

Contested Legacies

Workshop (2001) and Conference (August 13-15, 2002) at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY

Report and information on publications by David Kettler

A special issue of the *European Journal of Political Theory* (April 2004, Vol. 3, No. 2) contains articles on Hannah Arendt by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott, Suzanne Vromen, Peter Baehr, and Alfons Soellner, in addition to three articles devoted to the contrasting roles of German exiles in the contested American reception of Max Weber. Entitled “Contested Legacies: Political Theory and the Hitler Era,” the special issue arises out of two conferences held at Bard College in 2001 and 2002. The first, an exploratory and planning workshop with twenty participants, was called “No Happy End”, and the second, a three-day meeting with some fifty presentations, running from August 13 through August 15, 2002, was called “Contested Legacies”. Both were activities of the Bard Intellectual Exiles project directed by David Kettler, Scholar in Residence.

The “Contested Legacies” conference opened with an informal memoir of Heinrich Bluecher by Peter Skinner, a physics professor who was an admiring junior colleague of Bluecher during his years at Bard, and continued with a panel on Arendt, called “The Political in a Non-Political Age”. Arendt continued to be a point of reference during the remaining eleven panels, although the interdisciplinary character of the event meant that, in addition to other sessions on social and political theory, there were panels on art and music, as well as literature, philosophy, history, and psychology. An underlying motif of the conference was, first, the need to gain distance from established conventions in the reading of the intellectual and cultural emigration, and, second, the opportunities provided by the current change in scholarly generations. A special feature of the conference was the participation of not a few scholars whose work on selected thinkers and other cultural figures had only recently led them to consider the relevance of the exile context to their earlier readings. That this presumption was itself not exempt from questioning also helped to lend freshness to the proceedings and to widen the boundaries of “exile studies.”

The sites of contestation intended by the conference title included Weimar Germany, the years of exile, post-war Germany, and the subsequent waves of reception of the works of the intellectual emigrants. Happily, the pattern of engagement and conflict extended to the days of the conference itself, with participants overcoming exceptionally unfriendly weather and somewhat rough housing arrangements (compensated for in small part by excellent meals) to immerse themselves in both formal and informal non-stop mutual exchanges. In addition to rewarding discussions on the social thinkers under review, there was an important current of attention to the so-called “new humanism” among the emigrants. Since the conference was expressly planned to be framed by the weekends of the Bard Music Festival, which in 2002 focused on “Gustav Mahler and his World” (a full

menu of concerts to which the conference participants were invited guests), cultural topics included not only visual artists but also the music critics and performers, among whom the reception of Mahler was a characteristic topic in exile.

Publications arising out of the project, apart from individual papers placed by their authors, include, in addition to the special issue of the *European Journal of Political Theory* mentioned above, a brochure containing programmatic statements by the organizer and twelve contributions from the preliminary workshop, as well as a book to be published by Palgrave Macmillan in Spring, 2005, containing sixteen articles around the theme of the exilic adaptations of the clash between *Bildung* and *Wissenschaft* so central to Weimar intellectual life. The project continues with an expansion of scope to a comparison with other twentieth-century intellectual exiles. Proposals and suggestions are welcome.

Information about the publications, as well as about the conferences and the project as a whole is available on the website: <http://www.bard.edu/contestedlegacies>.

The contact is David Kettler: kettler@bard.edu