CHAPTER 8

European Small-State Academics and the Rise of the United States as an Intellectual Center: The Cases of Halvdan Koht and Heikki Waris

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Introduction

Given the status of US research universities today, it may be difficult to remember that as recently as the early twentieth century, US intellectual life was considered by many in Europe as provincial and mediocre, offering little more than “feeble replicas” of Great Britain.1 During the 1900s, however, the centers of academic and intellectual life underwent a profound shift. One of the most remarkable changes was the rise of the United States from a European cultural province to an economic, military, cultural, and academic center in its own right.2 This center had a rapidly expanding influence on the premises of intellectual and academic life all through Europe.

The shift of balance in transatlantic intellectual and academic relations first took place quietly and rather unremarkably. Before 1900 very few European academics journeyed to the USA. Instead, the US academics headed to Europe and mostly to the German universities. The 1880s and 1890s were the heyday of the international academic pilgrimages to Germany, and the new Humboldtian University of Berlin was the undisputed academic model from the United States in the West to Japan in the East.3 Nineteenth-century Germany was also

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the leading center of modern scientific history⁴ and the so-called historical
 economics that had emerged as a response to the “social question.” This dis-
 tinctively German academic approach to the alarming consequences of in-
 dustrialization and modernization attracted great interest across the Atlantic and
 throughout Europe.⁵ The new German model of more pragmatic, economi-
 cally and socially oriented history was effectively imported to the USA by the
 US visitors to German academic centers and successfully implemented in the
 rising American universities. The new German intellectual and academic cur-
 rents found fertile soil also in those academically more peripheral parts of
 Europe such as the Nordic countries, traditionally dominated by German aca-
 demic and cultural currents.⁶

This chapter examines the decentering of Germany and the gradual rise of
 the United States into a leading center of academic life through the pathways of
 two Nordic scholars, Halvdan Koht (1873–1962) from Norway and Heikki Waris
 (until 1924 Varén, 1901–1989) from Finland. The two historians provide an illus-
 trative case of the changing “relative geographies”⁷ of the centers of academic
 life. Both came from the more peripheral milieus of European intellectual and

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⁴ It is a well-known fact that the position of Germany in general and Leopold von Ranke in
 particular as the vanguard of modern scientific history was partly based on one-sided inter-
 pretations or even total misunderstandings of Ranke’s ideas; see, e.g., Georg G. Iggers and Q.
 73–75, 122–23.

⁵ The internationally best known representative of this current was the Verein für Sozialpoli-
 tik (Social Policy Association), founded in 1872, with such figures as Gustav Schmoller, Max
 Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Werner Sombart in its ranks; see Woodruff D. Smith, Politics
 and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840–1920 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991),
 174–82.

⁶ Risto Alapuro and Matti Alestalo, “Konkreettinen sosiaalitutkimus,” in Suomalaisen sosio-
 gian juuret, eds. Risto Alapuro et al. (Porvoo and Helsinki: WSOY, 1973), 84–87; Erik Allardt,
 The History of the Social Sciences in Finland 1828–1918 (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica,
 Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories, eds. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz
 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 257. In addition, French and British social philoso-
 phy, historiography, and evolutionary theories were applied, but to a lesser degree. On these
 currents, see Allardt, The History of the Social Sciences, 94–109, 124; Knut Kjeldstadli, “History
 as Science,” in Making a Historical Culture. Historiography in Norway, eds. William H. Hub-
 bard et al. (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 2001), 55–63; Fredrik Thue, In Quest of a
 Democratic Social Order: The Americanization of Norwegian Social Scholarship 1918–1970 (PhD
 dissertation, Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo, 2005), 14–15, 24–27.

⁷ “Relative geography” refers to the question of where the most dynamic centers of scholarly
 life were perceived to locate, how the centers related to one another, and how these relations