“Die Herrschaft ‘des nationalen Sozialismus’ komme noch.” (“The rule ‘of national socialism’ is yet to come.” Friedrich Naumann, 1903, quoted by C. Werth)

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Research agenda and scope

The term “national socialism” intuitively conjures up, and not without reason, the most morbid associations: Nazism, Fascism, the Third Reich, the Holocaust. National socialism, indeed, deserves to be numbered among the defining features of these historical phenomena. Yet the prevailing usage of the term has tended to throw the baby with the bathwater, misleadingly conflating national socialism with extreme right-wing ideology (and, in the German context, with Nazism). Ever since the fall of the Third Reich, the term “national socialism” has been cowering beneath the swastika’s forbidding shadow, incapable of setting itself loose from that conceptual and historiographical quarantine.

My prospective dissertation aims to take a first step towards breaking the spell cast over “national socialism”. It seeks to demonstrate that national socialism was a far broader phenomenon than Nazism or fascism, in terms of both its sociocultural reach and its temporal depth. Socioculturally, national socialism will hopefully be shown to have flourished as naturally in the discourse of bourgeois reformist circles as it thrived in the minds of revolutionary right-wing ideologues and activists. Temporally, my dissertation will try to furnish proof to the full-blown existence of national socialism in bourgeois discourse well before the interwar period.

More specifically, my dissertation will conduct a two-tiered examination of national socialism in bourgeois circles in Wilhelmine Germany (1890-1918). The first tier, covering the pre-1914 period, will try to show that the discourse of national socialism was already in full bloom before the outbreak of the Great War. The second tier, chronologically coextensive with World War I, will examine the bourgeois discourse
of national socialism against the backdrop of war as existential national crisis. My investigation will assess the role played by that discourse in legitimizing and sustaining Germany’s catastrophic war effort, especially its ideological role in the establishment of Germany’s (in)famous war economy. In addition to the separate exploration of each of the two time-periods, an important task of my research will also be to examine the complex relationship between them, revealing continuities as well as discontinuities, and discussing the significance of these temporal configurations.

The terms “bourgeois” and “discourse” are employed here in a rather loose sense, designed mainly to delineate negatively the boundaries of my research in accordance with its particular agenda. The term “bourgeois” is intended to exclude both left- and right-wing anti-bourgeois and revolutionary social actors. My dissertation thereby exempts itself from having to deal with manifestations of national socialism not only in various predecessors of the Nazi party, but also in German social democracy. My aim is to explore national socialism in circles that in many respects held an affirmative stance towards the existing political and socioeconomic order, but at the same time were deeply concerned about some of its fundamental features. It is the presence of national socialism in these social circles, in or close to the mainstream of Wilhelmine society, that provides the starkest counterpoint to the extreme right-wing movements with which national socialism is traditionally identified.2

The term “discourse” is also employed here in a loose and negative mode. “Discourse” refers here to conceptual constellations circulating through social networks and occupying roughly what Keith Baker (1990: 14) called the “complex middle ground, where ideas seem neither to merge with the practice of concrete social life nor to separate
out as the object of a set of specialized intellectual activities.” The discursive orientation of my research means that concrete political activity (e.g., policy formulation and implementation) will not be investigated, unless it is directly relevant for the clarification of certain issues at the discursive level and no more than will be required for that specific purpose. At the other end of Baker’s spectrum, canonical and purely philosophical texts will comprise only a small portion of my primary sources.

Two final points concerning the general agenda of my dissertation must be clarified immediately. First, my inquiry will persistently seek to avoid a teleological narrative presenting pre-1918 national socialism as the embryonic form of Nazism or as “anticipating” Nazism in some way. Such a teleological frame would defeat the above-mentioned begriffsgeschichtliche agenda of removing national socialism from beneath the Nazi shadow. The aim, rather, is to set up national socialism as a concept with a life of its own, such that ultimately it would become part of the historical, non-teleological context within which Nazism can be better understood. Wilhelmine national socialism must be fleshed out within the framework of its own historical context; only then, once its independent historico-conceptual foothold has been secured, can it start to shed new, richer light upon the interwar years. Only then can National Socialism be assessed in terms of the broader context of “national socialism” and not vice versa.

A second point I wish to stress is that my research, even though it is restricted to Germany, is not intended as a resuscitation of the now notorious Sonderweg thesis, i.e. the claim that it is Germany’s purported digression from the “normal”, “Western” road to modernity that is accountable for the triumph of Nazism and the perpetration of the Holocaust. I do not wish to argue that national socialism was a purely German
phenomenon. Indeed, I believe an examination of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth
century bourgeois discourses in Britain, France, and Austria (to mention just the most
important European countries at that time) would yield substantial evidence of national
socialism as well. Thus in France, the reformist doctrine of “solidarism” – propounded
primarily by Léon Bourgeois (1907), who in turn synthesized ideas of Alfred Fouillée
(1885, 1910), Emile Durkheim (1958, 1997), and others – is in many ways a doctrine of
national socialism. Solidarism, and the related discourse that proliferated through
numerous bourgeois movements of social reform, stressed the need for national harmony
and social cohesion in an age of crass egotistic materialism and increasing atomization
and alienation of the individual: a set of themes very familiar from the German arena.4 In
short, German national socialism must be understood as merely part of a European-wide
phenomenon.

“National socialism” and auxiliary concepts

National socialism is a complex phenomenon which, accordingly, requires an
elaborate conceptual apparatus in order to probe its depths and grasp its historical
significance. In what follows, therefore, I will start by presenting the basic ideal type of
national socialism, followed by a series of auxiliary concepts and analytical distinctions
designed to enhance the heuristic powers of the basic ideal type and to situate the latter
within a broader theoretical context. These concepts and distinctions are (in their order of
presentation): (1) the political-economic logic of late modernity; (2) economistic vs. non-
economistic political-economic discourse; (3) social hermeneutics as an inflection of non-
economistic political-economic discourse; (4) positive vs. negative social hermeneutics;
diachronic, counterfactual, and inverted negative hermeneutics. While each element in this series serves as a kind of conceptual artery from which the next element branches off, each element also has its own autonomous heuristic value, its own immediate contact with the empirical domain. Accordingly, as I go about elaborating the series, I will include references to the ways in which its elements will hopefully touch upon and help to illuminate some aspect or other of Wilhelmine national socialism.

National socialism: a basic ideal type

The term “national socialism” experienced relatively infrequent usage in Wilhelmine Germany. Concomitantly, my research will not take primarily the form of a semasiological *Begriffsgeschichte* tracing the multifarious and shifting meanings of the term itself. Rather, “national socialism” will be employed as an ideal type seeking to highlight a particular conceptual constellation, a discursive formation that existed and circulated historically despite its partial tendency to remain nameless. This ideal type is based in part on preliminary encounters with relevant cases in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Germany, France, and Austria; and in part on Zeev Sternhell’s extensive explorations of national socialism in the framework of his work on fascism, proto-fascism, and Zionism (1973, 1976, 1986, 1994, 1998, 2000). Such a broad ideal-typification is intended to suggest that national socialism might have constituted a discursive axis shared by a broad spectrum of political thinkers and movements, an axis transcending our conventional left/right, reformist/revolutionary, or bourgeois/anti-bourgeois classifications. At any rate, the ideal type I will now present is not necessarily a finished product; it may well undergo all kinds of modifications as I work through the historical sources.
The ideal-typical category “national socialism” refers to a mode of social, political, and cultural thinking that calls for social solidarity and harmony by force of, and/or in intimate relation with, common membership in the national community. It views the nation as the primary social unit and strives to harmonize and organize the social according to the needs of the nation. More specifically, the social vision of national socialism typically revolves around two organizing principles: national service and national participation. First, the idea of *national service* envisions a state of affairs wherein the productive exertions of all members of the nation are placed at the service of, or at least in concurrence with, the nation’s well-being. This idea entails an abhorrence towards class conflict, and instead demands cross-class cooperation in the interest of the nation. National socialism is, concomitantly, suspicious towards any inter- or trans-national form of class activity or organization. The idea of national service also tends to favor a productivist rather than class logic, viewing the distinction between producers and non-producers (or even parasites) as the most fundamental and existential social divide and source of social conflict within the nation. Second, the idea of *national participation* strives to guarantee that all members of the nation are integrated both materially and culturally into the life of the nation.

Capitalism and the free play of economic forces are criticized by national socialism only insofar as they pose obstacles to the establishment of a healthy, harmonious nation. Consequently, national socialism seldom seeks to bring about a comprehensive overhaul of the capitalist system. Rather, national socialism advocates organizational measures and/or reformist agendas designed to achieve a number of possible objectives, all of which fall short of dismantling the capitalist economy. Such
measures and agendas may include: channeling economic activity in its existing forms (or
certain segments of that activity) towards the fulfillment of the material, cultural, or
political needs of the nation; eliminating (metaphorically or literally) the existence or
dominance of parasitic social elements living at the expense of the nation with no
contribution whatsoever on their part; promoting “social peace” by way of
institutionalization or encouragement of cross-class cooperation; or bolstering and
restoring certain norms and values, aesthetic forms and principles, and cherished cultural
heritages that are considered to make up the spiritual backbone of a harmonious nation.

Underlying the various programs of socioeconomic and cultural reform
propagated by national socialism is a comprehensive “reading” of the logic of collective
life and its pathologies under modern, industrial conditions, a reading that is engaged in
active contestation with other, especially Manchesterian and Marxian, readings. Like
Manchesterism and Marxism, national socialism articulates a certain vision of the
political-economic logic of modern collective life. At the same time, national socialism
diverges from the other two in the specific shape it wishes to bestow upon this logic.

The political-economic logic of late modernity

One of the defining characteristics of late modernity is the mutual entanglement
of the political and the social. In very rough terms, “the social” is that dimension of
collective life which has to do with providing for material and non-material needs of the
members of a given human grouping construed as a collective household. 8 “The
political”, within the political-economic logic, is that dimension of collective life which
has to do with giving shape, direction, order and meaning to the social: with shaping, in
other words, the conditions of life in common and the rules according to which this
shaping occurs.⁹ These two analytically distinguishable dimensions of late-modern collective life have come to form a skein which it is perhaps no longer possible to unwind back into two separate threads, despite the occasional tantalization on account of a glimpse of political thread here, a loose end of social thread there. It is this mutual entanglement of the political and the social – in its ever-changing historical vicissitudes and multiple, contested conceptual and discursive constructions – to which my term “political-economic logic of late modernity” refers.¹⁰

The social-political entanglement is not primarily an empirical one between certain concrete, empirically identifiable political institutions and other concrete socioeconomic phenomena. Rather, it is above all a logic underlying and informing the empirically given activities and institutions. The logical entanglement of the political and the social is, to be sure, always manifested in empirical political and social activities; but my historico-theoretical interest is in the historically contingent, conceptual-discursive contestation and construction of the logic itself. This focus on the stratum of logic is significant because surfaces can deceive: a given conception of the political-economic logic (e.g. national socialism) can manifest itself in more than one mode at the surface-level of empirically given political life. By fixing our gaze upon the deeper level of the underlying logic, it is possible to discern common threads running through apparently divergent movements, programs, actions, or institutions.

My dissertation will focus on national socialism as one of the major conceptual and discursive articulations of the political-economic logic in Wilhelmine Germany. Wilhelmine national socialism (in its various permutations) did not merely advocate certain changes in concrete, empirically identifiable political and socioeconomic
practices. It also represented a distinct conception of the political-economic logic underpinning German collective life, a conception comprising both a critique of the existing political-economic logic and a national socialist alternative.

**Economistic and non-economistic political-economic discourses**

The political-economic discursive field is studded with multifarious conceptions of the relationship between the political and the social. Within this variegated field, a distinction can be made between economistic and non-economistic discourses. Economistic political-economic discourses reduce both the political and the social to purportedly “natural” economic laws of production, exchange, and consumption.¹¹

Non-economistic political-economic discourses, however, are more important for our purposes, since it is this domain that national socialism inhabits. Non-economistic discourses insist on the irreducibility of both the social and the political to the economic. The relationship between the political and the social can appear in these discourses in two non-mutually exclusive forms. First, the relationship can be construed as socially oriented: that is, caring for the social is understood to be one of the principal tasks of the political. In contrast to economistic discourses, however, the non-economistic caring for the social follows (at least to some significant extent) an extra-economic roadmap.

Second, the political-social relationship can be construed as politically oriented: that is to say, the social is looked upon as a source of energy, as a kind of collective “human motor”¹² that can and must be harnessed for the sake of certain political endeavors (war, state-building, and so on).

National socialist discourse can display both social and political orientations or directionalities; thus the abovementioned vision of national participation can be regarded
as a socially oriented element of national socialism, while the idea of national service
seems to be a manifestation of political directionality. (The two types of orientation can
also appear in various degrees of admixture.) My research will need to flesh out the
discursive functions and historical dynamics of these two dimensions. For example, it
appears that the outbreak of the Great War brought about a massive shift of national
socialist discourse from social to political directionality, due to the perception of acute,
existential political crisis.

Whatever the specific directionality (i.e. political or social) attributed to the
political-social complex, the latter is sometimes conceived in non-economistic discourses
as analogous to a psychophysical entity. The social (or the strictly economic dimension
thereof) is regarded in this framework as, so to speak, the “physical” or “exterior”
dimension of collective life, whereas the political is understood as purveying the
collectivity with its interiority, i.e. its soul, its will, its self-consciousness, its ethical
content, or what have you. In this psychophysical model, the “political-economic” nexus
is given a broader “interiority-exteriority” inflection. Thus in the case of Wilhelmine
national socialism, so it seems, the national principle tends to function simultaneously as
supreme political end, ethical substance, and cultural content with which the social needs
to be imbued and for the sake of which the social needs to be cared for, harmonized,
organized and harnessed.  

Social hermeneutics

The interiority-exteriority template represents not merely a psychophysical
imaginary, but also a hermeneutic one. Hermeneutics has to do inter alia with attaching
some “inner” meaning or substance to externally perceived human artifacts. Modern
hermeneutic thought, from its theological beginnings through its nineteenth-century application to literary and historiographical criticism, has been preoccupied largely with written texts or agglomerations thereof (e.g., literary genres). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Dilthey (1989, 2002) accomplished a crucial transposition of hermeneutic theory from the textual sphere to social life as such. A transition, in other words, from textual to social hermeneutics.\(^\text{14}\)

Dilthey, however, was only the theoretically most articulate tip of the iceberg. Wilhelmine social thought and discourse seem in fact to have been saturated with a social hermeneutics of this type. The social world was often given a hermeneutic “reading” by sociologists, cultural critics, artists, political activists and others. That is to say, the social was conceived to be amenable to, and best understood through, attempts to grasp the inner content inhabiting the outer expressions of social life.

**Positive vs. negative social hermeneutics**

Social hermeneutics can manifest itself in two major modalities: positive and negative. These valences refer to the way the relationship between the inner and the outer is construed. Positive social hermeneutics represents the simple, straightforward conception of outer social phenomena as expressions of inner content, as explained above with respect to Dilthey. It assumes a fullness of interiority gradually recovered by the interpreter as she moves from her initial perplexity towards a mental state of understanding.

Negative hermeneutics, on the other hand, is more complex. It is a critically oriented hermeneutics that seeks to highlight certain negative tendencies in the dynamics of the inner-outer relationship: tendencies such as the depletion, hollowing-out, or moral
degeneration of the interiority of social life. At its methodological core, negative hermeneutics still relies upon discrete applications of positive hermeneutics: it is still engaged in attributing certain inner contents to outer expressions. But it goes beyond positive hermeneutics in that it perceives some kind of lack or emptiness in those inner contents.

Three types of negative hermeneutics

Negative social hermeneutics can appear in either diachronic, counterfactual, or inverted form. Diachronic negative hermeneutics traces the diminution of interiority across time. It links together a number of individual “positive” interpretations (at least two) into a temporal sequence that reveals an ongoing negative process. The second, counterfactual type of negative hermeneutics identifies a diminution of interiority not across time, but rather in relation to an explicit or implicit counterfactual model that usually represents some normative expectation as to the desirable state of affairs. The third, inverted type of negative hermeneutics is usually grafted upon one of the other two types. It is inverted in the sense that it not only identifies a diminished interiority, whether diachronically or counterfactually; it also attributes this diminution to an active impact exerted by the exterior form upon its own interiority. This inversion constitutes perhaps the most radical form of negative hermeneutics, since it disrupts the most fundamental logic underlying hermeneutic theory. Instead of the outer forms of social life serving merely as passive containers of inner content (as in classical positive hermeneutics), this social interiority is now conceived as subjected to the deleterious impingement of the constraints, demands, or sheer weight of its own exteriority.
In Wilhelmine national socialism, all three types of negative hermeneutics can be found in its critique of contemporary society. For example, Walther Rathenau’s concern about the “de-Germanization” (Entgermanisierung) characterizing the “age of mechanization” ([1911]1918a: 89ff; [1912]1918b: 50ff) is a blend of all three negativities. The diachronic dimension is evident immediately in Rathenau’s prefixes and suffixes; the counterfactual, in his distinction between soul and (rationalist, materialist, utilitarian) intellect as superior and inferior interiorities, respectively (1918b: 48f); and the inverted dimension surfaces as Rathenau discusses the subjugation of “all forces of thought and feeling” (i.e., all interiority) to the (exterior) demands of a mechanized society preoccupied with the ceaseless production of material goods (1918b: 51).

It is against the backdrop of these myriad hermeneutic negativities that national socialism calls for the rehabilitation of the nation’s interiority and its harmonization with the ineluctable demands of modern industrial society. One of the central tasks of my analysis of national socialist discourse will be to trace this movement from negative hermeneutics to hermeneutic social reform: the drive to imbue the social with national content against the backdrop of a perceived sociocultural (and, with the outbreak of the Great War, outright existential) crisis. More broadly, the negative-hermeneutic character of national socialism’s political-economic critique indicates the firm rootedness of national socialism in profound cultural anxiety.18
State of existing research

National socialism

National socialism as a phenomenon both transcending Nazism and predating 1918 was first given scholarly attention by Byrnes (1950) and Eugen Weber (1962) in the framework of French historiography. Yet both took national socialism to be a purely right-wing ideology, and so did every subsequent scholar who dealt with this issue. This is true as well for the work Zeev Sternhell, who has undertaken the most systematic analysis of national socialism to date in the framework of his entire oeuvre. Sternhell shows the centrality of national socialism in the French revolutionary right at the turn of the twentieth century, in European fascism, and in the ideological origins of the Zionist Labor movement in pre-state Palestine. However, despite their importance for demonstrating the broad scope of European national socialism, Sternhell’s writings nevertheless figure national socialism as a phenomenon largely restricted to forces at the fringes of European society.

The historiographical treatment of national socialism in Germany does not fare much better. Even when German national socialism appears at all in the literature, it does so in two modes: either sporadically, in the course of treating (and implicitly reducing national socialism to) other phenomena such as “reactionary modernism”, “the conservative revolution”, “National Bolshevism” and so on; or else as characterizing a specific thinker (such as Oswald Spengler) or movement (such as the DAP in Austria), without construing it as a phenomenon in its own right. The existing research on the German war economy and the discourse surrounding the war economy between 1914 and 1918 has also largely failed to flesh out the national socialist dimension of that
While Bruendel (2004) does identify the national socialist aspect of wartime discourse, his account lacks systematic conceptualization of national socialism, and fails to make the connection between wartime and prewar national socialist discourse. Klemperer (1957) similarly mentions the “socialist orientation” of the “war experience”, growing out of “a general national feeling of solidarity” (57). But his discussion thereof, spanning no more than three pages, underestimates the scope and depth of the phenomenon; and, like Bruendel, he disregards the rootedness of wartime national socialism in the prewar era.

Weißmann (1998) and Werth (1996) are notable exceptions to this general tendency of the existing literature. Weißmann offers a book-length examination of national socialism as a distinct ideological formation transcending the boundaries of Germany and described by him as a phenomenon of profound, epochal significance. But Weißmann’s account is seriously flawed in a number of ways. First, his conceptualization of national socialism is rather superficial, inaccurate, and at times bizarre. Second, Weißmann’s analysis of national socialism is restricted largely to the radical right. When he does mention non-right-wing strands of national socialism (such as the Fabians in Britain or Friedrich Naumann), they are only discussed fleetingly, and there is no serious attempt to identify the divergences as well as similarities between those different types of national socialism. Finally, and most dramatically, Weißmann’s alarming record as a “revisionist” historian of Nazism and the Holocaust casts a dubious light on his work on national socialism. Thus one of his critics has pointed out that, by emphasizing the continuity of the NSDAP with a broad and deep ideological tradition of national socialism, Weißmann sought to lend Nazism an image of respectability and to downplay
and divert attention from the centrality of racism for Nazism.26 My own research, by contrast, will make sure to distance itself from any implication in this kind of agenda in at least two ways. First, as noted earlier, I will seek to de-teleologize the concept of national socialism, and to leave it to future research to determine the impact of my conceptualization upon our understanding of Nazism. Second, even within this non-teleological schema, my general attitude towards national socialism and its historical consequences in World War I is a strongly critical rather than apologetic one. By extending national socialism to the mainstream of bourgeois society, I believe I do more to condemn the latter than to whitewash the former.

Werth (1996), the second major exception to the existing literature on German national socialism, examines eleven thinkers and movements that strove after a synthesis of nationalism and socialism in the interwar period. Werth goes as far as submitting Naumann and Rathenau to the same analytical framework as Jünger, Spengler and other revolutionary right-wing figures. Yet Werth’s work suffers from two important shortcomings. First, his account is a rather descriptive exposition of social and political ideas with almost no theoretical depth and only a minimal degree of historical contextualization. Werth presents each thinker or movement in isolation, thereby failing to grasp their interconnectedness as parts of a broad historical phenomenon. Second, Werth’s study does not treat the Great War and the period preceding it (with the exception of a brief discussion of Naumann and of Rathenau’s pre-1918 activity). That is of course a legitimate delimitation of the scope of investigation, but it leaves much work to be done in terms of highlighting the historical profundity of national socialism.
More general works on the relationship between nationalism and socialism have usually failed to observe national socialism as a synthesis that is greater than the sum of its parts. Most studies in this area are content with exploring the way socialists “proper” have viewed the phenomenon of nationalism, as a component that was inherently exogenous to their own socialistic outlook.²⁷ Jacob Talmon, in his monumental trilogy (1955, 1960, 1980), follows the *diverging* paths of nationalism and socialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (i.e. their mutual polarization), while completely ignoring their points of convergence.

**National socialism and the Wilhelmine bourgeoisie**

Bourgeois national socialism in Wilhelmine Germany has as yet received extremely scant attention as a phenomenon worth detailed examination in its own right. The literature on Friederich Naumann, a declared national socialist, provides ample proof of this. In Meyer (1967), the national socialist elements in Naumann’s thought appear only fleetingly. Shanahan (1951) is concerned with Naumann’s strong statism, including the tension between this statism on the one hand and his christian orientation, his liberalism, and his individualism on the other hand; the relation between Naumann’s social orientation and his nationalism is not discussed. Zimmermann (1982) does analyze certain aspects of Naumann’s national socialism, but he waves away the complex significance of the phenomenon by dubbing Naumann’s world-view as “‘national-social’ism”, cautioning in a footnote that “Naumann’s ‘national social’ism should not be confused with Hitler’s ‘National-Socialism’.”²⁸ This anti-teleological stance is not, of course, incorrect as such. But in Zimmermann’s case, it serves to block off any serious confrontation with national socialism as a broad and deep phenomenon in its own right,
regardless of its relation to Nazism. Theiner (1983) deals mainly with Naumann’s party-political activity; Naumann’s ideology is treated relatively marginally and is not integrated into the overall analysis of his political development.29

Düding (1972) devotes a little more attention to ideology, and even purports to map out Naumann’s “synthesis of nationalism and socialism” (63ff). Yet his efforts, too, are inadequate. First, the socialist and nationalist dimension are, curiously, discussed in two separate sections, thereby structurally undermining the author’s own idea of a synthesis between the two. Second, even when the nationalist dimension makes a brief appearance during the discussion of Naumann’s brand of socialism, the nationalist-socialist nexus is limited by Düding to the idea that, for Naumann, socialism can only be realized within the framework of a strong national state. While this idea certainly constitutes one aspect of Naumann’s national socialism, it is merely a small part thereof. Düding, in short, barely scratches the surface of the national socialist phenomenon. The lack of depth in Düding’s understanding of national socialism is accompanied by a lack of breadth: he discusses Naumann’s national socialism in complete isolation, as if Naumann and his Nationalsozialer Verein (NSV; National-Social Association) were the sole bearers of this ideological formation. Finally, Düding’s preoccupation with ideology at all is quite limited. Most of his book concentrates on the party-political life of Naumann’s National-Social Association, and he seems to deploy the terms “nationalism” and “socialism” (as well as “liberalism”) in the sense they possessed within that Wilhelmine party-political context, rather than in a political-theoretic orientation. In two early works on the NSV, dating back to the first half of the twentieth century – Gauger (1935) and Wenck (1905) – the nationalist-socialist synthesis figures more prominently
that in any other work. Yet here, too, national socialism is not conceptualized
systematically and is not grasped as a broad phenomenon transcending the limited case of
the NSV.\textsuperscript{30}

The most recent volume devoted to Naumann’s life and work, edited by Rüdiger
vom Bruch (2000), examines Naumann mainly in the double context of German
liberalism and social Protestantism (4). National socialism is not deemed to be a major,
defining framework of analysis. In other words, Naumann’s national socialism is
relegated to the sidelines, despite occasional acknowledgements in the book of the
centrality of nationalism in Naumann’s social thought.\textsuperscript{31}

Works discussing left-liberalism and bourgeois reformism in general do not
change the pattern established so far of ignoring national socialism. Heckart (1974),
focus mainly on the party-political and social dimensions of German liberalism, with
ideological patterns remaining relatively undeveloped; under these circumstances, it is
not surprising that the national socialist aspect of left-liberal thought and discourse fails
to surface in these studies. At most, there is mention of the attempts to infuse elements of
social reform into the classical liberal program, but the relation of this reformist
dimension to the liberals’ nationalist outlook is not explored. This lack of linkage
between nationalism and social reformism is also to be found in Hübinger (1988), who is
generally more sensitive to the ideational dimension. In Bruch (1985), the national-social
nexus surfaces occasionally in his meticulous portrayal of bourgeois reformism in the
Kaiserreich.\textsuperscript{32} Bruch sometimes even explicitly recognizes the national horizon of
bourgeois reformism,\textsuperscript{33} but no systematic development of the issue ensues. The same
tendency is repeated in Repp (2000). Nevertheless, the evidence these authors provide is sufficient to expect this direction of inquiry to be rewarding.\textsuperscript{34}

Perhaps the most encouraging recent historiographical signal comes from Eley and Retallack (2003), who associate the concept of “Wilhelminism” with “the nexus that formed around the turn of the century between capitalist dynamism, national state formation, and social improvement”, and consider this distinct configuration to be epitomized by Walther Rathenau (8). The authors thereby not only point up the centrality of the national-social nexus for the entire epoch, but also figure bourgeois reformism as its quintessential manifestation. This historiographical perspective suggests that the concept of national socialism might help to bring into sharper focus one of the most fundamental features of early-twentieth century Germany.

**Dissertation structure and selection of empirical cases**

The year 1914 seems to represent a crucial temporal watershed between two continuous, but nevertheless in some important respects discontinuous, periods in the life of Wilhelmine bourgeois national socialism. Accordingly, it will serve as a pivotal structural principle in my dissertation, dividing the latter into two main sections: prewar and wartime national socialism.

The rationale underlying this structure is twofold. First, there is the profound alteration, marked by the outbreak of the Great War, in the sociopolitical and cultural contexts in relation to which the discourse of national socialism oriented and defined itself. Before August 1914, national socialism was articulated in response to what was perceived as an ominous rise of class conflict and a profound cultural crisis permeating
all walks of society. During the war, these anxieties were replaced by a Janus-faced attitude: on the one hand, a conviction that Germany had become embroiled in a life-or-death struggle for its very existence (rather than merely for its moral fiber, social cohesion or cultural values); on the other hand, a perception of the Great War as an unprecedented historical opportunity for national rejuvenation and harmonization, for a radical overhaul of its entire political-economic logic.35

The second, and probably more crucial, reason for choosing 1914 as the dissertation’s pivot is that, during World War I, national socialism became a living reality in the form of Germany’s war economy. Not surprisingly, the establishment of the war economy was initiated and led by two figures, Walther Rathenau and Wichard von Moellendorff, who had already participated in the production and circulation of national socialist discourse before the war, and now found the ideal context – that of existential national crisis – to realize their ideas.36 Without the systematic organization of the national economy, of the national oikos, for the benefit of the war effort, Germany might well have been defeated within a few months’ time, due to a severe raw materials crisis.37 In other words, the war economy and its underlying, legitimating national socialist discourse furnished the structural and ideational conditions for the very possibility of carrying out a four-year war with such mind-boggling costs in human lives and such pervasive social devastation. This perspective highlights the profound historico-theoretical link between Rathenau and Moellendorff’s national socialism on the one hand and the blood-drenched fields of Verdun and the Somme on the other: the catastrophic unfolding of World War I needs perhaps to be understood, not simply as a hypertrophy of
the political, but as a hypertrophy of the political-economic logic in the garb of national socialism. 38

1890-1914: national socialism and the crisis of culture

The first, prewar section of my dissertation will trace the emanation of national socialism out of two tightly interwoven sites of bourgeois discursive production: (1) German sociology and political economy, and (2) social and political reformist movements, including the writings and activities of the individual actors associated with those movements.

The German social sciences were a major site of intellectual production of national socialist ideas. The latter crystallized at the junction of historicist thought and the critique of classical political economy, and received substantial impetus with the dominance of the Historical School of Political Economy 39 at the universities and at the Verein für Sozialpolitik (VfSP; Association for Social Policy). Gustav Schmoller and Adolf Wagner, two of the founding fathers of the Verein and venerated intellectuals in the Second Reich, expounded national socialist ideas as early as the 1870s. Schmoller, for example, viewed in 1872 the significance of the “social question” as deriving from the question of the “future of the German Empire” and “our [i.e. German] culture”. 40 Within this context, the principal aim of reform was, for Schmoller, to interpolate the lower classes in “harmony and peace” into the “organism of society”. 41 He advocated the idea of national participation through culture, education (Bildung), and welfare. 42 Underlying this social program was a negative-hermeneutic critique of contemporary society, including an admonition against the harsh mechanistic character of industrial work, which no longer has any “educating and cultivating” effect. 43 A similar negative
A second site of production of national socialist discourse were some of the many Vereine (associations) that sprouted in the dozens from the early 1890s onwards. The
most prominent national socialist movement is, of course, Friedrich Naumann’s *Nationalsozialer Verein* (NSV; National-Social Association). The activities, protagonists, and publications of this (admittedly short-lived) association will have to be explored in great detail.\textsuperscript{49} Another paradigmatic case seems to be that of the *Deutscher Werkbund*, an association established with the aim of elevating the aesthetic quality of German industrial, mass-produced commodities. As Schwartz (1996) brilliantly demonstrates, this mission of the *Werkbund* is not to be understood merely at the surface-level of an attempt to render German commodities more competitive in the international economy. At a deeper level, the *Werkbund* enterprise emerged out of a deep concern about the depletion of German culture under the conditions of industrial capitalism and mass society.\textsuperscript{50} The *Werkbund* might prove to be of prime importance for my research since, in its preoccupation with the culture-industry interface, it constitutes a paradigmatic instance of the hermeneutic inflection of bourgeois-reformist political-economic discourse. Moreover, the *Werkbund* drew into its orbit many stellar figures of bourgeois reformism, ranging from sociologists Sombart and Simmel to architects Hermann Muthesius and Peter Behrens.\textsuperscript{51} Other relevant *Vereine* might include the *Heimatschutz*, the *Dürerbund*, and the *Flottenverein* (Navy League). But, in order to keep my research within manageable proportions, my tendency at this point is to focus exclusively on the NSV and the *Werkbund* as two representative foci of national socialism in the *Vereine*.

In addition to examining these social and intellectual sites of discursive production as worthy of investigation in their own right, I will also try to determine the extent to which the architects of the German war economy took part in, and were
influenced by, the prewar discourse of national socialism. With respect to Rathenau, the existence of such links is suggested by Repp (2000: 262f).

1914-1918: national socialism at war

The outbreak of war witnessed a number of continuities. Thus the German social sciences remained an important discursive field, accompanying the establishment of the war economy with lively commentary and debate (Krüger 1983). Most of the scholars encountered in the prewar era will therefore continue to figure prominently in this section as well.

The main shift in focus compared to the prewar section will be a central preoccupation with those figures who became directly associated with the war economy: most prominently Rathenau and Moellendorff, but also Josef Koeth, Richard Sichler, Johannes Tiburtius, and others. Furthermore, it may prove worthwhile to go farther afield and examine the percolation of national socialism into the German army as the latter gradually assumed more and more authority over social, economic, and cultural life, realms into which it had never ventured before the war.52 However, at this point it seems to me that extending my research into the army would inflate my project to unwieldy proportions.
Tentative chapter outline

PART I – historiographical, theoretical, and analytical framework

1. Introduction: Research agenda and conceptual apparatus [This chapter will address the issues discussed in this prospectus under the sections “Research agenda and scope” and “National socialism and auxiliary concepts”, above]

2. Metatheory and methodology [see the section by the same name, below]

PART II – 1890-1914: national socialism and the crisis of culture

3. National socialism in the German social sciences [This chapter might turn out to be too massive and may therefore end up as two shorter chapters]

4. Friedrich Naumann’s national socialism

5. The National-Social Association

6. The Deutscher Werkbund

PART III – 1914-1918: national socialism at war

7. The civilian protagonists of the German war economy

8. The sociological discourse on the war economy

PART IV – Conclusions.
Metatheory and methodology

Conceptual history of the political

My dissertation research is configured as an application of Rosanvallon’s (2006) idea of a “conceptual history of the political”. Rosanvallon, a student of Claude Lefort and François Furet, laid out in his Collège de France inaugural lecture of 2002 the metatheoretical foundations for his project of an histoire conceptuelle du politique. Rosanvallon’s metatheory rests on four major pillars, all of which inform my research plan: (1) a distinction between “the political” and “politics”; (2) a historical dimension to the study of the political; (3) a conceptual or ideational dimension; and (4) rejection of exclusive reliance on canonical texts for the study of the political.

First, then, Rosanvallon draws a fundamental distinction between “the political” and “politics”. The political, for Rosanvallon, is both a “field” and a “project”. As a field, it is “the site where the multiple threads of the lives of men and women come together … allow[ing] all of their activities and discourses to be understood in an overall framework”. As a project, it is “an always contentious process whereby the explicit or implicit rules of what [the members of a community] can share and accomplish – rules which give a form to the life of the polity – are elaborated” (34). Politics, by contrast, is “the immediate field of partisan competition for political power, everyday governmental action, and the ordinary function of institutions.” The political, in other words, is what underlies, frames, and gives shape to politics as well as to society as such.

The definition of the political as a “project” immediately endows it with an ineluctable temporal and thus historical dimension, which brings us to the second pillar of Rosanvallon’s metatheory. “Such a conception of the political,” claims Rosanvallon,
makes a historical approach the condition of its thorough study. In fact, one cannot make sense of the political as I have just defined it except in recalling, in some tangible way, the breadth and density of the contradictions and ambiguities that run through it. (38)

A full and permanent closure of the conditions of life in common, according to this conception, is never possible. There would always remain some surplus of “contradictions and ambiguities”, “of trial and error, of conflict and controversy, through which the polity sought to achieve legitimate form” (38). The historicality of the political thus emerges from, is coterminous with, the latter’s contestability (i.e. absence of full closure) and contingency (i.e. absence of permanent closure). The study of the political, under these conditions, is to a large extent an analytic of this absence of immobility, of this fullness of motion through time.

A third pillar of Rosanvallon’s metatheory is the ineradicability of the conceptual or ideational dimension. The political as project, according to Rosanvallon, proceeds largely through an ongoing elaboration, contestation, and clarification of fundamental political concepts such as “democracy, liberty, equality, and so forth” (45). Concepts and, more generally, “[r]epresentations and ‘ideas’ amount in this approach to a structuring material of social experience. … [they] orient action, impose on the field of possibilities the limits of the thinkable, and demarcate the ground on which contest and controversy can take place” (45f).

We now arrive at the fourth pillar of Rosanvallon’s metatheory. His emphasis on the centrality of concepts and ideas notwithstanding, Rosanvallon does not advocate studying the political in the form of an intellectual history that isolates concepts and ideas
from their sociopolitical context. The political always unfolds “in the tangle of practices and representations” (46); therefore the study of the political has as its object not just works of great intellectual merit, but the entire range of phenomena comprising the tapestry of “political culture”: “the reception of literary works, the analysis of the press and movements of opinion, the life of pamphlets” and so on (46).

All four pillars are present in my dissertation plan. First, the distinction between politics and the political (first pillar) underlies my conception of the political-economic logic as distinct from the surface of political-economic activity and institutions. The latter can be regarded as a particular (and, in my view, central) modality of the political in late modernity. Second, in keeping with Rosanvallon’s historical notion of the political (second pillar), I construe the political-economic logic of late modernity as resisting full and permanent closure, as subject to ceaseless contestation and experimentation. Third, the combination of the third and fourth pillars situate Rosanvallon’s concept of the political as project precisely in Baker’s “complex middle ground” which earlier I identified with my notion of discourse qua socially circulating conceptual constellations. The political, according to the third pillar, does not (in Baker’s words) “merge with the practice of concrete social life”; but, as suggested by the fourth pillar, neither does the political completely “separate out as the object of a set of specialized intellectual activities”.

The ideal type

A conceptual history of the political requires conceptual apparatuses that would be sensitive to historical contingency and diversity and compatible with an interpretive
mode of historical inquiry. Weber’s ideal type, I believe, offers such an apparatus. The
Weberian ideal type, as presented in his essay, “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and
Social Policy” (1949), displays two major features. First, the ideal type is “one-sided” in
its conceptualization of empirical phenomena (90). It does not claim to identify the
“essence” of its empirical referents, but rather chooses to highlight a certain aspect of
those empirical cases, some aspect that is deemed significant by the investigator from a
certain cultural or value standpoint (64, 76, 81, 90). The ideal type thereby serves as a
heuristic tool for detecting aspects of the empirical world that are significant but would
have been much harder to track down without conceptual articulation. At the same time,
ideal-typical concept formation also exempts the scholar from having to demonstrate that
other conceptualizations of the same empirical phenomena are false. Conceptualizing
Friedrich Naumann as a “national socialist”, for example, does not necessarily preclude
his conceptualization, in the framework of other research agendas, as a “left-liberal”, a
“social reformist”, a “liberal nationalist”, and so forth. I do not claim that, by
characterizing Naumann as a national socialist, I have finally found his true essence, and
that consequently any other form of conceptualizing his social and political thought is
perforce inferior. Rather, I merely argue that, from the standpoint of a certain research
agenda, it is worthwhile to examine Naumann as a national socialist. Naumann’s case is
relatively easy, however, since he himself used the term “national socialism”. The
heuristic value of “national socialism” as an ideal type is even more evident where the
term does not surface explicitly in the empirical domain. Such is the case with Walther
Rathenau and with much of the discourse surrounding the activities of the Deutscher
Werkbund.
A second major feature of the ideal type is its distance from empirical reality. The ideal type is made up of components that are “more or less present and occasionally absent” from the relevant empirical cases. Hence, concrete historical phenomena can at most “approximate to” the ideal type or “diverge from” it (90). Ideal types, in other words, “are pure mental constructs, the relationships of which to the empirical reality … is problematical in every individual case” (103). This feature allows for diversity within the pool of cases joined together by the ideal type, to such an extent that sometimes there would only be a partial overlap between the various cases. The criterion for assessing the validity of an ideal type therefore does not depend on a naturalist logic of commonality: that is to say, its validity and explanatory power do not diminish if all the concept’s attributes are not shared by all empirical cases. Rather, an ideal type’s validity depends solely upon the extent to which it manages convincingly to highlight a significant feature of the empirical world that has hitherto been overlooked. Concomitantly, I do not expect Friedrich Naumann, Walther Rathenau, Johann Plenge and other national socialists to be national socialists in exactly the same way. There might well be only a partial overlap between their respective national socialisms, amounting to a Wittgensteinian (2001) relationship of family resemblance. This partiality, however, would not undermine the validity of my concept of national socialism if I manage to demonstrate that all of these figures had some role in sustaining a particular space in the political-economic discourse of Wilhelmine Germany, a space that might moreover be of great significance for making sense of Germany’s trajectory in the twentieth century.
Conclusion

Nationalism and the preoccupation with the socioeconomic upheavals associated with industrial capitalism were two of the most powerful, formative undercurrents informing German collective life following its unification. My dissertation will try to show that these two discursive moments also converged to form a distinct, and extremely significant, mode of political-economic thinking.

The concept of national socialism brings into visibility a common thread running through a bewildering array of other, more familiar terms: “social reformism” and “social liberalism”, “socialism of the lectern” (*Kathedersozialismus*) and “Prussian socialism”, “conservative socialism” and “organizational socialism” and “state socialism”, “war socialism” and “cooperative economy” (*Gemeinwirtschaft*). All of these terms are perfectly legitimate and important in their own way, in their own historiographical contexts. Nevertheless, they all fail to shed light on what I believe is a fundamental moment in late modernity: namely the drive to anchor the national in the social and the social in the national; to synchronize the rhythms of national brotherhood, social solidarity, and economic productivity.

National socialism was not born *ex nihilo* in 1890 or 1870, nor did it find its death in 1918 or 1945. Before Germany’s unification, elements of national socialism can be discerned in the thought of Fichte, List, and Lassalle; and outside Germany, in that of Saint-Simon, Comte, and Mazzini. After 1945, national socialism was triumphant – under varying guises – in many anti- and post-colonial movements and regimes, and may also be found in most versions of the ”Third Way” ideology. I hope my dissertation will be helpful in opening up and encouraging further research into the national socialist
phenomenon beyond the *fin-de-siècle* German case. In addition, and here I come full circle to the beginning of this prospectus, I hope my research will help to shed new light on Nazism and fascism, by clarifying a cardinal element in the context within which they emerged.

At the metatheoretical level, my hope is that I will be able to carry out a convincing implementation of a Rosanvallonian conceptual history of the political. American political theory has, over the past few decades, lost much of its historical sensibility. At the same time, the Cambridge School metatheory as developed primarily by Skinner (2002) and Pocock (1985) focuses too narrowly on strategies of linguistic and discursive contextualization, thereby verging on a fetishization of methodology and foreclosing many important avenues of political theorization. Rosanvallon’s metatheory, I believe, offers at least one way of broadening the horizon of Anglophone political theory such that a healthy degree of historical consciousness is combined with a good dose of theoretical and analytical sophistication. Rosanvallon’s approach enables us to theorize history and historicize theory in a way that neither collapses the one into the other, nor deflates the tension between the two through some grand, Hegelian synthesis.
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Notes

1 This is a heavily revised version of a PhD dissertation prospectus entitled “Bourgeois National Socialism in Germany and in France, 1890-1914”, submitted and approved in the fall of 2003 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I would like to acknowledge the formative and lasting impact of my teachers in Jerusalem – Zeev Sternhell, Steven Aschheim, and Dan Diner – upon my dissertation program. National socialism, of course, is a Sternhellian concept par excellence; Professor Sternhell nevertheless supported my efforts to take this topic beyond his own realms of specialization. Thanks to Professor Aschheim I developed an interest in cultural history and in bourgeois culture in particular. And it was in Professor Diner’s Colloquium on German History that I became acquainted with the fascinating world of hermeneutics. My present dissertation prospectus, despite all the revisions it has undergone, would have been virtually inconceivable without this distinct amalgam of influences.

2 While the term “bourgeois” will not have a significant function in my research beyond this negative delineation, it is nevertheless worth noting that my choice of this term also follows a dominant tendency characterizing German historiography in the past two or three decades. Since Blackbourn and Eley’s (1984) paradigm-altering book, there has been a massive flow of research on the bourgeoisie as a pivotal actor in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany. This enormous body of research powerfully argues that Germany’s persistent authoritarianism and eventual descent into catastrophe cannot be attributed to a combination of weak bourgeoisie and powerful reactionary forces such as the Junkers and the monarchy, as had been claimed in the 1960s and 1970s by Barrington Moore (1966), Ralf Dahrendorf (1967), Hans Ulrich Wehler (1973), and many others. Rather, it is a dynamic, vibrant bourgeoisie that in many ways constituted Germany’s socioeconomic, cultural, and political driving force ever since its unification. (Besides Blackbourn and Eley [1984], other pioneering texts include Evans [1978] and Eley [1980].) While this new historiographical paradigm initially took the form of social history, the late 1980s and the 1990s witnessed a substantial expansion of scope, especially into the realm of cultural and intellectual history. See e.g. Weindling (1991) on the dynamics of the construction of bourgeois identity as
exemplified in the intellectual and social activity of the medical profession; Applegate (1991) on the changing meanings of the concept of *Heimat* and its problematizing impact on our understanding of bourgeois culture; Frevert (1991), a “thick description” of middle-class duelling; Hettling (1999) on the tension and interaction between the individualizing and socializing moments permeating bourgeois thought and culture; and Repp (2000) on the articulation, dissemination, and application of reformist ideas across a dense network of voluntary associations, academic circles, and personal connections that together comprised a broad and vibrant “reform milieu” in Wilhelmine Germany. As part of this cultural turn, the German bourgeoisie itself (indeed, the category of “bourgeoisie” as such) came to be understood in cultural rather than (or as well as) socioeconomic terms (Kocka [1987]; Hettling [1999]; Lundgreen [2000]). My focus on Wilhelmine bourgeois discourse owes a great deal, and hopes to add its own contribution, both to the initial paradigm shift concerning the historical significance of German bourgeoisie, and to the subsequent cultural and intellectual inflection of the paradigm.

3 The analytical distinction between political “discourse” on the one hand and “concrete” political activity on the other is to a certain extent, of course, arbitrary and can only be validly upheld for practical research purposes such as demarcation of scope, as is done here.

4 On these and other aspects of bourgeois social reformism in *fin-de-siècle* France, see Elwitt (1986), Stone (1985), Offen (1984) and Rabinbach (1990).

5 *Begriffsgeschichte* seems to have a tendency to favor semasiological over onomasiological inquiry. Thus Koselleck’s (1985: 79) “initial” definition of *Begriffsgeschichte* is at its core a semasiological one: “*Begriffsgeschichte* … is initially a specialized method for source criticism, taking note as it does of the utilization of terminology relevant to social and political elements and directing itself in particular to the analysis of central expressions have social or political content.” Koselleck subsequently qualifies this initial definition: “The investigation of a concept cannot be carried out purely semasiologically; … the semasiological approach must alternate with the onomasiological” (85f). Nevertheless, it is significant that onomasiology here comes in only as a qualification, a complementation of the core semasiological definition.
My understanding of the ideal-typical method is articulated below, under the section “Metatheory and Methodology”.

That said, I have no intention to deny the value of these distinctions for other aspects of my inquiry or for other research purposes.

This definition of the social as a collective *oikos* is derived from Arendt (1958) and Myrdal (1955), and concurs, I believe, with Foucault (2000). It is a more specific definition than the one offered by Mouffe (2005: 17). Two further points of clarification: (1) It is a historically specific term, tethered to the conditions of modern European civilization; (2) “The economic” is a narrower term, referring strictly to the mechanisms of production, exchange, and consumption of material goods. It is part of the social, and can also become coextensive with it. Indeed, many critiques of capitalism make precisely this latter claim.

This definition of the political relies heavily on Rosanvallon (2006). Rosanvallon’s ideas have a crucial place in my dissertation’s metatheory; see the section “Metatheory and methodology” below. But see also Wolin (2004: 9-12, 16f).

In its original Greek denotation, “economy” refers to the administration of the family household; that is, the set of rules and actions designed to provide for the needs of the family. In the course of the eighteenth century, the attribute “political” was added to denote the extension of the term’s application to the level of large, state-governed collectivities. “Political economy” thus came to denote the administration of the social *qua* collective household. The rise of the term “political economy” is part and parcel of the transition from early to late modernity and represents a pivotal feature of late modern life, namely the reorientation of the political towards the social and vice versa; in other words, their mutual entanglement.

On the rise of “political economy” and its historico-conceptual significance for our understanding of late modernity, see Arendt (1958: esp. 28-33); Foucault (2000; 2003: ch. 2, 11); Myrdal (1955: esp. ch. 1, 6); Polanyi (1957); Wolin (2004); and in the German context: Tribe (1995), Steinmetz (1993). What Foucault presents as a transition from sovereignty to governmentality, discipline, and biopolitics can be refigured as a transition from the juridico-political logic dominating early-modern collective life to the
political-economic logic characterizing late modernity. An interesting insight into this transition can be gained from the juxtaposition of Rousseau’s *Discourse on Political Economy* (1997) and Sieyes’ *What is the Third Estate?* (2003). Rousseau’s discourse, despite the fact that it has political economy as its topic, still reflects the juridico-political logic insofar as it construes political economy itself in juridico-political terms. Sieyes’ essay is the diametrical opposite of Rousseau’s. Despite the fact that it deals mainly with juridico-political matters such as representation, popular sovereignty, and constituent vs. constituted powers, the entire discussion is founded upon a political-economic understanding of collective life.

We are also, of course, heavily indebted to Marx and the Marxist and post-Marxist intellectual tradition for highlighting and analyzing the political-economic logic of late modernity, even though this tradition has often over-emphasized the logical and ontological primacy of the economic over the political. Important exceptions include, among many others, Marx’s “Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State” (1975a), “On the Jewish Question” (1978), and “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” (1950); Gramsci (1971); and Laclau and Mouffe (1985). My own approach to the political-economic logic particularly concurs with Laclau and Mouffe’s emphasis on the symbolically and discursively constructed nature of the social. I expand this constructivism to encompass not only the social but also the political and the political-economic logic.

11 According to economistic discourses, the political obeys, or should obey, the dictates of the economic system. The political, in this view, knows no laws but economic laws; it thereby effectively disappears into the fold of the (economized) social. It becomes an ancillary organ of the social, a lubricant for its machinery. And, like any other lubricant, the political too derives in this conception its constitutive features, its mode of utilization, indeed its very raison d’être, from the nature and the needs of the social qua economic machine. Furthermore, economistic discourses often posit an ideal horizon of a spontaneously harmonious society in which the political as a distinct dimension of collective life becomes redundant. On the nightmarish rise of economism in late modernity, see inter alia Polanyi (1957), Wolin (2004).
This general tendency towards the deflation of the political in economistic discourses notwithstanding, it must be noted that these discourses sometimes serve to mask, and/or include discursive loopholes enabling a hypertrophy of the political, the latter spinning out of economic control, either in the name of economistic purposes such as the protection of property rights, or as a state of exception. In such cases, as Marx (1978: 36) puts it, the political “set[s] itself in violent contradiction with its own conditions of existence”.

12 This term is borrowed from Rabinbach (1990).

13 The cultural is basically a subset of the social, just like the economic. The cultural and the economic often vie for predominance within the social, harnessing the political for their cause. Non-economistic critique in many cases decries the depletion of the cultural at the hands of the economic. In non-economistic discourses, the political and the cultural share a certain affinity vis-à-vis the economic, because in those discourses both of them are construed as animated by extra-economic principles and therefore as capable of curbing the encroachment of the economic (or a certain modality of the economic, e.g. capitalism) upon the social. For example, the political can be conceived as the domain in and through which the cultural can be fostered within the social. In the case of nationalism, the political is oftentimes conceived to be inherently imbued with cultural content. In national socialism, this cultural content of the political is expected to flow back into the social as a way of restoring or guaranteeing social cohesion and harmony in the face of the ominous rise of the economic. Even more deeply, the economic itself was often understood in Welhelmine national socialism to be a cultural domain, and the national socialist task was construed as imbuing the economic with a different “spirit” than the cold, rational, calculating, individualistic and cosmopolitan spirit of contemporary capitalism.

14 For Dilthey, social life consists of an inner world that is constantly expressed in outer manifestations such as gestures and words, music and poetry, churches and universities, and so on. Understanding the social world in the human sciences can only be achieved by way of an interpretive movement from the externally given expressions of life to the inner content that these expressions refer
back to. Dilthey himself explicitly endorsed “the conceptual pair of outer and inner” (2002: 105), as he called it, in developing his social hermeneutics.

The social hermeneutics that developed within the fold of the German human sciences at the turn of the twentieth century is ultimately rooted not just in the hermeneutic tradition stricto sensu, but more broadly in the German tradition of philosophical idealism.

By pointing up the transition from textual to social hermeneutics I do not mean to imply, of course, that textual hermeneutics was abandoned. Rather, it was merely embedded within a broader hermeneutic horizon.

15 The last pages of Max Weber’s *Protestant Ethic* (1976) offer a good example of diachronic negative hermeneutics. In a somber conclusion to his essay, Weber laments the severe depletion of the interiority of capitalism, from the days of its inner robustness in the early modern era down to its emptiness in Weber’s own time: “Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men … To-day the spirit of religious asceticism … has escaped from the [iron] cage. … [T]he pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions …” (Weber 1976: 181-2; emphasis added).

16 To take another example from Weber, his depiction of the rationalized interiority of modern bureaucracy derives its negative character in part from its implicit juxtaposition with charismatic interiority, which is portrayed by Weber as rich, active, self-determining and versatile. See Weber (1958: 245ff); Gerth and Mills (1958: 52, 72). Another classic example of counterfactual negative hermeneutics is Ferdinand Tönnies’ (2001) distinction between “Community” (*Gemeinschaft*) and “Society” (*Gesellschaft*). Consider the following passage: “All creative, productive activity of mankind is a kind of art … When this process serves to maintain, promote or give pleasure to the Community, … it can be understood as an intrinsic function of the Community. … Commerce, the skill of making a profit, is the opposite of all such art” (68; original emphasis). Commerce is earlier identified with *Gesellschaft* (64).
The passage cited above from Weber’s *Protestant Ethic* includes also an element of inverted hermeneutics when it endows material goods with “an inexorable power over the lives of men”. Also, in his essay on “Science as a Vocation”, Weber (1958: 129ff) shows how the interior meaning of modern scientific work is all but snuffed out by its own “external conditions”. Lukács (1971) is another paradigmatic example of inverted negative hermeneutics. Not surprisingly, Lukács was strongly influenced by Weber and by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century German social thought in general. At the same time, the case of Lukács might suggest that the tradition of inverted negative hermeneutics goes as far back as Marx’s early writings and his concept of alienation in particular (1975b: esp. 322-34 [“Estranged Labor”]).

On the relationship between the cultural sphere and the political-economic logic (especially in non-economistic discourses), see n.13, above. The deep rootedness of national socialism in cultural revolt has been emphasized with respect to its radical right-wing strand by Sternhell (1994), who figured the rise of fascism as a trajectory leading “from cultural rebellion to political revolution”. See also Stern (1974).

Santarelli (1965); Mosse (1972); Payne (1995); Flynn (1992); Weißmann (1998).


For the first set of cases, see Herf (1984), Klemperer (1957), Lebovics (1969), Woods (1996). For the second, see Stern (1974), Merlio (1982), Whiteside (1962). Mosse (1964, 1970) provides a very broad and rich picture of Volkish thought and discourse, a key component of which is national socialism; however, Mosse never explicitly acknowledges the existence of national socialism as a phenomenon that is not entirely reducible to Volkism and that is deserving of attention and systematic analysis in its own right. Bracher (1973), too, construes national socialism as a basically right-wing phenomenon.


Klemperer suggests that the wartime “national” or “German” socialism was “inherently conservative” (57). This claim deflates the complexity and richness of influences composing national socialist discourses.
For example, one of the three major components of Weißmann’s concept of national socialism is what he calls “a socialistic nationalism that stemmed above all from France’s Jacobin tradition” (Weißmann 1998: 12). Yet it is unclear how national socialist movements in twentieth-century Germany, for instance, were linked in any way with the Jacobin heritage (except perhaps by way of negation rather than appropriation). This is true especially for radical right-wing national socialism (the main object of Weißmann’s inquiry), which explicitly positioned itself in violent opposition to all aspects of the heritage of the French Revolution, including Jacobinism. In fact, Weißmann himself becomes embroiled in self-contradiction when, only a few pages after dubbing national socialism as carrying Jacobin features, claims that national socialism could historically only attain political success after World War I had swept away all the “political coordinates” set by the French Revolution (14). Furthermore, Jacobinism was characterized above all by a radical political egalitarianism and rationalism, which has nothing to do with any strand of national socialism, certainly not as a central, defining component of national socialist ideology.

In a book commissioned in the mid-1990s by the German publisher Propylaen, Weißmann had sought to diminish the scope of the Holocaust; his book was consequently withdrawn from publication.

This claim was brought forth by Theodor Wieser in his review of Weißmann’s book for the Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 6/2/1999. A look at Weißmann’s personal website (http://www.karlheinz-weissmann.de) seems to confirm Wieser’s claim. A number of Weißmann’s books have been published by Edition Antaios, a radical right-wing German publisher. His most recent book, Das Hakenkreuz: Symbol eines Jahrhunderts, aims to rehabilitate the swastika’s respectability by embedding it in a broader history of the symbol. This is precisely the same strategy that Wieser has shown to have been adopted by Weißmann with respect to the concept of national socialism.

Davis (1967); Lovell (1992); Schwarzmantel (1991); Vincent (1992).


For example, Theiner discerns a turn taken by Naumann in 1903 from national socialism to liberalism. However, this turn is construed only in terms of the social base on which Naumann relied from that time on (i.e., a purely bourgeois social base, instead of attempting to create a party based on both the
bourgeoisie and the proletariat). Theiner disregards the clear continuity in Naumann’s national socialist Weltanschauung. See pp. 111f and esp. p. 129.

30 Wenck had served as secretary of the NSV and his book was published just two years after the NSV’s dissolution. Hence his book is much more a primary than a secondary source. As for Gauger, his work, although begun in 1931, was published in 1935, and the shadow of National Socialism can almost be touched when the author notes the contemporary popularity enjoyed by the nationalist-socialist synthesis as bestowing historical importance upon Naumann’s movement. By contrast, I hope to show that Wilhelmine national socialism is significant in its own right, even without the teleological pull exerted by the NSDAP.

31 See e.g. Jähnichen’s contribution (2000: esp. 163-5). Jähnichen, among other things, quotes Ernst Troeltsch’s observation that “[Naumann’s] politics [is] less democratic or even socialistic as nationalistic” (Jähnichen 2000: 165 n.75). See also Hübinger’s contribution (2000: esp. 169).

Another example of blindness towards national socialism in the world-view of key bourgeois figures is the literature on Max Weber, whose political outlook contained a national socialist dimension (especially in the 1890s); indeed, he was among those who influenced Naumann to move from Christian to national socialism. Nevertheless, national socialism has never been imputed to Weber: neither in the above-mentioned sources on Naumann nor in the major works on Weber’s political life, such as Mommsen (1984) and Mayer (1944). Only Bracher (1973) couples Weber and Naumann together as liberals “advocating an imperialist solution to the social problem in a ‘national social’ state” (p. 50). At the same time, however, his flash of insight is unfortunately swept away in the strong teleological current characterizing the overall narrative of his book: Weber and Naumann, too, appear as nothing but pawns in the march of history towards the National Socialist dictatorship. It is precisely this simplistic teleological scheme that the current research seeks to avoid.

32 See e.g. Bruch (1985: 62, 67, 69, 70, 130)

33 Bruch (1985: 7, 72, 78, 111, 119, 148, and esp. 120f, 133f)

34 For further examples (among many) of blindness to the significance of the national-social nexus in bourgeois reformism, see Campbell (1989); Schwartz (1996); Mitzman (1973).

For some, the new and dramatic developments were merely a consummation of tendencies already visible in the prewar era. See e.g. the continuity between Johann Plenge’s diagnoses before (1911: 178) and after (1916) the outbreak of the War.

On Moellendorff, see Barclay (1978). Rathenau’s prewar writings contain evidence of national socialism, as suggested in my earlier discussion of Rathenau’s notion of “de-Germanization”. On Rathenau’s connection with the Wilhelmine reform milieu, see Repp (2000: 262f). See Rathenau (1918c) for his account of the emergence of Germany’s war economy and his involvement therein.


On the pervasive political-economic reach of the War, see Feldman (1992) and Kocka (1984). On some of the aspects of the discourse surrounding the political-economic dimension of the War, see Michalka (1996), Krüger (1983), Bruendel (2004). An excellent primary source on wartime political-economic discourse is Thimme and Legien (1915).

Quite suggestively, the intellectual tradition of political economy has in Germany acquired the name of “national economy”.

Schmoller (1890: 2; see also 10, 12, 55f, 153).

Schmoller (1890: 11; see also 44, 62).

Schmoller (1890: 12, 55).

Schmoller (1890: 34).

Wagner (1872: 7-9).

Thus in 1889, Sombart chided Marxism for being blind to the “national movement of our day” and to the fact that “cosmopolitanism is completely and entirely obsolete” (Repp 2000: 157). Similar evidence, drawn from a variety of primary sources, is dispersed throughout Repp’s chapter on Sombart. In addition to the direct evidence, one might also mention Sombart’s membership in the Deutscher Werkbund from 1907 to 1911; his close personal and social ties with most if not all of the other figures and movements mentioned here; his cultural, negative-hermeneutic critique of capitalism; his increasingly virulent nationalism from the early 1910’s onwards; and finally – though here we must beware of teleologizing – his ultimate support for Nazism and his book on “German socialism” published in the mid-1930s.

Thus, as an illustrative example, the Werkbund in 1910 adopted as its motto the phrase “Die Durchgeistigung der deutschen Arbeit” (“The Spiritualization of German Labor”). See Schwartz (1996: 60).

Interestingly, Hjalmar Schacht – future Minister of Economics in the National Socialist regime – was also listed in 1913 as one of the Werkbund’s members. See Die Kunst in Industrie und Handel: Jahrbuch des deutschen Werkbundes 1913 (1913). On the Werkbund in its reformist context see, aside from Schwartz (1996), also Petsch (1980).

Cf. Feldman (1992: 38): “Although unalterably opposed to the internationalism of the Socialists, [many officers] were potentially receptive to a more nationally oriented ‘Prussian socialism’.”

This expression appeared in the title of the original publication of the inaugural lecture (Rosanvallon 2003), and was discarded in the English translation.
Wolin’s (2004: ch. 1) metatheory bears a striking resemblance to Rosanvallon as far as the first three of these four pillars are concerned, but in Wolin’s case these tenets are all transposed to a canonical register, thereby diverging from Rosanvallon with respect to the fourth pillar.

I owe this metaphor to Dan Diner.

For a broad survey of the Third Way, see the *Journal of Political Ideologies* issue dedicated to the subject [7(3), 2002]. The nationalist dimension is immediately evident even in the introductory essay which provides an overview of the issue’s articles. See Bastow et al. (2002: 273ff).