

I read Paolo Pombeni's review of my book with great interest and I thank him for the care and candor with which he critiqued its themes. He finds the thesis 'captivating and plausible' in some ways, and indeed concedes that my argument about the centrality of Germany to the modern history of our continent is 'undeniable', but has reservations about other aspects of the work. No doubt the book has faults, and there are certainly some errors, which I am correcting, but I would like to take this opportunity to respond to some of his objections. He finds my interpretation of the origins of the First World War too linear and that the Italian Question therein receives too superficial treatment. I do mention the invasion of Libya in 1911 as the start of the crisis, however, and it is not clear to me how the Italian Question bears fundamentally on the outbreak of war in 1914. As for his skepticism about whether the banking crisis of 1931 was exacerbated to the point of explosion by the French reaction to German power in Central Europe, I refer him to the work of Gil Agualdo, which suggests exactly that; I did not footnote him because the voluminous reference section had to be pruned of most works which were not sourcing direct quotations.

Paolo also states that I force the facts of world history into a 'a bed of Procrustes' by claiming that during the cold war, despite crises such as in Korea, Vietnam, Cuba and so on, 'the real prize... was always Germany'. I make this claim, however, on the basis of evidence, for instance when President Kennedy warns the British Prime Minister at the height of the Cuban crisis of 'the possible relation of this secret and dangerous move on the part of Khrushchev to Berlin', or when I cite German concerns about US involvement in Vietnam within the Berlin context, not to mention the constant Soviet focus on Germany. Of course, all these issues can be argued, but I cite these cases as examples to show that my claims are not simply a figment of my imagination! The criticism that I do not take sufficient account of the growth of the 'Kulturstaat' and modern party systems is well taken. This absence partly reflected the nature of the book, but also my own weaknesses. I would add that more generally, the book would have benefitted from greater engagement with economics, and political economy, but then that would have made it even longer and probably even more contentious. At all events, I am grateful to Paolo for taking my 'grand synthesis' seriously, for expressing his reservations forthrightly but courteously, and for providing me with food for thought and consideration in future editions (if there are any).

*Brendam Simms*