

instead, to provide fresh ways to read, compare, and connect these traumatic histories, to link histories previously thought of as totally unrelated.

Sometimes, of course, the findings are particularly disturbing and unsettling (but, at the same time, illuminating). On the occasion of his 50th birthday, April 20, 1939, Adolf Hitler told members of his personal entourage that his “Blood and Soil” ideology had been “confirmed in historical hindsight” by “land seizure” in the present-day areas of the United States, Canada, and Australia – accompanied by the brutal displacement or extermination of the “far inferior native inhabitants.” (Hermann Giesler, *Ein Anderer Hitler* [1982], 373–375). In Hitler’s genocidal fantasies and in the Nazi colonial imagination, they were fighting “Indian wars” against “Russian Redskins” and “Jewish flat-footed Indians” in the “Wild East.” In acquiring new living space and building a race-based continental land empire in the eastern *Lebensraum* (Poland, the Baltic states, Ukraine, Belarus, and western Russia), Hitler thought he was merely doing in the twentieth century what the Americans had done in the nineteenth. In the autumn of 1941, as the German army was driving towards Moscow and the Holocaust in Eastern Europe was just beginning, Hitler told close associates: “Here in the [E]ast a similar process will repeat itself for a second time as in the conquest of America.” (Werner Koeppen cited in Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis* [2000], 434–435).

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Contesting Modernity in the German Secularization Debate: Karl Löwith, Hans Blumenberg and Carl Schmitt in Polemical Contexts

By Sjoerd Griffioen. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022. Pp. 496. Paperback €132.00. ISBN: 978-9004504523.

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Sjoerd Griffioen’s study of the German secularization debate examines the dispute over the place and value of religion in modernity as it unfolded between Hans Blumenberg, Karl Löwith, and Carl Schmitt. Following up on the polemics of these three, the book traces echoes and receptions of their ideas in the broader German intellectual discourse between the 1950s and the 1980s. It is divided into four main parts: The first reconstructs the Löwith-Blumenberg debate and finds that the two scholars were more in agreement with each other than previous studies have suggested. Part two adds Carl Schmitt to the controversy and thematizes the transformation of the secularization debate into one about political theology after 1968, identifying “different lines of agreement as well as different lines of contestation” (149) between these intellectuals. The third part follows the traces of agreement and disagreement on secularization raised by Löwith, Blumenberg, and Schmitt in the philosophy, historiography, theology, and politics of the second half of the twentieth century. Griffioen suggests that the original debate these three scholars advanced seems to have both anticipated and pre-structured the coming broader “intellectual need . . . for coming to terms with the past and achieving a diagnosis of the present condition” (197). In the fourth section, methodological considerations are presented. The author refrains from proposing

his own theory of secularization. Instead, he strives to systematize and evaluate the concepts he has analysed in the preceding chapters. Referring to the idea of “philosophical historiography,” complemented by transnational perspectives, he makes a strong case for the notion of *Geistesgeschichte*. According to Griffioen, the legacy of the original discussion extends well into post-secularism.

Since secularization and its effects are today often dealt with in anthropology, sociology, and historiography, it seems a worthwhile endeavour to include historical-philosophical perspectives that have been seminal to the whole topic of secularization. Griffioen does so by drawing on an impressive number of scholars and their works from a variety of disciplines, including Reinhart Koselleck, Hanno Kesting, Wilhelm Kamlah, Walter Jaeschke, Hermann Lübke, Hermann Zabel, Eric Voeglin, Rudolf Bultmann, Jacob Taubes, Odo Marquard, and others, relating their ideas to one another, and offering insightful analysis and conclusions in a well-structured narrative. Not all quotations from the German originals are translated, though, which will pose a problem for those who are not proficient in German but still hope to follow the dense argumentation. An important finding is that within a tightly woven web of common interests, themes, and motifs, of cordial acquaintances, friendly correspondences, and solid antipathies surrounding secularization and its sometimes highly disparate interpretation in the German intellectual landscape of the time, one can nevertheless hardly speak of opposing camps. Rather, internal heterogeneity must be taken into account, as this book clarifies.

Although the author has written a philosophical study (his 2020 dissertation at the University of Groningen), he himself raises a crucial question on which this reviewer, who is a historian, will comment. Griffioen asks whether the whole debate can really “ever reach valid conclusions when it is only waged on an abstract level” (223), or whether historical research inevitably has to be part of such an endeavour. He answers this question affirmatively by incorporating source material from the published written estates of the intellectuals under study and by favouring an intellectual-historical approach. Such a plea for linking historical and philosophical methods and perspectives on secularization seems essential to this reviewer. If this approach had been applied more consistently throughout the book, a slightly more nuanced picture might have emerged. Here are some examples: The extensive historical research on secularization is only briefly touched upon in this volume. Had it been taken up more broadly, the philosophical debate could have been embedded in a larger historical-conceptual context. Also, the reader is told several times that Löwith, Blumenberg, and Schmitt were affected by war and totalitarianism, without learning how this concretely affected their theories. The same applies to antisemitism (Löwith’s and Blumenberg’s families were wholly or in part of Jewish descent, and Schmitt cultivated a more or less hidden antisemitism, see Raphael Gross, *Carl Schmitt und die Juden: Eine deutsche Rechtslehre*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp [2005]), which again is mentioned only in passing.

Finally: Among the many authors considered in this study, different confessional backgrounds and identities are at play, which are not explicitly spelled out. However, one common denominator seems evident: All were White, male, and stemmed from a particular social and educational milieu. They all participated in a rather exclusive, if nuanced discourse on religion, modernity, and progress. The extent to which these class-, gender-, and race-specific elements of the debates about secularism and secularization reflect the self-conceptions of those primarily involved in them, and what impact they had on their works and the entire secularization debate deserves further attention. (For the larger context, see Manuel Borutta, “Genealogie der Säkularisierungstheorie. Zur Historisierung einer großen Erzählung der Moderne,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2010): 347–376; Joan Wallch Scott, *Sex and Secularism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press [2017].) Sjoerd Griffioen’s comprehensive book, which vividly reconstructs the controversies and polemics about secularization in German, more specifically

West German, intellectual circles since the 1950s, draws attention to the original debate and its legacies, provides helpful interpretations and propositions, and stimulates further reflection on the aforementioned points.

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The Stalin Cult in East Germany and the Making of the Postwar Soviet Empire, 1945–1961

By Alexey Tikhomirov. Translated by Jacqueline Friedlander. Lanham and Boulder: Lexington Books, 2022. Pp. xiv + 369. Cloth \$125.00. ISBN: 978-1666911893.

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Ostensibly, this new book by Alexey Tikhomirov is about the role of the “Stalin cult” in the emergence and formative years of the German Democratic Republic, and its contribution to the building of the post-1945 Soviet empire in East Europe more generally. Tikhomirov pays particular attention to the ideological content, the visual, spatial, and semantic aspects, and the popular reception of the ritualized devotion to Stalin, as well as to resistance to it. The Soviet leader was cast in many roles before East Germans: father, victor in war, prophet, savior of the German nation, “fighter for peace,” theorist of Marxism-Leninism, and, in his final years in particular, advocate of German unity (above all through his “Note” to the Western Allies in March 1952).

For the ruling *Sozialistische Einheitspartei* (Socialist Unity Party, SED) and its Soviet masters, success in propagating the “Stalin cult” was measured first and foremost in quantitative terms: over two million young East Germans signed a statement saluting Stalin on his seventieth birthday in December 1949; membership in the German-Soviet Friendship Society surpassed three million by the early 1950s; and the population of the model industrial town of Stalinstadt (before 1953 known as Fürstenberg an der Oder and after 1961 as Eisenhüttenstadt) rose from 2,400 in 1952 to 15,150 in 1955 (173, 179, 217).

But even more than the “Stalin cult,” this study seems to be about continuities in notions of honor in Germany from the interwar to the postwar eras. The word “honor” itself appears repeatedly, especially (but not) only in the book’s early chapters, where it is linked to what Tikhomirov calls the “emotional economy of victor and vanquished” (73). Thus “[t]he image of Stalin as the victor was promoted against a backdrop of mass disillusionment with Hitler,” just as the “Hitler Myth” (Ian Kershaw) was built against the humiliation felt at the Treaty of Versailles (78). In both cases, recovery was centered on a masculinist restoration of “the national honor and the dignity of the state” (85).

Building on the metaphor of recovery, Tikhomirov also suggests a continuity with the biological identity politics found in 1930s Germany, in which—as he explains it—shame was felt at an instinctive, almost bodily level and the “‘enemy’ was compared to an active pathogen and a bacillus...” (204) Thus the East Germans’ “emotional need to insult and humiliate symbols of Soviet power in order to avenge their damaged national honor” (258), whether at the micro level or (as in June 1953) on a nationwide scale, might find its 1930s counterpart in the everyday performative acts of violence directed against Jews, which were part of the Third Reich’s self-construction as an “empire of shaming.” (See Martina Kessel, “An Empire of