216 PETER WATSON

faiths world-wide where it could have an impact on intercivilisational dialogue. Reinhard Marx will certainly be a man to keep an eye on in the years to come.

Note

In early 2010, a Special Issue of this journal – vol. 1, no. 2 (January 2010) – dealt with the then
prevailing global financial and economic crisis under the title "The Global Financial Crisis: Economic
Challenges and Prospects for Islamic Finance".

Peter Watson, The German Genius: Europe's Third Renaissance, the Second Scientific Revolution, and the Twentieth Century

(New York: HarperCollins, 2010; 1st ed.), 992 pp. ISBN: 978-0060760229. US\$23.10

Christoph Marcinkowski International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) Malaysia

Before Hitler, Nobel Prize ceremonies were in large part a German affair. For over a century Germany led the world through its scientific, educational and cultural achievements. *The German Genius* reminds English-speaking readers that the world we live in today in so many ways is a creation of German technology and culture. While, on a purely geopolitical level, the Germans failed to become dominant they succeeded in virtually every other sphere.

The author, Peter Watson, who has published 13 books so far, is a British intellectual historian and former journalist and now perhaps best known for his work in the history of ideas and art. Watson was for four years a member of the *Insight* team of *The Sunday Times*. He was also New York correspondent of *The Times*. Since 1998, he has been a Research Associate at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, at the University of Cambridge.

Watson's colossal volume is a vast chronicle of ideas, humanists, scientists, and artists: Bach, Lessing, Herder and Winckelmann, Goethe, Kant and Schiller, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Gauss, and many more. Examining the contributions of literally hundreds of German thinkers and mapping the conceptual connections between them, the author demonstrates the breadth, volume, and influence of the German output in philosophy, science, industry, art, literature, and all forms of scholarly activity.

Without any attempt to minimise, dismiss, or overlook the evil of the Nazis and the Holocaust (for which Germany and her people *in toto* have been stigmatised), the narrative offers a reminder of great achievements that were not accidental, but rather a result of German culture and society. Quite correctly, there is nothing in

ISLAM AND CIVILISATIONAL RENEWAL

ICR 3-1 01 text 216 20/09/2011 13:20

BOOK REVIEWS 217

this book that would be considered sympathetic to Nazi Germany. Given that it has been written by a British author and journalist who in his introduction discusses Britain's relationship to Germany and some of his motivations for writing the book, Watson's book is a remarkable attempt at a corrective to this distorted and one-sided view of history, and it should be applauded in so far as it succeeds.

The narrative begins toward the end of Bach's life (1685–1750), well prior to a united German nation having been achieved (1871), and continues beyond the events of 1989 and the subsequent reunification of what we recall as East and West Germany. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed within Prussian Lutheranism a revivalist movement known as 'Pietism' whose main purpose was to convince its adherents that they should devote themselves to improving life on earth through education. However, Peter Watson breaks new ground in his account of the founding of the University of Berlin in 1810, from which he dates the rise of the educated middle class as the basis of unprecedented prosperity. The humiliating and crushing defeat of Prussia by Napoleon in 1806 led to the reforms of the administrative, legal, and educational sectors. The aim of the Prussian reformers was revolutionary: to introduce scientific methods (Wissenschaft) into all branches of learning from the study of antiquity to the observation of nature. Creativity and innovativeness became some of the hallmarks of German intellectual and scientific culture. The Unification of Germany and the establishment of the German Empire under the leadership of Prussia in 1871 made Germany the most powerful and technologically most advanced nation in Europe.

As described by Watson quite accurately, Germany actually invented the modern university, a university in which professors are expected to *discover*, not just *teach*, knowledge, and students learn to *reason*, not just *memorise*, combining teaching with research in both humanities and science – at a time when Harvard and Oxford were conservative and theology-centred. Watson makes the salient point that books were more popular in Germany and the German-speaking countries than elsewhere, which had a profound effect on the German psyche.

On a negative note, however, one could lament Watson's selective approach in his choice of subjects; in particular the important role of German women not only in science and thought but also as promoters of women's rights could have been made more apparent. Moreover, although he did so to a certain extent, the role of the Jewish Emancipation and its relation to emerging German nationalism should have been made one of the focal points as it would be important for a comprehensive understanding of German history in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Also, to the mind of this reviewer, Watson could have elaborated more on the particular characteristics of what he refers to in his subtitle as 'Europe's Third Renaissance'. We already know, for instance, that the renaissance of the twelfth century was a period of many changes which included social, political, and

ICR 3.1 Produced and distributed by Pluto Journals ICR.plutojournals.org

ICR 3-1 01 text 217 20/09/2011 13:20

218 PETER WATSON

economic transformations, and an intellectual revitalisation of Western Europe with strong philosophical and scientific roots, changes which paved the way to later achievements. The period saw the increased contact with the Islamic world in Spain and Sicily, the *Reconquista*, as well as increased contact with Byzantium, allowing the translation of texts from other cultures, especially ancient Greek works.

The Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century in turn – the 'Second Renaissance' in Watson's reckoning – marking the transition between medieval and early modern Europe, began a movement that was confined largely to the literate culture of intellectual endeavour and patronage and is best known for the renewed interest in the culture of classical antiquity, but was concentrated in the elite whereas and for the vast majority of the population life was little changed from the Middle Ages.

What was it then that was 'reborn' in Watson's 'Third Renaissance', epitomised by nineteenth-century Germany? From a purely Western perspective, one could answer that the idea of doubt, that humans are self-directed, not God directed, emerged as a movement in the late eighteenth century, a circumstance which made the West what it is today. This writer, however, would argue that the German 'Third Renaissance' consists above all in its creativity and inventions in the field of natural science, technology, and political philosophy – in short in something what is called in German *Forschergeist* or 'spirit of research'.

Moreover, Watson, in examining Germany's scientific and social discoveries and the advances in education and exploration, ignores something which made the phenomenon of a 'German genius' a matter of global significance, namely the emigration of millions of Germans from the fatherland in the nineteenth century, which could well have been made a focal point of his work.

In addition, topics and personalities appear in Watson's book at times disconnected from each other and arranged rather dictionary-like, which can make it difficult for those who are confronted for the first time with things German to follow the thread. There are also countless wrong spellings of German terms, which are certainly the result of a careless editorial process – quite surprising for a publisher of the standing of HarperCollins – and which, unfortunately, casts some doubt about the extent of the German-language skills of the author.

In sum, however, *The German Genius* is a remarkable achievement as it offers non-Germans perhaps for the first time an opportunity to have an objective view at the German cultural achievements – after decades of 'histories' and 'assessments' of things German written by authors hailing from (and writing from the perspective of) the victors of two world wars.

Finally, the book should also be of considerable interest to readers of this journal, as Germany was perhaps the only major country in Europe, which, in sum, can look back to a more or less positive relationship with the world of Islam. A closer reading of Watson's book teaches in particular readers in the contemporary Muslim

ISLAM AND CIVILISATIONAL RENEWAL

ICR 3-1 01 text 218 20/09/2011 13:20

BOOK REVIEWS 219

world that there existed always also 'another West'. It also teaches them a lot about the spirit of resilience, perseverance, creativity and innovation, providing them with a wider and more comprehensive and holistic attitude toward Western civilisation.

Note

Christoph Marcinkowski, "Germany and the Muslim World", *Islam and Civilisational Renewal*1, no. 3 (April 2010), 519–22. See also idem, "Toward 'Prussian Virtues': Transforming the Civil Service in Muslim Countries into a Factor of Political Stability", *Islam and Civilisational Renewal*2, no. 4 (July 2011), pp. 717–22.

In May 2010, IAIS Malaysia and the German Embassy in Malaysia hosted an *International Seminar on Germany and Islamic Culture*, which was co-organised by this reviewer and where he delivered a lecture entitled "Germany and Islam: A Pictorial Journey Through Time".

Mehran Kamrava (ed.), *Innovation in Islam: Traditions and Contributions* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2011), xii+251 pp. ISBN: 978-0-520-26695-7. US\$24.95

Tauseef Ahmad Parray Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

Innovation in Islam — consisting of twelve chapters, eleven essays by a multi-disciplinary group of leading scholars from across the world and a descriptive introductory chapter by the editor — offers in-depth analyses of the history, meaning and context, causes, consequences, and obstacles to innovation in Islam. Focusing on the ways and means through which the teachings of Islam have been produced and perpetuated over time, the contributors investigate such areas as the hermeneutics and epistemology, the arts and letters, jurisprudence, personal status, and Muslims' perceptions of the self in the modern world. Innovation in Islam illuminates a debate that extends beyond semantics into everyday politics and society — and one that has ramifications around the world.

The overriding objective of the book is to demonstrate that Islam, both as a worldview and as a comprehensive system of social and political organisation, is fundamentally 'adaptable', and therefore fundamentally 'applicable and relevant' to today's modern world. As the contributors demonstrate, writes Kamrava, it is not Islam *per se* that needs to change in order for it to once again become a leading source of – or at least context for – innovative change and progress in fields such as scientific and intellectual production and social and political organisation. For Kamrava, it is not in Islam itself that we must seek the answer to Bernard Lewis's rhetorical question *What Went Wrong*? Instead, the answer lies in the larger context within which Islam has historically found itself: in the ways in which knowledge about Islam has been acquired, accepted, and internalised, in perceptions about

ICR 3.1 Produced and distributed by Pluto Journals ICR.plutojournals.org

ICR 3-1 01 text 219 20/09/2011 13:20