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Why We Should Talk about German 'Orientierungskultur' rather than 'Leitkultur'

Abstract: The notion of *Leitkultur* has been used in German immigration debates to capture the idea that our living arrangements ought to be shaped by shared cultural identity. Leitkultur contrasts with a multiculturalism that sees multiple cultures side-by-side on equal terms. We should replace Leitkultur with *Orientierungskultur*, a notion whose introduction is overdue. German philosophy, especially Kant, has bestowed an intellectual meaning upon an originally geographical notion that is already ubiquitous, making 'Orientierungskultur' a natural construct. That notion allows us to say there is an inevitably amorphous but recognizable *German culture* whose prominence in public life provides a grounding for many and prevents them from feeling alienated from the society they helped build; at the same time, for some domains of public life not participating in default behavior is not merely tolerated but acknowledged as a genuine alternative. Crucially, one way of orienting oneself is to turn away.

Keywords: Leitkultur, multiculturalism, constitutional patriotism, orientation, immigration

1 Introduction

Established communities have ways of doing things. An influx of newcomers can be disruptive, especially if much of it occurs in a short period. New arrivals are welcome to those who connect culturally, benefit economically, value diversity or believe immigration or refuge is a proper response to humanitarian crises or otherwise morally called for. To others more diversity is alienating because they feel their social world no longer is *for them*. But a move towards a homogenous nation state praised by conservatives like Carl Schmitt is infeasible regardless of desirability. So, what to do? In Germany one response is a proposed *Leitkultur*, to capture the idea that our living arrangements ought to be shaped by shared cultural identity, also to guide admission for those whose membership status bloodline

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and cultural belonging do not settle. Leitkultur normally contrasts with a multi-culturalism that sees multiple cultures side-by-side on equal terms.[1]

The shadow of fascism makes such debates in Germany torturous: somebody inevitably tries to gain political capital drawing Hitler-analogies or evoking the risk that others might. Accordingly, there is more resistance to the *notion* of Leitkultur than to the ideas behind it. Self-declared opponents often repackage similar claims without using the term. Of course, some do reject the ideas behind Leitkultur. Jürgen Habermas, for one, thinks constitutional patriotism is all we need.[2] But the questions supposedly answered through Leitkultur plainly arise: an increasingly diverse and globally economically and politically integrated country nonetheless must respect the desire of large parts of its population to inhabit a cultural space that does not deviate too much or too abruptly from what they are used to. Nobody has a right to expect that things will not ever change. But too much change, or change coming too fast, overwhelms people. They can rightly complain that their community does not take them seriously as members.

I submit that we should replace Leitkultur with *Orientierungskultur*, *orienting culture*—a notion whose introduction is overdue. That notion allows us to say there is an inevitably amorphous but recognizable *German culture* whose prominence in public life provides a cultural grounding for many and prevents them from feeling alienated from the society they helped build; at the same time, for some domains of public life not participating in default behavior is not merely tolerated but acknowledged as a genuine alternative. The notion of Orientierungskultur offers citizens, residents and those who spend time in Germany ways of reflecting on what it means for German culture (or a subset thereof) to

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1 (1) Political scientist Bassam Tibi introduced 'Leitkultur' into academic debates, to capture the idea that Germans and immigrants must be linked by a European Leitkultur, e.g., Tibi 1998. In politics, contributions by conservative politician Friedrich Merz were stage-setting, e.g., the article 'Einwanderung und Identität', *Die Welt*, October 25, 2000, https://www.welt.de/print-welt/article540438/Einwanderung-und-Identitaet.html. Another early use is in Theo Sommer's "Der Kopf zählt, nicht das Tuch", *Die Zeit*, July 16, 1998, https://www.zeit.de/1998/30/199830.auslaender_.xml/komplettansicht. Since then the term has made regular appearances in political debates. (2) Anything connected to 'multiculturalism' is complex and disputed. For philosophical groundings see Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 1996. See also Song 2007. For recent discussion, see Joppke 2017. For more concrete discussion of integration policies in Germany and elsewhere in Western Europe, see Goodman 2017; Klusmeyer/Papademetriou 2009. (3) One could also approach our topic from the standpoint of 'identity politics', see e.g., Appiah 2005; Gutmann 2003. Since that raises its own issues, I neglect that angle. What would also be worth exploring is the connection to Taylor's notion of a 'horizon of significance', e.g., Taylor 2018, chapter 4. But that too is a topic I neglect.
2 Habermas 1996, Appendix II; 2000, chapter 4. On constitutional patriotism, see also Müller 2007; Sternberger 1990.

have a distinguished status in society. What is crucial by way of contrast with Leitkultur is that *one way of orienting oneself is to turn away*.

For some, Orientierungskultur is what they mean *by Leitkultur*. But Leitkultur has connotations with undue dominance. Also, what is attractive and important about one tradition having public prominence is better theorized under 'orientation'. For others, Orientierungskultur might be related to what they mean *by multicultural constitutional patriotism*. But theorizing about the background culture does a better job articulating the historical contingencies of our political relationships than multicultural constitutional patriotism. However, Orientierungskultur also shares important features with constitutional patriotism and Leitkultur. It shares with the latter the idea that one culture has a default status, and with the former the insistence on increased respect for adherents of non-mainstream cultures. German philosophy—none other than Immanuel Kant—has bestowed an intellectual meaning upon an originally geographical notion (orientation) that is ubiquitous in everyday German, making 'Orientierungskultur' a natural construct. English lacks such a background in the usage of 'orientation', which makes talk of orienting culture odd. Accordingly, I use the German word even in an English text.

Thinking about Orientierungskultur, and thus about *German culture as something that orients* people, allows for a credible articulation of a liberal ideal for Germany while also addressing worries about alienation as they arise in a globalizing world.[3] I first say a few words about German culture and introduce the idea of Orientierungskultur through an example that shows how that notion relates to two competing positions we already encountered. Next I offer a systematic account of Orientierungskultur, and enlist Kant's stage-setting work on orientation. This makes it not only possible to link Orientierungskultur to individuals aiming to orient themselves, but allows us to characterize a notion originally introduced to play a role in debates about immigration as an actual societal ideal. The second half of this paper explores various ways in which Orientierungskultur actually orients, by way of connecting to recent liberal thinking, to wit, the distinction between a *public-reason standpoint* and *comprehensive moral doctrines*. Reflection on one's identity as German is a matter of reflecting on public reason, a comprehensive doctrine, German Orientierungskultur as well as the interplay among them.[4]

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3 For an effort to supplement the idea of *Leitkultur* with that of *Leitzivilisation*, see Dorn 2018.

4 (1) In the background to the present project there is my overall approach to *immigration* that is part and parcel of my view of global justice, the *grounds-of-justice view*, see Risse 2012. Let me introduce some central themes here that inform the present project. If within my framework we inquire about the state's right to rule, we come to this view: A state has the right to rule, and thus

2 So What Is German?

A society's culture, roughly, is its sets of prevalent attitudes, social practices and norms. 'Culture' is a perplexing notion because it is difficult to ascertain what it means in the first place for attitudes, practices or norms to be prevalent, and which ones are. Any complex social space is populated by a range of subcultures interrelated in multifaceted ways, or by different cultures that only loosely overlap. Subgroups or individuals partake of subcultures in a myriad of ways: they might be fully immersed in some but only thinly connected to others while distancing themselves from or being oblivious of yet others. Nonetheless, there are overlapping clusters of attitudes, practices and norms that render it appropriate to talk about an amorphous but recognizable set of traditions we may call *German culture*. The shadow of fascism makes this too a tough topic to explore. Anyone who does so likely provokes criticism of the *how-dare-you* sort.

Suppose an algorithm drew a large digital map with a dot for each individual, representing graphically (a) their attitudes on social, political and perhaps other issues; (b) their patterns of participating in activities around them, from food consumption to sports; as well as (c) main ideas structuring their conversations and thinking. Suppose that algorithm could identify clusters of similarities across these representations, accounting for thicker and thinner overlaps.

can reasonably expect others to accept exclusion, *only if* it (a) administers justice on its territory on behalf of its people, or at least makes credible efforts to that end, (b) assumes its share of global responsibilities to ensure others can lead minimally decent lives where they reside, and (c) lets a number of people live on its territory in proportion to the value for human purposes of that region. Sovereignty depends on realizing justice. So the price for exercising control over a part of a shared planet is to do one's share for humanity. Immigration is a matter of global concern rather than state discretion. Humanity's collective ownership of the earth as one ground of justice enters centrally. The reference point for assessing proportionality is the *value for human purposes of three-dimensional spaces*. States may not exclude people from entering if and as long as they *underuse their share of collectively owned resources and spaces*. A population *underuses* its share of three-dimensional space if the per-capita value of what they occupy is higher than the world average across states. The average person in such a state can access more resources than people can on a per-country average. They overuse if the per-capita value of what they occupy is lower than the world average among states. Underusers can be reasonably expected to permit immigration. Overusers do enough in permitting a share of humanity to make a living. One implication is that people from outside a country would in principle have claims to immigration. To work out how particular people have claims to enter particular countries a fair amount of non-ideal theory must enter. See Risse 2012, chapter 8; 2016; 2015; 2008. On this approach Germany would not likely be *obligated* to accept immigrants because it would arguably be proportionately populated as things stand. But Germany has accepted immigrants in recent decades, and the Leitkultur debate has arisen because of their presence and that of their descendants.

Then this set of clusters represents local culture. In the age of Big Data and high-powered social science something like this is not even beyond the domain of the feasible. Culture not only normally contains contradictory streaks but changes over time, with abundant disagreement on what it is in the first place at any given time. But none of this invalidates talk about culture. Life-worlds are deeply complex.

There is a set of notions that inform matters identified in (a)–(c) as we provide such a mapping for Germany. These notions enter thinking and behavior in very different ways, and yet a representation of culture as sketched would generate clusters in ways it would not in other parts of the world. Some of these notions are hard to translate into specific words in other languages because they are rich in connotations. I simply list some of them, and only translate where there is a good English word: Heimat, Ordnung (order), Gemütlichkeit, Geborgenheit, Verein, Pünktlichkeit (punctuality), Sauberkeit (cleanliness), Sparsamkeit (thriftiness), Fleiss (diligence), Ernsthaftigkeit (earnestness), Gründlichkeit (thoroughness), Pflicht (duty), Weltschmerz or Naturverbundenheit (connectedness to nature). Many people might scoff at such a list, worried that it merely reflects clichés. But it may just be the instantiations of the notions in thinking and behavior of previous generations that bothers them, or the uncoolness of reflecting on what it is to be German, rather than what is behind these notions per se. After

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(2) And then there are refugees, which Germany was and continues to be obligated to accept. On refugees the grounds-of-justice view offers the following stance: First of all, in virtue of the required respect for human life, people in failed or dictatorial states are entitled to support from the rest of the world. Such respect requires help with building and maintaining functioning political and economic institutions since such institutions are essential to any kind of self-determined life. Such a duty is constrained because outsiders have limited abilities to build such institutions. Secondly, however, if it is not feasible to ensure people get to live under functioning institutions, or if this simply does not happen, as co-owners of the globe these people have rights to relocate. It is not for us to prevent them from finding another location on a planet we inhabit together and that none of us has put here. It does not matter morally if they flee from war, injustice or misfortune. There is no moral right to come specifically to Germany, or to remain once present. But the required global response needs to be broken down into particular obligations assigned to specific duty-bearers. Rich countries have greater obligations than poor ones. Germany exhibited exemplary behavior in this regard. Other states have disgraced themselves morally. But that others fail in their moral duty does not release anybody from their own. Of course, reality is complicated. Many arrivals are not threatened in their existence. Many will only be on the move because they know they are welcomed in Germany. So we must find bearable ways of identifying those really threatened in their existence, and then those who cannot lead a decent life in their home country. But to these people Germany does have an obligation of justice, no matter what others do.

all, clichés are what they are not because they are wrong but because they contain truths covered up by a sense of banality.[5]

There is much more: there are culinary, humoristic or artistic preferences that have arisen from a historical trajectory that unfolded in a particular geographical and political space; perspectives on history and religion as well as patterns of social and political attitudes, including views on what is appropriate for the state to do and how social mores are sanctioned that fall short of being laws; or a range of architectural styles that dominate our cities and have come into use in response to practical challenges and aesthetic tastes. All these matters change over time, normally gradually but sometimes abruptly. Often change consists in efforts to get away from something that was there before. In that sense, what came before continued to exert influence if only by way of providing the contrast.[6]

Across history innovations that worked for people spread quickly across vast swaths of land.[7] So change often came about through influx of ideas and practices from neighboring countries or even from far away, or through new arrivals who came to stay. The last decades in particular have brought many newcomers, with demographic and cultural implications that triggered the debate about Leitkultur in the first place.

3 An Illustration: Shaking Hands

To illustrate some relevant positions, let me offer an example. Some of Orientierungskultur is binding, and for clarity's sake that should be kept in mind. But

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5 For making a set of notions central to German identity (and for these particular ones), see Gelfert 2005; Bausinger 2009; Pond/Schoenbaum 1997; 1994; Sana 1994; Minder 1992; Gross 1993; Germanisches Nationalmuseum 2006; Krockow 2000; Craig 1991; Borchmeyer 2017; MacGregor 2016.

6 Carnival makes for a fascinating case study. The centuries-long tradition of gluttonous behavior preceding lent (which was accompanied by a breakdown of public order for several days especially in the West of Germany) came under suspicion in the early 19th century, beginning with the Napoleonic occupation and the subsequent expansion of state activity in Prussia. Carnival escaped prohibition by being integrated into state practices: it was organized by committees, structured around well-defined carnivalistic roles, and its culminating event was a parade (*Rosenmontagszug*, Shrove Monday procession) on a predetermined route easy to control for the state. This domesticated way of unleashing humor and drunkenness onto the streets (ironically often involving uniforms as customs) is a quintessential German phenomenon. Specifically for carnival in Cologne and its changes under Prussian influence, see Euler-Schmidt/Leifeld 2017. For carnival across Germany, see Mezger/Dold/Blümcke 1999.

7 On that general theme, see McNeill/McNeill 2003.

it is precisely because it is concerned with social mores that this example clari-fies some central positions. In April 2017, then-Secretary of the Interior Thomas de Maizière intervened in the Leitkultur discussion in *Die Zeit*. 'We are not Burka', he insisted. Germans reveal their face in public, to show presence as citizens. They greet each other by shaking hands (on suitable occasions). Days later, Jürgen Habermas let it be known that no Muslima had to shake de Maizière's hand.[8]

One opposing view is a type of multiculturalism consistent with constitu-tional patriotism as a political umbrella under which a range of cultural outlooks can flourish. (Even though I introduced Habermas as a participant to this debate who appeals to constitutional patriotism, I do not claim the following reflects his stance.) They might reason as follows: 'In Germany we live under the Basic Law, our constitution. Our public sphere should be regulated in accordance with the constitution, but all worldviews that can flourish under our constitution are welcome. The constitution makes no provisions on social mores. In public no-body's mores have default status. Lack of familiarity with anybody else's mores is not embarrassing. What is embarrassing is to presume there is one guiding set of mores.'

Advocates of Orientierungskultur, the view I wish to promote, would say this: 'Leitkultur advocates are right that one set of social mores should have default status in public life, and be respected as such. Lack of familiarity is embarrassing. But multicultural constitutional patriots are right that there is no presumption that everybody participate in them. However, it might be appropriate for those who opt not to participate politely to explain to those who operate on the basis of default mores that, and perhaps why, they do not. Non-participants need not be embarrassed, and it is not a matter of exceptional toleration that they would not be required to do so; it is a matter of articulating that one's cultural allegiances deviate from default practices. Those who proceed based on defaults need not be embarrassed but ought to respect that others have alternative allegiances.'

Leitkultur insists on a strong priority of certain established ways and toler-ates deviations only in exceptional cases. Multicultural constitutional patriotism holds all cultural outlooks that accept constitutional essentials are on a par and

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8 Thomas de Maizière, "Leitkultur für Deutschland – was ist das eigentlich?", *Die Zeit*, April 30, 2017, http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2017-04/thomas-demaiziere-innenmi-nister-leitkultur. For Habermas's reaction of May 3, 2017, in: http://www.rp-online.de/politik/deutschland/leitkultur-das-sagt-juergen-habermas-zur-debatte-aid-1.6793232. Defenders of Leit-kultur might say this: 'In Germany, we customarily shake hands. It matters that this includes women because women are social equals. This is an accomplishment we cherish. If you spend time here, please respect this. Lack of familiarity with these customs is embarrassing. Unwilling-ness to participate is tolerated, but only on an exceptional basis.'

need not defer to each other. *Orientierungskultur* holds that established ways do have a certain priority but in some domains of public life other cultural outlooks deserve the higher degree of social recognition that comes with being esteemed minorities rather than toleration in exceptional cases.[9]

4 Orientation

'Orientation' derives from the Latin and Old French for East, a meaning persevered in phrases like 'the orient' or a train that goes there, the 'orient express'. The underlying verb is *oriri*, to rise: East is where the sun rises. ('Origin' comes from that root.) So 'orientation' in the geographical sense is to have a sense of where one is in relation to where the sun rises. That direction has a privileged position because it attracts attention first since light emanates from there. But that does not mean one would or should go that way. It is just that in relation to that distinctive point it is also clear how to reach all other points.

It is possible to talk about Orientierungskultur even in borderline cases without diversity. But to be informative, such talk presupposes a context without unitary culture. There is then not one neatly integrated set of practices and norms but a multiplicity of interconnected sets of which one nonetheless stands out. To talk about Orientierungskultur—culture that provides orientation -parallel to the geographical account is to say two things. First of all, the Orientierungskultur is the one of most instant visibility and impact. Its following and attractiveness generates a default status among available practices and norms. Secondly, the Orientierungskultur is the one in relation to which others position themselves. One way of positioning is to distance oneself—much as one way of getting orientation

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9 One could consider stronger versions of multiculturalism than multicultural constitutional patriotism. One such view insists we should be open-minded when it comes to the dominance of German in public life and that German-speakers should have no advantage speakers of *certain* (perhaps all) other languages lack. However, such multiculturalism would be a non-starter. Germany is not traditionally multilingual. (In any event, if we limited the term 'traditionally' to the post-war period: before the world wars the middle of Europe looked very different, also linguistically.) For that reason, practical disruption and extent of alienation would be conclusive obstacles to the creation of a genuinely multilingual public sphere. So there is a presumption that all adults who participate in public life and in employment markets learn German. This view is consistent with views such as (a) the state should incentivize newcomers to learn German; (b) allowances should be made for people in employment scenarios who are still learning German; (d) older newcomers with no ambitions on the labor market do not have to learn German; (c) Germans ought to acquire other languages, for instance English in academia.

from sunrise is to walk (what one then knows to be) *West*—though that could still be a distancing within shared cultural space. In this regard Orientierungskultur differs from Leitkultur: Leitkultur aims to lead and demands allegiance in ways Orientierungskultur does not.

Leitkultur does not have to insist its prescriptions are legally enforceable across the board, and Orientierungskultur must be partially enforceable, in matters of legal interpretation. But the idea of orienting oneself entails that in certain domains of public life deviations from a mainstream have more esteemed status than exceptionally tolerated behavior. 'Orientierungskultur' allows us to say one culture occupies a default position though others are also present and just as entitled to sticking to principles or social mores. Inevitably there will be limitations. Too much diversity can undermine the ability to make decisions through democratic processes that losers can be reasonably expected to accept, as well as society's capacities to provide a social world most participants can consider theirs: a world that meets their needs, reflects their values and is intelligible to them. To speak about *German Orientierungskultur* is to single out (a version of) German culture as providing orientation in the presence of other cultures that are not part of German culture.[10]

The Basic Law limits acceptable diversity. It delineates a public space where individuals interact as citizens. To debate politics, vote, serve in the army, send children to public schools, generally to encounter each other on public spaces citizens do not need to be belong to a certain religion or adhere to a particular worldview. Nor do politicians who make law or authorities who implement it. So one way in which diversity is constrained in Germany is that all cultures that operate openly and seek respect must accept separation of politics and religion *to that extent*. Islam is inevitably in the background. By now Islam belongs to contemporary Germany, in any reasonable way one may want to understand such

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10 In his exchange with Habermas, Rawls distinguishes *background culture* from specifically *political background culture*. The background culture, he says, "is the culture of the social, not of the publicly political. It is the culture of daily life, with its many associations: its universities and churches, learned and scientific societies; and endless political discussions of ideas and doctrines are commonplace everywhere." This background culture "contains comprehensive doctrines of all kinds: these are taught, debated against one another, and argued about, indefinitely without end, as long as society has vitality and spirit." See Rawls 1995, 140. I understand Orientierungskultur in the sense of this general background culture, not the political one determining how people encounter each other as citizens. Rawls also rightly associates this general background culture with Habermas's understanding of the public sphere, going back to Habermas 1991. Orientierungskultur is one interpretation of the public sphere.

belonging.[11] But for Muslims not to bring too much diversity they must accept an understanding of religion that disavows unity of politics and religion. The same is true of Christian fundamentalists or any other group that cannot distinguish between their outlook and the political domain, or of groups that deny the acceptability of cultural diversity altogether, for whatever reason.

Orientierungskultur is no status set in stone. An Orientierungskultur must be the culture of choice for a large share of the people. Otherwise there would be no point to think of it as occupying the central role this status entails. It is also hard to see how a culture could maintain this status unless its representatives make that culture look attractive. But what would be wrong with the view that all cultures are on a par as long as they respect the constitution? Why is it *newcomers* who must orient themselves vis-à-vis German culture and thus shoulder the costs from such alignment? Why should not Germans abandon their culture's hegemonic status? Nobody has a right to expect that things do not change around them, as much as change might make them uncomfortable.

The response comes in three steps. To begin with, there is per se nothing morally problematic about groups building their own culture (setting aside loathsome cultural streaks, which would have to be addressed separately): on the contrary, it is subjectively good for people involved with such efforts because it enriches their lives and shapes who they are to begin with, and it is good from an impartial standpoint because it allows people to produce, create and maintain things of objective value. Secondly, if change comes too fast or is too extensive, many have reason to feel alienated in the sense that their social world fails to meet their needs, reflect their values or be intelligible to them. That is a matter of moral concern because what they had been doing together was subjectively and objectively valuable. To be sure, and that is the third step, the sheer fact that there is such alienation is no conclusive argument against change, even on the strongest ways of understanding the second step. Instead, that fact needs to be weighed against claims of newcomers to cultural homes of their own. The notion of Orientierungskultur balances such claims, in ways neither Leitkultur nor multicultural

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11 Within days of taking up office as Secretary of the Interior in March 2018, Horst Seehofer went on record for denying that point: http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2018-03/horst-seehofer-islam-deutschland. The original statement on whether Islam belongs to Germany was made by-then President Christian Wulff in a speech on the 20th anniversary of German reunification on October 3, 2010. Alongside Christianity and Judaism, President Wulff insisted, Islam too belonged to Germany. Since then time and again leading politicians have taken a stance on that matter.

constitutional patriotism could. It imposes costs on all sides, and could be read as a proposal for a fair division of these costs.[12]

5 The Kantian Connection

We talk about orientation in the world, or a crisis in finding it, about value orientation, religious, philosophical, artistic, intellectual, political or sexual orientation. We need to orient ourselves in smaller and larger manners all the time, when we enter a room to find a seat or need guidance in life choices. Perhaps we are oriented already if we are grounded, say, in Lutheran Protestantism, Tibetan Buddhism or Orthodox Judaism. Perhaps we seek to re-orient ourselves. In light of its ubiquity in pre-theoretical discourse especially in German it is surprising that little philosophical theorizing has been done about the notion of orientation in recent times. That said, the originally geographical term does have a history in German discourse that now makes talk about Orientierungskultur straightforward.[13]

The most influential philosophical exploration of orientation is Kant's 1786 essay 'What is Orientation in Thinking?'[14] That essay was crucial for introducing 'orientation' into philosophical as well as everyday German. More importantly for our purposes, Kant talks about the *individual* in pursuit of orientation. Orientierungskultur is a type of culture set apart from other cultures. Saying that much does not yet bring in the individual though it is ultimately the individual who needs orientation, or for that matter, needs culture. Kant's discussion lets us

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12 (1) 'Alienation' has been one of the great buzzwords of 19th and 20th century social theory, originating with Feuerbach, Hegel and Marx. My usage follows Elster 1986, chapter 3; Wolff 2002, 27–36. See also Schacht 1971; Ollman 1977. For recent work, see Jaeggi 2014. (2) Why would newcomers have *claims* at all? On this subject see again the discussion in the footnote at the end of *section 1*, where I reconnect to my earlier work on immigration and refuge. 'Newcomers' in the relevant sense discussed here could also be descendants of people who came to Germany; they would be 'newcomers' for present purposes if they decided to stick with cultural patterns of their forebears. Similarly, the argument speaks to Germans who adopt non-traditional cultural patterns.

13 One exception is Werner Stegmaier, whose magnum opus develops a philosophy of orientation and who also added an anthology of contributions on the topic; see Stegmaier 2007; 2005a. See also Stegmaier 2016. For a Festschrift on Stegmaier's work, see Bertino et al. 2016. See also Mittelstraß 1982; Kaulbach 1966. Kant's essay on orienting oneself in thinking is the most influential contribution to philosophical reflection on orientation. There is no parallel discussion in English-speaking philosophy, but for an exception, see Flikschuh 2017.

14 Kant, 'What Is Orientation in Thinking?'. For discussion see O'Neill 2011.

make that connection. And once we see what Kant says about how the individual can orient herself, we can reconnect to what we said about Orientierungskultur to cast a society that has such a culture in a positive light.

The word 'to orient' was not used in German before the 18th century. Once introduced from the French, it was quickly lifted from its original geographical context into a philosophical one, and from there became ubiquitous.[15] The term assumed its philosophical meaning in Enlightenment debates about faith versus reason. German-Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn argued that both had roles to play in human thinking. To formulate that view he enlisted the notion of orientation from its original geographical (and French) context. Mendelssohn rejected the dichotomy between faith and reason.[16] Reason itself had to determine when received views (including articles of faith) were acceptable, and when critical investigation was appropriate. As he put it, both modes are needed for reason *to orient itself*, for the reflective person to know what to think and what to do. And the reflective person can orient herself in the world only by investigating the scope and limits of reason. For the individual to be seen as *orienting himself* testifies to the Enlightenment's emphasis on judgment, and thus on individuality in the first place.

Kant draws on this usage of orienting oneself in 'What is Orientation in Thinking?'. He starts with the geographical meaning and points out that the individual can orient herself in external space only by first having a subjective sense of herself as located in that space. Our internal sense of the distinction between left and right makes focus on external points possible to begin with. Everything outside of us we recognize only in relation to us. At this stage Kant enlists the move made by Mendelssohn (also by way of distinguishing himself from him, but that is not of interest here). Kant draws an analogy between orientation in space by means of felt differences between left and right, on the one hand, and orientation in the supersensible realm by a feeling of a need inherent in reason to allow faith to play a role in human life, on the other.[17] Faith is not based on knowledge, but reason still needs it. Faith and reason are both required to provide orientation in the world. As in the geographical analogy an investigation of one's own standpoint is required to be oriented. That is the grand project of Kant's critical philosophy, for reason to critically examine its scope and limits.

So 'orientation' enters German philosophy as a notion concerned with how an individual can comprehend, and find a place in, the world. Within decades,

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15 For the intellectual history I follow Stegmaier 2007, chapters 2–3. See also Stegmaier 2005b.

16 Mendelssohn 2008, 169–176. This is Section X of Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Dasein Gottes*. For Mendelssohn and Kant, see also Jensen 2003.

17 Kant, 'What Is Orientation in Thinking?', 238–242.

first the noun 'orientation' becomes customary in philosophical and colloquial German. Later in the 19th century the term 'Weltorientierung' appears, often synonymously with 'philosophy' itself (Stegmaier 2007, chapter 3). By now constructions involving orientation in any number of senses have become ubiquitous in German, enabling also the construction of the term 'Orientierungskultur'.

Kant ends with a plea for public use of reason.[18] He praises freedom of conscience and speech and stresses how orientation in thinking—and an assessment of what such orientation implies for living arrangements—is a shared task. After all, according to Kant's critical philosophy, advice on how we ought to live together cannot come from anywhere but proper use of reason. It cannot come from God, or any kind of law engrained in nature, nor from uncritical reflection of received ways. Humans should take all the help they can get in orienting themselves. For all we know we can get such help only from each other.

We can take from Kant that the individual needs to orient herself in the world-at-large as a thinking being, and also in the social spaces we create and inhabit together. In a society shaped by an Orientierungskultur that space is of a certain form, where one culture has the standing of being the point of reference while not demanding universal allegiance. So while individuals orienting themselves and a culture being an Orientierungskultur deploy 'orientation' in different ways, they are related. Orientierungskultur would prevent alienation—a phenomenon not emphasized by Kant but by many of his successors—because it gives individuals a cultural reference point; at the same time, such a society would enable and require discourse across cultures and subcultures precisely because the Orientierungskultur does not demand universal allegiance. A society organized around an Orientierungskultur encapsulates a standing invitation to do intellectual work for or against commitments to that culture. In this manner the Kantian connection allows us to enlist the notion of Orientierungskultur for purposes beyond the immigration context, to characterize a society worth having (assuming historical circumstances are of the right sort).

In sum, we can bring together Kant's reflections and my proposed notion of Orientierungskultur as follows. On the one hand, a society shaped by an Orientierungskultur calls for the public use of reason Kant rightly identified as a central way for individuals to orient themselves in the world. At the same time, by providing orientation at the level of competing cultural tendencies such a culture offers the kind of reassurance for which many will, and should, be grateful.

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18 Kant, 'What Is Orientation in Thinking?', 247–249.

6 Orientierungskultur, Public Reason and Comprehensive Doctrines

How does a culture *orient*? To set the stage let me introduce the distinction between public reason and comprehensive moral doctrines, in light of which it becomes clearer why an Orientierungskultur is needed and just how it orients. The societal ideal sketched at the end of *section 5* will also get more complex in its normative features. That distinction is central to *political liberalism*, a development of liberal thought whose major proponent is Rawls (Rawls 1996). Typical examples of comprehensive moral doctrines include versions of Christianity, Judaism, Islam or Buddhism. Such doctrines offer advice on all domains of life but typically rely on metaphysical and epistemological assumptions about which reasonable people disagree. To accept any of the world's major theistic religions one has to accept that there is divine revelation shared with choice individuals, and that the world accessible to our senses is not all there is.

In addition to comprehensive doctrines there is public reason, which politicians and judges are asked to use debating and passing laws or applying the law, and citizens too are advised to use when discussing political matters with each other *as* citizens. No arguments drawing on comprehensive doctrines ought to be used then, in any event none that could not also be formulated without recourse to such doctrines. To simplify things, the public-reason standpoint in the German case only draws on the Basic Law. Constitutional patriotism is a way of taking pride in public reason.

The Basic Law demands detachment from comprehensive doctrines and formulates the contents of a relationship among citizens as they are characteristic of public reason. Especially by way of comparison with Americans Germans have little genuine affection for their constitution. There are no ubiquitous references to the will of the people as grounded in the founding document. The museum on Herrenchiemsee Island (location of the constitutional assembly in the late 40s) is little-known. Presumably this discrepancy is due to the fact that the American constitution grew out of a crushing victory whereas the German one arose from a devastating defeat that ended a genocidal regime. Nonetheless in an increasingly diverse Germany, constitutional patriotism based on the vision captured by that document has a better chance of attracting allegiances than any alternative. A public-reason culture is key to successful political arrangements in today's multifaceted societies.

To be sure, to the extent that public reason and comprehensive doctrines are matters of attitudes, practices and norms, and to the extent that they exist in Germany, they should be seen as embedded into German culture. Culture is not some-

thing *apart* from public reason and comprehensive doctrines, but the more en-
compassing unit. But the way culture orients is not reducible to public reason,
more specifically to what is written in the constitution, nor is it reducible to com-
prehensive doctrines. We should accept the normative significance of the fact that
culture orients, and thus that there is an Orientierungskultur, *in addition* to what-
ever we say about public reason and comprehensive doctrines. To the extent that
we need to add the distinction between public reason and comprehensive doctrine
to the account of society stated at the end of our Kant-discussion, the quest for ori-
entation in social space also becomes more complex. German Orientierungskul-
tur, public reason captured by the Basic Law and comprehensive doctrines inter-
act in complex ways that vary across persons.

Christianity has played a key role in German history and continues to play
such a role in public life. Cities, towns and villages normally are organized around
churches, Christian holidays mark the rhythm of the year, religious music, lit-
erary themes, art and folklore in the Christian tradition shape much of public
life, Christian symbols, names and cultural references are everywhere, Christian
organizations do a substantial amount of charitable work and many Germans
see themselves as Christians, if only as lapsed but therefore still culturally con-
nected Christians. Germany's place in Christendom, and Christendom's place in
Germany, have been key factors in the region's trajectory since late Antiquity. Fa-
miliarity with Christianity is part of German Orientierungskultur. But this does not
mean *adherence* to Christianity is part of Orientierungskultur. The point of Orien-
tierungskultur in a liberal society is that more is shared than public reason. But
the nature of this sharing does not collapse into acceptance of one comprehensive
doctrine.

7 Providing Orientation: Public Reason and Legal Interpretation

Let us explore just how Orientierungskultur works. The first way is one where ori-
entation coincides with abidance by the law. Orientierungskultur is needed to in-
terpret central terms defining citizenship. Public reason depends on the histor-
ical and cultural background of a country, in this case Germany. Since we are
talking about constitutional and legal interpretation, at least some of the orienta-
tion takes the form of law-abiding behavior. Or in any event, deviations would be
prosecuted rather than tolerated or esteemed. The second manner in which Ori-
entierungskultur orients—discussed in *section 8*—is by offering social mores de-
viation from which is not a legal matter. It is in this domain that the *orienting*-part

comes into its own (offering the possibility of turning away). Here deviations from the mainstream should not only be tolerated on an exceptional basis but be accepted as genuine alternatives. Finally, *section 9* discusses how Orientierungskultur enters into curricular design. On the subjects of the next sections much more could be said. My concern is to explore what it means for a culture *to orient*.

The first manner in which German background culture orients is that the vocabulary deployed in the constitution to characterize the status of and relationship among citizens must be interpreted for particular cases. If we do not want to leave this task to comprehensive doctrines (as in a liberal tradition we do not), we must turn to the broader cultural background.[19] Consider 'dignity'. Article 1 of the Basic Law insists dignity is inviolable. Dignity is a difficult notion, one some philosophers think can be theorized and others wish to do without.[20] But as far as courts are concerned, it needs to be spelled out what is meant by dignity as well as by violating it. Merely to scratch the surface, such violations might be certain infringements on individuals that *in each case* are forbidden (almost) regardless of costs. Alternatively, what could be meant is an aggregative notion, demanding that human dignity be somehow maximized across persons.

What is in the background is decisions about weighing entitlements and interest against the perceived public good. This involves decisions about what kind of entitlements individuals have, but also decisions about the nature of rights, of the public good itself and the relationship among these ideas. Most people would agree that, should the heavens fall, some rights will not be protected. But then, under what conditions could there be infringements? Only if rights of others are at stake, or also when a sufficiently large amount of other goods is affected? In such matters the background culture would provide orientation by way of helping to settle matters of legal interpretation.

Making such determinations also involves a basic understanding of what sort of things governments do, and at what level (federal/state/municipal), or what treatment to accord to minorities after they lost a political struggle. In Germany many see the police as 'Freund und Helfer' (friend and supporter), or anyway not as a group best avoided, as many American do; possession of weapons is not part of the understanding of citizenship or personal independence; freedom of speech matters but is not worshipped the way it has been in recent American history;

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19 That same thought appears in Habermas 1994, 122–128. Habermas talks about "permeation of the constitutional state by ethics" where 'ethics' for him means ideas about the good life. Such permeation is what I mean by the legally binding aspect of Orientierungskultur. Habermas's argument is also taken up by Müller 2007, chapter 2.

20 Much work has recently been done on dignity, see Tiedemann 2014; Pfordten 2016; Bieri 2015; Kateb 2014; Rosen 2012; Waldron 2015.

unlike in France politics is done in a non-pompous style, etc. A commitment to human rights, multilateralism, non-populist juridical culture and a humane penal culture with relatively lenient prison terms are as central to the political outlook as is sound environmental policy. The work week is organized around Sunday as a holiday. Sundays are quiet even in larger cities, and the year is structured by a number of holidays many of which are of Christian origin but have an established place in public culture regardless of religious background. All of this has legal implications for labor markets. The details of these views cannot simply be read off the Basic Law or any particular laws. The background culture orients by informing how the constitution and the laws are interpreted.

The Basic Law on occasion explicitly opens itself to interpretation in terms of a background culture. Article 2 (1) states each person has the right to free development of her personality, as long as she does not violate rights of others or violate the constitutional order or moral law. Article 5 (1) records the right to freedom of expression in speech, writing and image, but 5 (2) adds limitations in terms of the protection of the youth and personal honor. Traditionally speech is limited more tightly in Germany than it has been in particular in the US the last 100 years or so. That too is a matter of Orientierungskultur. Again, since these are legal matters the orientation that happens here is limited to strict guidance.

But has not German culture, thus the Orientierungskultur, been influenced by comprehensive doctrines prominent in Germany, that is, by Christianity? Nietzsche, for one, argued forcefully that Christianity casts a long shadow.[21] Even those who are not self-consciously Christians have been shaped in a society that has emerged from a Christian one. We cannot ignore that the past continues to shape the present, also and especially in our ways of distancing ourselves from what has come before. Nietzsche is probably right that the additions to German culture that have come from liberal, socialist or democratic traditions cannot be understood without recourse to Christianity. But our contemporary public culture, dependencies notwithstanding, is also quite different from what various versions of Christianity qua comprehensive doctrines would prescribe.

8 Providing Orientation: Social Mores

The background culture sets standards for social norms, such as the hand-shaking scenario discussed earlier. Let me elaborate on that case a bit more. On visits to the United Arab Emirates, new arrivals learn the custom is not to shake hands

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21 This is the guiding theme especially of Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*.

with women. As in other Muslim countries a default is in place on the side of not initiating such contact. In Japan people do not shake hands. Japanese find physical contact invasive. Like Korea, Japan has a fine-tuned bowing culture. Not knowing such defaults could cause embarrassment. In Germany, the custom is to shake hands on certain occasions, and then to shake hands with all adults without discrimination especially along gender-lines. There would be much reluctance in Germany to taking the word of those who position themselves as spokespeople for certain cultures to the effect that women should be excluded from such interaction.

To the extent that social mores are part of Orientierungskultur, they should be used to teach children behavioral defaults, as well as instruct new arrivals in the ways of the land. People should know *what to expect*, to assess what to take part in or deviate from. If new arrivals do not wish to participate in a custom, they should politely (cognizant of its default character) explain to those who stretch out their hand that this is how they see it. Those others should politely accept their view. Similar considerations apply to those growing up in Germany in a culture that does not practice universal hand shaking.

It is neither practical nor desirable to pretend all social norms are on a par in any location. The generic rationale for why German habits of this sort would obtain the status of Orientierungskultur is to prevent alienation on the side of those steeped in those traditions while giving all others a fair sense of what to expect. If, say, the Minister of the Interior often moves in social niches where hand shaking is rejected, social learning should tell him how to approach Muslimas. But that is not because he should not presume that there are cultural defaults. There are many other such matters of social mores that come as suggestions beyond hand shaking: how to dress for everyday life, professional performance or festive occasions; whether to bring gifts to a home; whether to invite to one's home, and whom; whether to take off shoes; how to integrate outdoor spaces into social activities; when to drink alcohol; how to behave in places of worship; or when to use formal rather than informal second-person and how to greet people to begin with.

To say social mores are part of Orientierungskultur is to say deviations can have a higher status than merely being tolerated on an exceptional basis. As appropriate, they could be regarded as genuine alternatives, generally acknowledged minority views in a larger cultural space. Some deviations would be regarded as rude or excessively idiosyncratic from the standpoint of mainstream culture. What would be the basis for respect as a genuine alternative is a form of living together that has endured through its ability to attract followers, which is possible only if it comes with cultural depth. While there is nothing wrong with

anybody making up forms of interaction, it would put too much of a burden on others to respect idiosyncracies.[22]

As far as social mores are concerned, the rule should be wherever possible to see mainstream culture as providing orientation by offering suggestions—though suggestions accepted by many people—rather than obligatory patterns. It imposes costs on non-mainstream cultures to accept an Orientierungskultur vis-à-vis which they ought to align themselves. They should not ask to be on a par with the mainstream, or insist there ought to be no defaults. They should explain deviations, and accept that others engage them based on default-driven assumptions. There would be limits to diversity. In Germany, facial coverage is problematic because it does not permit recognition of the person one deals with. In public spaces this contradicts democratic ideals that are part of the public-reason standpoint. This could at most be acceptable in an accommodating spirit for low numbers.

This approach also imposes costs on adherents of the Orientierungskultur. Adherents of non-mainstream cultures should not have to feel their ways are accepted merely on an exceptional basis. They are an esteemed minority. Adherents of the Orientierungskultur should suspend social sanctions (ranging from ostensible disapproval to exclusion) and show respect. They should also familiarize themselves with non-mainstream ways so they can handle encounters properly.

There are many examples of how the general culture orients by making suggestions rather than imposing binding rules. A range of cultural patterns derives from the central notions in *section 2*. Other patterns derive from the established comprehensive doctrines, one way or another. The Christian background makes the role of churches in the design of cities, as well as the acoustic presence of church-bells, part of what does the orienting. Mosques and muezzins in Germany play no such role. Muslims should not insist they be allowed to play such roles. But room should be made for mosques, religious instruction should be offered, and Christian symbols should not be displayed in schools or administrative buildings. Much as adherents of certain variants of Islam can be expected not to cover faces in public, Christians should do without crucifixes in public buildings. To take German customs as defining an Orientierungskultur satisfies various legitimate purposes: to prevent alienation on the side of those parts of the population who are committed to the cultural essentials while making room for those who are not.

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22 For viewers of the TV series Seinfeld: Festivus does not have to be generally respected. Festivus is a holiday made up by one of the show's characters to spite mainstream traditions. Its purpose is mostly to allow the inventor (Frank Costanza) to tell people what he dislikes about them.

9 Providing Orientation: Education

One may wonder whether my argument in support of a society organized around an Orientierungskultur works across generation. A culture's default status is never secure but must be defended through debate and example. What then is the rationale for granting a built-in advantage to one culture in the educational process? But concerns about alienation carry over to the next generation. Societies emerge from a past trajectory and normally change gradually. The society children grow into was created by generations before them, to a large extent by adherents of the default culture. It is in that social world that children must orient themselves. That social world now is one where a range of other cultures is present.

Education should acquaint all children with the default culture, regardless of whether they themselves belong to it. They must acquire a range of skills for the world of tomorrow. They also need a sense of how German culture regards the process of schooling in the first place. A central term is *Bildung* —literally 'formation'. Schools contribute to personality development, not limiting themselves to 'bringing up' children (literally 'education'). And decisions must be made on what to teach. Since it is our history and culture from where we enter our future, we must know this history and culture, so here German history and culture embedded into European history and culture, and then also into world history and culture. Americans need to know a lot about the Civil War; Germans do not. But anybody living in Germany should be familiar with the major stepping stones that made the country what it is. Anybody living in Germany must know about the Second World War and the Holocaust, and should reflect on how contemporary German culture is connected to that time. Anybody who identifies with German Orientierungskultur needs a view on whether she is ashamed of that connection or on which other emotional response to the Holocaust is appropriate.[23]

The ways in which education should connect to European and global contexts should create room for instruction on other cultures present in Germany. Again, one way of providing orientation is to make it possible to turn away. To that end, children must get acquainted with alternative approaches. School should provide such acquaintance, but other cultures would be free to implement educational agendas outside of school. However, they should not shelter children from the default culture, no more than adherents of that culture should shelter children from alternatives. All comprehensive doctrines must face the risk that children orient themselves as they see fit.

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23 For the view that Germans, when visiting concentration camps, should feel shame, see Leist 1997.

10 Conclusion

There is value to one cultural tradition occupying a default status while there also is a range of other cultures that are not merely tolerated on an exceptional basis but whose adherents are esteemed minorities. One way for the default culture to provide orientation is by making it possible to turn away from some of its components. To be sure, some of its components involve constitutional essentials and other legal matters that come with coercive enforcement. So not all of Orientierungskultur offers orientation by being a reference point for rejection. But some of it does, and whenever possible the default culture should provide orientation by presenting itself as attractive while allowing people to turn away from it.

Orientierungskultur is a word-creation that can be embedded into an intellectual history going back to Mendelssohn and Kant. A similar construction in English does not work as well because this background is lacking. Liberal theory distinguishes public reason from comprehensive doctrines. But for the formulation of an ideal of society—a decidedly liberal one—in a context as steeped in history and culture as Germany the notion of Orientierungskultur is needed in addition. As always with philosophical frameworks, the vocabulary provided here offers ways of approaching scenarios, rather than definitive assessments.

A society organized around an Orientierungskultur invites representatives of cultures and comprehensive doctrines to make them appealing through debate and lived example. Such a society makes for a more appealing ideal than one shaped by Leitkultur or multicultural constitutional patriotism. As we reflect on our identity as Germans or people living in Germany, a public-reason standpoint such as constitutional patriotism, comprehensive moral doctrines such as versions of Christianity or Islam, as well as German Orientierungskultur and one's relationship to it, all matter. Nobody said reflection on identity would be easy. In that spirit I conclude by pointing out that my main purpose has been to introduce the term Orientierungskultur into both political and philosophical debates about immigration and identity. Many questions remain open and much has gone by too fast. But hopefully others will find the term useful, and help address these matters.

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