 44-61. I would especially like to thank Wendy Anne Kopisch, who translated the biggest part of this article from German into English. Compliments should be addressed to her, whereas any mistakes and weird formulations should be ascribed to the author of this article.

<sup>2</sup> In this article the terms “America/American” are to be understood as synonymous with the United States of America.

<sup>3</sup> Until well into the 1990s, the intellectual migration was primarily interpreted by exile research within a national frame of reference and in terms of “gain/loss.” In the German-speaking context, the central aspects were the paradigm of loss, of isolation, or of the “experience of being foreign,” while the majority of English-speaking authors stressed the asset to American society in terms of the intellectual input of the refugees. The multifaceted nature of this experience process was only taken into account with the emergence of the more recent field of (modern) intellectual history. This contribution can be conceived as a sociologically informed intellectual history of a particular group of refugees. It seeks to build on the most recent findings on the sociology of intellectual transfer. See Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno—One Last Genius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Detlev Claussen, “Intellectual Transfer. Theodor W. Adorno’s American Experience” in *New German Critique* 97, *Adorno and Ethics* (2006): 5-14; and Michael Werz, “Das atlantische Kraftfeld. Wie sich die amerikanische Erfahrung in Begriffen niederschlägt,” in *Theodor W. Adorno*, ed. Moshe Zuckermann, 215-233. In a more general sense, the article does also draw on the historical concept of entangled history, as described by Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria., ed., *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2002).

When at the end of the 1930s, public debates in England and in the United States began to focus on the politics of Nazi-Germany, many refugee intellectuals sought to trace the origins of National Socialism. In their statements they critically questioned what they perceived as “German tradition” often by use of explicit and underlying comparisons with American history and social reality. These statements and discussions bear witness to the fragility of “traditions” and of national patterns of perception in the face of the experiences of persecution, flight, and forced re-location. At the same time they allow for detailed pictures of affinities and differences within transatlantic history to emerge.

Discussion amongst émigré intellectuals of the newly founded Study Group on Germany, who met at the New School for Social Research in New York City in the year 1943, illustrates several aspects of these transatlantic dynamics. The discussion aimed at critically inspecting popular icons of the proclaimed tradition of German *Geistesgeschichte* that were suspected to have potentially paved the way for the ascension of National Socialism in Germany.<sup>4</sup> Felix Kaufmann, an emigrated jurist and social scientist from Vienna, gave a lecture on the relationship between “German Philosophy and German National Character,” which enkindled a lively discussion in the Study Group on Germany. This article explores the circling of terms, topics, and ideas reflecting past and current experiences of the émigré intellectuals, in the course of this particular discussion. Hence it aims at showing how the mingling of these experiences can be read as different forms of transatlantic dynamics, revealing the entangled histories as well as the sometimes-differing social realities of Germany and the United States.

Following a short overview of the group of émigrés who settled at the New School for Social Research, this article provides a brief introduction to the context of the public debate on Nazi Germany and the “German Problem,” and to the individual biographies of the members of the Study Group on Germany. After that, different aspects of the transatlantic dynamics will be illustrated on the basis of Kaufmann’s lecture and of the subsequent discussion.

### A German University in the United States

The New School for Social Research was founded in 1918 by a group of progressive American intellectuals in New York City as a university of reform.<sup>5</sup> It was by no means a typical university or even a typically American university, but rather an addition, if not an alternative, to the established academic institutions. Its declared objective was the education of adults entrusted with socio-political tasks. From the outset, the New School was well known for the “respectable

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<sup>4</sup> The term *Geistesgeschichte* refers to a traditional version of intellectual history as it was practiced by many historians in Imperial Germany and in the Weimar Republic. For a detailed description of this concept, see Bernd Faulenbach, *Ideologie des deutschen Wegs. Die deutsche Geschichte in der Historiographie zwischen Kaiserreich und Nationalsozialismus* (München: Beck, 1980), 123. In this article, the German language term is used to indicate the difference between *Geistesgeschichte* and modern intellectual history.

<sup>5</sup> The founders of the New School for Social Research included Thorstein Veblen, John Dewey, Charles Beard, Harold Laski, Franz Boas, Horace Meyer Kallen and Alvin Saunders Johnson. For the history of the New School, see Peter Rutkoff and William B. Scott, *New School. A History of the New School for Social Research* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Peter Rutkoff and William B. Scott, “Die Schaffung der ‘Universität im Exil’,” in, *Exil, Wissenschaft, Identität. Die Emigration deutscher Sozialwissenschaftler 1933-1945*, ed. Ilja Srubar (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), and Claus-Dieter Krohn, *Wissenschaft im Exil. Deutsche Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaftler in den USA und die New School for Social Research* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1987).

radicalism” represented by its teaching staff, known as the “New York pragmatists,” and swiftly evolved into a magnet for intellectuals.<sup>6</sup>

When the Nazis passed the “Law on the Restitution of the Civil Service” in 1933, Alvin Johnson – the co-founder and director of the New School since 1922 – with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, began to help intellectuals threatened with persecution by the Nazis to escape to the United States. To this end he founded the University in Exile at the New School. Johnson, an economist and co-editor of the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, possessed outstanding knowledge of German academia and considered his efforts to be not only a “rescue operation” but also a unique opportunity for the potential of the emigrating intellectuals to unfold in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Together with Emil Lederer, an economist and Social Democrat from Berlin, who was the first to arrive safely in New York City, Johnson drew up a “wish list” of reform-oriented intellectuals and scientists from a variety of German universities and disciplines: sociology, economics, political science, administrative studies, Gestalt psychology and musicology.<sup>8</sup> In 1935, during the course of the expansion of the New School to a complete university, the University in Exile became the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Sciences. The Graduate Faculty grew successively with the waves of refugees that arrived in 1938 after the German annexation of Austria, and again in 1940 after the German occupation of France. By the year 1945, some 178 exiled intellectuals and scientists from the whole of Europe had found employment – in one form or another – at the New School. This university thus accommodated more academic émigrés than any other institution in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

In the year 1942, after the United States had become involved in World War II, some members of the Graduate Faculty established the Study Group on Germany, an intellectual meeting that in such a constellation would only have been possible in exile. Organized like the research groups at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy (*Institut für Weltwirtschaftsforschung*), the “German problem” was to be analyzed and discussed on the basis of individual lectures. This thematic focus was by no means unusual. The term refers to broad and controversial public debates in Great Britain and the United States accompanying the German aggression against Poland, the outbreak of World War II, and the entry of the United States into the war following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

### “The German Problem”

Beginning at the end of the 1930s with headlines about the “German Problem,” the “German Enigma,” or the “German Riddle,” many authors discussed the question of “German aggressiveness,” referring to the fact that shortly after the end of World War I, Germany was again attacking other nation states. This debate can be characterized as a heterogeneous set of a wide range of voices from the public and from the universities including refugees as well as

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<sup>6</sup> Rutkoff and Scott, *New School*, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Rutkoff and Scott, “Die Schaffung der ‘Universität,’” 133.

<sup>8</sup> The first thirteen to be granted help from the New School were Emil Lederer, Gerhard Colm, Karl Brandt, Eduard Heimann, Hans Speier, Albert Salomon, Carl Mayer, Arnold Brecht, Frieda Wunderlich, Max Wertheimer, Alfred von Hornbostel, Max Ascoli, Erich Hula. See Rutkoff/Scott, “Die Schaffung der ‘Universität,’” 130.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

citizens of the host countries.<sup>10</sup> Some publications took this development as proof of an “aggressive, political, and intellectual German tradition” and contrasted it with a “democratic British or American tradition.”<sup>11</sup> In Great Britain, one of the most prominent voices in this debate for certain was Lord Gilbert Vansittart who, in his “Black Record,” described German history as “a one-way road to National Socialism.”<sup>12</sup> While his arguments aroused strong opposition, not only from British Labour activists, but also from parts of the German Social Democrats in exile; other British and refugee activists used the arguments of the Black Record to confirm their own policy.<sup>13</sup> In the United States, Emil Ludwig, a German-American writer together with the “Society for the Prevention of World War III,” argued very similar to the British and the German émigré Vansittartists.<sup>14</sup> But in contrast to the struggles in Great Britain, the dividing line between Ludwig and his opponents in the United States was one between established German-American immigrants and refugees from Nazi Germany.

In this debate on the “German Problem,” academic authors were involved as well. Some American intellectuals, who had – as early as World War I – taken a stand against “aggressive traits” in German history, saw history now repeating itself. World War II and the German attack on Poland seemed like an approval of their thesis and they reprinted their works almost unaltered. One of these authors was George Santayana, a well-known man of letters and retired professor of philosophy from Harvard University, who in 1939 published a new edition of his study about “Egotism in German Philosophy” (1916). In 1942, John Dewey, philosopher, psychologist, “educational reformer” and one of the most prominent American intellectuals of the time, attempted to demonstrate a connection between the philosophy of German Idealism and National Socialist policy with a new edition of his book “German Philosophy and Politics” (1915), complemented with a new chapter on National Socialism.

It was precisely those books by Dewey and Santayana that gave rise to a controversial debate within the Study Group on Germany. They challenged what the refugee intellectuals considered

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<sup>10</sup> It would be impossible to fully grasp all the details of the debate in this article. For this reason only a short description of the main trends of this debate will be given to illustrate the context of the discussions within the Study Group on Germany at the New School.

<sup>11</sup> For an exemplary overview concerning books, editions and journal articles, see *In Re: Germany* monthly review journal published by the research and information service of the American Friends of German Freedom. Between June 1941 and January 1944, the journal mentions about 51 publications dealing with one of the following terms or subjects: German problem, German enigma, Vansittart(-itis), explanations of National Socialism (or fascism), perceived differences between “the Germans” and “the West.” Several volumes of this journal can be found in Box 72, Folder 5 in the papers of Karl Otto Paetel in the German and Jewish Intellectual Émigré Collection, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

<sup>12</sup> Jörg Später, *Vansittart. Britische Debatten über Deutsche und Nazis* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 132. Vansittart’s Black Record provoked several misunderstandings. For advocates of the thesis that identified all Germans as Nazis the term “Vansittartitis” was coined. For a historical account on Lord Vansittart, the misunderstandings, and the “Vansittartitis,” see Später, *Vansittart*.

<sup>13</sup> One example is the “Fight for Freedom” group whose members were denounced as Vansittartists for their harsh critique of German nationalism and their uncompromising support of the allied strategy. See Jan Gerber and Anja Worm, eds., *Fight For Freedom* (Freiburg: Ca Ira, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Ludwig and the Society claimed a “war passion of the German people” and became known as Vansittartists in the United States. The debate between followers of Ludwig on the one side and Hannah Arendt and Paul Tillich on the other, which appeared in the refugee journal “Aufbau” from July 1942 documents the character of this confrontation. For a detailed record, see Alf Christophersen and Claudia Schulze, “Chronologie eines Ekklats. Hannah Arendt und Paul Tillich,” in *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte/Journal for the History of Modern Theology* 9 (2002): 98-130.

their own intellectual history. Dewey and Santayana touched on a raw nerve. Were the Germans different? Did something like an aggressive German tradition exist? Were the icons of German intellectual, cultural, and political history in some way responsible for the formation of National Socialism? In light of National Socialism spreading across Europe, what was regarded as the German intellectual tradition became suspicious. The émigré intellectuals located at the New School for Social Research decided to subject the popular icons of German intellectual history to a close and critical examination. Hence in 1942, they founded the Study Group on Germany.

### The Study Group on Germany

A closer look at the list of participants of the Study Group on Germany reveals a highly complex mix of biographies and careers in this group of intellectuals: scholars of the humanities and social sciences, socialists and social democrats met with liberals and conservative democrats from religious and non-religious Jewish and Christian milieus. The Study Group consisted almost entirely of refugees. Horace Meyer Kallen was the only American participant.<sup>15</sup>

The Chairman, Albert Salomon clearly outlined the central research question of the Study Group in its first meeting:<sup>16</sup>

Are differences between German and other European groups of a distinct character, and if so, of what does this distinction consist? On the other hand, what do the Germans have in common with other European groups that makes for communication among them? [...] It is important to raise and answer such questions for the bearing they will have on the shaping of the post-war world.<sup>17</sup>

The group wished to avoid recourse to the traditional history of ideas as it considered the subject a political and sociological matter. From a methodological point of view, it agreed that the German “national character” should initially be analyzed “on the basis of explicit statements by non-Germans.”<sup>18</sup> While the participants found a consensus regarding the use of the term “national character,” they by no means agreed on what exactly this meant. Inquiries as to the

<sup>15</sup> Horace Meyer Kallen, born in 1882 in Bernstadt, Silesia, as the son of an orthodox Rabbi, had already immigrated to the United States with his family in 1887, and had studied philosophy at Harvard under the supervision of George Santayana, amongst others. He gained his first professorship at the New School in 1918. In criticizing the concept of the melting pot he developed an alternative vision of American society and coined the term cultural pluralism in 1915. He was actively involved in Zionist politics. For a biography of Kallen, see Sarah Ann Schmidt, *Horace M. Kallen. Prophet of American Zionism* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Until his emigration in 1935, Albert Salomon was a lecturer in sociology at the German Academy for Politics (*Deutsche Hochschule für Politik*), Berlin, and subsequently an honorary professor of sociology at Cologne. At the New School, he was professor of sociology and social philosophy from 1935 until his retirement. On Salomon’s biography, see Ulf Matthiesen, “Im Schatten einer endlosen großen Zeit. Etappen der intellektuellen Biographie Albert Salomons,” in *Exil Wissenschaft Identität. Die Emigration deutscher Sozialwissenschaftler 1933-1945*, ed. Ilja Srubar (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 299-350.

<sup>17</sup> Study Group on Germany, “Transcribed Minutes” (November 18, 1942: 1), Box 5 Folder 63, Adolph Lowe Papers, German and Jewish Intellectual Émigré Collection, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York. All further pages of this unpublished typescript are to be found in the legacy of Carl Mayer, File 37.8, Social Science Archive, Constance University, Constance, Germany. In the following, the minutes are referred to by the abbreviation “SGM.”

<sup>18</sup> SGM (November 18, 1942: 2). This methodological approach was, however, only truly implemented in the lecture given by Felix Kaufmann.



term “national character,” the “problematic of national character” or remarks stating the ambiguity of this concept repeatedly interrupted the further discussion.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, the participants of the discussion were rather unsure about the nature of the term “national character.” If one follows the further course of the first meeting, it becomes apparent that this incertitude was associated with the existence of National Socialism. The émigré intellectuals correlated a critical analysis of decisive events in German history with questions as to whether National Socialism may or may not have been avoided, as to its acceptance by the German population and its relevance for German and international history. With these questions in mind, they extended the line of German history to include the period preceding 1500.

Adolph Lowe thus gave a lecture on a “Catalogue of pre-Lutheran events decisive for Germany – A description of the German, as compared to the Anglo-American, social pattern.”<sup>20</sup> Lowe, a sociologist and economist from the university of Frankfurt, had been working for the social democratic government and was a member of the “religious socialists” along with Paul Tillich and Eduard Heimann.<sup>21</sup> In his lecture, he argued that the specific geographical structure of the area that would later become Germany (a “wooded land mass” up until 1500) had transformed into social factors that would be crucial for the feudal structure in this region. According to Lowe, this was particularly true with regard to the feudal allocation of land (*Landvergabe*). Lowe claimed that the resulting characteristic form of feudalism ultimately developed into weak urban middle classes and a lack of national coherence – features he regarded as peculiar in German history.<sup>22</sup>

In the following meeting, Eduard Heimann, a social economist and former employee of the Reich Ministry of Economics in the first years of the Weimar Republic, lectured on “The Great Gulf: A Study of the Cleavage between Germany and the West.”<sup>23</sup> In his lecture, he sought to approach a possible difference between Germany and other nations with an analysis of the different social effects of Lutheranism on the one hand, and of Calvinism on the other. Heimann maintained that the institutionalization of Lutheranism in Germany had led to a division of morality into separate political and individual spheres, inducing a fundamental weakness of

<sup>19</sup> See SGM (November 18, 1942: 1f.).

<sup>20</sup> On the lecture by Adolph Lowe, see SGM (Dec. 16, 1942; Jan. 13, 1943; Feb. 10, 1943 and Feb. 24, 1943).

<sup>21</sup> Amongst his other occupations, Adolph Lowe was first employed by the Ministry of Finance of the Weimar Republic; subsequently he worked as an economic theorist at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy and at the University of Frankfurt. In April 1933, he emigrated initially to Geneva and Manchester, and in 1940 to New York City, where he was appointed professor of economics at the New School. On Lowe’s biography, see Krohn, *Der philosophische Ökonom*. The term “Religious Socialists” refers to different groups of socialists and social democrats that originated in different European countries since the nineteenth century and regarded the advocacy for socialism as an ethical decision. The group around Tillich, Lowe and Heimann came up in the Weimar Republic in the 1920s. The group was clearly committed to social democracy but argued against the bureaucratization, the embourgeoisement, and the growing reformism within the Social Democratic Party. For a detailed history of the group, see Martin Martiny, “Dokumentation. Die ‚Neuen Blätter für den Sozialismus‘ und die SPD 1930-1933,“ in *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 25 (1977), 3:373-419.

<sup>22</sup> See SGM (December 16, 1942: abstract).

<sup>23</sup> Heimann fled to the United States as early as 1933, where he was appointed professor of economics and sociology at the New School. At the same time, he studied Christian theology and later taught “Christian sociology” at the Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York. For his lecture see Eduard Heimann, “The Great Gulf. A Study of the Cleavage between Germany and the West,” in *Christendom* 5 (1940): 332-344 and SGM (March 10, 1943; March 24, 1943). On Heimann’s biography, see Heinz-Dietrich Ortlieb, “Eduard Heimann. Sozialökonom, Sozialist und Christ—Ein Nachruf,” in *Eduard Heimann. Sozialismus im Wandel der modernen Gesellschaft. Aufsätze zur Theorie und Praxis des Sozialismus. Ein Erinnerungsband*, ed. Heinz-Dietrich Ortlieb (Berlin/Bonn-Bad Godesberg: J.H.W. Dietz, 1975), 1-20.

liberalism. More specifically, he continued, only a limited intellectual liberalism had been able to develop in Germany, which could not operate on a political level. While Heimann did not consider the antipodes of Lutheran and Calvinist teaching as the ultimate reason for the proclaimed divide between Germany and the West, he did believe that the Calvinist doctrine had had a different effect in the “Western” states: “Here the Calvinist doctrine, despite its theoretical harshness, still maintained a balance between normal loyalty to authority and, under abnormal conditions, the right of revolution.”<sup>24</sup>

Subsequently, Kurt Riezler spoke on the political dynamics in Germany with reference to Otto von Bismarck.<sup>25</sup> Riezler was not only a philosopher and classical scholar, but by the time of his emigration in 1938, he had already achieved a remarkable diplomatic and political career. He subsequently served in the Foreign Office of Imperial Germany, as Chief of Cabinet in Friedrich Ebert’s administration of the Weimar Republic, and in the influential position as trustee of Frankfurt University.<sup>26</sup> His lecture, which can be regarded as based on first-hand experience, dealt mainly with the evaluation of domestic policy of Prussian prime minister Otto von Bismarck, in the light of the events following his rule. He claimed that Bismarck had obstructed the emergence of political unity in Germany by transferring principles of foreign policy to domestic politics. The consequence – in Riezler’s eyes – was not only a delay in nation building, but also the tardy development of internationally oriented political thinking in Germany. In the two final meetings, Felix Kaufmann, a jurist and social scientist from Vienna, spoke of the relationship between “German Philosophy and German National Character.”<sup>27</sup> In the further course of this article Kaufmann’s lecture will be subject of a more detailed analysis revealing the underlying transatlantic dynamics.

To complete the picture of the intellectual biographies that form the Study Group on Germany, it is necessary to mention some additional participants who did not hold lectures themselves. Two of the most vital discussants of the group were Carl Mayer and Leo Strauss. Mayer was a sociologist who while in Germany had worked at the *Akademie der Arbeit* (Academy of Labor) in Frankfurt. – Strauss had previously been lecturer at the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (College for Jewish Studies) in Berlin.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Erich

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<sup>24</sup> Heimann, “The Great Gulf,” 341. His article culminates in an interesting sociological comparison of the concepts *Obrigkeit* and “authority.” It can merely be indicated here, that this comparison could as well be interpreted as a form of transatlantic dynamics.

<sup>25</sup> SGM, April 21, 1943.

<sup>26</sup> Kurt Riezler was an employee of the Foreign Office of Imperial Germany in 1906 and, following various diplomatic missions, he was appointed Council Speaker of the Reich Chancellery in the administration of Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. Later as Chief of Cabinet in the Friedrich Ebert administration, he was considerably involved in the defeat of the Bavarian Soviet Republic and the *Kapp-Putsch*. He was appointed professor of philosophy at the New School. On Riezler’s biography, see Wayne C. Thompson, *In the Eye of the Storm. Kurt Riezler and the Crises of Modern Germany* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1980).

<sup>27</sup> For Kaufmann’s lecture, see Kaufmann, “German Philosophy and German National Character” (1943), unpublished typescript in the papers of Felix Kaufmann, microfilm roll IV, 2083-2102, Social Science Archive, Constance University, Constance, Germany. The roll number given here may be incorrect; unfortunately it is not possible to verify this information, as the archive is currently closed due to renovation work. See also SGM (May 5, 1943; May 19, 1943).

<sup>28</sup> Immediately after his escape from Germany in 1933, he was appointed professor of sociology at the New School. His research had a special focus on the sociology of religion. On Mayer’s biography, see Arnold Brecht et al., *Carl Mayer 1902/1974. Ein Überblick über sein Leben und Werk und die Arbeit des Sozialwissenschaftlichen Archivs Konstanz*, (Constance/New York: author’s edition, 1974). Leo Strauss had been awarded a Rockefeller scholarship for trips to Paris and Cambridge before the National Socialist regime came to power. In 1938, after his arrival in the United States, he was employed by the Political Science Department of the New School. It was not

Hula, Felix Gilbert and Fernando de Los Rios were also attending the meetings. Hula was a specialist for international law and political science from Vienna. Gilbert prior to his emigration had worked as a historian and philosopher in Berlin. Fernando de Los Rios was a political scientist who had held several secretary positions in the Spanish Republic and had been principal of Madrid university.<sup>29</sup>

The Study Group on Germany brought together a cross-section of the Weimar political and intellectual representatives who would probably not have met under different circumstances. The lecture topics dealt with the most prominent icons of German *Geistesgeschichte*: the geographical factor, the Lutheran Reformation, the rule of Bismarck, and the philosophy of German Idealism, as they were perceived by the mainstream of historians since the late nineteenth century. These ideas were still influential during the Weimar Republic. Theories dealing with these icons sought to justify peculiarities of German history and came to be known as *Deutscher Sonderweg* (German special path) theories.<sup>30</sup> It might be for this reason that the few authors who mentioned the Study Group on Germany considered it a continuation of the *Sonderweg* theories.<sup>31</sup> This interpretation ignores important differences concerning the context and the lines of argument. Whereas the *Sonderweg* theories were intended to justify the existence of the German nation-state and the conduct of its government, the members of the Study Group sought to critically examine the course of German history, searching for characteristics that might have paved the way to power for the Nazis. The advocates of the *Sonderweg* were deeply convinced of their theoretical artifacts. They argued with certainty, and they pretended to know very well, all aspects of “German national character.” A clear contrast to this attitude can be identified already in the first meeting of the Study Group. The long line of history that was constructed in the discussion, and the lack of clarity surrounding the term “national character” mentioned above, both point towards a fundamental incertitude prevailing among the members of the Study Group. The search for the causes and conditions that allowed

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until 1949 that he was appointed professor of political science at the University of Chicago. On Strauss’s biography, see Eugene R. Sheppard, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile. The Making of a Political Philosopher* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Erich Hula was a student of Hans Kelsen in Vienna and followed him as an academic assistant to the university of Cologne in Germany. 1934 he returned to Vienna and worked for the chamber of labor. He fled in 1938 shortly after the Nazi Anschluss of Austria. On Hula’s biography, see Johannes Feichtinger, *Wissenschaft zwischen den Kulturen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2001), 298-301. Felix Gilbert had studied with Friedrich Meinecke and was a specialist for the history of the Renaissance. He left Germany in 1936. He emigrated to England first before he reached the United States. Gilbert worked at the New School and later joined the Research and Analysis Branch of the Office of Strategic Services. On Gilbert’s biography, see Gerhard A. Ritter, “Die emigrierten Meinecke-Schüler in den Vereinigten Staaten. Leben und Geschichtsschreibung zwischen Deutschland und der neuen Heimat: Hajo Holborn, Felix Gilbert, Dietrich Gerhard, Hans Rosenberg,” in *Historische Zeitschrift* 284 (2007), 59–102. On the biography of Fernando de Los Rios see Virgilio Zapatero, *Fernando de los Rios: una biografía intelectual*. (Valencia: Pre Textos, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> For an overview over the *Sonderweg*-theories as well as the main trends and actors of the science of history in Germany for the period in question, see Faulenbach, *Ideologie des deutschen Wegs*.

<sup>31</sup> For the few existing references to the Study Group on Germany, see Ilja Srubar, “Das Bild Deutschlands in den Werken der sozialwissenschaftlichen Emigration 1933-1945,” in *Exil, Wissenschaft, Identität*, 281-298, in particular 295; Rutkoff and Scott, *New School*, 137-139; Ingeborg Helling, “Wirken in der Emigration: Felix Kaufmann,” in Srubar, *Exil, Wissenschaft, Identität*, 181-205; see Thomas Meyer, “Die Macht der Ideen. Albert Salomon im Kontext zweier ideengeschichtlicher Debatten: Weimar und Exil.” In Peter Gostmann and Claudius Härpfer, eds., *Verlassene Stufen der Reflexion*. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2001), 157–177, Meyer does not mention the term *Sonderweg* but regards the Study Group basically as a continuation of the debates in the Weimar Republic. See *ibid.*, 171.



for National Socialism to rise unsettled the conceptual and intellectual fabric of the refugee intellectuals. But this incertitude not only differentiates the Study Group from the advocates of the *Sonderweg*; in addition, it simultaneously produced kinds of transatlantic dynamics, in the form of a virtual encounter between German history and the experience of American social reality.

At the end of the first meeting, the participants discussed the schedule for the following months. The group did not adhere to the plan for a confrontation of German history with the history of Western Europe, as Albert Salomon had outlined in his introductory remarks. When the participants made proposals for their lectures, they already drew on either a comparison between “Germany” and “America,” on comparisons between “German” and “Anglo-American aspects” or on American authors. Obviously, the refugee intellectuals did not only critically examine their intellectual tradition, but they simultaneously tried to reflect on the current experiences of American society. Further aspects of these transatlantic dynamics can be revealed with a closer look on the discussion following the lecture Felix Kaufmann gave in the last two meetings of the Study Group. Before proceeding with the interpretation of this respective discussion, the following section of this article will give a brief introduction to Kaufmann’s biography and the line of arguments in his lecture.

### **Felix Kaufmann’s Lecture, “German Philosophy and German National Character”**

Felix Kaufmann was born in Vienna in 1895. Prior to his emigration, he worked as *Privatdozent* (unsalaried lecturer) at the University of Vienna, having completed doctoral and post-doctoral research in the field of philosophy of law. Meanwhile, he earned his living as the director of the Austrian branch of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.<sup>32</sup> Such a twofold occupation was not unusual at that time. During the interwar years in Austria, salaried academic positions were rare. Due to the widespread anti-Semitic and un-democratic attitudes within established academia, the few positions available were blocked for younger scholars, particularly for Jews, but also for social democrats.<sup>33</sup> As a result, many of the academic outsiders unfolded their scholarly activities in circles outside the universities. These circles and private seminars, run by popular intellectuals, also attracted international visiting scholars. Kaufmann was engaged in several of these circles in Vienna, such as the private seminar of Hans Kelsen, the Vienna Circle, the “Geist” circle, and the groups around Moritz Schlick and Ludwig von Mises.<sup>34</sup> Kaufmann was

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<sup>32</sup> Ingeborg Helling mentions two PhDs: one in the field of law, completed in 1919 and a second one in the field of philosophy, completed in 1926. See Helling, “Wirken in der Emigration,” 181-183. Hans Kristoferitsch and Andreas Orator’s article provides slightly different information. They mention a PhD in philosophy of law in 1920 and an additional thesis (Habilitation) in the same field in 1922. See Hans Kristoferitsch and Andreas Orator, “Felix Kaufmann,” in *Der Kreis um Hans Kelsen*, ed. Walter, Robert et al. (Wien: Manzsche Verlags- und Universitätsbuchhandlung, 2008), 153.

<sup>33</sup> Ingeborg Helling “Strömungen des Methodologischen Individualismus,” in *Geschichte der österreichischen Soziologie*, ed. Josef Langer (Wien: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1988), 185-201, in particular 188; and Feichtinger, *Wissenschaft zwischen den Kulturen*, 32. This situation differs from the development in Germany since the end of the German Empire and during the Weimar Republic, where reforms in the educational sector had led to a significant higher chance for Jews and social democrats to gain full academic positions.

<sup>34</sup> Helling, “Wirken in der Emigration,” 182. Kaufmann’s participation did not necessarily mean full membership in each of these circles, *ibid.* His adherence to Kant’s a priori for example kept him from fully consenting to the Wiener Kreis. For the international atmosphere of these circles, see Feichtinger, *Wissenschaft zwischen den Kulturen*, 187.

an excellent academic networker, who maintained a lively correspondence with a broad network of scholars from all parts of the former Habsburg Empire, and contacts with scholars in Great Britain and in the U.S.<sup>35</sup> Kaufmann can be characterized as an academic supporter of social democracy. As his publications in respective journals suggest, he maintained close contacts to academic Austro-Marxists as well as Social Democrats in Germany.<sup>36</sup>

The variety of these circles and networking activities reflects the wideness of Kaufmann's research interests, which spread over the academic fields of law, philosophy, *Nationalökonomie* (political economy), mathematics, and sociology. His work can be roughly divided into two phases. During the first phase up to 1931, Kaufmann was mainly concerned with the philosophy of law. Inspired by Hans Kelsen, he tried to synthesize Kelsen's "pure theory of law" with Husserl's phenomenology.<sup>37</sup> In the second phase after 1931, he turned away from philosophy of law and began to develop a methodology of the social sciences that resulted in his first major publication in 1936.<sup>38</sup> Besides Kelsen's theory and phenomenology, his reading of Kant and Neo-Kantianism can be regarded the most influential traits in Kaufmann's thinking.<sup>39</sup>

With the *Anschluss* (the Nazi-annexation of Austria) in 1938, the new regime deprived Kaufmann of his teaching allowance at the university.<sup>40</sup> Intellectuals and scholars with Jewish family background were already warned by the recent developments in Germany. Kaufmann feared arrest and left Austria at the end of May for New York City. An invitation from Alvin Johnson brought him to the New School where he began to teach as professor of philosophy in autumn 1938. This was the first time in his academic life that he was able to devote all of his professional time to research and teaching. In the United States, he committed to a variety of scholarly activities.<sup>41</sup> From 1940 on he developed a vital interest in pragmatism, particularly concerning the work of John Dewey, with whom he started correspondence in 1944.<sup>42</sup> Kaufmann died in New York City in 1949, at the mere age of 54.

The following paragraph shows that John Dewey is one of the central figures Kaufmann was concerned with in his lecture for the Study Group on Germany. Although the university training

<sup>35</sup> Hans Georg Zilian, *Klarheit und Methode*, (Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1990), 31. The author names Charles Lionel Robbins (London School of Economics) and Alan Sweezy (Harvard University) as examples for Kaufmann's international contacts, *ibid.*, 32. Zilian describes Kaufmann as a switchpoint for the Austrian intellectual migration, *ibid.* 31.

<sup>36</sup> He upheld close contacts to Otto Neurath, for example. Among others, he published in the famous *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* which until World War I was run by Max Weber, Edgar Jaffé and Kurt Sontheimer, a group of sociologists including some of the then few *Kathedermarxisten* (academic Marxists) at German universities. Emil Lederer, who became a colleague of Kaufmann at the New School, later inherited the role as editor. For Kaufmann's article, see vol.54 (1925) of the journal. Except from Hans Georg Zilian none of the biographers mentioned Kaufmann's political familiarity with social democracy. Zilian, *Klarheit und Methode*, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Zilian, *Klarheit und Methode*, 8f. Kelsen and Husserl are said to have had the greatest impact on Kaufmann's work. Alfred Schutz, "Felix Kaufmann," in *Social Research* 17 (1950), 1: 3.

<sup>38</sup> See Felix Kaufmann, *Methodenlehre der Sozialwissenschaften*, (Wien: Julius Springer, 1936).

<sup>39</sup> Helling, "Wirken in der Emigration," 183. It has to be noted that in Austria, in contrast to Germany, Neo-Kantianism was not popular among the professors at universities. It rather spread among academic outsiders.

<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, none of the biographers delivers any information about Kaufmann's situation during the Austro-fascism of the Dollfuss administration between 1934 and 1938. But surely difficulties for political opponents and people with Jewish family background did not just start with the *Anschluss*.

<sup>41</sup> In the United States, Kaufmann together with Marvin Farber founded the "International Phenomenological Society" at the University of Buffalo in the 1940s, as well as the journal *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, which contributed considerably to the growing popularity of phenomenology in America. See Schutz, "Felix Kaufmann," 3.

<sup>42</sup> See Helling, "Wirken in der Emigration."

in Austria may have differed in some respects to that of the Study Group members from Germany, Kaufmann's lecture illustrates that he was not only familiar with one of the most popular icons of German *Geistesgeschichte* – the philosophy of German Idealism – but also with the most prominent critics of this philosophy.

Based on the view – indeed a widespread opinion of the time – that German idealist philosophy constituted the purest expression of the “German national character,” Kaufmann examined European and American interpretations of this philosophy in his lecture. He analyzed Heinrich Heine's “On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany,” George Santayana's “Egotism in German Philosophy,” and John Dewey's “German Philosophy and Politics.” While Kaufmann shared the conviction of all three authors regarding a delayed development in Germany as compared with the western nations, he argues that their interpretations of German idealism are strongly marked by their negative stance toward the philosophy itself. In Kaufmann's view, Heine, Santayana, and Dewey all assume that the spirit of German idealism can be identified with that of Lutheran Protestantism, and that both work in the same political direction. All three authors addressed idealism as a specifically German philosophy that unveiled the inner tendencies of the German spirit and character:

Here I have my doubts. I do not think that transcendental idealism is specifically protestant [*sic*] or specifically German. It rather seems to me that it can only be understood in terms of a philosophical tradition spreading over more than two millenia [*sic*] and common to all civilized European countries. I am therefore rather skeptical [*sic*] toward attempts to link transcendental idealism with German politics.<sup>43</sup>

From a methodological point of view, Kaufmann first pointed out that it would be impossible to analyze the role of the “great philosophers” in the development of the “national character” without taking into account alterations by their successors. The latter was considerably more significant than the theories themselves in terms of their impact on the intellectual and political climate of a society.<sup>44</sup> Heinrich Heine's treatise of 1834, he continued, was of remarkable influence on such figures as Sigmund Freud and John Dewey, who followed Heine's assumption that the Germans were still in an earlier phase of civilization. Heine had emphasized that transcendental idealism was a specifically German idea, “a true expression of the German mind and therefore an effective weapon in the hands of the German political leaders.”<sup>45</sup> Kaufmann claimed in turn, that Heine, had been in possession of astonishing psychological insights, remarkable sociological talent, and had rightly foreseen a new German aggression. He had not been able, however, to prove the considerable role played by the philosophy of Kant or the latter's successors.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kaufmann, “German Philosophy”, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>46</sup> Kant, claimed Kaufmann, had been neither the *Alleszermalmer* (all-quashing character) that Heine took him for, nor was his work as revolutionary as Heine had believed. Kaufmann refuted Heine's interpretation of Kantian philosophy by means of David Hume (SGM 5 May 1943: 3). Evidently Kaufmann confuses something. For Heine, Kant was the *Weltzermalmer* (quashed the entire world). See Heinrich Heine, “Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland,” in *Heinrich Heine: Schriften über Deutschland*, ed. Schanze, Helmut (Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 1994 [1834]), 123. The term *Alleszermalmer* was used by Moses Mendelssohn in reference to Heine.

Kaufmann considered the claim that German idealism was subjectivist and congenial with the Germans themselves the central argument of George Santayana's book.<sup>47</sup> Santayana initially pointed out in his foreword that he had found German idealism difficult to understand and that he had felt most uneasy about this philosophy from the beginning because it had something obscure and sinister about it.<sup>48</sup> Although he had taken great pains to remain objective, he claimed, as an outsider he had only been able to approach the subject with "common reason." He asserted, "all I would give here is the aroma of German philosophy that has reached my nostrils."<sup>49</sup> Kaufmann was troubled by this interpretation, primarily in that a man of Santayana's position, a "brilliant philosopher and author," would allow himself to judge Leibniz and Kant merely in terms of their "odor."<sup>50</sup> As a result Kaufmann rejected this approach as unprofessional and arbitrary.

According to Kaufmann, John Dewey critiqued several key aspects of Kantian philosophy, converging in the statement: "Kant's system is one that reflects a society that is not based on discussion, but on authority, and the unity of which is thus determined."<sup>51</sup> While Dewey did not assume a direct influence of German philosophy on National Socialism, he believed that it had paved the way for Hitler's ideology as a result of its strong influence on the National Socialist intelligentsia. Dewey, Kaufmann claimed, came to this conclusion by means of his central assumption that unity could be established within a society in two different ways: "by telling and being told, which is the German way; and by discussion, which is the American way."<sup>52</sup> Dewey critiqued, in particular, Kant's two-worlds-theory and his rigid apriorism, which, in Dewey's eyes, could harbor the danger of viewing liberty as being of secondary value.<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, Kaufmann continued, Dewey considered the categorical imperative a formal and empty postulation that could only be filled out with material ethics. While the Germans had adapted it to the imperatives of their state and government, the Anglo-Saxons – who unlike the former – based their actions on a concept of law and justice, and had lent it substance from the very beginning. In response to this critique, Kaufmann reformulated the categorical imperative: "act in accordance with your conviction,"<sup>54</sup> as a fundamental ethical postulation that would bind moral decisions to personal convictions, or to personal advantage.

Felix Kaufmann's lecture evokes a kind of transatlantic setting. He started from a seemingly aloof standpoint, asking how a famous critic of German culture and politics and two American intellectuals interpreted the relationship between German philosophy and German national character. But during the course of his lecture, Kaufmann got increasingly involved in his own research question, and ended as an advocate of the philosophy of German idealism, particularly defending Immanuel Kant against his interpreters in the United States.

Kaufmann failed to follow his own guideline, to avoid speaking about political philosophy and to merely discuss the relationship between epistemology and ethics.<sup>55</sup> This becomes clear as neither his critique of George Santayana's work nor that of John Dewey's book has been

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<sup>47</sup> Kaufmann, "German Philosophy," 13.

<sup>48</sup> George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1939 [1916]), viii.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>50</sup> See Kaufmann, "German Philosophy," 15 [wrong pagination of the original document it should be 14, AS]

<sup>51</sup> SGM May 19, 1943: 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (New York: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1942 [1915]), 71. On this, Kaufmann merely commented that it was not Kant who invented the two-worlds-theory.

<sup>54</sup> SGM May 19, 1943: 3.

<sup>55</sup> Kaufmann, "German Philosophy," 6f.

formulated from a purely epistemological standpoint, but the failure becomes all the more evident in the subsequent controversial discussion.

To Kaufmann, as well as to the other émigré participants of the Study Group on Germany, the philosophy of German idealism was not just any philosophy or an arbitrary example. It was part of their scholarly education and constituted a theoretical milestone with which they all were more or less critically engaged. Thus Dewey and Santayana's critiques seemed to transcend the realm of a mere academic dispute and represented a stern attack on the refugee's intellectual heritage. Kaufmann and some other participants reacted with categorical rejections of both critiques. The fact that Horace Kallen, a student of Santayana and proponent of the New Schools "respectable radicalism," viewed the philosophy of German idealism from a different angle enriched the discussion on Kaufmann's lecture with a certain tension that reveals an interesting episode of transatlantic dynamics. The following section provides a closer look at the different arguments raised in this discussion and contextualizes the underlying transatlantic dynamics.

### The Different Odors of German Idealism

In the next meeting of the Study Group on 5 May 1943, Horace Kallen was the first of the participants to express unease with Kaufmann's lecture. In his first and last statement during the whole meeting, he rejected Kaufmann's arguments in their entirety.<sup>56</sup> Carl Mayer however, agreed with Kaufmann and called the critiques of Dewey and Santayana "scientifically impossible, politically a damage."<sup>57</sup> At the same time, Mayer pointed to the significant impact of German idealism in England and in the United States, and to the resulting contradiction: "Thus the 'bad' influences of the German idealists had been used to defend democratic institutions."<sup>58</sup> The further discussion focused on the "odor" that George Santayana had attributed to German idealism, which was identified as the effect of either a doctrine itself or of a specific interpretation of the doctrine. Kaufmann summarized his critique to the effect that the "odor" should not lead to the assumption that reasons for the aversion to the Germans could be found in German philosophy. Adolph Lowe took up the contrary position stating that in the philosophy of German idealism "there is something strange, smellable [sic] distinct from Western civilization."<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, idealist philosophy did have a different "odor" in varying social realities. In the German Confederation, and in the Kingdom of Prussia especially, G.W.F. Hegel ascended to become the official philosopher of the absolutist state. In the United States, Hegel's and Immanuel Kant's philosophy attracted many progressive intellectuals. In the nineteenth century, many American intellectuals had gone to pursue their studies in Germany in search of answers to the social problems in America, as doing so was seen as a qualitative asset; German universities were considered models for American academia.<sup>60</sup> German idealism, in the form of Kantian and

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<sup>56</sup> The following comment is given at the beginning of the discussion of May 5, 1943 regarding Horace Kallen: "Dr. Kallen disagreed both with Dr. Kaufmann's premises and conclusions." (SGM May 5, 1943: 3)

<sup>57</sup> SGM May 5, 1943: 4

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> See Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 6. Thomas Bender, in his book, *New York Intellect* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1987), 14f., describes the complex relationship that the "New York intellect" had with Europe. While Europe served as a model for American intelligence, different aspects came to the fore in different periods. From the end of the eighteenth century until the



Hegelian philosophy, seemed especially attractive after the American Civil War in terms of an explanation for the tremendous dynamics of change in American society, an immigration society with the need to constantly re-invent itself.<sup>61</sup> This philosophy was of decisive appeal to the pioneers of pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce and William James.

While Horace Kallen and George Santayana had studied in Germany, John Dewey had been deeply impressed by the imported idealism that he encountered as a student of George Sylvester Morris at the new Johns Hopkins University via the infamous “Metaphysical Club”<sup>62</sup>: “By the time Dewey graduated, in 1884, almost every one of Hopkins’s fifty-three professors had studied in Germany, and thirteen of them held a Ph.D., a degree not even granted in the United States until 1861. Hopkins was known as the Göttingen of Baltimore.”<sup>63</sup> This transatlantic constellation helped to establish idealism as the dominant philosophical trend in the United States by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup> In the Study Group, Horace Kallen points out that, until World War I, Hegelianism had had numerous followers in America who used idealist terminology “for re-stating the American sentiment about freedom.”<sup>65</sup>

Relations changed with the outbreak of World War I. During the Study Group discussion, Kallen deemed the books by John Dewey and George Santayana to be “war books.” In light of the “German assault on civilization,”<sup>66</sup> idealism became questionable for the progressive intellectuals in the United States: “the violation of treaties is impossible to bring in line with the Categorical Imperative unless there was something wrong with it.”<sup>67</sup> In both the First and Second World Wars, public debates raised questions as to the Americanization of immigrants and what constitutes “American identity”<sup>68</sup>. Critics of immigration suspected “Hyphen-Americans” of possessing “feelings of loyalty towards foreign countries and foreign churches.”<sup>69</sup> In response, intellectuals such as John Dewey shifted the focus to the universal elements of “American identity” and protested against prejudice: “Prejudices of economic status, of race, of

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mid-nineteenth century, Edinburgh, Scotland, was the point of reference as the city of Enlightenment (David Hume, Adam Smith, while from the mid-nineteenth century, Paris shifted into the focus of intellectuals with its more concentrated literary aspect of intellectual life and its increasing distance from the Anglo-Saxon tradition. After the end of the civil war, the point of reference shifted once again in the process of the academization of the New York intelligentsia and was more orientated towards the model of the German research university.

<sup>61</sup> Gert Raeithel, *Geschichte der nordamerikanischen Kultur, vol. 2: 1860-1930* (Frankfurt/Main: Zweitausendeins, 2002), 216. Translation by Wendy Anne Kopisch. Philip Gleason, in his article, “American Identity and Americanization,” in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. Stephan Thernstrom et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 31-58, describes the change of “American identity” after the Civil War as a paradigm shift from an emphasis on the ideological and religious between 1815 and 1860 to a dominance of ethnicity between 1860 and 1924. Recourse to idealism on the part of American intellectuals goes hand in hand with the secularization of American society: religion was constantly doubted in the light of the growing significance of experimental psychology. (Westbrook, *John Dewey*, 13ff.)

<sup>62</sup> Dewey’s philosophical and political work had been strongly influenced by Hegel’s philosophy until the end of the nineteenth century. See Westbrook, *John Dewey*, 13ff. and Axel Honneth, “Die Logik des Fanatismus. Deweys Archäologie der deutschen Mentalität,” in *John Dewey: Deutsche Philosophie und deutsche Politik*, ed. Axel Honneth (Berlin: Philo, 2000), 16.

<sup>63</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (London: Flamingo, 2001), 257.

<sup>64</sup> Westbrook, *John Dewey*, 6.

<sup>65</sup> SGM May 19, 1943: 4.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid: 3.

<sup>67</sup> Horace Kallen, *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Gleason, “American Identity and Americanization.”

<sup>69</sup> Dudley E. Baines, “Die Vereinigten Staaten zwischen den Weltkriegen 1919-1941,” in *Fischer Weltgeschichte. Die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika*, ed. Willi P. Adams et al. (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1977), 287. Translation by Wendy Anne Kopisch.

religion, imperil democracy because they set up barriers to communication, or deflect and distort its operation.”<sup>70</sup> As a result of this development within American society, however, German idealism was critiqued for being no longer appropriate – a problematic legacy. For this reason, Dewey, as a representative of a pragmatic philosophy, not only criticized the nationalistic usurpation of Hegelian and Kantian idealism with a “German individuality.” He also formulated thoughts on an “American philosophy” that would have to direct its objectives and means towards the “democratic way of life” in order to attain the ideal of social unity beyond constraint and violence.<sup>71</sup>

This little excursion into the broader context of the issues arose during the Study Group discussion illustrates the first aspect of transatlantic dynamics. During their critical examination of German idealism as one of the icons of German *Geistesgeschichte*, the participants stumbled upon the entangled histories of Germany and the United States. These dynamics rendered the discussion a very productive enterprise. What served as a national icon in the historiography throughout the German Empire, and Weimar Republic, lost its definiteness in the Study Group discussion, and gave way to a detailed and critical analysis of the social realities on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>72</sup> The following section argues that these dynamics become particularly apparent, considering additional, underlying aspects of the discussion.

### Transatlantic Differences and Familiarities

The discussion on Felix Kaufmann’s lecture oscillated between an emphasis on the progressive moments of the philosophy of German idealism and criticism of its autocratic aspects. Some participants thus underlined that idealist philosophy constituted one of the greatest obstacles for National Socialism and that the idealists themselves constantly remained cosmopolitans. Others in turn critiqued that this philosophy was difficult to read and to understand, inaccessible, and lacking in common sense.<sup>73</sup> In contrast to Felix Kaufmann, who de-nationalized German idealism by placing it within a European tradition, Adolph Lowe regarded it as a product of specific features of the social reality in Germany.

Towards the end of the discussion, Lowe used the term *Privatmensch* (private individual) to encompass the social reality that yielded German idealism and gave it the specific odor, which Santayana and Dewey had smelled.<sup>74</sup> He described the *Privatmensch* as a lonely individual, “confronted with himself and the Universe.”<sup>75</sup> Kurt Riezler agreed: “The notion of the *Privatmensch* is really the main point; it goes together with the fact of the lack of a society.”<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup> John Dewey, *German Philosophy*, 46.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>72</sup> Surely not all but a great deal of the productive character of the discussion is owed to Horace Kallen, who defended George Santayana, one of his academic teachers at Harvard University, in a very calm and prudential manner. See SGM May 19, 1943:4.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 2,4.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. The usage of terms like this one was not unusual at the time. Thomas Mann published his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (reflections of an a-political individual) in 1918. Helmuth Plessner, another intellectual refugee who fled to the Netherlands lectured about the “apolitical German.” See Helmuth Plessner, *Die verspätete Nation* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1939; Revised Edition, 1988). Lowe’s term most likely refers to Ernst Troeltsch’s, “Privatmoral und Staatsmoral” (1916), in *Deutscher Geist und Westeuropa*, Ernst Troeltsch (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1925), 134-166, in particular 138f.

<sup>76</sup> SGM May 19, 1943:5.

During previous meetings, members of the Study Group used the term *Privatmensch* several times, but they never really explained or questioned the term. Thus it can be regarded as pointing to a shared experience of the participants. The fact that the émigré intellectuals used a term in German language while the discussions were lead in English hints to the untranslatability of this shared experience. A closer look at Lowe's own lecture shows that the term *Privatmensch* encompassed perceived peculiarities of the German social reality, contrasted with Lowe's experiences in England and the United States.

In his lecture, Lowe had traced the origins of the *Privatmensch* to the Lutheran Reformation and connected what he perceived as a German peculiarity with the philosophy of Kant. At the meeting of the Study Group on February 24, 1943 Lowe stated that with Martin Luther's disfavor of reform and opposition as expressed in his views on the peasant wars and with his appeal to turn all energies inward towards perfection of the self, the Reformation had led to the "spiritual and intellectual formation of the 'society-less' individual."<sup>77</sup> Instead of developing social conventions and autonomous spontaneous social cohesion like the middle classes in England had done, Lowe claimed, the Reformation maintained petty absolutism and split up German society into a ruling bureaucracy and an apolitical subject class that obeyed without question.<sup>78</sup>

The topic of the *Privatmensch* – or what Lowe used synonymously, the apolitical, society-less individual – had bothered Lowe for quite a while. Archival materials indicate that he had already worked on it during his exile in Manchester. His earlier manuscript on "The German Idea of Freedom" (1940), in which the "a-political [sic] individual" is mentioned as well, points to the different situation in England.<sup>79</sup> "The prestige falls in Germany to the Civil Service which, as an administrative class, was not serving anyone else. The bureaucracy was very good and efficient, fulfilling those functions which in Western society fell to the self-administration of the middle class."<sup>80</sup> As a consequence of this development, Lowe stated in the same manuscript, "German political philosophy but also German social life moves between the poles of an a-political [sic] individual and the machinery of an authoritarian government."<sup>81</sup> Kant and Hegel served Lowe as striking examples that the philosophy of German idealism, by justifying the then existing, divided social reality, jumped from the autonomous subject to the compulsory state without even taking into account that individuals could have autonomous interests in building a society. "The isolated subject is to be reconciled with political authority but is not called up for joining in self-government."<sup>82</sup> Germany, Lowe noted, had been lacking a "political society" in contrast to England where this concept constituted one of the basics of political philosophy since the Puritan Revolution.<sup>83</sup> It had, as Lowe described, "not the atomized but the sociological individual as starting point (...) original forces staining society: interest, reason, sympathy (...)

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<sup>77</sup> Adolph Lowe, "Characteristic Facts and Events Relating to German History before 1500" (1942), unpublished, handwritten manuscript of the Study Group lecture, 14. The manuscript can be found in the papers of Adolph Lowe Box 4 Folder 9 in the German and Jewish Intellectual Émigré Collection, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York. See for Lowe's critique of Luther's views, Adolph Lowe, "The German Idea of Freedom" (1940), unpublished handwritten manuscript, 3f., in the papers of Adolph Lowe Box 4 Folder 93 in the same archives.

<sup>78</sup> Lowe, "Characteristic Facts," 12.

<sup>79</sup> Lowe, "German Idea of Freedom," 4.

<sup>80</sup> SGM February 10, 1943: 6.

<sup>81</sup> Lowe, "German Idea of Freedom," 7.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

the political end as well as the political agents are the individuals spontaneously [sic] associating in religious, economic, cultural groups.”<sup>84</sup> Although Lowe initially developed his diagnosis of German society in the eighteenth and nineteenth century against the backdrop of the situation in England, he later also used the term “Western societies” indicating that the contrast could also be assigned to the American social set-up.<sup>85</sup> Lowe’s own diagnosis made him take a stand against Felix Kaufmann and other participants and defend Santayana’s and Dewey’s critiques of the philosophy of German idealism. Lowe’s comments during the discussion on Felix Kaufmann’s lecture indicate that in his eyes, German idealism did not only affirm the split in German society, it even bore the marks of the society-less individual. “For us, today, the works of the great masters breathe loneliness; their arguments are carried as in isolation; there is a lack of understandability.”<sup>86</sup> Other participants agreed stating that it was a “philosophy of professors” and not “a common sense philosophy.”<sup>87</sup>

But it was not only the connection to Kant that led Lowe to mention this key term of his own lecture again in the discussion on Kaufmann’s presentation. The term *Privatmensch* can also be read as a hint to the different experiences the émigré intellectuals had in the Weimar Republic and in the United States of the New Deal. Taking the climate of academic institutions as an example, the notion of the *Privatmensch* can be regarded as an opposite to the émigré’s experiences at the New School for Social Research, especially at the time of the war effort. For the émigré intellectuals who did research on current social challenges and taught at a unique university within a vital and politically committed environment, the academic climate back in Germany could well have appeared to have been apolitical and wallowing in a form of isolated self-focus.

Fritz K. Ringer strikingly described what he called the institutional set-up of the German universities during the nineteenth century: a conservative system of personal dependencies, subordination, and patronage.<sup>88</sup> Cloaked in the “freedom of science”-slogan, many of the established professors agitated against politics, democracy, and parliament, and in turn supported anti-democratic activities. Jews and different kinds of democrats and socialists experienced harsh social exclusion and had nearly no chance of getting a professorship. With the collapse of the German Empire in 1918, this system, as well as the mandarins, did not simply disappear.

The majority of the members of the Study Group was politically involved in and around the different strands of the social democratic milieu and many had a Jewish family background. Unsurprisingly, in the Weimar Republic, most of them had worked as research fellows at one of the few newly founded research institutes or universities, advocating the democratic and politically committed social sciences, and pleading for a reform of the educational system. Even if they succeeded in getting one of the few paid positions in the academic sector, they were aware of their status as outsiders and were not surprised when in 1933, many of their colleagues

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> See for example SGM February 10, 1942: 6.

<sup>86</sup> SGM May 5, 1943: 4.

<sup>87</sup> SGM May 5, 1943: 5 and May 19, 1943: 2.

<sup>88</sup> See Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the Mandarins: The German Academic Community 1890-1933* (University Press of New England: Hanover, NH, 1969). Ringer coined the term “mandarin” for the academic elite rising in the nineteenth century and deriving their status not from heritage or wealth but from *Bildung* (classic education with a focus on the humanities). Not all mandarins had strictly conservative and anti-democratic attitudes. Ringer differentiates between an orthodox majority and a modernist minority. See *ibid.*, 128ff.

refrained from protest against the persecutions by the National Socialist regime, declaring politics a “dirty business.”<sup>89</sup>

As mentioned above, from the outset, the New School for Social Research was not only an academic institution, but also an enterprise of politically committed social sciences. As an outsider in the academic landscape, it differed from conventional universities in the United States, and even more clearly from traditional universities in Germany.<sup>90</sup> The history of the New School started in 1917, with dissident scholars leaving Columbia University, protesting against president Butler’s policy of silencing anti-war voices within the faculty. The first statements of the founders indicate that they aimed “to generate a body of critical social science that would contribute to the ‘reconstruction’ of western society along more egalitarian and scientific lines.”<sup>91</sup> The 1918 founding spirit, and the creation of the University in Exile in 1933, “made the New School one of the few places in the country where the issues of political reform and academic freedom could be discussed with candor.”<sup>92</sup> Moreover, the refugee intellectuals themselves got engaged with New Deal politics when they initiated the Peace Research Project, serving the American government and the allied reconstruction policy with their research as part of the New School’s war effort, shortly after the Study Group on Germany had ended.<sup>93</sup> For most of the participants of the Study Group, who in the Weimar Republic had worked at the most progressive universities and research institutions, the transatlantic difference might not have been a harsh one, but statements of Adolph Lowe, for example, indicated that they felt a difference concerning the institutional and political climate.<sup>94</sup> Yet the term *Privatmensch* can be interpreted as a second, rather underlying aspect of the transatlantic dynamics pervading the discussions of the Study Group on Germany. In this sense, it must be regarded as a product of unique experiences shaped by certain differences between the social set-ups and climates of the Weimar Republic and the United States of the New Deal. The use of the German language term implies that, from the perspective of exile, these differences might have become particularly apparent. The following paragraph addresses a third aspect of the transatlantic dynamics, which is closely related with the term *Privatmensch*.

Although Kaufmann, compared to the German refugees, had a slightly different background in Austria, some remarks in the manuscript of his lecture seem to point in a direction very similar to Lowe’s experiences mentioned above. In the last section of his lecture, he followed his critique of Dewey’s interpretation with a short outline of the latter’s philosophy.<sup>95</sup> Here, Kaufmann mentions in the most positive light, the reform approaches to education and child upbringing that Dewey had advanced considerably in the United States, and which were based on the central categories of experience and discussion. Dewey, Kaufmann continued, regarded German education and upbringing, governed by concepts of the classical philosophers – above

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<sup>89</sup> Their awareness of the situation at the end of Weimar Republic surely was one of the reasons why these intellectuals were able to escape from Nazi persecution. See for Adolph Lowe’s account of his own experiences in Adolph Lowe, “Die Hoffnung auf kleine Katastrophen. Gespräch mit Adolph Lowe,” in *Die Zerstörung einer Zukunft*, ed. Matthias Greffrath (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1980), 137-139.

<sup>90</sup> Rutkoff and Scott, *New School*, 1ff. Besides, the Columbia University’s invitation of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Frankfurt School) shows that even conventional institutions in the United States seemed to be open-minded in the 1930s.

<sup>91</sup> Rutkoff and Scott, *New School*, xii.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> See for the war effort and the Peace Research Project Krohn, *Wissenschaft im Exil*, 156ff.

<sup>94</sup> See Lowe, “Die Hoffnung auf kleine Katastrophen,” 137ff.

<sup>95</sup> As the following remarks are not part of the Transcribed Minutes, it is possible that Kaufmann spared this part of his lecture. See Kaufmann “German Philosophy,” 17ff.



all Kant and Hegel – with suspicion because it was based on subjective insights of a lonely individual, and was thus inaccessible for others. In Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy, on the other hand, objective and purpose were verified by experience and in discussion. Dewey, Kaufmann summarized, assumed that the principles of the philosophy of German idealism were responsible – if only indirectly – for the events in Germany as a result of this particular kind of education. Kaufmann himself deemed this point fundamentally significant for the postwar re-education in Germany. He concluded his lecture with a call for an educational reform that reads almost as a direct reference to Dewey’s statement on prejudices as cited above. “Task of a philosophical education – making people susceptible to arguments – The fight against prejudices must not only be a fight against particular prejudices but against prejudices as such.”<sup>96</sup> This explicit and consenting quotation of an American author can be interpreted as representing a third aspect of the transatlantic dynamics. The episode of Kaufmann’s lecture revealed that the émigrés were not only seeking to critically examine what they perceived as “German tradition.” At the same time, they were searching their new environment for experiences and ideas to build on for a future reconstruction of European societies after the defeat of the Nazis. In Dewey’s concept of education, Kaufmann found an alternative to the kind of elitist *Bildung* (education in the sense of Wilhelm von Humboldt) avoiding confrontation with the social reality, and thus producing “society-less” individuals.

Advocating educational reform must have been familiar to Kaufmann. Among intellectual outsiders in Vienna, it was a very popular issue. The Habsburg Empire had systematically excluded several groups from higher education. Children of workers and peasants were not able to attend universities and social barriers for socialists, nonconformists, and Jews were high. As a consequence, a branch of higher learning began to develop outside the university. During the short interwar period in Vienna, social democrats initiated adult education programs for blue- and white-collar workers, and a variety of intellectual debating circles developed that tried to popularize scientific methods and results. The Austro-Marxist movement aimed at providing equal access to education for all parts of the population as a central goal.<sup>97</sup> As shown above, Kaufmann took part in these activities. Furthermore, his works on the methodology of the social sciences can be read as a call for transparency and democratization of scientific methods and standards. The explicit and consenting quotation of Dewey, as cited above, shows that in Dewey’s notion of education, Kaufmann clearly found a concept to build on and to further pursue his idea of educational reform. Dewey’s ideas, and Kaufmann’s experiences in Vienna, indicate this third aspect of the transatlantic dynamics: a certain familiarity regarding the issue of educational reform as it was discussed in the intellectual debates in Austria and in the United States during the interwar years.

## Conclusion

It becomes evident both in Kaufmann’s lecture and in the subsequent discussion in the Study Group on Germany that it was impossible for the émigré intellectuals to address “German national character” from a purely epistemological point of view. The force fields of flight, exile,

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>97</sup> See for the conditions of education in Austria in the interwar years and for the reform policies of Austrian social democrats Helmut Gruber, *Red Vienna. Experiment in Working-Class Culture 1919-1934*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

and World War II had led the participants of the Study Group to a critical sociological examination of the icons German *Geistesgeschichte* that transcended pure epistemology.<sup>98</sup> On the surface, it seems as if only topics of the “long German past” were negotiated. A closer look reveals that the participants were at the same time dealing with their impressions of the American social reality. The mingling of their past and current experiences induces kinds of transatlantic dynamics in Kaufmann’s lecture as well as in the ensuing discussion. Three particular aspects of these transatlantic dynamics were closer examined in this article.

I described the first aspect as the discovery of entangled transatlantic history. During the critical examination of the philosophy of German idealism, the émigré intellectuals stumbled upon the entangled histories of Germany and the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his lecture, Kaufmann had de-nationalized German idealism and located it within a two thousand year-old European tradition, in order to save it from association with National Socialism. The subsequent discussion, with recourse to the particular “odor” of this philosophy – in the sense of its social context – unveiled both its productive and its reactionary moments. While the philosophy of German idealism during the German invention of tradition served as a national icon, representing the interests of the authoritarian German Empire, at the same time, it served as a secular intellectual stronghold for the non-dogmatic, progressive intellectuals in the United States and their concepts of liberty and democracy.<sup>99</sup> Thus, the former national icon loses its definiteness and sets the stage for a critical analysis of the social realities of Germany and the United States.

The term *Privatmensch*, introduced by Lowe, illustrated a second, rather underlying aspect of transatlantic dynamics: the discovery of certain differences between the social realities in Germany and in the United States. With this term and its synonyms, “a-political” or “society-less” individual, Lowe sought to grasp features like self-referentiality, an aversion against politics, and a lack of autonomous interest in social coherence, as expressed in different historical sources, from Lutheran writings, to German idealist philosophy, that he did not find in Western societies. I interpreted this term as implicitly referring to the differing academic climates the émigré intellectuals had experienced in the German Empire and Weimar Republic on the one side, and the United States of the New Deal on the other. In the Weimar Republic as academic outsiders, concerned about democracy, they were well aware of the anti-democratic spirit prevailing at German universities. At the New School, and particularly during the war effort, they experienced a different social climate that encouraged political activities, allowing them to combine their academic interests with their political ambitions to re-vitalize democracy in a future postwar Germany.

Kaufmann’s direct and approving reference to Dewey illustrated the third aspect of transatlantic dynamics, characterized as transatlantic familiarity. In the Study Group discussions, the émigré intellectuals were not only examining the German past, but also at the same time, searching for connecting factors in their new American environment. Although Kaufmann rejected Dewey’s critique of the philosophy of German idealism, he shared the latter’s concerns regarding German education, and approved the ambitions in the field of educational reform. The democratization of education and the promotion of adult education as well as equal access for all parts of the population were very popular issues in interwar Vienna, especially in Kaufmann’s

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<sup>98</sup> The term “force fields” refers to Martin Jay, *Force Fields. Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>99</sup> The term “invention of tradition” refers to Eric Hobsbawm. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terece Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

intellectual networks. Therefore, I interpreted the consenting citation of Dewey in Kaufmann's lecture as reflecting a transatlantic familiarity of intellectual debates with respect to certain socio-political issues.

Taken together, these three aspects suggest a broader conception of exile research, transcending the still prevailing focus on aspects of foreignness and isolation. Research on such a multilayered phenomenon as the intellectual migration, should be capable of grasping not only the aspects of foreignness and isolation but also the fruitful and productive effects of exile in this unique episode in transatlantic history.