The Invention of Realpolitik, 1848–1871

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To the memory of Luis de la Plaza, without whom I would never have become a historian.

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Introduction

When Henry Kissinger died, recently, the obituaries hailed him as a master of Realpolitik, as its very personification. For the *Financial Times*: 'For nearly a decade, Henry Kissinger, the US national security adviser and secretary of state who has died at 100, was able to put into practice what he had preached in his academic career. He argued that realpolitik diplomacy was rooted in the understanding that achieving a balance of power […] required taking the interests of all parties into consideration, but not necessarily the interests of those not holding power.'[1] The achievements of the former US Secretary of State, according to press articles, included repairing American relations with China, an initiative designed to thwart the Soviets in the Cold War, laying the basis for peace in Vietnam, for which he received a Nobel Prize, and his 1970s shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East, which helped maintain the peace or at least contain conflict.[2] The balance sheet, however, was not all positive. The journal *Foreign Policy* also wrote that 'the late statesman was a master of realpolitik—whom some regarded as a war criminal.'[3] Kissinger's crimes involved

[1] Jurek Martin & Malcolm Rutherford, 'Henry Kissinger, US diplomat, 1923–2023', *Financial Times*, 30 November 2023, accessed on www.ft.com on 2 December 2023.

[2] Edward Luce, 'The many legends of Henry Kissinger', *Financial Times*, 1 December 2023, accessed on www.ft.com on 2 December 2023.

[3] Michael Hirsh, 'Henry Kissinger, Colossus on the world stage', *Foreign Policy*, 29 November 2023, accessed on www.foreignpolicy.com on 2 December 2023.

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backing Pakistan's brutal suppression of an uprising in what became Bangladesh because he needed the Pakistani leadership as a channel to China. They also included the carpet bombing of Cambodia as a tactic to scare North Vietnam out of the war, an action that spawned the rise of the genocidal Khmer Rouge and on its own killed tens of thousands of Cambodian civilians.[4]

As these mixed reviews suggest, Realpolitik itself is Janus-like, a concept liable to attract praise and criticism in the same breath, and just as often misunderstanding. The same obituaries write that Kissinger could be 'all things to all people.'[5] 'Although Kissinger was often seen as a supreme believer in a world order based on realpolitik and a balance of power, at heart he was ultra-loyal to the individualistic American ideal,' opines *The Guardian* in a characterisation that leans more towards Realpolitik's opposite, Idealpolitik.[6] While some authors uphold him as belonging to a long line of masters of the school, others warn that Kissinger himself did not quite espouse Realpolitik.[7] His biographer Niall Ferguson recounts how, while drafting an article on the Prussian statesman and diplomatist Otto von Bismarck, he disowned the Realpolitical pedigree, only then to cross out this disavowal. 'This tortured disavowal of Bismarck is of a piece with all that Kissinger had hitherto written on the impossibility of basing a strategy on pragmatism alone,' Ferguson comments.

The vocabulary the obituaries deploy is in itself instructive. Alongside 'Realpolitik' and 'realist,' the words 'balance-of-power,' 'geostrategic,' 'stage,' and 'chessboard' stand out. The terms 'stage' and 'chessboard' are telling, redolent as they are of foreign policy as a performance, of international relations as a game. People do not matter, they suggest, figuring only as chess pieces. People are not human beings with rights, including the right to live, but pawns to be made use of—in war, secret operations, or otherwise—as the game requires. Realpolitik accordingly enjoys a crucial but difficult relationship with rights and with morality or the lack of it. The label of a 'game,' however, is also informative in another sense. If international relations are a game, they must have winners and losers.

[4] Luce, 'The many legends of Henry Kissinger'.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Jonathan Steele, 'Henry Kissinger obituary', *The Guardian*, 30 November 2023, accessed on www.theguardian.com on 2 December 2023.

[7] John Bew, *Realpolitik: A History* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 256–260; Frank Wayman & Paul Diehl (eds), *Reconstructing Realpolitik* (Ann Arbor, 1994), pp. 5–6.

They are, it is implied, a zero-sum exercise—what player 1 wins is what player 2 loses—not something liable to produce a beneficial outcome for all players, let alone third parties. Finally, informing the stakes in the game are the words 'interests' and 'strategy,' terms often deployed in the press or in academia, but less often probed or defined. Strategy to do what? Interests identified how?

Justifying this lack of questioning, in turn, is an essential claim of Realpolitik: that it is timeless, that it has ceaselessly been practised throughout history, obviating the need for scrutiny. 'There are varieties of realism, but all realists start with a common assumption—that anarchy is the overarching constraint of world politics,' writes Daniel Drezner in his tongue-in-cheek political theory manual.[8] 'How would the introduction of flesh-eating ghouls affect world politics? The realist answer is simple if surprising—international relations would be largely unaffected. […] To paraphrase Thucydides, the realpolitik of zombies is that the strong will do what they can, and the weak must suffer devouring by reanimated, ravenous corpses.'[9] Realpolitik's timelessness is cousin to its truth. It has always been so and always will be, goes the credo. Political realism is eternally valid because the nature of the relationship between states remains forever constant, characterised by anarchy and the single-minded pursuit of power by all.

An unapologetic example of such thinking is to be found in Graham Allison's *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* Sparta's fear of the increasing power of Athens made war between the two inevitable, so Allison quotes Thucydides, and it is the same between the contemporary United States and a rising China. Iron-age city-states sitting at either end of the dry and sparse Peloponnesian peninsula, nuclear-armed superpowers possessing globe-encompassing economies: these are both the same, the reader is asked to accept. War, and presumably nuclear apocalypse, are therefore inescapable—unless of course everyone follows Professor Allison's prescriptions, likewise drawn from an array of long-past historical conflicts. (Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* also paints an overtly ideological clash in which Athens sought to impose democracy on its conquests and Sparta encouraged its

[8] Daniel Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies* (Princeton, 2011), pp. 33–34.

[9] Ibid., p. 38.

allies and dependents to espouse its monarchical model, but this seems to smack too much of Realpolitik's antithesis, Idealpolitik, to register in Allison's system.)[10]

Jonathan Haslam, evincing greater chronological awareness, distinguishes between successive incarnations of foreign-policy realism with the aim of salvaging a valuable core. Even Haslam nevertheless observes that: 'Few would contest the assertion that relations between states through the greater part of history have largely been conducted along realist as against utopian or legalist lines. The lineage of realist thought is long, indeed. The written record limits our scope to ancient Greece, India and China.'[11] By contrast, the more reflective Sean Molloy notes: 'Part of the problem of confronting the history of Realism is that until recently it has not been written of in consciously historical terms. The lack of a historical-philosophical sense has led to a somewhat complacent attitude.'[12]

Actually Realpolitik was born in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century. The Liberal journalist and essayist August Ludwig von Rochau first deployed the term in 1853, in the aftermath of the 1848–1849 revolutions. As the historian John Bew points out, it was later imported from German into the Anglo-American political vocabulary, undergoing subtle shifts in the process.[13] Realpolitik was invented, not discovered. The circumstances of its birth are important, this book argues, and are even key to its relevance.

To point at the concept's historical inception is also to query some of its basic underpinnings. Realpolitik's temporality, or rather its claim to atemporality, has at least attracted some academic attention. A second, more rarely remarked upon issue is that Realpolitik was not originally crafted as a foreign-policy concept. Rochau and his fellow travellers

[10] Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston, 2017), p. vii. For a more thoughtful reading of Thucydides, see Jonathan Kirshner, *An Unwritten Future: Realism and Uncertainty in World Politics* (Princeton, 2022), pp. 18–30.

[11] Jonathan Haslam, *No Virtue Like Necessity: Realist Thought in International Relations Since Machiavelli* (New Haven, 2002), p. 13.

[12] Sean Molloy, *The Hidden History of Realism: a Genealogy of Power Politics* (New York, 2006), pp. 8–9; see also Duncan Kelly, 'August Ludwig von Rochau and Realpolitik as historical political theory', *Global Intellectual History*, 3 (2018), pp. 301–330.

[13] John Bew, 'The real origins of Realpolitik', *The National Interest*, 130 (2014), pp. 40–52.

were preoccupied with the constitutional state of things in Germany and more narrowly in Prussia. Domestic politics were what their writing and probing centred on, revolving as they did around quintessentially domestic preoccupations such as class relations, parliamentary representation, monarchical legitimacy, press freedom, or the role and origin of the law. Their problem was that Germany remained divided, at the time, between thirty-eight statelets, a situation they wished remedied. Admittedly, this involved some consideration of the foreign-policy implications, and Realpolitik's growing number of followers did realise that the European great powers would have their say over the formation of a German nation-state. Their thinking on the matter remained peripheral, however, and often incredibly crude and ill-informed, and such was not the primary focus of their theorising. It is only as Bismarck arrived on the scene that diplomacy and war became the solution to the Realpolitikers' national unification problem. Even then, it took Bismarck several years to persuade them and manoeuvre them into a half-palatable compromise. The same period and process, it is worth noting, saw the emergence of the notion known as the primacy of foreign policy ('Primat der Außenpolitik'), a separate concept which nevertheless shares certain assumptions with foreign-policy realism.

A third problem, likewise connected to the question of historical roots, lies in the claim to reality itself. 'What we call seeing a thing clearly is only seeing enough of it to *make out what it is*; this point of intelligibility varying in distance for different magnitudes and kinds of things, while the appointed quantity of mystery remains nearly the same for all,' once observed John Ruskin, who was musing on Turnerian painting.[14] Reality looks plain and graspable from afar, less so when the viewer approaches. Political realism, like common sense, can be frustratingly hard to pin down: unsurprisingly, for political theory belongs to the realm of abstraction, by nature removed from the physical and tangible.

Realpolitik was not and could not be the brainchild of a genius suddenly seeing a timeless truth. It emerged from and became popular in an era marked by a larger intellectual vogue itself named Realism. Cultural moments fade away rather than end abruptly, but the revolutions of 1848–1849 and their repression offer a discernible bookend to the Romantic era. What followed was realism, or rather Realism. (This

[14] Michael Fried, *Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (New Haven, 2002), p. 1. Italics in the original.

book capitalises 'Realism' when discussing the concept as contained and understood in that period, and uses the lower-key 'realism' otherwise.) As always, there were precedents, especially in science, literature, theology. What has famously been described by Max Weber as the 'disenchantment of the world' had received a fresh impulse.[15] In 1835, the theologian and writer David Friedrich Strauss had published a *Life of Jesus* cutting out all the miracles from the Gospels.[16] The secularist philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach had taken aim at God himself, proclaiming in 1842 that the 'spirit of the times' was that of Realism.[17] Materialism, especially German materialism, had its roots in the 1840s but flowered and became controversial in the 1850s. So did the Realist movement in literature, including its French and German schools, a movement destined to endure well into the nineteenth century. Theodor Fontane, perhaps its prime German literary figure, declared in 1853, the same year Rochau first deployed his neologism:

> What characterizes our time on all sides is its realism. Doctors reject all conclusions and combinations, they want experiments; politicians (of all parties) turn their gaze to real needs and lock away their abstract templates into their desks; military men shrug their shoulders at our Prussian military constitution and demand 'old grenadiers' instead of 'young recruits'; above all, however, as to the solution to the social problem, what has come so decisively to the fore that no doubt can remain: the world is tired of speculation and demands that 'fresh green pasture' which lays so near and yet so far. This realism of our time not only finds its most decisive echo in art, but is perhaps expressed in no other area of our life as obviously as in art.[18]

Realism, then, was something new and exciting, not at all something timeless. It broke with the past; it was modern. But then what could that

[15] Ibid., p. 232.

[16] J. W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought 1848–1914* (New Haven, 2000), p. 18.

[17] Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Boston, 1977), pp. 4–5; Christian Jansen, *Einheit, Macht und Freiheit, Die Paulskirche und die deutsche Politik in der nachrevolutionären Epoche 1849–1867* (Düsseldorf, 2000), pp. 256–257.

[18] Quoted in Andreas Huyssen (ed.), *Bürgerlicher Realismus* (Stuttgart, 1974), pp. 52–53.

mean, and what did it mean? Three paintings by perhaps the greatest of the Realists, Adolph Menzel, offer a clue. Menzel was a book illustrator who, having acquired notoriety with a collection on Frederick the Great, turned to oil paintings on his way to artistic fame and recognition.[19] His subjects were eclectic. In one painting, *The Meeting of Frederick II with Joseph II* ('Zusammenkunft Friedrichs II. mit Joseph II.'), painted in 1857, Menzel shows the eighteenth-century Prussian king meeting the Habsburg emperor. The two men lean towards each other, about to embrace, in a modest, human pause, both dressed in simple military uniforms. The pomp, the symbolism, the supercilious staging of historical painting are absent. This is Realism as antithesis to idealism. Realism as disillusionment. And this was the first meaning of Realism: disappointment with and rejection of the ideals of the pre-March era, the period before the revolutions of 1848–1849, whose results had so underwhelmed. Realpolitik, not Idealpolitik: the dislike, the visceral rejection, even, of all idealism remain part of the realist political canon today.

Menzel's *Balcony Window* ('Das Balkonzimmer'), painted in 1845, typifies Realism altogether differently. The picture, showing the corner of a flat with a standing mirror, a chair, and curtains billowing in front of a window, has to do with everyday life. Its interest, reinforced by the absence of a human figure, is in the common and prosaic. It seeks after the material and graspable. Its subject may be described as down-to-earth, practical. In literary terms, it might find its equivalent in the contemporary novels by Gustave Flaubert. The painting emphasises means over essence, a line of approach which, as will be seen, raises its own questions, when translated into politics. Perhaps it should be noted that it does not show any balcony. Was this an allusion to reality's eternally hidden core?

Finally, in *Iron Rolling Mill* ('Eisenwalzwerk'), painted in 1875, Menzel provides perhaps the most surprising interpretation of what Realism meant, though this interpretation is found in Rochau and everywhere in the literature: Realism as modernity. Realism was new, urban, technological, industrial. It was not traditional, even less so unchanging. It was a steel mill, not a pastoral scene or a landscape with ruin. To be a Realist was to be with the times, with the Zeitgeist, with the ideas of the time, as the German Realpolitikers would ceaselessly emphasise. Conceptual sobriety, practicality, and an interest in the mundane, the need to

[19] Fried, *Menzel's Realism*, pp. 5–10.

adapt to the times: such were the preoccupations, then, of the Realist movement, preoccupations which for good reason also characterised the contemporaneous shift in political thinking.

Realpolitik was chronologically and even culturally anchored. It was situated within a specific rather than a universal programme or movement. This is not reason on its own to reject the realist or foreign-policy realist framework. An abstract entity may have long existed before it was put in conceptual terms: the universe, for example, though the point is more tentative when it comes to a policy. But precisely, another characteristic of Realpolitik that is seldom remarked on is that it actually possesses both a descriptive and a prescriptive meaning, each having its own claim to a pedigree.[20]

Descriptively, Realpolitik holds that states have always competed with each other for territory, mercantile gain, or diplomatic influence and will always do so. Relations between states have been a zero-sum gain. If states have invoked other motives than self-interest for their actions, this is to be treated as gloss, a veneer to be peered through to discern their actual aims. The descriptive sense purports to characterise the past as well as the present. It is pertinent to history as well as to foreign affairs. (Example: did 1930s appeasement qualify as Realpolitik, or was Neville Chamberlain 'a supercilious prig who wilfully and fundamentally misread Hitler'?)[21] But Realpolitik also exists in a prescriptive sense, a sense inspired by the descriptive view but drawing the conclusions in terms of action. Realpolitik prescriptively defined finds a broader field of application in that it can concern both domestic and foreign policy. In a nutshell, it proposes that the pursuit of power should trump all else, especially ideology or morality. The prescriptive sense is forward-looking. (Example: should the US seek to contain China?)

Both meanings make overlapping yet distinct claims. It is therefore possible to assert that, descriptively, Realpolitik has always mapped onto fundamental truths, whereas prescriptively it originated in the 1850s; or, in other words, that it was long practised before it was preached. While paying attention to both meanings of the term, and while seeking to disentangle them as best as possible, this book chiefly aims to query Realpolitik in the prescriptive sense. A political concept can hardly have

[20] Haslam indirectly makes this distinction in *No Virtue Like Necessity*, pp. 11–12.

[21] Kirshner, *An Unwritten Future*, p. 8.

existed prescriptively before it was articulated. And while there may have been precursor terms or authors—after Thucydides, Machiavelli is the most commonly cited, though the German Realpolitikers, as will be seen, mistrusted him—the very need for inventing a political concept speaks for its novelty.

Admittedly, foreign-policy realism's descriptive sense—the practice, perhaps timelessly apposite even while the concept itself was not—cannot altogether be ignored. The inventors of Realpolitik drew from historical example, abundantly so. Their emergence coincided with the rise of historicism and a German historical school, not by coincidence.

In terms of history-writing itself, this presents no problem, being a matter of focus. Diplomatic historians typically attend to the ebb and flow of relations between states. Practice, the means deployed, how and with what effect are what interests them. Athens was tactically wrong to enslave Melos, as it pushed neutral cities into the arms of Sparta. Louis XIV's wars led to overstretch. Palmerston made a fool of Guizot on the Eastern Question, etc. Sometimes they describe a system, as in Paul Schroeder's magisterial work on the Restoration-era Concert of Europe, or Brendan Simms's multi-century sketch of Germany's pivotal role in holding the European balance of power.[22] It is not the intent of the present book to dismiss an entire school of international history, a school that has produced so many enduring works. These histories deal principally with means—though the best among them are wise to the deeper complexities of statecraft—and as a result they do not need to ask about ends. The action, less so the motive, is where they train their lens.

As Realpolitik came to be deployed prescriptively, however, there was no longer avoiding what the ends should be, and therein lay, and still lies, the debate. Realist writers tend to conflate realism's descriptive and prescriptive senses: descriptively the framework is true, therefore Realpolitik's prescriptions must be obeyed. But this is to paper over the crucial distinction between means and ends. Rochau's book may be cited as *Die Grundsätze der Realpolitik* ('The Principles of Realpolitik') for short, but this included the subtitle *angewendet auf die staatlichen Zustände Deutschlands* ('As Applied to the State Circumstances of Germany'). The nation-state was Rochau's end. The paradox, meanwhile, was that

[22] Paul Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763–1848* (Oxford, 1994); Brendan Simms, *Europe: The Struggle for Supremacy from 1453 to the Present* (New York, 2013).

Realpolitik was under his pen born prescriptively first and came about descriptively second. It emerged first as a political programme, and only later did it bloom into a school of thought reliant on its descriptive sense.

Political realism thereupon continued to evolve, and in some respects was actually perfected in twentieth-century America by such thinkers as Edward Mead Earle and Hans Morgenthau.[23] Haslam writes of multiple versions of realism sharing certain assumptions. 'Additional definitions have been offered, Hans Morgenthau conceived of it as the search for power as the ultimate aim of all states. Waltz, on the other hand, has seen it as the search for security. Robert W. Tucker talks of a self-help system. All assume an anarchical international system. As we can see, there is no single theory; more a collection of approaches with different points of emphasis, but converging upon a central core they all hold in common.'[24] Because Realpolitik and foreign-policy realism are directly pertinent to world affairs, meanwhile, they continue as an object of urgent debate. The Second Gulf War, the economic and military rise of China, Russian imperialism, international cooperation on such challenges as climate change: recent and current events and trends, as they come under the gaze of journalists, academics, or policymakers continue to be explicitly or implicitly interpreted through the opposite prisms of Real and Idealpolitik. 'The United States has sought to remake the world in its own image. Proponents of this policy, which is widely embraced in the American foreign policy establishment, believe it will make the world more peaceful and ameliorate the dual problems of nuclear proliferation and terrorism,' writes the realist John Mearsheimer. 'From the beginning, however, liberal hegemony was destined to fail, and it did. This strategy invariably leads to policies that put a country at odds with nationalism and realism, which ultimately have far more influence on international politics than liberalism does.'[25] The foreign-policy observer Christopher Walker would disagree: 'The democracies need to renew and refresh their commitment to democratic institutions, and to take steps to stop the authoritarians from hollowing out the most important regional and global rules-based organizations. As China, Russia, and Iran scale up their media

[23] Bew, *Realpolitik*, pp. 208–209; Molloy, *The Hidden History of Realism*, pp. 133–141.

[24] Haslam, *No Virtue Like Necessity*, p. 12.

[25] John Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, 2018), p. viii.

presence in places such as the Balkans, Central Europe, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa, so too should the United States and European democracies instead of scaling back as they have been doing.'[26]

The historical literature on Realpolitik itself is more circumscribed. Two works, John Bew's *Realpolitik: a History* and Natascha Doll's *Recht, Politik und "Realpolitik" bei August Ludwig von Rochau*, stand out as landmark contributions to the history and interpretation of the term.[27] Bew, without omitting to discuss Realpolitik's German origins, provides a magisterial account of the credo's fate in twentieth-century Britain and the United States. Doll's *Recht, Politik und "Realpolitik"* takes a more juridical, hermeneutic approach. When it comes to the concept's coinage, its origins, and its meaning, both authors tend to cleave to a Rochau-centred narrative. Yet as Bew himself points out, Rochau was a pamphleteer and polemical writer, not a political theorist.[28] Admittedly, some works have become milestones in political thought that were also penned as pamphlets (John Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*, say, or Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*). But Rochau himself wrote that he wanted nothing more than to move with the Zeitgeist. Realpolitik was the invention of an entire Realist era, not just a jaundiced revolutionary activist.

This Rochau-centred attribution deserves broadening to consider Bismarck's role and his interaction with a broader group of Realpolitikers in the 1860s. Alone, it risks idealising Realpolitik as a Liberal concept invented by Rochau but later perverted by others, especially the sulphurous Heinrich von Treitschke. Actually once Realpolitik emerges as the coinage of a wider group working in interaction with Bismarck, the supposed diversion arises as inherent: a feature, not a bug. Realpolitik was never a Liberal concept, and it always had mixed origins. It emerged from Europe's constitutional struggles on the one hand and the wars of Italian and German unification on the other. The term may have been penned by Rochau but, firstly, his coinage only reflected a broader Realist

[26] Christopher Walker, 'Dealing with authoritarian resurgence', in Larry Diamond et al. (eds), *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy* (Baltimore, 2016), p. 231.

[27] Bew, *Realpolitik*; Natascha Doll, *Recht, Politik und "Realpolitik" bei August Ludwig von Rochau (1810–1873): ein wissenschaftsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zum Verhältnis zwischen Politik und Recht im 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005).

[28] Bew, *Realpolitik*, pp. 21–22.

vogue and, secondly, because what chiefly agitated the pamphleteer was German unification, the doctrine itself took longer to cohere. It was actually of collective creation, including its shift to the foreign rather than the domestic-policy sphere, and Realpolitik had only acquired a stable meaning by 1871.

Realpolitik, from inception, owed much to conservative ideas, particularly in the realm of history-writing. The first chapter of this book, accordingly, looks at the early influence of German historicism and specifically Leopold von Ranke, as well as the part-competing, part-overlapping Hegelian philosophy. Both contributed to elevate the state in German historical perception, and each separately and differently observed on the importance of the Zeitgeist, key elements in the Realpolitikal doctrine.

The analysis turns next to the turning point that were the revolutions of 1848–1849. The revolutions, the conservative reaction that followed, and the failure of Italy and Germany to unify cleared many long-cherished illusions. Faith in the power of revolution and in the model long embodied by France crumbled, and it was dealt a death blow by Napoleon III's 1851 coup. All this led Liberals throughout Europe to grope for a new approach: Rochau's *Grundsätze der Realpolitik*, drawing the lessons from revolutionary miscarriage and repudiating jejune political idealism, was one such answer. Chapters 2 and 3 look into the contemporaneous Realist turn. Realism, in art, in literature, in science, was all the rage: from Courbet's canvases to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, from Feuerbach's shocking secularism to the scientific materialism showcased by the great exhibitions. But in politics, too, old ideological alignments ceded ground to practicality, whether in Prussia under Otto von Manteuffel or in Piedmont under Camillo di Cavour. The landscape was becoming more fluid throughout Europe, favouring opportunism. Chapter 4 considers the compromises this favoured as the 1860s dawned. Rochau and his emulators believed in parliamentarism and equal civic rights. Yet rather than reflecting the theories of natural right to be found in Rousseau or Kant, this was promoted as a matter of effectiveness and modernity. As the 1860s dawned, such thinking was set to test political practice, with an important feedback loop on theory.

Chapters 5 and 6, finally, look at the transformation of Realpolitik under the influence of pre-unification Bismarckian politics. In Prussia, elections at last handed the Liberal party parliamentary victory. Would the new Minister-President Bismarck be open to cooperation? But Bismarck well understood Realpolitik to imply something less democratic than his

opponents believed. National unification and nationalism, he saw, were the tools to tame them or, as he saw it, bring them to reason. This examines how Realpolitik morphed from an essentially domestic into a foreign-policy concept. Its proponents had intended it for the domestic field, not international relations. Admittedly, their prime concern was German unification. But this only pointed to their dilemma. Bismarck was long a hate figure of the Liberals. He faced them off for four long years. He shut down their newspapers and hounded them in the courts. Then in 1866, he took a major step towards the unification of Germany: he caused Prussia to turn against and defeat Austria in war. The choice was whether to continue rejecting him or to embrace him and, with him, his successes. His combined military and foreign-policy triumph moved to take centre place in the Realist paradigm. In the process, what Realpolitik meant and what it stood for arose as radically transformed.

The Temporality of Realpolitik

History became, in the Romantic era, the most popular of disciplines. It struck the consciousness of the cultivated public as it never had before. It became the reference in a multiplicity of intellectual domains, from law to political thought. Whereas hitherto it had barely existed as an academic specialty, in the nineteenth century's first decades it established itself on the curriculum of Germany's universities, existing or new. The University of Berlin, inaugurated in 1810, shortly thereafter acquired a history faculty that was the first in Germany. Its first professor was Barthold Georg Niebuhr, who read on Roman history, and it presently offered lectures on historical theory and method. Heidelberg, Leipzig, Munich, Mannheim would soon also offer formal historical teaching, though the creation of history faculties there mainly took place after 1850.[1] Matching these trends and meeting this rising demand, historical writers began producing specialised journals in increasing numbers, among which the two most notable perhaps the *Historisch-Politische Zeitschrift*, an 1830s publication, and Heinrich von Sybel's *Historische Zeitschrift*, founded in 1859.

The same phenomenon saw the rise of a new school of historians, beginning with Leopold von Ranke, an innovator who systematised the classification of sources, a tremendously prolific writer, and a towering

[1] Frederick Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 22–23.

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academic figure in the making. Ranke, originally educated in classics and philology, published in 1824, at age twenty-eight, the instant success that was his *Histories of the Latin and Teuton Nations, 1495–1514*.[2] He was promptly appointed in Berlin, where he would teach and write for fifty years. Ranke in turn inspired an entire generation, most prominently Sybel but also Georg Waitz, Wilhelm von Giesebrecht, Jacob Burckhardt, and Friedrich Meinecke.[3] Contemporaries of Ranke included Karl von Rotteck, Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann, Georg Gervinus, and Max Duncker. Among the figures more properly belonging to the Realist period were Gustav Droysen, a Hellenist who also wrote on Prussian history, and the historian of Rome Theodor Mommsen, who would go on to obtain the Nobel Prize. It is worth noting that all or most of these figures were also politically active, usually among the Liberals, including Rotteck, Dahlmann, Waitz, Gervinus, Duncker, Sybel, Droysen, and Mommsen.[4]

Ranke famously claimed that he had found his vocation after reading *Quentin Durward*. Finding Walter Scott's description of Charles the Bold awful, he had turned to an official history of the Burgundian duke. Disappointed again, he decided he could do better himself. Scott, Alexandre Dumas: the Romantic period may have been the heroic era of the historical novel, but yet more historical fiction was produced or read in the second half of the century. In Germany, a particularly popular writer was Luise Mühlbach: a search into lending libraries lists her as the single most published German author between 1849 and 1888.[5] More than 750 historical novels would be published in German between 1850 and 1900.[6] Popular histories and vulgarisations also did well, such as the history of Frederick the Great that brought fame to Menzel, Franz Kugler's *Geschichte Friedrichs des Großen*.[7] So did historical painting: though the genre was not new, a group of painters and art enthusiasts

[2] Theodore von Laue, *Leopold Ranke, the Formative Years* (Princeton, 1950), p. 25.

[3] Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition*, pp. 253–254.

[4] Georg Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, 1969), p. 91.

[5] Brent Peterson, 'Mühlbach, Ranke, and the truth of historical fiction', in Todd Kontje (ed.), *A Companion to German Realism* (Rochester, 2002), pp. 61–2.

[6] Jacques Le Rider, *L'Allemagne au temps du réalisme; de l'espoir au désenchantement* (Paris, 2008), p. 291.

[7] Franz Kugler, *Geschichte Friedrichs des Großen* (Leipzig, 1842).

founded a Verbindung für historische Kunst in 1854, a cooperative whose role was to encourage the production of historical paintings among the many German art societies.[8]

France gave the lead in a kindred development: the inventorisation of archives and historical monuments, their opening to the public, and the pioneering of heritage protection. François Guizot, as Minister of Public Instruction, gave the impulse to the systematic compilation and classification of archival documents, found dispersed among provincial libraries and depots. In 1833, he co-founded a 'Société de l'histoire de France,' dedicated to the publication of historical sources. It obtained a regular budget and a board to coordinate efforts and pilot local actions, eventually to preside over a network of 300 correspondents.[9] A flurry of specialist bulletins followed, and the publication of hundreds of original documents.[10] In parallel, Guizot created an inspectorate of historical monuments to produce inventories and records, establish deontological rules, and pilot conservation.[11]

Though it took a little more time, the initiative was emulated in Prussia and other German principalities. In 1810 already, in the aftermath of the Stein-Hardenberg reforms, the Prussian interior ministry had been assigned the task of looking after monuments through a 'Baudeputation,' or buildings committee.[12] Karl Freiherr von Stein initiated the publication of Prussian archival collections including official acts and laws in 1819.[13] In 1835, Frederick William III placed the responsibility for monuments with a culture ministry, and in 1843 he appointed the first Prussian Conservator of Historical Monuments in the person of Alexander Ferdinand von Quast, an architect and archaeologist who had earlier been responsible for the restoration of a Franciscan monastery in

[8] Le Rider, *L'Allemagne au temps du réalisme*, p. 255.

[9] François Guizot, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps* (8 vols, Paris, 1858–1867), vol III, pp. 177–183; Françoise Mélonio, *Naissance et affirmation d'une culture nationale: la France de 1815 à 1880* (Paris, 1998), p. 137.

[10] Mélonio, *Naissance et affirmation d'une culture nationale*, pp. 182–183.

[11] Ibid., pp. 151–153.

[12] Felicitas Buch, *Studien zur preußischen Denkmalpflege am Beispiel konservatorischer Arbeiten Ferdinand von Quasts* (Worms, 1990), pp. 9–11.

[13] Peterson, 'Mühlbach, Ranke, and the truth of historical fiction', pp. 55–56.

Berlin.[14] Bavaria created a Commission of Public Art and Monuments in 1852, with a General Conservator appointed in 1868. Württemberg likewise followed suit on von Quast's example, and Baden appointed a state conservator in 1853.[15]

Stein had explained his logic to the Grand Duke of Baden: 'To build a new regime among a long-established people requires first examining the existing state of things to find out by what rules it may be ordered; it is only by developing the present from the past that one can assure its permanence in the future.'[16] The craze for history, the interest in monuments: both were associated with reform. With reform, with political change came the concern that the old not be forgotten with the arrival of the new. Underlying these initiatives was a shift in temporal perspectives which, underway since the previous century, was now receiving a fresh impulse.

The Enlightenment witnessed a gradual but fundamental change in the understanding of historical time and, with it, a momentous alteration in cultural and political horizons. So has persuasively argued the pioneering historian Reinhart Koselleck, whose work in turn triggered a wave of studies into 'temporality,' 'historicity,' or 'regimes of historicity' mining the rich scholarly seam so unearthed. Christopher Clark even speaks of a 'temporal turn' in history-writing, interested in notions of time, history, the past, present, and future, and the kaleidoscope of lived experiences created by the varying interactions among them.[17]

Koselleck's work is subtle and complex, but to the extent it can be summarised with respect to the central change characterising Enlightenment history, this consisted of a switch from a flat to a directional sense of time's effect. For long, history had been reduced to a trove of situations and examples from which it could ceaselessly be drawn for the purposes of correctly assessing the present. From Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, say,

[14] Buch, *Studien zur preußischen Denkmalpflege*, pp. 1–7 and 19–21; Astrid Swenson, *The Rise of Heritage: Preserving the Past in France, Germany, and England, 1789–1914* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 54.

[15] Swenson, *The Rise of Heritage*, p. 56.

[16] Buch, *Studien zur preußischen Denkmalpflege*, p. 12.

[17] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, 2004); Christopher Clark, *Time and Power: Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Princeton, 2019), pp. 4–6.