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ANTHONY McELLIGOTT (ed.), *Weimar Germany*, Short Oxford History of Germany (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 344 pp. ISBN 978 0 19 928006 3. £55.00 (hardback). ISBN 978 0 19 928007 0. £18.00 (paperback)

The history of the Weimar Republic has always been the subject of intensive research, and this is still true today. But if we look at current work on the topic, it quickly becomes clear that priorities have changed. For some time now, the Weimar Republic's failure has no longer been at the centre of interest. It no longer plays its earlier dominant role as a political example of a democracy's loss of power and self-sacrifice.

In fact, the historiography of the Weimar Republic has long since completed its own 'cultural turn'. This, however, has only been possible against the background of the pioneering older works that highlighted its crucial problems and the reasons for its political instability and ultimate collapse. The findings of these works continue to be valid. Yet it is also true that the Weimar Republic no longer needs to be pressed into service primarily as a negative foil for the Federal Republic and to validate its political legitimization. Given the Federal Republic's mature traditions and secure basis in civil society, the significance of Weimar as a historical-political argument has, if not disappeared entirely, certainly become much weaker. Dichotomies that were previously dominant, such as those between 'republican' and 'anti-republican', have moved into the background in favour of the ambiguities of Weimar culture. The narrative of the Weimar Republic thus no longer necessarily encompasses its flawed development and the failure of Germany's first democracy, giving rise to the German triad of democracy, dictatorship, and the successful re-founding of democracy after 1945. Instead, more recent research focuses on the experiential history of cultural modernity.

The edited collection under review here fits into this context, but has the great advantage of avoiding any methodological one-sidedness. The editor rightly emphasizes the fundamental problems inherent in looking back at the Weimar Republic 'from the vantage point of "1933"' (p. 5), stressing instead the openness and indeterminacy of Germany's first democracy. Starting from here, the most important factors weighing down the Weimar Republic are named, but following the lead of Detlev Peukert, the editor and authors overwhelm

ingly choose the 'ambiguities of "classical modernity"' as their point of reference, around which the chapters are structured. As Anthony McElligott points out, these ambiguities largely grew out of the Weimar Republic's social modernization, which was highly advanced in international comparison. The result was that conditions were chronologically out of step with each other, something that was characteristic of the Weimar Republic.

In a total of nine chapters, this volume treats the essential themes in a balanced way. McElligott's detailed analysis of political culture understands this term as covering both the constitutional structure of the Weimar Republic and the increasing tendency, anchored in the constitution, towards a state drawing on plebiscitary legitimation, going beyond the parliamentary system. In accordance with the existing research, William Mulligan highlights the problematic role of the Reichswehr, which aimed for a militarization of society and the rebirth of Germany's great power status. While Wolfgang Elz and Harold James concisely sum up the main problems of Weimar foreign policy and economic development, John Bingham, Karl Christian Führer, Adelheid von Saldern, and Kathleen Canning provide source-based analyses of the urbanity of the Weimar Republic, the creation of a new mass and leisure culture, new ways of living, and the role of women. All four authors emphasize the specific ambivalence between the avant-garde modernity of Weimar culture, and its conservative or even backward-looking elements. This comes across especially clearly in the area of gender roles. The completely new scope for action which women achieved, especially in an urban culture, was followed at the end by a bitter debate about double earners and the reproductive duty of women which merged almost seamlessly into the Nazi period.

The history of the Weimar welfare state is also characterized by such ambivalences. Young-Sun Hong, however, rightly warns against taking a view that all too simplistically advocates a continuity thesis. Even a 'dialectical continuity' (p. 203) in Peukert's sense in Young-Sun Hong view plays only a subordinate part. Rather, he argues, Nazi welfare policy's fixation on racism and eugenics must be taken into account.

The Jews more than any other population group represented the specific ambiguity of Weimar culture. To the extent that they embodied 'modernity', internationalism, and cosmopolitanism, they attract-

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ed the hatred of those who feared that these things would lead to Germany's decline. Yet German Jewry was by no means homogeneous, containing a wide range of traditions and orientations which are described impressively by Anthony D. Kauders.

Written throughout by acknowledged specialists, this volume represents the most up-to-date research. The essays are clearly structured and fluently written, and paradigmatically connect basic information with a presentation of the most important historical problems. Cleverly selected references make it easy to follow up topics with further reading. For an English-speaking student readership in particular, a number of key themes could have been treated in more depth, such as the history of the 1918–19 revolution, the problems of the party system, and the rise of National Socialism and its electorate. Nonetheless, the volume is highly recommended as an introduction to the topic, as a source of quick information, and especially for academic teaching.

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