

## FORUM

### Modern German History and the Handbook

The historiography of modern Germany appears increasingly fragmented. The decline of old master narratives and paradigms, such as modernization, class conflict, nation state building or the *Sonderweg*, has been accompanied by the emergence of new methodologies. The linguistic turn, the visual turn, the material turn, postmodernism, poststructuralism, to name but a few, have raised doubts about the very existence of a singular story of German history. They have, in turn, spawned vibrant new sub-fields, such as the history of emotions, memory studies, the history of the body, neurohistory and environmental history, which have changed the questions we ask of the past, and opened up more variegated source materials for historical inquiry, now prominently including artefacts, images, sounds and ‘ego-documents’. What ties all these new developments together? Can we still tell ‘a German history’? Or if not, how else might we organize our thinking about the past? This question is particularly pressing at a time when many look to history for concrete answers and explanations: the media, the general public, school teachers and, last but not least, the students we teach. Oxford University Press have been at the forefront of responding to such demands for general answers by commissioning a series of new handbooks, which included, last year, a new *Handbook on Modern German History*, edited by Helmut Walser Smith. The handbook’s stated aim is to synthesize new research, and to provide us with some signposts through the thicket of recent historiographical developments. The editors of *German History* have invited five experts, including a specialist on French history, to reflect on some of the broader issues and challenges that are inherent in this genre of text in the context of the latest developments in our discipline. They are: **Mary Fulbrook** (UCL), **Jim Retallack** (Toronto), **Joachim Whaley** (Cambridge), **Brian Vick** (Emory) and **Julian Wright** (Durham).

**1. The introduction to the new Oxford University Press Handbook of Modern German History asserts the longue durée existence of ‘the German nation’, and makes the passage of that nation through time its central object of study. Yet it also acknowledges that nation state sovereignty marked a relatively short-lived interlude in the wider history of the German lands and their inhabitants. How successfully does this handbook navigate the dangers of teleology that the adoption of a national frame for ‘German history’ implies?**

**Fulbrook:** The contributors steer a careful line between an essentialist concept of the German nation and a sensitivity to the changing cultural constructions and political associations of any conception of what it means to be ‘German’. The teleology of older accounts of German history, with an overwhelming focus on the ways in which different aspects of its past did or did not lead to ‘small German’ unification under Prussian

dominance, is notably absent. There is interesting discussion of the ways in which variant state forms developed and changed, and the ways in which these changing state forms affected and were affected by emergent and shifting discourses of nationhood. It is also extremely helpful to have contributions emphasizing the variety of ways in which concepts of the nation could be constructed, and the ways in which these were inflected by broader contemporary assumptions, as in the possibility of links between liberalism and cultural conceptions of ‘race’ in the later nineteenth century. The handbook is also particularly strong in emphasizing the sheer mobility of ‘Germans’, and the highly volatile conceptions of inclusion and exclusion and what it meant to be German at different times and in different places.

On the other hand, there will always be choices to be made (even in a handbook of this length and scope); in this case, as in so many others, ‘Austria’ and ‘Austrians’ rather fade in and out, with a greater emphasis on what did eventually land up as the Germany we know today. The changing shapes of Austrian territories as always play a far more significant role in the early modern period and the nineteenth century than in the twentieth century and beyond, and in analyses of culture than in analyses of politics and social change. This is a pity, since not only for the period of the Third Reich but also in respect of patterns of dealing with the Nazi past after 1945—denazification, war crimes trials, restitution and compensation, postwar and Cold War politics, culture and society—the areas of central Europe currently and formerly belonging to Austria provide intriguing variations worthy of more explicit exploration in comparison with the two explicitly designated ‘German’ states.

**Vick:** On the whole the volume stayed fairly true to its aim of backing away from the nation state paradigm. The earlier contributions, for example, recognized the independent state traditions and patriotisms (themselves in some senses national) in certain states for the era before 1870. If anything, the authors could have gone even further in emphasizing the diversity of experiences and conditions within German states and regions. For the later periods the coverage of regional diversity rather falls away, but even for the earlier epochs, the differing experiences of, say, Upper Bavaria and Franconia, or Brandenburg and East Prussia, could have received more attention. Some of the older teleology survived in the emphasis on German national identity and nationalism as exclusively ethnic in nature from an early stage, overlooking evidence of contrary, civic traditions that persisted well into the nineteenth century, and going against the grain of recent studies that break down the older East–West, civic–ethnic dichotomy more generally in studies of European and global nationalism (including, I admit, my own, but not only). Pieter Judson’s contribution stood out for its efforts to break down such restrictive teleology. It provided a more nuanced account for the later nineteenth century, showing that even then there were still only partial shifts to ethnic nationalism among radical nationalists, and it predicated itself on a more complex mix of civic, ethnic and historical elements of identity for the earlier part of the century. It may also be that bracketing the special status of the period 1871–1945 continues to privilege the older definition of the nation state from that era. For the earlier period, the German Confederation is increasingly seen as having offered a framework for coexistence in the fifty years prior to 1866. After 1949, despite or alongside the growth of post-national identities and the respective integration into Western capitalist and Eastern

Communist blocs, the two German states could still be seen as nation states, striving for full membership in a world organized around the nation state concept more than ever before through the UN (a goal finally realized by their admission to that body in 1973, on the same day as the Bahamas). If we insist that there was nothing primordial about the notion 'German' or the entity 'Germany', then the division of the supposed single nation state, deep though it was, becomes less significant. Keeping track of the changes in what was called Germany and German is the reconciling move.

**Whaley:** All books have to start somewhere and the late eighteenth century is without doubt a logical place to start a history of modern Germany. That is not to say, however, that there were not strong continuities with those developments that emerged during the course of the fifteenth century and that created the early modern Holy Roman Empire. Many previous accounts have tended to give the impression that the German nation, or German nationalism, developed out of a void and in response to the crisis of the French period. The *Oxford Handbook of Modern German History* has a more nuanced approach, but one that remains problematic in two ways. First, while some contributions locate the origins of a new concept of the nation in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the emphasis on its final creation in the French era raises major questions. What is not satisfactorily explained is the relation between the new nation and the older nation whose tradition was systematically eradicated in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In his introduction, Helmut Walser Smith suggests that the Seven Years War generated a new sense of nationhood in some parts, notably Prussia, though he argues that this was also reflected in the revival of German culture generally after about 1760 and in the embrace of the vernacular. Robert von Friedeburg denies that this older nation ever existed. He cites Daniel von Czepko bemoaning the absence of a nation in the early 1640s and Wieland doing the same in the crisis of 1793; he denies the existence of a sense of Germanness in the middle ages and suggests that patriotism was insignificant. Yet he also argues that until the 1740s some kind of unity prevailed, or at least community or common interest in the *Reich*. Just what happened to that sense of community is not made entirely clear. Subsequent chapters do not give a clear answer. Christian Jansen suggests that *Reichspatriotismus* was an early form of 'greater German nationalism'. He does not explain what he means by this and on the next page he refers to 'constitutional patriotism', before ascribing the idea of nationalism to Herder. Overall, this is a very traditional account of the genesis of nationalism that pays no attention to the work of Ute Planert, or to the growing body of scholarship which recognizes that even Fichte's *Reden an die deutsche Nation* referred to the *Reich* rather than to some nation state of the future. If one examines the reform plans of 1848 in the context of the Old *Reich* a similar point emerges. Was the nation state as it was later conceived, or as such a thing was imagined by Ernst Renan, actually on the agenda during the first century covered by the *Handbook*? It is surely not enough to say that the *Reich* was not a state and that the nation only came into being towards the end of the eighteenth century. The words nation and patriotism clearly evolved, developing a new social meaning and political significance. Yet the same was true of 'liberty' and 'freedom', and many others.

Second, the adoption of a national frame for German history raises the question of Austria, which surely belonged to the 'German lands' at least until 1866–1871, and beyond in cultural terms. Austria appears as an unremarked presence in many of the

earlier chapters and in some late chapters, for example those on nineteenth-century literature and on modernism. This is an issue which one might have expected the general introduction to address: its absence there (and in discussions of nationalism elsewhere) is a major omission. As Wolfram Siemann has recently suggested (<http://www.sehepunkte.de/2011/05/11838.html>), a book that made sense of the complex position of Austria in Germany through the long nineteenth century is still very much needed. Any book that did that really could claim to be an innovatory and revisionist history.

**Wright:** The issue of the nation state and the way historians conceive its history as a teleology, whether they acknowledge this or not, has resonance for French historians. Germanists, it seems, are again arguing over the *Sonderweg*—and typically imagine they are the only ones to do so. French historians of course have ‘l’exception française’ to worry over. But here we seem to be having to raise concerns that in many academic quarters were never really that significant. I was particularly mindful of this when reading of the intentionalist *versus* functionalist debate about Nazi Germany and the Jews in this handbook—is this really still being used by historians of the Third Reich to structure their approaches? So much fresh historiography on the Third Reich has provided new perspectives here; I would be surprised if many Germanist PhD students are still wrestling with an argument which is thirty years old at least. In France, the argument, current in the 1980s, between Marxists and Revisionists about the French Revolution remains important but more because it reflects present concerns that students of historiography should pay attention to, and not because it actually defines the way historians want to think about the French Revolution. ‘L’exception française’ is a category that emphasizes a certain way of thinking about the nature of politics and political argument. Since the cultural turn, and since exciting developments have taken place within the history of French political thought that are to an extent unrelated (I am thinking of the work of Pierre Rosanvallon), the category has been unpicked significantly and many students of French history are now able to focus on a national political history without having to pay lip-service to old-fashioned narratives of French exceptionalism. Cultural historians have shown how politics connects in so many ways with religion, society, class, culture, family and gender (as several of the contributors to this volume do in fact); and newer political historians have in a different way unpicked the narrative of the rise of the French Republic and the French revolutionary system. So while I think it is probably inevitable that French history *will* dwell on one state far more than German history *ought to*, the approach to communities, languages of politics, class and gender, cultural relationships and aspirations now being advanced in many quarters has certainly refreshed our discipline. This volume could do more to show how similar approaches are refreshing German history by setting up more challenging headings and categories. This is surprising, because in my view, it is actually easier to get a handle on a new approach to German history than it is for French history. Here, much of the real innovation of the 1980s and the cultural turn precisely focused more, not less, attention on the nation state. It is only very recently that historians have started to work with a more global perspective on the history of the French Revolution, for example. And yet there are many trying to do this—and here we are dealing with a state, and a state-run education system, that has led to a concretization of the nation state historiography since Napoleon, with far greater rigour and depth than German historiography. Essentially, it *ought to be* easier to develop a

more plural focus for the cultural, political and social history of Germany than France; and yet it is certainly incumbent on historians of both countries to develop this; and I am disappointed that the structuring of this handbook did not lead more concretely to more of the genuinely transnational or indeed regional perspectives that are present in (for example) Jonathan Sperber's excellent article.

**Retallack:** I cannot discern any dangerous teleology in the structure of the book, in the sequence of chapters, or in their conclusions. The contributors refuse to be constrained by the geographical or political or linguistic bounds of 'Germany'. More pertinent, I think, is the question of whether the authors offer the reader consistent definitions of the nation, the nation state, nation state sovereignty, and the specific problems (and opportunities) that nationalism has presented to the German people. On that score I note a tension about whether the unified German nation state is interesting mainly a) because it has been so short-lived (1871–1945, 1990 to the present) or b) because it was always subject to pressures, flows and networks that transcended its national borders. The contributors analyse those transnational relationships and contexts more adroitly than they do the question of how Germans reacted to the specific configurations of culture and power that defined their interior relationships to the 'sovereign' nation. References to 'fully-authentic Germans' and inconsistencies in charting nineteenth-century trajectories from *Reichspatriotismus* through *Reichsnationalismus* (and beyond) will not be helpful to undergraduate readers. More interesting is the repeated failure of German 'sovereignties' to ensure the prosperity, welfare, rights and physical safety of Germans from the Thirty Years War to 1990. This is a theme that could have been developed more concretely—perhaps in the manner that Michael Ignatieff, on the tenth anniversary of 9/11, linked the many failures of 'sovereignties' in the USA and around the world to employ, care for, emancipate or protect their own people since 2001. I am not arguing for a new history of 'the Germans'—the next Gordon Craig is not in sight. Rather, the history of *people* living in German lands may be inherently more compelling and less constraining than the history of Germany either as a nation state or as something else.

**2. The handbook's introduction states that it marks 'a novel attempt to place German history in a deeper international and transnational setting'. To what extent, and in what ways, does it integrate the findings of transnational research into its narrative about the emergence and transformation of the German nation state?**

**Vick:** The Oxford Handbook and its contributors have made a worthy effort to relate German history to broader international and transnational frameworks, and in ways that break new ground. Much of the work providing a basis for such extensions of German history has been done in the past decade or so, hence in that sense such a synthesis could only come now, and does lend freshness to the narrative. In some respects the handbook functions as a first occasion to pause and take stock of these new directions. The drive to do so comes in part from a desire to get beyond the nation state paradigm and to expunge traces of nationalism within historical narratives (as in the first section of the forum). Also, however, and partly independently, it stems from a desire to

bring German history together with larger endeavours at global or world history, and at reconsideration of historical and other humanistic or scientific knowledge in the light of postcolonial approaches. In terms of master or meta-narratives, if the present volume to some extent splits the difference between the *Sonderweg* and post-*Sonderweg* revisionist paradigms with respect to the nation state, it also to a degree sits—at times uneasily—between the stage of postcolonial critique of liberal and Marxian positions (as in Andrew Zimmerman’s contribution), and the emerging post-postcolonial revisions to postcolonial narratives (as for example in the work of Suzanne Marchand or Sankar Muthu, reflected here in the fine essay by Franz Leander Fillafer and Jürgen Osterhammel on the Enlightenment and cosmopolitanism). Overall, the contributions usefully highlight the relationship between historical trends in the (mostly) German-speaking lands and those emerging from international, transnational and—if I may use an older term—comparative frameworks. That is, they emphasize points at which exogenous forces from economics, international relations or warfare shaped German history, as well as ways in which social, economic, religious and even political developments in Germany were embedded within larger European and global trends. Many authors were also careful to compare developments in Germany with those in Britain, the USA and other countries, in ways that should enhance the value of the book for teachers and students. They did so not only with an eye towards the question of Germany’s special path, but also with the goal of aiding historical understanding by showing where the German case sits on the broader spectrum of historical experience.

**Fulbrook:** A number of essays in the handbook make a concerted effort to place the issues under discussion both within a comparative framework—with informed glances sideways, at developments elsewhere in the world—and in the context of an ever-changing system, the different parts of which mutually interact and affect one another. In his analysis of race and world politics Andrew Zimmermann, for example, points up the ways in which racism could be based in cultural rather than biological notions, and was perfectly compatible with late nineteenth-century German liberalism. German colonialism and the ‘civilizing mission’—not only in non-European colonies but also with respect to Polish workers within and immediately beyond German borders—was rooted in a combination of ‘racial’ and economic considerations in ways comparable with and influenced by the ‘struggles for culture’ of other nations, including particularly the United States. Other essays, such as that by Adam Tooze on the German ‘national economy in an era of crisis and war’, intimate just how closely domestic economic developments and the international situation are intertwined: the history of the German economy in the twentieth century cannot be understood without analysis of the impact, scale and character of war and associated policies of racial exploitation; the integration of western European economies after this war (as well as related developments in eastern Europe, not the subject of Tooze’s essay) were integrally related to the preceding struggle unleashed across Europe by German ambitions. Yet it is important not to lose sight of the ways in which there is a dynamic of domestic politics and culture at work too. Thomas Mergel’s rather more familiar narrative of the development of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich in the peace-time years covers well-trodden ground, although with comparative glances at developments elsewhere.

**Whaley:** The transnational theme is indicated on the first page of the introduction but what follows over the next nineteen pages is really exclusively dedicated the genesis and history of the German nation state without any transnational or comparative reference. Individual chapters are more diverse: in several of them, a broader perspective is really one of the best features of the *Handbook*. Robert von Friedeburg's account of the 'origins of modern Germany' is enriched by comparisons between Germany and France, Spain, the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth; the German territories are compared fruitfully with English counties or French regions. Ute Planert's analysis of the interaction of world politics and German history in the period 1740–1815 is outstanding and will stand as one of the best of its kind. The chapter on 'cosmopolitanism and the German Enlightenment' by Franz Leander Fillafer and Jürgen Osterhammel (the very name is programmatic in relation to international and transnational history!) is a superb and highly original account of the *Aufklärung* as a movement that engaged not only with purely German concerns but with the issues that defined both Europe and the wider world at the end of the eighteenth century. Jonathan Sperber's chapter on the Atlantic revolutions in the German lands may overstate the significance of the American Revolution for Germany, but the way that he sketches the international dimension of German developments is exemplary. It is a shame that Christian Jansen's chapter on the formation of German nationalism does not have a comparative dimension. The later contribution by Andrew Zimmermann on race and world politics 1878–1914 does follow the more general pattern of the book, though it rather simplifies the German debate about race and forces it into a teleological mould: one gets little sense of the kind of complexity revealed by scholars such as Christopher Hutton. Finally, the chapters in Part IV on Germany 1945–1989 and in Part V on the years since 1989 also give an excellent sense of an international perspective. This is particularly true of Kiran Klaus Patel's lucid account of 'Germany and European integration since 1945'. Patel's essay is one of the best of its kind and will surely soon find its place on all student reading lists on this topic.

**Retallack:** Germany's colonial wars finally get their due in this handbook (as they also did, incidentally, in a recent *Festschrift* for Hans-Ulrich Wehler). Attention to German imperialism helps many contributors (perhaps none more than Andrew Zimmerman and William Hagen) keep transnational flows and comparative analyses front and centre. Readers are forced to move beyond the question of war's effect 'on' or 'in' Germany alone. Consistent with recent scholarship, one also finds Poland cropping up as part of the 'German problem' with remarkable frequency. On a different front (looking westward), Adam Tooze's chapter is exemplary in discussing the German economy 1917–1945 in a truly international setting. Readers are treated to a concise and compelling explanation of Germany's economic options between 1919 and 1933, making the history of global finance as dramatic as it has become, for all the wrong reasons, in the past four years. Lastly, the essay on German modernism by Stephen Dowden and Meike Werner is quite brilliant in locating allegedly German examples of modernism in their non-German geographical and aesthetic contexts. Provocative and wide-ranging, this chapter is best read in conjunction with the earlier one by Celia Applegate, which covers much more ground temporally. It is clear that every contributor was given strict marching orders to address transnational Germany in his or her chapter.

Nary a conscientious objector can be found. Hence there is considerable overlap and repetition across chapters. Nevertheless, transnational history—which has often been called upon to practice what it preaches—has never before been so consistently taken up in a book of this kind.

**Wright:** The development of transnational history—not comparative history, although this book sometimes conflates the two—is only just beginning to refresh our discipline. I am aware of just how much more potential there is in fact in the German case, where different kinds of peoples who would associate by language or culture with Germany have so often lived outside the lands covered approximately by the Wilhelmine *Reich* or the united Germany of today. It is well known that the study of the German people ranges incredibly widely from pockets of German-speaking people in the American mid-west to the Baltic or the eastern parts of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. Because this insight is driving so much exciting and illuminating work—work which then tells fundamentally important stories about the German ‘heartland’ itself (wherever that is defined), I would have liked to have seen far more development of this theme as a guiding principle in this handbook. There are a number of half-way compromise positions: it would have been fascinating to have had chapters that, by the way they were set up, gave greater primacy to the cultural, political, social and economic diversity which is reflected better when one considers—for example—the Rhineland cities; or the German diaspora in North America; or the Austrian Empire itself. A very few studies within the volume provided this sort of shifting focus, notably Celia Applegate and the discussions of high culture and literature. But over and over again the volume itself simply reinforced a rather narrow definition of Germanness that was to a considerable extent indistinguishable from traditional narratives.

**3. The publishers advertise the handbook by stating that it ‘underscores the centrality of war to the unfolding of German history, and [that it] shows how [war] dramatically affected the development of German nationalism and the structure of German politics’. What, if anything, distinguishes the central agency accorded to war in the master narrative of German history in this handbook from that of older accounts?**

**Wright:** I want to come back in more detail to a broader point that arises from this question in my response to Question 5. What I found a little startling was that there was so little self-irony in the decision taken here to use war as a framework for understanding the development of German modernity. To me, this is all too reminiscent of nineteenth-century historiography. Surely, a hundred and fifty years after Treitschke, it would be helpful to reflect on why war remains a useful defining category for German historians—with much more of a sense of the historiographical longevity of this idea. If this approach is *not* outmoded, we needed to know much more about why this was so; and, frankly, the sceptic who sees too much Treitschke in this approach needs to be reassured that the great waves of intellectual endeavour that have driven new social and cultural approaches to the study of German modernity have been considered . . . and found not as useful as the ‘centrality of war’ . . . but I wonder whether they have! In many of its individual articles, this handbook did hint that in fact newer social and cultural

approaches were providing real fresh insights that could be taken further and developed into a new, thought-provoking framework for reconceptualizing modern German history.

**Vick:** The contributions illuminate many of the ways in which the experience of war has shaped political, social and cultural developments in Germany over the past three centuries, for the eighteenth century and Napoleonic era as for the catastrophic first half of the twentieth century. The vein in which authors bring in the military dimension comes more under the heading of War and Society, and to that extent marks some change from older accounts, and a refreshing one (this is not, to disagree respectfully with Julian Wright, Treitschke's idea of war). Particularly for the early modern and Napoleonic periods, quite a bit of new research has pointed to the stresses, tensions and shaping influences of the rapidly growing scale of warfare in European social life, and that is perceptively reflected here. Even some of the coverage of the spread of conceptions and practices of patriotism in the German states, as with Ute Planert's discussion of the dissemination of Frederick the Great memorabilia, could come under the rubric of war and society in this sense. Comparative measuring of the different major wars against the yardstick of the 'total war' concept also foregrounded the connections between military and social history along the lines of recent scholarship. On balance, however, war if anything emerges as perhaps less central than in previous master narratives of German history. Continuities as well as caesuras characterize the periods surrounding even the wars of the twentieth century, as for example with Benjamin Ziemann's de-emphasis of the notion of a 'brutalization' of soldiers and society in the wake of the First World War. The contribution by Adam Tooze also makes the point that many social and economic trends carry across the interruptions of the world wars.

**Fulbrook:** War plays a key role in this handbook, but not (or not merely) in relation to high politics and the changing nation state borders that featured so prominently in older accounts of German history. Key issues include the impact of war on changing demographic profiles and the shape and character of society; on the transformation of gender roles; on a sense of place, and patterns of destruction and reconstruction; on constructions of the future as well as the past; as well as, of course, on borders and on politics more narrowly defined. In this sense, the general way in which war is portrayed is panoramic, almost all-encompassing; it looms far larger in its long-term significance (and changing character, particularly with the twentieth century) than in older accounts that tend to distinguish more discretely between periods of peace and warfare. In this the handbook is in my view absolutely on the right lines.

But there are some caveats, and much depends on precisely which war, under what historical conditions. As Benjamin Ziemann points out, while 1914 and 1918 were key turning points, the Great War was more a catalyst accelerating changes that were already in the making and that took a while to play out than an independent precipitant of change in itself. Effects were various depending on the area: contrary to some interpretations, for example, the Great War in Ziemann's view played less of a role in the alleged emancipation and empowerment of women than it did in the field of interpretations of inclusion and exclusion with respect to notions of a national community. Moreover, both the varying cultural codings of war-related experiences and the political contests over different interpretations help to shape the longer-term impact

of war during the unstable periods of change following war. The Second World War, for a wide variety of well-rehearsed reasons, arguably had a far more substantial and major impact than any previous war in German history. Yet even in this case there were continuities in, for example, aspects of mentalities: Thomas Mergel suggests that it was not until the 1960s that notions of the nation as a 'harmonious society' that had been prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s were finally challenged and displaced by a sense that a 'national community' need not necessarily be homogeneous in order to be harmonious, and that diversity and conflict are integral to modernity. Given the large claims about the significance of war that are made for this volume, there could be more explicit comparative discussion of the varying impact of different wars in relation to their aftermaths and postwar reconfigurations under differing circumstances; but this might constitute a separate research project in itself, not a realistic challenge for a handbook.

**Whaley:** In one way or another, war was surely central to the unfolding of the modern history of much of Europe. The chapters of the *Oxford Handbook of Modern German History* that are devoted to this theme—and few chapters are not in some way concerned with it—offer excellent analyses of events, of ideologies, of the social and economic impact of war, and of the aftermath and legacy of conflict in Germany. In one sense it would be difficult to see how any such work could fail to deal with these things. They play a central role in the 1997 volume *German History since 1800* edited by Mary Fulbrook, as they do in other handbooks such as the new Gebhardt. In justifying the rough starting date of 1760, Helmut Walser Smith's introduction in some ways reinforces traditional arguments about the alleged role of war in the development of the German nation: the conflict between Prussia and Austria in the Seven Years War is presented as a conflict which generated new national aspirations, created new notions of patriotism and fatherland, and released new cultural energies that had national implications. Again, this raises the question of how new these things really were and of how they related to earlier forms. On the other hand, Ute Planert's chapter on 'international conflict, war, and the making of modern Germany, 1740–1815' is a superb survey which gives an excellent sense of the complexity of the period. This reiterates the arguments Planert has made elsewhere concerning a *Sattelzeit* in the development of German nationalism, a concept which enables her to recognize continuities as well as innovations. For example, she emphasizes that nationalist enthusiasm in the first two decades of the nineteenth century was 'predominantly a media event created by the educated elite' and that in south Germany many still hoped for the return of the Habsburgs and the restoration of the *Reich* as late as 1814.

But was war really the main motor in the development of nationalism? Were not other factors equally important at various points? Recent work has emphasized the significance of political struggles, but also of print cultures and other media (for example, the visual arts and music), transportation systems, leisure cultures, travel, tourism, even commercial and manufacturing cultures in generating, shaping or reinforcing national and regional identities. To underscore the centrality of war both ignores these recent developments in research and seems to revert to a notion of German exceptionalism that many historians have abandoned over the last two or three decades.

**Retallack:** First of all, I'm not sure I agree with the premise of the question: I don't think this *Handbook* offers a master narrative. Moreover, it is unwise to lump 'older accounts' together. Consider A.J.P. Taylor's *The Course of German History*: no one would say that war wasn't central to his analysis. Nor am I aware that authors of more recent textbooks, surveys, or collected essays have neglected war as a central feature of German history: their readers and students would howl if they did. The two *Short Oxford Histories of Germany* that deal with the Imperial and Nazi eras contain three essays dealing directly with the two world wars. The historiography of the Holocaust is increasingly attentive to its wartime context (in eastern Europe above all). And the wartime experiences of ordinary Germans provide some of the most compelling passages in Ian Kershaw's recent book *The End* and in the third volume of Richard J. Evans's history of the Third Reich. What this *Handbook* offers us for the first time is a longer historical view that integrates Germany's many wars into a fuller account of its social, economic, cultural and intellectual development. Besides the multiple perspectives we are given on the First and Second World Wars, and despite the relative neglect accorded to the wars of 1864, 1866 and 1870/71, here we find rich, bold statements about the centrality of war. Ute Planert could not be more programmatic at the outset of her chapter: 'In the beginning was not Napoleon, but war'. In a different register, three essays in Part IV, by Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, Andrew Port and Andreas Daum, complement each other perfectly in charting transitions from defeat to division to Cold War. So this is not a case of too many cooks spoiling the broth. Benjamin Ziemann stirs the pot pretty vigorously when he writes that the First World War was (merely?) 'a catalyst of change' and not 'a fundamental caesura and immediate cause of rapid change'. But there is no harm in asking readers to consider how Germans got into and out of hot water when war *seemed* to be their only option in an overheated international setting.

**4. Much of the handbook's content follows familiar patterns of periodization. Alongside these, it also includes essays that take a thematic approach to cultural dimensions of German history, such as the sense of place, and gender, and it accords a prominent place to religion. Some scholars have argued that cultural history cannot simply be grafted onto existing political narratives, and the associated periodization, but that it represents a different epistemological project, which asks different questions of the past, and entails different notions of change and continuity. How does this handbook reconcile these different projects?**

**Retallack:** The huge time spans covered by Parts II and III and the much briefer periods covered by Parts IV and V created handcuffs and challenges for each author. The manner in which they have addressed those challenges makes explicit their 'situated' and 'positioned' scholarship, and as readers we would be much the poorer if they had not done so. That doesn't mean that we can't quibble about the relative balance each author assigns to cultural dimensions of German history and all the other ones. For example, the editor notes in his introduction that by considering the period 1860–1945 (Part III) as a whole, we can better understand the 'experiment' of the unified German nation state. That understanding, in turn, 'places less stress' on 'specific governments, regimes, and revolutions'. However, still with reference to Part III, it is an open question

how far one should go in downplaying historical institutions, events and systems in order to stress continuity and culture (not to mention Catholics, who certainly get their due in these chapters too). I am also not convinced that cultural history demands different notions of change and periodization. In fact few authors appear to have had difficulty reconciling political narratives and cultural approaches. On the contrary: by the time we read the fourth capsule summary of the *Kulturkampf* we are not in any doubt that it was a Bismarckian strategy, a liberal initiative, a cultural conflict and a transnational issue all rolled into one. More details on other important topics would have been welcome, particularly when the period 1860–1945 encompasses such a large proportion of ‘modern German history’ (as distinct from early modern history and from political science).

**Vick:** Up to a point, the authors seem to have exercised useful flexibility in setting the period parameters, as for instance with the chapters on the economy, where James Brophy and Cornelius Torp exchange batons roughly in the middle of the nineteenth century (1850–1860), in neither case feeling compelled to adhere to the political benchmark year 1870. The pieces on migration by Ernest Benz and by Sebastian Conrad and Philipp Ther similarly found their own periodization, spanning the years 1760 to 1948 with a break around 1880. Many authors chose to reconcile the cultural and political projects by searching for points of intersection and interaction between them. Celia Applegate’s essay on place, and that on gender by Ann Goldberg, for example, at once set out the longer-term, distinctive narrative appropriate to their fields as well as exploring the permutations of their subjects within the politically-defined periods, say, changes in notions of *Heimat* in the Third Reich and the postwar era, or the social condition of women in the *Kaiserreich* and Weimar, as these phenomena were shaped in part by political trends and forces. The economic realm as one that reveals continuities in development across the political caesuras, at the same time that politics and war exerted strong pressures on the economy and society, also came out quite clearly in the economic chapters, particularly in that of Tooze. Similarly, many of the more strictly ‘political’ contributions made consistent efforts to highlight ways in which social, economic and cultural changes affected political trends, or at least marched in tandem with them (the editor Helmut Smith’s piece on the *Kaiserreich* for example did a fine job of that). Gender and women’s history did have less presence than expected, outside Ann Goldberg’s very solid thematic chapter, and some of the contributions for the post-45 period. This may result in part from the privileging of the political in the periodization. There may also be some teleological skewing of perspective in that the periodization at times emphasizes continuities over potential breaks. Weimar in particular was somewhat elided as a distinct period within the 1919–1945 sweep, when arguably the differences pre- and post-1933 are greater than those pre- and post-1961 (the date chosen to divide the coverage of the period from 1949–1989 into separate chapters; Weimar did not receive its own chapter).

**Fulbrook:** The essays in Part I do an excellent job of tracing continuities and change across the centuries, weaving constructions of identity—as ‘Germans’, as people tied to and moving beyond particular places of emotional significance, as gendered subjects—through different periods. Unexpected connections are explored and illuminated,

providing new approaches to topics which have been looked at from other, often more restricted perspectives. It is indeed difficult, always but perhaps especially in the German case, to separate ‘culture’ from social and political developments, as becomes clear in later sections of the handbook. This is more than evident, for example, in Koepnick’s remarks about ‘culture after Auschwitz’, and the significance of the different contexts of creative writing in East and West Germany as well as after 1989. The collection is quite successful in ensuring cross-references between essays, or at least not excluding further discussion, from a different perspective, of issues which have been raised in other locations within the handbook.

On the other hand, some essays do address the more standard features of a given place and period, successfully sandwiching more intensive analysis of changing cultures and societies. Thus in Part IV, essays on major historical moments surround in-depth analyses of significant aspects; these often work extremely well in conjunction with one another. Andrew Port, for example, presents an accomplished review of the two German states in the Cold War period prior to the erection of the Berlin Wall, linking key developments in political and economic history with the history of mentalities, the processes of Sovietization and Americanization, and questions of overcoming the past. The following essays, including Uta Poiger on the 1960s in the light of debates about youth and cultural changes, as well as Donna Harsch on consumption and (post-) industrial society and Benjamin Ziemann on religion, provide essential in-depth understanding of the nature of the unfolding societies and cultures, prior to Andreas Daum’s depiction of key turning points on the domestic and international political fronts.

In comparison with the overwhelming emphasis on death and destruction in the preceding section, Part III, it is only too evident that 1945 does remain—for all the need to address and explore continuities across what was far from a ‘zero hour’—arguably the single most significant turning point in German history. This means, all the more, that history should precisely *not* be taught in terms of discrete periods divided by changes of regimes, but rather in terms of the continuing significance of preceding periods for later developments. This is so both in the constitutions and mentalities of the people who were constantly seeking, in so many different ways, to deal with legacies of the past and to make what they saw—very variously, in always contested ways—as a better future; and in the structural, social, political and economic circumstances in which they sought to achieve culturally and ideologically driven goals.

**Whaley:** Despite the insistence of some scholars on the fundamental incompatibility of political history and cultural history, many readers simply do want books that make the links. Students of history want to know how to make sense of culture in a given period. Students of literature and culture more generally want to know how culture relates to the broader historical framework. The problem is that culture and politics often develop according to different chronologies, and in a volume such as this the danger is that culture ends up being treated as something that simply illustrates or reacts to political developments. The *Handbook* offers several alternative narrative strands that stand alongside the political narrative. The two thematic articles in Part I are not particularly successful. Celia Applegate seems to argue that place was important to Germans precisely because of the absence of a nation. But she makes no reference at all to the existence of any

sense of nation, however defined, in the eighteenth century or before. Ann Goldberg's survey chapter devoted to 'women and men' from 1760 to 1960 confines itself to a straightforward outline of gender relations, but too much is missing to make this a particularly useful account: her chapter manages to side-step most of the interesting questions about the history of the *Frauenbewegung*. There are three chapters on culture. Ritchie Robertson's piece on nineteenth-century literature is one of the very best contributions. He challenges the canon formed in the late nineteenth century and in doing so comes up with a strikingly original interpretation of nineteenth-century literature. He also significantly includes Austria in a superb overview of the century that one can confidently recommend to students of both history and literature. By contrast, the reflections of Stephen D. Dowden and Meike G. Werner on the 'place of modernism' fail to provide the same kind of comprehensive survey. They too include Austrian culture, which is commendable, but their focus on modernism from the late nineteenth century through to the 1950s and 1960s somehow manages to leapfrog Nazism and the whole question of culture in the Third Reich. Lutz Koepnick's chapter on 'culture in the shadow of trauma' is in many ways as good as Robertson's and provides an admirable guide to German culture (both GDR and FRG, both literary and visual) in the later twentieth century that will be equally illuminating to students of history and students of literature. The three essays devoted to religion (George S. Williamson, Rebekka Habermas, Benjamin Ziemann) also work well, both in relation to the other chapters devoted to the respective periods with which they deal and as a set of pieces that one might wish to read as an outline of German religious history from the eighteenth century to the late twentieth century. Anyone reading the cultural and religious strands separately should make sure to conclude with William A Barbieri's chapter 'Towards a Multicultural Society?' in Part V, which forms a marvellous coda to them both.

**Wright:** Above all, writing German history now should, it seems to me, take a multi-centred approach. There were signs of this approach in many parts of the volume, but one major telling reflection and criticism does I think sum up the problem: too often, chapters that looked as though they might have quite different things to add in fact led to similar points and even similar examples being used. Certain broadcasts by Goering in the early 1940s were used to make similar points in many sections. Examples abound of other points of repetition and overlap. For an 800-page collection of essays to have so many rewritings of similar themes with only a subtly different focus begs the question—what could a collection of that size and weight do if it had instead given opportunities to frame some of the chapters around themes such as childhood, propaganda, technology, the diaspora, or if some chapters had been organized along strictly regional lines? So many of those students of German history who have the interest to dip into a book of this size would have learned an enormous amount from a discrete chapter not just on German communities in eastern Europe, but on the Prussian 'heartland' itself—not to mention Berlin. But the freshness of perspective that such alternative structures could have developed seemed to me to be lacking from much of this. The themes of literature, death and faith were, I felt, some of the strongest in the book, and allowed for a richer perspective; I would have liked to see more of this by the articulation of other, similarly rich focus-changing themes.

**5. How well does the genre of the handbook—with its implied goals of objectivity, authority, disinterested reliability and comprehensiveness—sit with our current insistence on the subjective, situated, interested and positioned quality of historical scholarship? Is there a tension between what a handbook might aspire to deliver as a teaching text, and how it functions as a polemical intervention within its academic field?**

**Retallack:** *The master narrative is dead! Long live the collaborative, composite, contentious narrative!* I for one am happy to let go the notion that this kind of work can or should present any sort of overarching narrative. Why should we need an interpretative ‘key’ that has to open a door to new historical insight in every chapter? The editor went as far as he needed to go in suggesting the value of the topics that this Forum’s questions have asked us to mull over: periodization, the centrality of war, nationalism and transnationalism. However, the thoroughbred scholars he put in the starting gate did not all run the same race. True, they each offer a authoritative, reliable assessment of their topic. But these authors aren’t ‘disinterested’—why should they be?—and the comprehensiveness they bring to their account could hardly be more variable. What makes this *Handbook* different from any other multi-authored volume, besides its scope? Not much. The decision to assign a number to every subsection of every chapter is ‘handbookish’. But will this work be used differently from other collections of essays by teachers who want to challenge their students to think outside the box or get up to speed on a specific subfield of German history? Neither budding scholars nor their mentors should forget that they are reading essays, not entries in an encyclopedia. On one level, then, ‘handbook’ is a misnomer. On another level, this genre will always have to compete with two other genres that have a more established place in scholarship (and German scholarship in particular): first, the huge monograph based on original archival research; second, the monumental work of synthesis by a single author. We will always need the former to keep the field alive between efforts at stock-taking. And I hope we will always appreciate the latter when they are written by such giants as Thomas Nipperdey, Otto Pflanze and James J. Sheehan. Some of these single-author syntheses feel more ‘handbookish’ to me than most chapters in Smith’s volume. Of course some entries are so clear and accessible—no muss, no fuss—that they fit perfectly into the handbook genre. But many others are too provocative and too elegant for that. Returning to my earlier metaphor, these essays were written by thoroughbreds who could not be hitched to any wagon. I see no cause for complaint there. On the contrary—and this is my final point—such essays (James Brophy’s more than any other) remind us that we do our students a disservice if we imagine that teaching texts should not include interventions in a chosen academic field, polemical or not.

**Fulbrook:** This does not read as a whole as a polemical intervention, since there is no one distinct perspective presented across the disparate parts; yet it is certainly also not a standard textbook providing a review of the relevant literature in each field or a balanced overview of key debates and contrasting approaches. Many of the essays wilfully develop opinionated takes on their respective topics, which are themselves often constructed and addressed in an original manner, rather than aiming to provide any kind of standard textbook coverage. Students would in the case of some essays need an already quite

advanced level of knowledge to be able to follow and appreciate the argument. Some are 'essays' in the best sense of the word, taking issue with other current approaches, marshalling examples and quotations in service of quite sophisticated arguments, rather than presenting the kind of 'state of play' overview that a less advanced student might require. Thus, for example, William Hagen's stimulating discussion of the relations between colonial ambitions in eastern Europe, racism and the Holocaust is highly suggestive; but it does not recover the ground generally included in introductory courses in this area. Thus it would probably be more suitable for an advanced seminar in conjunction with other texts; it is not an essay which could be assigned for undergraduates new to the area. Similar comments could be made about several other essays. There is generally a lack of chronological narrative or explanation of significant developments or turning points, which are often simply taken as given; more frequently, received views are subjected to critique and revision, which may cause difficulties for any student not already relatively well-versed in some version of a master narrative of events, dates, periods and debates. In this respect, it is not entirely clear what the constituency for such a book might be; few students (or more senior colleagues) would have either the stamina or desire to read the whole way through, but dipping in and out on particular themes is also not entirely satisfactory. Yet the whole is a great deal more than the sum of its parts: with the overlaps and mutual references, the collection provides a highly stimulating combination of essays reflecting on a wide range of facets of German history. It is certainly not a textbook in the older sense, nor a comprehensive reference work; but rather a volume of essays in which there is much to engage with, and which will thus prove a boon in teaching at advanced levels.

**Whaley:** Styles of history come and go, but there is surely a need for authoritative statements that summarize the state of knowledge at various times. There is no reason why a teaching text should not also be a polemical intervention. The question is, however, whether the *Handbook* really is novel. The main difference seems to be the choice of 1760 as a start date (though some chapters go back to 1740, where Robert von Friedeburg effectively concludes) and the choice of 1860 as a turning point rather than 1871. In the post-1956 period, the *Handbook* follows the rather conventional wisdom of defining the 1960s as the crucial turning point in the Federal Republic, rather than explore the crisis of the early 1970s, which is attracting increasing scholarly attention. Compared with the old Gebhardt (the 9th edition), this *Handbook* has many advantages. Where the Gebhardt was dry and doctrinaire, the *Handbook* is often lively and thought-provoking. Is it more authoritative? Like almost every other survey, it can do no more than reflect the authors' sense of the state of research to date. The absence of the kind of doctrinaire master plan that characterized the old Gebhardt and, even more so, the East German *Deutsche Geschichte in zwölf Bänden* is also positive. But in relation to the period before 1871, it has also given rise to a variety of views, not always compatible with each other, which some students may find confusing. Indeed a debate about the various arguments concerning nationalism, identity and new beginnings found in the introduction and Parts I and II of the *Handbook* would make a lively masters or research seminar. In general, the *Handbook* may well suit masters-level students and new research students better than undergraduate beginners. What kind of target audience did the editor and publisher have in mind? The editor's acknowledgements state that the volume aims to offer 'mid-level synthesis':

'neither historiographical overviews nor simply textbook glosses'; the *Handbook*, he emphasizes, aims to 'open, not close, a field'. To an English reader, it might seem that the target audience is to be located in the US universities and colleges. Few, if any, English institutions run courses covering the long span of German history from the mid-eighteenth century to the present. The needs of English students may well be better served by the excellent volumes of the *Short Oxford History of Germany*, which is due to be completed in 2012. Even so, while it may not be as novel as the publicity material suggests, much of the *Handbook* is very well done. It will not be the last word on modern German history, but it is a book that those who study the period will wish to consult.

**Vick:** There is of course some tension between the handbook *qua* objective repository of knowledge and the notion of authorial subjectivity, but perhaps less than one might think, and not so much more than in pre-postmodern versions of history (not to say modern). Even then, scholars recognized that they did not always agree, and participated in debates, sometimes quite polemical ones. When it came to writing a handbook entry as opposed to an essay, they might have tried to find a compromise position less open to objections, and hence in some sense more objective. But authors could also simply try to make clear what the majority or standard view might be, and then indicate some of the variety of alternative views, or those times when he or she was advancing one of those other positions, perhaps even on the basis of new research. It is important to remember in this respect that knowledge is both subjective and inter-subjective, and that the latter realm allows substantial room for agreement as well as disagreement, even rather often for an element of consensus (as in the thought of Frank Ankersmit or Gianni Vattimo). From the perspective of most of us as teachers, I suspect we would be happy as long as the *Handbook* contributions still make clear that the process of knowledge creation is just that, an ongoing process, proceeding from a dialectic between the subjective and inter-subjective, and offering a variety of interpretations from which students, like historians, have to choose on the basis of sound, well-articulated reasons. For the most part, the contributions do a good job of that. Many indeed question older, or even still-standard interpretations of certain periods and themes, but they usually include a brief, fair description of the other side before moving on to their own.

**Wright:** Can a handbook do both these things simultaneously? I think the answer is given by the volume itself: in some articles and sections of the work, notably those I have mentioned in my previous answers, a real freshness of perspective does come across. But in order to reconcile the quest for originality more successfully with the aspiration to authoritative handbook status, it seems to me we are missing one important level of reflection here—a level that is important for any 'handbook of history', and that is a reflection on the situation of the *Handbook* itself as a work of history. Or an at least ironic acknowledgement that this is one more book in a field that has a rich and controversial past. I have suggested, provocatively, by referring to Treitschke, that the ambition to write a general global history of Germany needs to prompt at least a modicum of the sort of ironic reflection which would be easy to provide through a proper historiographical survey. So at least one major essay on German history and German historians would have helped the reader gain a sense of how our search for truth as historians is never short-circuited by a failure to recognize the subjective approach of historians themselves.

As a French historian, I am impressed and delighted when I read German historians such as Axel Korner laying out discussions of the way in which generational conflict has shaped the rewriting of German narratives, sometimes radically and controversially, as with the reception of Daniel J. Goldhagen's work among young people in Germany. But is this work of history an 'old history' or a 'new history'? These distinctions are not perhaps as facile as they may seem, especially given the amount of ink spilt over them. The point here is that it is not possible to know clearly how the handbook is situated in these terms. There are similar challenges to undertake in French history, for example as we consider the French Second World War experience as it plays out today. But without a sense that there are structures and narratives that are open to challenge in the history of a nation then—perhaps unwittingly—the impression of impressive objectivity is unfortunately all too easy to perpetuate. Finally, the writing of such works is a real team project. But the team of historians brought together here could have made its plurality more transparent, precisely through a historiographical survey. After all, it is through history itself, as much as war, that the qualities and definitions of Germanness that we are concerned with have been partly imagined and articulated.