

The rebirth of the university

In the midst of destruction, in some marvellous way, intellectual life sprouted. A small but influential group dedicated themselves to debate, critique, and soul-searching during the early post-war years. Newly written drama was produced in cold basements; newly produced films were shown in mouldy tents. Although this cultural vitality eventually faded, a foundation for post-war Germany was laid here.¹

The cultural vigour of the first post-war years astonished many thinkers who had been forced to leave Nazi Germany. Theodor W. Adorno had spent the war years in exile in America, but returned to his native country at the end of the 1940s. He had expected to encounter listlessness and cynicism. Instead he saw how young Germans thirsted for art, philosophy, and *Bildung*. In a letter to Thomas Mann, Adorno compared the atmosphere to that which had characterised the period following the Napoleonic wars. Then as now, he noted, the students discussed logical and metaphysical problems with the same gravity that other generations had discussed politics. In a way this was not strange: if the German nation had a future, it was not as a political great power but as an intellectual one. In their present situation, the Germans were – with an echo

1 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Vor dem Vorhang: Das geistige Berlin 1945–1948* (Munich, 1995); Jörg Echternkamp, *Nach dem Krieg: Alltagsnot, Neuorientierung und die Last der Vergangenheit 1945–1949* (Zürich, 2003). Parts of this chapter build upon earlier texts of mine: Johan Östling, ‘The Regeneration of the University: Karl Jaspers and the Humboldtian Tradition in the Wake of the Second World War’, in *The Humboldtian Tradition*, ed. by Josephson, Karlsohn, & Östling, and Johan Östling, ‘The Swansong of the Mandarins: Humboldt’s Idea of the University in Early Post-War Germany’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 13:2 (2016), 387–415.

from Hölderlin – ‘tatenarm und gedankenvoll’ (‘poor in deeds, rich in thoughts’).²

It was not only Adorno who experienced the thirst for and the joy of knowledge among the young Germans. Legal historian Helmut Coing spoke of the deep, sincere sense of happiness that unfolded during this time. In spite of the poverty, there was an openness to everything connected with science and scholarship, art, and music, he remembered. Eduard Spranger, the philosopher and educationalist, praised the students he met in the late 1940s. They were the most earnest and dedicated he had ever known.³

The university was one of the first societal institutions that were allowed to resume their activities after the surrender of Nazi Germany in May 1945. Much had changed, however. In a very tangible sense, the outcome of the Second World War had transformed the academic terrain. The loss of the eastern territories meant that venerated universities such as Königsberg and Breslau ceased to be German educational institutions. In the Soviet zone a rapid reshaping of the universities, with clear ideological overtones, was immediately begun. Over the next forty years, well-established German educational institutions such as Berlin, Greifswald, Halle, Jena, and Leipzig came under Communist control.⁴

2 Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton, 2006), pp. 134–38; Theodor W. Adorno & Thomas Mann, *Briefwechsel 1943–1955*, ed. by Christoph Göttsche & Thomas Specker (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), pp. 46–47.

3 Christoph Führ, ‘Zur deutschen Bildungsgeschichte seit 1945’, in *Handbuch der deutschen Bildungsgeschichte: 1945 bis zur Gegenwart: Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, ed. by Christoph Führ & Carl-Ludwig Furck (Munich, 1998), pp. 6–7.

4 Ralph Jessen, ‘Zwischen Bildungspathos und Spezialistentum: Werthaltungen und Identitätskonstruktionen der Hochschullehrerschaft in West- und Ostdeutschland nach 1945’, in *Eliten im Sozialismus: Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, ed. by Peter Hübner (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 1999); Connelly, *Captive University; Hochschuloffiziere und Wiederaufbau des Hochschulwesens in Deutschland 1945–1949: Die sowjetische Besatzungszone*, ed. by Manfred Heinemann (Berlin, 2000); Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), pp. 440–48; Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Geist im Dienste der Macht: Hochschulpolitik in der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1961* (Berlin, 2003); Gunilla-Friederike Budde, *Frauen der Intelligenz: Akademikerinnen in der DDR 1945 bis 1975* (Göttingen, 2003).



7 The war-damaged Berlin university in 1945

In the west, much of the old system seemed to endure. Nazism, the Second World War, the defeat, and the occupation did not alter the basic order that had been established during the nineteenth century. The organisation, the faculty divisions, the internal hierarchy of subjects – in all essentials, the structure remained the same. Nevertheless, people also faced a number of significant challenges in the western zones of occupation. Several comparatively small university towns, such as Marburg, Göttingen, and Tübingen, were largely spared material destruction; but in many cities, including Hamburg, Cologne, and Frankfurt am Main, lecture halls, libraries, and laboratories had been seriously damaged. Lectures had to be given in temporary facilities, book collections were severely depleted, and access to technical equipment was woefully inadequate.⁵

Getting the academic machinery up and running was not simply a matter of clearing away concrete obstacles and solving practical problems. The university and its future role in German society stood out as a vital issue to many more people than the professors. Dolf

5 Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*, pp. 14–19. The literature on individual universities is quite extensive today. See, for instance, Steven P. Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth*, as well as *Die Universität München im Dritten Reich: Aufsätze*, ed. by Elisabeth Kraus, 2 vols (Munich, 2006–2008). For an overview, see Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*, pp. 17–19.

Sternberger felt that ‘the problem of the university is, crucially, a general problem that in no way concerns academics only’.⁶ This was also true of the three powers that controlled occupied Western Germany in 1945–1949. They all identified the university as a key arena for societal transformation. The guiding principles of the Potsdam Agreement – denazification, demilitarisation, and democratisation – would also become those of the German university. Like the educational system at large, the university had to go through a real transformation if it was not to remain an anti-democratic bulwark of reactionary opposition. Ideas as to how this should be done were nevertheless very different among the occupational forces, and the same applied to the degree to which they were prepared for the task. There was no general plan for the future of the university.⁷

The Americans and the British agreed that the best way to bring about re-education was to reform the traditional German university, preferably in close cooperation with democratically minded German academics. The French for their part doubted that it was possible to change the existing university in the desired manner. Democratisation and re-education were matters of too great importance to be entrusted to the Germans themselves. The French solution was to establish new universities (for example in Mainz and Saarbrücken) and to pursue active cultural policies.⁸

At the same time, the will of the allies to change the German educational system was only one side of the matter. These brief but important years also saw ongoing intellectual reflection concerning the idea of the university. One central question which engaged

6 Dolf Sternberger, ‘Nachbemerkung’, in Karl Jaspers & Fritz Ernst, *Vom lebendigen Geist der Universität und vom Studieren: Zwei Vorträge* (Heidelberg, 1946), p. 63.

7 Corine Defrance, *Les Alliés occidentaux et les universités allemandes: 1945–1949* (Paris, 2000); Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*.

8 Walter Rüegg & Jan Sadlak, ‘Relations with Authority’, in *A History of the University in Europe: Universities Since 1945*, ed. by Rüegg, pp. 76–84; James F. Tent, *Mission on the Rhine: Reeducation and Denazification in American-Occupied Germany* (Chicago, 1982); David Phillips, *German Universities After the Surrender: British Occupation Policy and the Control of Higher Education* (Oxford, 1983); Stefan Zauner, *Erziehung und Kulturmission: Frankreichs Bildungspolitik in Deutschland 1945–1949* (Munich, 1994); Defrance, *Les Alliés occidentaux*; Paulus, *Vorbild USA?* See also Christian H. Stifter, *Zwischen geistiger Erneuerung und Restauration: US-amerikanische Planungen zur Entnazifizierung und demokratischen Neuorientierung österreichischer Wissenschaft 1941–1955* (Vienna, 2014).

many of Germany's leading thinkers was how to breathe life into the culturally and academically mangled country. What did the dominant ideals for the university look like? What role did the classic German heritage play when it came to vitalising the university? In what way was Wilhelm von Humboldt a point of reference? These questions are at the centre of this chapter.

This limited period of time – the five years following the end of the war – together with the particular conditions that prevailed in occupied Germany provide the prerequisites for realising David Armitage's approach to intellectual history: an investigation of the Humboldtian tradition's significance in a highly specific context. At the same time, the categories drawn from the history of knowledge provide analytic concreteness. The dominant academic mode of presentation during the five years following the end of the war was the lecture, an oral address that was often printed in a journal or published separately subsequent to its delivery. The German mandarins were still the leading agents of knowledge; indeed, these years were the last time they were at the centre of the great debate concerning fundamental academic ideas. Although they had differing views on the history and future of the German university, they were part of the same language sphere and belonged to a shared world of experience. On the precise meaning of the concept of knowledge, however, they could hold conflicting opinions.

Humboldt during the years of occupation

In the three western zones of occupation it soon became obvious that there would be no radical renewal of the German university. The leading professors had no interest in breaking with the older tradition, and the occupation forces lacked the energy and the ideas needed for the implementation of a new order. When, in the autumn of 1945, the Americans were allowed to examine the new statutes of Heidelberg University, they expressed their disappointment that in the main these represented a restoration of old values. Hopes for a new kind of university, however vague and embryonic these ideas might have been, came to nothing.⁹

During subsequent years the western occupation forces instead tried to reform the existing university system, through a gentler and far less comprehensive type of ideological reshaping than that taking

⁹ Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*.

place in the east. In particular, the Americans and the British took the initiative for several reform conferences and encouraged the various state governments (which gradually took over responsibility for educational issues) to work for change. One common goal was to democratise the structure of universities and place them in the service of the new society.¹⁰ One of the most important initiatives was the ‘Marburger Hochschulgespräche’, an informal discussion forum that convened several times during the early post-war years. It attracted a good deal of attention in the academic world, especially at first. In a declaration from 1946, the participants stated that the best way to promote democracy was to safeguard scholarly and scientific freedom. After a few years, however, interest in the forum cooled significantly, and in 1949 the discussions in Marburg took place for the last time.¹¹ Under British guidance, a commission was set up which mainly consisted of reform-minded German academics. They visited most universities in the three western zones, and in 1948 they presented a comprehensive reform proposal, the so-called ‘Gutachten zur Hochschulreform’ (literally ‘experts’ report concerning the reform of higher education’). In the ‘Blaues Gutachten’, thus known because of the colour of its cover, a number of proposals were presented that were aimed at, among other things, opening up German universities and making them accessible to wider social groups. Though many of these proposals were never realised, this document became a point of reference in the more recent West German debate.¹²

In spite of a number of efforts, however, none of the three western allies succeeded in bringing about a profound change of the German university. One important reason for this failure was that both the occupational forces and the leadership of the university were quickly brought face to face with a number of concrete challenges and found themselves unable to muster enough energy to push through changes. One main problem was the question of how the university was to be staffed. Roughly 1,700 Jewish scholars and scientists, 300 of whom were university professors, had been forced to flee, primarily to Great Britain and the United States. Several of them

10 Defrance, *Les Alliés occidentaux*; Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*.

11 *Dokumente zur Hochschulreform 1945–1959*, ed. by Rolf Neuhaus (Wiesbaden, 1961), p. 260.

12 *Dokumente*, ed. by Neuhaus, pp. 289–368; David Phillips, *Pragmatismus und Idealismus: Das ‘Blaue Gutachten’ und die britische Hochschulpolitik in Deutschland 1948* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, 1995).

were considered to be world leaders in their respective fields. In addition to this, there were those who had left the country during the twelve years of Nazi rule because of ideological or humanistic convictions.¹³ A more immediate problem concerned all those professors and lecturers who were politically compromised. Not a few of them had been ideologically dedicated and had worked for the Nazi cause through their academic activities, though the percentage of NSDAP faculty members varied greatly among the universities. Towards the end of the war, almost two thirds of all professors in Heidelberg had joined the Party; in Freiburg the corresponding proportion was roughly half, and in Bonn a quarter.¹⁴

The academic denazification turned out to be an arduous and delicate task. The process differed from zone to zone, but one basic pattern can be distinguished: Nazi rectors were replaced by new ones everywhere. These individuals had unblemished reputations and had usually held important academic positions before 1933, and many of them were advanced in years. The feeling of returning to normality after a twelve-year-long state of emergency, rather than a break with tradition, was therefore strong. For the occupying authorities, however, replacing the leadership was not enough. As most of the professors had not been party members, but had embraced a national-conservative outlook that had clear points in common with Nazism, much effort was expended in designing a system of categories (*Minderbelastete*, *Mitläufer*, and so on; these two concepts might be translated as ‘less tainted’ and ‘fellow-travellers’ respectively) which would differentiate degrees of sympathy and guilt. Though it

13 Mitchell G. Ash, ‘Scientific Changes in Germany 1933, 1945 and 1990: Towards a Comparison’, *Minerva*, 37:4 (1999), pp. 331–34. Friedrich Heer, an Austrian historian of ideas, characterised the intellectual blood-letting that had been caused by this immense academic exodus in a retrospective reflection. ‘From the 18th to the 20th century German intellectual life is inconceivable without the explosions of Jewish input’, he wrote. ‘Everything there has become provincial’. Quoted in Christoph Führ, *The German Educational System since 1945: Outlines and Problems* (Bonn, 1997), p. 5.

14 The literature on the denazification of the universities is extensive. See *Akademische Vergangenheitspolitik: Beiträge zur Wissenschaftskultur der Nachkriegszeit*, ed. by Bernd Weisbrod (Göttingen, 2002); Eckel, *Geist der Zeit*, pp. 88–111; Axel Schildt & Detlef Siegfried, *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte: Die Bundesrepublik – 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 2009); pp. 54–57, and Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*, pp. 19–23, as well as the literature quoted in Wolbring’s book.

turned out to be difficult to apply these schematic categorisations in the real world, an actual denazification process was carried out during the early post-war years, albeit with varying degrees of thoroughness. This process was most zealously implemented in the American zone – the Soviet zone excepted, of course. In Erlangen, only a few lecturers remained after the purges, and in Munich there were not enough competent, unimpeachable people to fill all the academic chairs.¹⁵

As within other social spheres – the school system, the church, the courts – there was visible opposition to enforced dismissals within the world of the university. This opposition was a combination of esprit de corps, an old aversion to interference in the internal affairs of the academy, and a realisation that it would be difficult to fill the vacancies left by disgraced people. Even so, no more than a few years later many of those who had been ostracised were received back into the fold again. Without much fuss, more and more of the dismissed individuals were reintegrated into the academic community, especially after denazification subsided at the end of the 1940s. In the young Federal Republic people wanted to forget, forgive, and close ranks. This was true not least in the universities.¹⁶

This is not to say that the universities remained entirely the same. Mitchell G. Ash has distinguished several important processes that characterised the academic *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (approx. ‘coming to terms with the past’) that occurred during the years following the Second World War. Though institutional changes took place in the late 1940s – such as the establishment of the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft for basic research (heir to the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft) and the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft for applied research – universities and research institutes were primarily busy re-establishing the old order that had existed prior to 1933. Alongside this development, the history of each discipline under the Third Reich was reinterpreted so that these years appeared to be an entirely apolitical period, a time when pure science and scholarship prevailed. At the same time, though, the compromised concepts and methods associated with Nazism were quietly eliminated. They were replaced by a scientific vocabulary that was better adapted to the

15 Schildt & Siegfried, *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte*, pp. 54–57.

16 *Akademische Vergangenheitspolitik*, ed. by Weisbrod; Koch, *Die Universität*, p. 214.

political culture of the new era. When it comes to cognitive style and scholarly-scientific orientation, there were nonetheless strong veins of continuity running from the late nineteenth century to the early post-war period.¹⁷ Thomas Etzemüller has spoken of ‘a strange mixture of continuity with respect to content, methodological innovation, and political adaptation’. That is to say, no intellectual abyss opened up in 1945.¹⁸

At the end of the 1940s the ideological differences between the eastern zone and the three western zones increased, and in the academic world this phenomenon became very apparent indeed. Immediately following the conclusion of peace, when it was still not entirely clear what the final character of East German society would be, many younger academics had found employment in the Soviet zone. Hans-Georg Gadamer was among those who subsequently became best known; he was rector of Leipzig before actively moving towards the western zones in 1947.¹⁹

In Berlin, the ideological polarisation became especially obvious. In January 1946 the city’s university had reopened, now again bearing the name of Universität Berlin. In his opening address, rector Johannes Stroux stressed that what lay ahead was a renewal of the internal and external character of the university. At the same time, he referred explicitly to Wilhelm von Humboldt and invoked him as a model, among other things through detailed quotations from the manifesto of 1809/1810. Then as now, he said, Germans found themselves in the greatest distress; but owing to idealism and humanism, they

17 Mitchell G. Ash, ‘Verordnete Umbrüche, Konstruierte Kontinuitäten: Zur Entnazifizierung von Wissenschaftlern und Wissenschaften nach 1945’, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 43:10 (1995). Jan Eckel relates a story about Karl Brandt, a historian of the Middle Ages in Göttingen, who presented the lecture series ‘The Middle Ages I’ during the winter term of 1944–1945 only to continue with ‘The Middle Ages II’ in the winter term of 1945–1946. Eckel emphasises that this is an anecdote, and that one has to look at the larger patterns, as Ash does. See Eckel, *Geist der Zeit*, p. 89. It can be added that Brandt was an old man and that it was possibly too much to ask of him to come up with a new lecture series at the age of seventy-seven. He died in March 1946.

18 Thomas Etzemüller, ‘Auf der Suche nach den “haltenden Mächten”’: Intellektuelle Wandlungen und Kontinuitäten in der westdeutschen Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945’, in *Die Rückkehr der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft in die ‘Ökumene der Historiker’: Ein wissenschaftsgeschichtlicher Ansatz*, ed. by Ulrich Pfeil (Munich, 2008), p. 35.

19 Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Eine Biographie* (Tübingen, 2013).

had succeeded in establishing a new kind of university. Here was a source of inspiration and guidance.²⁰

During the initial post-war years, several suggestions were made to rename the university at Unter den Linden after Wilhelm and/or Alexander von Humboldt. Even so, it was not until February 1949 that the new official name became Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, after both Humboldt brothers. During the intervening period the university had been transformed in a Communist direction, and the climate had become significantly harsher. In response to that development, oppositional students and teachers established a new university in the American sector in 1948. Through their choice of name, Freie Universität ('the free university'), they wished to safeguard academic freedom.²¹

The years of occupation, 1945–1949, were thus marked by conflicting forces and patterns of movement. On the one hand, it was a particularly eventful period in the history of the German university. It was a time of reckoning, soul-searching, and re-orientation. A number of professors were dismissed, even though many of them returned fairly soon. On the other hand, the early post-war years appear to be the era of unfinished reforms. The form and mission of the university remained intact; the work on renewing it was only a torso.

The discussions about the university were connected with the long German tradition of reflecting on the basic academic issues, but they were also a part of the profound examination of the nation's history that was conducted after Nazism. What may seem to have been a limited exchange of opinions about the university was in point of fact intertwined with greater issues to do with the future of Germany. The university was still what Barbara Wolbring has called a centre for national identification ('Zentralort nationaler

20 Reimer Hansen, 'Von der Friedrich-Wilhelms- zur Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin', in *Geschichte der Universität Unter den Linden: Sozialistisches Experiment und Erneuerung*, ed. by Jarausch, Middell, & Vogt (Berlin, 2012), pp. 109–23.

21 Hansen, 'Von der Friedrich-Wilhelms- zur Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin'; Jarausch, Middell, & Vogt, *Geschichte der Universität Unter den Linden: Sozialistisches Experiment und Erneuerung*; Siegwald Lönnendonker, *Freie Universität Berlin: Gründung einer politischen Universität* (Berlin, 1988); *Die Freie Universität Berlin 1948–2007: Von der Gründung bis zum Exzellenzwettbewerb*, ed. by Karol Kubicki & Siegwald Lönnendonker (Göttingen, 2008).

Identifikation’). This was particularly true of the educated bourgeoisie who still dominated public life. The debate about the university became a point of crystallisation of sorts for the conflicts of the first post-war years.²²

Questions about the foundations of the university were not raised in an intellectual vacuum. In several studies, historian Axel Schildt has stressed how important Christian, conservative thought patterns were for the formation of the landscape of ideas in early post-war West Germany. Instead of affirming temporary trends and impulses, many Germans during the late 1940s and early 1950s put their trust in timeless, supra-individual values which often originated in a classic western tradition. It was as if the Nazi disaster had given rise to a mistrust of the immediate past that was transformed into a mistrust of the immediately contemporaneous.²³

This reference to the West (*das Abendland*) can be traced in a renaissance both for a humanistic ideal of *Bildung* and for ideas about natural law.²⁴ The rediscovery was also a way of overcoming the expanding sense of crisis. It was not just a matter of the immediate crisis, the material and humanitarian distress, but of modernity itself as a state of crisis. Technological and natural-scientific developments had rocked society as a whole to its foundations and undermined the stable order. The hope was that a reactivation of permanent values would be able to create a new foundation.²⁵

It was not least in this context that great hopes were tied to the university. The academic institutions were assigned a special spiritual task, an ability to administer and refine what was best in the German tradition. But the reconstruction of the university also meant that promises of a new future were kindled in a more general sense.²⁶

22 Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*, pp. 5–6.

23 Axel Schildt, *Zwischen Abendland und Amerika: Studien zur westdeutschen Ideenlandschaft der 50er Jahre* (Munich, 1999); Axel Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten: Freizeit, Massenmedien und ‘Zeitgeist’ in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre* (Hamburg, 1995); Schildt & Siegfried, *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte*.

24 Schildt & Siegfried, *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte*, pp. 54–67.

25 Christina Schwartz, ‘Erfindet sich die Hochschule neu? Selbstbilder und Zukunftsvorstellungen in den westdeutschen Rektoratsreden 1945–1950’, in *Zwischen Idee und Zweckorientierung: Vorbilder und Motive von Hochschulreformen seit 1945*, ed. by Andreas Franzmann & Barbara Wolbring (Berlin, 2007).

26 Schildt & Siegfried, *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte*, p. 54.

The literature on the university during the years of occupation is not insignificant. A number of works are available that deal with individual universities and aspects of the reform efforts of the allies. But there are few comprehensive studies of this time, and even fewer that deal specifically with the Humboldtian tradition. The most important investigation in this area is without doubt Barbara Wolbring's monumental *Habilitation* thesis about the early post-war debates about the university. She demonstrates how rich and varied the discussion on the role of the university and the meaning of *Bildung* was during these years. By doing so, she emphatically refutes an idea that existed in earlier research: that the years of occupation had been characterised by a vacuum in scholarly-scientific self-understanding. It is true that several of the ideas that had flourished during the previous fifty years had lost their attraction or legitimacy, but opinions as to which direction the future should take were many. One group may be said to have worked for a kind of return of Humboldt's ideas. However, the ideals they associated with him, and the question of how those ideals were connected to the older German tradition, remain unclear; Wolbring's analyses do not focus on these issues.²⁷

Nevertheless, a widespread idea features in scholarly literature to the effect that Humboldt and his ideals experienced a renaissance after 1945. It is said that there was a 'noticeable return to Humboldt's ideas' and that leading professors were engaged in an 'evocation of Humboldtian ideals'.²⁸ Several outstanding experts on modern German university history share the same picture of this period. Sylvia Paletschek writes that in the discussion on the university, 'the

27 Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*. See also my discussion of the book: Johan Östling, 'Rezension zu: Wolbring, Barbara: *Trümmerfeld der bürgerlichen Welt. Universität in den gesellschaftlichen Reformdiskursen der westlichen Besatzungszonen (1945–1949)*', in *H-Soz-Kult*, <http://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-21761> (11 March 2014) (accessed 15 February 2016).

28 Peter Uwe Hohendahl, 'Humboldt Revisited: Liberal Education, University Reform, and the Opposition to the Neoliberal University', *New German Critique*, 38:2 (2011), 161; Corine Defrance, 'Die Westalliierten als Hochschulreformatoren (1945–1949): Ein Vergleich', in *Zwischen Idee und Zweckorientierung: Vorbilder und Motive von Hochschulreformen seit 1945*, ed. by Andreas Franzmann & Barbara Wolbring (Berlin, 2007), p. 39; Bernd Weisbrod, 'Dem wandelbaren Geist: Akademisches Ideal und wissenschaftliche Transformation in der Nachkriegszeit', in *Akademische Vergangenheitspolitik: Beiträge zur Wissenschaftskultur der Nachkriegszeit*, ed. by Bernd Weisbrod (Göttingen, 2002), p. 26.

return to the “German” or “Humboldtian” idea of the university [became] a central topos’, using Freiburg historian Gerd Tellenbach as an example.²⁹ Konrad H. Jarausch, in a survey of the West German university system, contends something similar but develops his line of argument further. He claims that ‘the postwar chaos prompted a return to *Humboldtian rhetoric* as an uncompromised tradition’, but that this once inspiring vision ‘had rigidified into a ruling discourse’. By re-employing a rhetoric where *Bildung* was a word with favourable connotations, the universities also returned ‘to the problems of elitism, arrogance, and apoliticism’, continued Jarausch. One consequence of this was that West German universities were plagued by a ‘Humboldt syndrome’ during the post-war period which made much-needed democratisation and reform more difficult.³⁰ Ralph Jessen talks about ‘the post-war renaissance of the rhetoric of *Bildung*’ and demonstrates with several examples how the future was sought via a return to classic New Humanist ideals. In the incipient Cold War, moreover, he sees a looming conflict over who had a right to the German heritage. West German academics and East German academics alike claimed that they alone held the heritage of the Humboldtian tradition in trust.³¹

On the other hand, Dieter Langewiesche is among those who are less inclined to speak of a return to a Humboldtian rhetoric. He has examined 142 German rector’s speeches from 1945 to 1950 and found that Humboldt is mentioned on seven occasions only. It was above all in Berlin that the Prussian educational reformer was referred to; in the rest of the German-speaking area, the talk was rather of a German university model.³² Christina Schwartz has also analysed a large number of rector’s speeches from the years of occupation, and she concurs with Langewiesche’s conclusion: Humboldt was very rarely mentioned. In contradistinction, many rectors referred back to older academic mottoes (such as ‘*Bildung*

29 Sylvia Paetschek, ‘Die deutsche Universität im und nach dem Krieg: Die Wiederentdeckung des Abendlandes’, in *Der Zweite Weltkrieg und seine Folgen: Ereignisse – Auswirkungen – Reflexionen*, ed. by Bernd Martin (Freiburg and Berlin, 2006), p. 243.

30 Jarausch, ‘The Humboldt Syndrome’, pp. 35–38.

31 Jessen, ‘Zwischen Bildungspathos und Spezialistentum’, pp. 364–67 and 379.

32 Dieter Langewiesche, ‘Das deutsche Universitätsmodell und die Berliner Universität’, in *Mittendrin: Eine Universität macht Geschichte*, ed. by Ilka Thom & Kirsten Weining (Berlin, 2010), p. 26; Dieter Langewiesche, ‘Humboldt als Leitbild?’

durch Forschung', 'Bildung through research'), and emphasised that the university had a mission of character formation.³³

The presence of the Humboldtian tradition in the early post-war era debate on the university thus remains insufficiently explained. In order to seek out more profound answers, it is necessary to analyse the most important contributions and investigate how these were related to older German ideals of the university. In this context, it is vital to determine who dominated the debate in the early post-war years. As in West German society at large, an older generation born during the first decades of the German Empire again stepped forward after 1945 and assumed positions of power. Students and younger academics, who had supported Nazism to a considerable extent during the Third Reich, were not allowed to leave their mark on the early post-war period. On the contrary, there were great fears that the younger generation would not allow themselves to be converted to democracy.³⁴

However, it was not just the high average age of the participants that gave the debate a special quality. The more elaborate and ambitious contributions came almost exclusively from the mandarins. In Nazi Germany, many of them had – passively or actively – supported the regime; but there were also those who remained at a distance from political power and who were able to step on to the academic stage again after the end of the war. It was this group of mainly older professors from the humanities who played a leading role in the university debate in the wake of the war. Natural scientists and medical researchers were largely absent. The mandarins' claim to be spokespersons for a greater cause lived on in the years after 1945, and that gave their contributions to the debate a distinctive character.³⁵

At the same time, it is essential not to adopt posterity's understanding of the mandarins in an uncritical manner. During the 1960s, the mandarins were accused of having wanted to bring back a conservative university.³⁶ This claim can be problematised. In order

33 Schwartz, 'Erfindet sich die Hochschule neu?'

34 Jaimey Fisher, *Disciplining Germany: Youth, Reeducation, and Reconstruction after the Second World War* (Detroit, 2007); Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*, pp. 41–123; Sean A. Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal: Culture and Politics after 1945* (Cambridge, 2014).

35 Krohn, 'Intellektuelle und Mandarine', pp. 64–69; Jessen, 'Zwischen Bildungspathos und Spezialistentum', p. 364.

36 Hohendahl, 'Humboldt Revisited', 162.

to understand their ideals, it is necessary to see the debate of the early post-war period against the background of the university's history in the Third Reich. Research from the most recent decades has shown how a large percentage of academics enlisted in the service of the regime and lent ideological support to Nazi policies. In terms of their own self-understanding, however, scholars and scientists had seen themselves as neutral experts who were exclusively knowledge providers. At the same time, it is obvious that Nazism was not anti-modern in the sense of its being opposed to science and scholarship. Pioneering research could be combined with traditional methods of teaching and authoritarian principles of government.³⁷

The mandarins who contributed to the debate on the university following the Second World War had thus experienced how the scholarly-scientific institutions had been used, directly or indirectly, by the Nazis during the preceding years. It had never been a matter of an absolute *Gleichschaltung* ('a forcible bringing into line'), but it was certainly a brutal violation of any thought of academic freedom. These experiences were very much alive during the latter half of the 1940s and would come to characterise the discussion.

In what follows I will concentrate on three of the most influential figures in the post-war debate on the university: philosopher Karl Jaspers, historian Gerhard Ritter, and Germanic philologist Werner Richter. All were older mandarins and all had had similar generational experiences: they were born in the 1880s, they had been professors of the humanities during the 1920s, and they had opposed Nazism in different ways. At the same time, their lives between 1933 and 1945 had turned out very differently. While Jaspers and Ritter had stayed in Germany and lived in a kind of internal exile, Richter had fled his native country and spent the war years in the United States.

Karl Jaspers and the rebirth of the university

Jaspers was undeniably a key figure during the years following the end of the war. In speeches, articles, and books he explained in great detail how the university should be vitalised and what the idea of the university should look like after the great catastrophe. In an exchange of views with Romance philologist Ernst Robert Curtius, he was even called 'a Wilhelm von Humboldt of our time'.³⁸ Jaspers's

³⁷ See Chapter 3.

³⁸ Quoted in Mark W. Clark, *Beyond Catastrophe: German Intellectuals and Cultural Renewal after World War II, 1945–1955* (Lanham, MD, 2006), p. 73.

impact on the university debate was enhanced by the fact that during these years, he emerged as a general moral authority in a country that needed moral stature and guidance more than anything else. There is reason to devote special attention to this man.

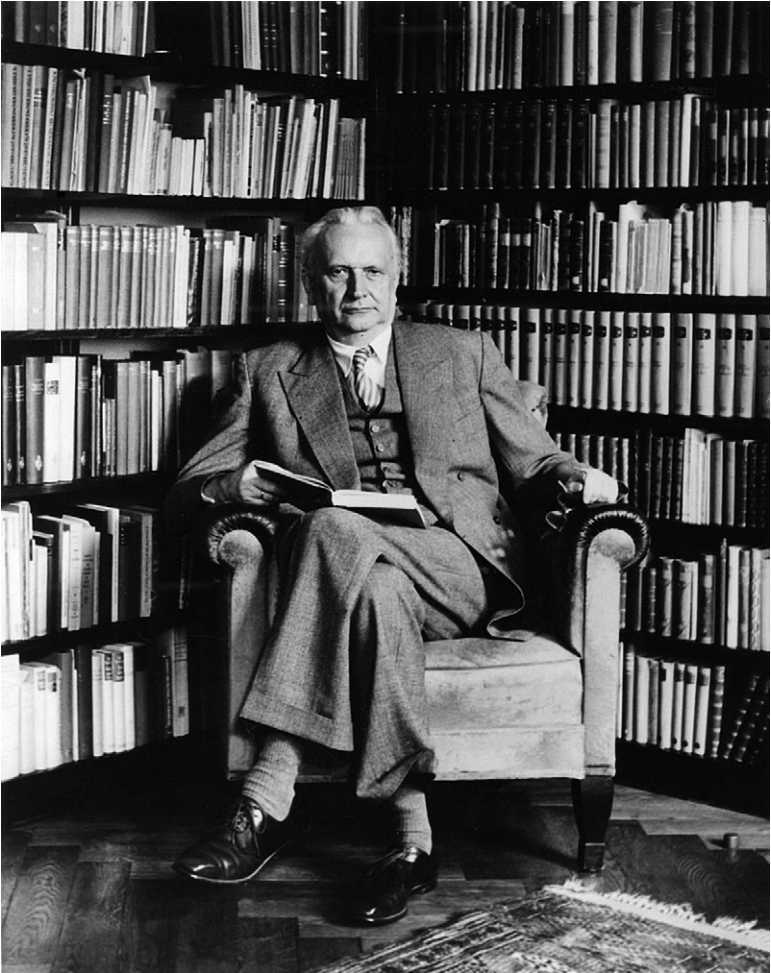
Karl Jaspers was born in Oldenburg, Lower Saxony, in 1883 and grew up in a well-to-do banking family. After studying law for a couple of terms, he switched to medicine and acquired a doctorate from Heidelberg in 1908 on the basis of a dissertation in psychiatry. Supported by Max Weber and Wilhelm Windelband he orientated himself towards psychology, a subject that was still considered part of philosophy at this time, and in 1913 he published the epoch-making *Allgemeine Psychopathologie*. Jaspers's scientific orientation was decided when, at the beginning of the 1920s, he transferred from a professorship in psychology to one in philosophy. During the interwar period he published several major works that formed the basis of his existential philosophy.³⁹

For a long time, Karl Jaspers was the emblem of the apolitical mandarin. The advance of the Nazis did not wake him up; even after the seizure of power he dismissed National Socialism as an operetta. Nevertheless, it was not long before he became aware of how thoroughly the new masters disliked him. In 1933 he was removed from his positions of academic leadership, in 1937 he was forced to take early retirement, and in 1943 he was banned from publishing. Jaspers's sin was not that he had opposed the regime. His crime was that he had refused to divorce his Jewish wife.⁴⁰

During the war years in Heidelberg, the Jaspers family constantly lived under the threat of deportation. On several occasions, they managed to escape at the very last minute. In spite of the persistent worry and intellectual quarantine, Jaspers continued his work in philosophy. To him these difficult years simultaneously meant that he had time for deliberation and that he could devote himself to reflecting on his own and his nation's development. On the basis of his own experiences, he developed ideas about what had caused the German catastrophe and how the Germans could rise again. About a month before the end of the war, he wrote in his diary,

39 Suzanne Kirkbright, *Karl Jaspers: A Biography: Navigations in Truth* (New Haven, 2004); Hans Saner, *Karl Jaspers: In Selbstzeugnissen und Bild-dokumenten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2005); Kurt Salamun, *Karl Jaspers* (Würzburg, 2006).

40 Kirkbright, *Karl Jaspers*; Saner, *Karl Jaspers*.



8 Karl Jaspers

‘Whoever survives this must choose a task to which he will devote himself for the rest of his life.’⁴¹

Karl Jaspers’s task came to be the restoration of the intellectual honour of Germany, and during the second half of the 1940s he was involved in several major trials of strength. He felt that the post-war period demanded more than detached observation and abstract thought. As a philosopher, he had to break with the apolitical line of German tradition and formulate a message that reached wider groups and was more influential. In short, he had to take his social responsibility seriously. One important channel became *Die Wandlung*, the monthly journal that Jaspers began publishing in the autumn of 1945 together with, among others, Dolf Sternberger, a journal that was guided by the watchwords humanism, freedom, and spiritual renewal.⁴² In the controversial book *Die Schuldfrage* (1946) Jaspers engaged with the moral responsibility for the German crimes, thereby providing one of the most important contributions to German soul-searching directly after the war. A few years later, in 1949, he published a work on the history of philosophy, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, in which he introduced the concept of *Achsenzeit* (‘axial age’) in order to characterise the simultaneous emergence of new ways of thinking in Europe and Asia from the ninth to the third centuries BC.⁴³

Jaspers’s basic conviction was that a genuine recovery for Germany presupposed a genuine examination of German history. It was not possible to naïvely revert to a pre-Nazi condition. Nor was it possible to imagine such a thing as a clean break with the past. What was required was a historical balance sheet, a summary of the assets and liabilities of the German nation. However, true rebirth was also conditional on utilising what was good and edifying in the German heritage. Universities had a crucial role to play in a spiritual – and, by extension, political – renaissance. If Germany was to rise again, Germans would have to put their trust in the university.⁴⁴

41 Quoted in Saner, *Karl Jaspers*, p. 51.

42 Ralf Kadereit, *Karl Jaspers und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Politische Gedanken eines Philosophen* (Paderborn, 1999); Clark, *Beyond Catastrophe*.

43 Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Frage* (Zürich, 1946); Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (Munich, 1949).

44 Kadereit, *Karl Jaspers*; Clark, *Beyond Catastrophe*; Jennifer M. Kapczynski, *The German Patient: Crisis and Recovery in Postwar Culture* (Ann Arbor, 2008).

During the initial post-war years, in particular 1945–1946, Jaspers kept returning to the fate of the university. In a large number of talks, essays, and journal articles, he produced variations on the same theme: it is of crucial importance to Germany that the university regains its strong position. At the end of the war, he also finished *Die Idee der Universität* (1946), the most detailed exposition on the nature and purpose of the university published during the early post-war years. Jaspers's book from 1923 had had the same title, but in the preface – dated Heidelberg, May 1945 – he emphasised that the new work 'is not a second edition, nor is it a revision, but a new draft based on the experiences of the last two horrible decades'.⁴⁵ Barbara Wolbring points out that Jaspers's text became an important point of reference in a wider discussion during the years following the end of the war, when a common idea was that the rebirth of the university had to begin in the native, New Humanist-idealist tradition. In this way, he made himself the interpreter of a significant current among the professors of the time.⁴⁶

Die Idee der Universität is an important document for understanding Jaspers's comprehensive view of science and scholarship, education, and university. In this 123-page book, he moves from the abstract to the concrete: it begins with theoretical reflections on the nature of science and scholarship, then deals with the function of the university, and finally discusses questions about politics and economics. In the preface to the book Jaspers emphasised, in a concentrated form, ideas about the German university to which he returned and which he developed further in other contexts over the following years. The future of the university depended on a renewal of its original idea, he wrote. For half a century it had been in a period of decline, and finally the deepest downfall had occurred. Re-establishing the university was a critical issue for the whole of German culture, argued Jaspers. It had to be done by reaching back to the older tradition while at the same time transforming it.⁴⁷

For a recreation of Jaspers's vision about how the university could be vitalised and how this rebirth was connected to an interpretation of German history, it is not enough to simply examine his book. Other texts from the same time, primarily a couple of the speeches

45 Karl Jaspers, *Die Idee der Universität* (Berlin and Heidelberg, 1946), p. 5.

46 Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*, p. 425.

47 Jaspers, *Die Idee* (1946), p. 5.

he delivered that were later printed, provide both a broader and a more profound representation of his ideas.⁴⁸

Towards a vitalisation

Two months after the end of the war, in August 1945, Jaspers delivered an address when Karl Heinrich Bauer took over the task of being Heidelberg University's elected rector and teaching there began anew. This speech would later be printed in its entirety in the first issue of *Die Wandlung* under the title 'Die Erneuerung der Universität'. The concept *Erneuerung* should not be understood in the literal sense of 'renewal', but in the sense of vitalising or injecting new life into the university; it is related to rebirth and renaissance.⁴⁹

In this speech, Jaspers presented his vision of the university. He set the tone from the very outset: this was a great day for the university. After twelve years, the university was once more able to elect its own rector; what was now being witnessed was a new beginning. The core of the university had, despite everything that had happened, remained intact. In spite of the Nazis' destruction, in spite of their interference with research and tuition, there were professors and students who had held their own. And because the scholarly-scientific spirit had not been suppressed, the university could now be revived. Those who should be thanked for this, continued Jaspers, were the occupying powers. Their forbearance and perhaps even assistance were a prerequisite for the ability to rebuild the university.⁵⁰

'The new beginning of our university cannot, however, merely consist in connecting on to the conditions that existed before 1933', Jaspers declared in a significant turn of phrase. Too much had happened; the disaster had had too deep an impact. In order to find a new foundation upon which to build, Jaspers felt that Germans had to search their true past: the native region, the native country, the lines that led back to Kant, Goethe, Lessing, and other major figures.⁵¹ It was in this spirit that Jaspers felt the university should

48 Several of these speeches and texts have been collected in Karl Jaspers, *Erneuerung der Universität: Reden und Schriften 1945/46*, ed. by Renato de Rosa (Heidelberg, 1986).

49 Jaspers, *Erneuerung der Universität*, p. 293.

50 Karl Jaspers, 'Erneuerung der Universität', *Die Wandlung*, 1 (1945/1946), pp. 95–96.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

be rebuilt. He hoped that the autonomy and the external structures could live on, and also that the students would return and that the conditions for research and tuition would be similar to those that had existed before. But none of this would entail any renewal. Instead, he declared:

This renewal can really only come about through the work of individuals, through researchers and students, in the community that is made up of their intellectual lives. This community must be guided by the immortal idea of the university, an idea where research and tuition are each other's servants, where academic freedom is a condition for the responsible independence of individual teachers and students, where the purely scholastic is rejected as well as isolating specialisation, and where the unity of the sciences will instead develop in lively communication and intellectual struggle.⁵²

The renewal, Jaspers argued, would be apparent through the tone it set in seminars and institutes; it would appear in publications and textbooks. And still there was as yet no common ground upon which to build. The idea of the university had not yet come truly alive again.⁵³

Jaspers then applied a historical perspective. In the beginning the university was a unity, he reminded his audience. The three faculties were to serve the basic needs of humanity: the theological the salvation of the soul, the legal the social order, and the medical the well-being of the body. In Jaspers's eyes, it was an abomination when this unity was lost during the second half of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, knowledge was dispersed and mixed with unscientific elements. This development attained its maximum potency during the Nazi era. On the other hand, the loss of unity led to an inability both to deal with the genuine forces of the time, especially technology, and to see how these affected the totality. Renewal had to originate in the past, Jaspers emphasised, partly by extending the university's mission to include all parts of existence, partly by re-conquering the idea of the unity of science. Maybe a new technological faculty should be established, and the faculty of philosophy once again be joined together into a single whole.⁵⁴

There were thus several components in Jaspers's idea about a vitalisation of the university. First, it had to do with safeguarding

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 97–98.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

the scholarly-scientific spirit that had survived the Nazi barbarism. Jaspers claimed that the core of the university was sound, and in doing so he referred to the well-known metaphor that Carl Heinrich Becker had formulated during the 1920s: the German university was ‘im Kern gesund’ (‘healthy at the core’).⁵⁵ Second, it was important to restore unity; the university could not be an aggregate of vocational training schools and specialist fields.⁵⁶ Third, the university had to deal with current problems, not least the role of technology in society, and expand its mission. Last but not least, Jaspers’s vision about *Erneuerung der Universität* was closely connected to his understanding of the history of the university. His historiography could be discerned in different speeches and texts during the early post-war period. The most coherent narrative emerged in a speech he delivered in Heidelberg in January 1946. With this address, he initiated a series of lectures by renowned German academics that had the goal of contributing to democratic renewal. The title of the lecture, ‘Vom lebendigen Geist der Universität’, testified to his belief in a living tradition.⁵⁷

‘The university is ancient’, Jaspers began his historical exposition. It was an institution whose idea had its conceptual roots in ancient Greece. The university of the Middle Ages had been European, and it had left behind remarkable structures of ideas; but this old university is as distant from us as it is admirable.⁵⁸

Jaspers next trained his gaze on the German area and sketched the development of the university from the Reformation onwards, dividing it into three consecutive stages. *The Protestant university*

55 Axel Schildt, ‘Im Kern gesund? Die deutschen Hochschulen 1945’, in *Vertuschte Vergangenheit: Der Fall Schwerte und die NS-Vergangenheit der deutschen Hochschulen*, ed. by Helmut König, Wolfgang Kuhlmann & Klaus Schwabe (Munich, 1997); Markschie, *Was von Humboldt*, p. 18.

56 He developed these and other aspects of an idea of scholarly-scientific unity further in other writings, not least in Jaspers, *Die Idee* (1946), pp. 37, 43, and 75–76.

57 Jaspers, *Erneuerung der Universität*, pp. 294–95. The title of the lecture referred to a well-known inscription on the Heidelberg university building, ‘Dem lebendigen Geist’ (‘To the living spirit’), formulated by literary historian Friedrich Gundolf during the time of the Weimar Republic. In the Third Reich it was replaced by the motto ‘Dem deutschen Geist’ (‘To the German spirit’), only to be restored to its original wording after 1945.

58 Karl Jaspers, ‘Vom lebendigen Geist der Universität’, in Karl Jaspers & Fritz Ernst, *Vom lebendigen Geist der Universität und vom Studieren: Zwei Vorträge* (Heidelberg, 1946), pp. 224–25.

had the aim of fulfilling the state's need for clerics and officials. In comparison with the mediaeval university, the universities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represented intellectual limitations.⁵⁹ During the eighteenth century, *the classically-humanistic university* came into being. There students liberated themselves and sought out those teachers who had something to offer them. A German-educated bourgeoisie emerged. Scholarship and philosophy became a common concern. Kant, Fichte, and Schleiermacher outlined an idea of the university, and Humboldt found a practical structure that was realised in the establishment of the university in Berlin. The basis was made up of the freedom of research and education – but also their inseparability. Humanism became the foundation of *Bildung*, and the university enjoyed a high prestige in public life.⁶⁰

What Jaspers called *the modern university* originated in the middle of the nineteenth century. Following the March Revolution of 1848, positivistic science and practical realism emerged victorious. At the same time, criticism developed against the fossilised Prussian university, formulated most sharply by Nietzsche. It was clear that the most significant incentives to fresh thought no longer came from inside the university.⁶¹ Its representatives said that they were willing to preserve the old idea, without, however, putting much force behind the words. They developed no principle of their own, and they did not safeguard the unity of the university. Students flocked to the university, the number of professors rose, and a mass university took shape. The level of admission requirements was lowered, teaching became more instrumental, and specialisation increased, Jaspers summarised. The result was that philosophical ideas were crowded out. No one assumed responsibility for the overall view.⁶²

According to Jaspers, much of the best in the German cultural tradition derived from the university. This was true of its most original contribution, Protestantism, and only in Germany were the main world-class historical philosophers – Kant, Hegel – simultaneously professors. All this was already apparent by the 1920s.⁶³ But what followed was of a completely different kind than what Jaspers had expected. A violent political incursion toppled the university.

59 Jaspers, 'Vom lebendigen Geist', p. 225.

60 *Ibid.*, pp. 225–26.

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 226–27.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 228.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 228–30.

Rectors and deans still existed in name, but they were appointed by the National Socialists. Almost completely without resistance, the university and academics capitulated. All the lofty ideals – truth, scholarship, ethics – were left to be defended by individuals, according to Jaspers.⁶⁴

The result, he continued, was that in 1933 the university lost its dignity. For this reason a new university was now required, this time under different conditions and with new tasks. Because one thing had become especially clear during the past twelve years: those who directed the sharpest criticism against the spiritual poverty of the modern university were the Nazis. For this reason, it could be said that the strong sympathy which their criticism encountered in itself demonstrated the extent of the intellectual destitution at the modern university. It is true, Jaspers admitted, that the Nazis seemed initially to wish to change the university in a welcome direction – closing the gaps between the faculties, a synthesis of the sciences, a philosophical seriousness as a basis for all scholarship, a receptiveness to the people and to grand history. All this sounded excellent, and many people allowed themselves to be seduced. But nothing came of it. In point of fact, the Nazis accomplished the very opposite of what they had promised. Instead of insight came empty words, instead of a worldview there followed a hotchpotch of disconnected propositions taken out of context. The intellectual class realised that the bell tolled for them, while the untalented and characterless saw their chances.⁶⁵

Jaspers ended his historical summary with the following statements: ‘The Nazi rape has ended. Free research can expand again. Open conflicts of opinion are again allowed and advisable.’⁶⁶ After this Jaspers turned to his contemporaries and asked what their common task would be. In an important passage, he stated the following:

As a consequence of our fidelity to the Humboldtian era we do not strive for a radical transformation of the forms of our institutions; instead we imagine a kind of conservative revolution. But we also know this: we cannot re-establish the, to us, classic German university era. All those social, political, and personal conditions which set the terms for our contemporary existence, our knowledge, and our skills, are different.⁶⁷

64 *Ibid.*, p. 230.

65 *Ibid.*, pp. 231–32.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

That is to say, the university could certainly resume its traditional tasks; but a lot had changed, and the old world of *Bildung* had crumbled. It was not possible to continue on the old track as if nothing had happened. One important task was to construct an image of German history that established connections to the good heritage. This required research; merely re-evaluating earlier views was not a viable approach.⁶⁸

Christoph Markschies has noted that historical opinions about the university can be fitted into either a model of decadence or one of progress. In the former case, one often finds elements of a golden-age myth.⁶⁹ This is undeniably the case with Jaspers. His ideal, the classically-humanistic university, gradually took shape during the eighteenth century; but it had begun to be undermined from the middle of the nineteenth century, and with Nazism came the real catastrophe.

At the same time, it is obvious that Jaspers was in two minds about this historical development. On the one hand, he wanted to return to the classic German university and resurrect its ideals. This was a part of the best of the German tradition. On the other hand, he realised that it was impossible to turn back. Far too much had changed.

Karl Jaspers and the Humboldtian tradition

In Jaspers's vision of a vitalisation of the German university, the Humboldtian tradition seemingly played a minor role. In *Die Idee der Universität*, he only mentions Wilhelm von Humboldt a handful of times; and in other texts as well, direct references to the Prussian educational reformer are very infrequent. On one occasion, however, when discussing the relationship between the university and the state, Jaspers quotes Humboldt without an explicit reference: 'The state must always remain aware of the fact that the matter in itself is greatly improved if the state does not interfere.' It is notable that passages with this essential meaning can be found in Humboldt's 'Über die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin' (1809/1810), although this exact phrasing does not occur there.⁷⁰

68 Ibid., pp. 232–35.

69 Markschies, *Was von Humboldt*, p. 20.

70 Jaspers, *Die Idee* (1946), p. 103. Cf. Humboldt, 'Über die innere und äussere Organisation', p. 257.

Humboldt was of course a well-known name for Jaspers, but he did not stand out as one of the main figures in the German university tradition. Kant and Weber were considerably more important sources of inspiration, and Jaspers repeatedly refers to them. Nor was the foundation of the Berlin university in 1810 a milestone in his historical understanding – naturally enough, as Jaspers traced the origins of the classically-humanistic university to the eighteenth century. A unified idea about the university was created around 1800 by philosophers such as Kant and Schleiermacher, and Humboldt is given credit for having put the new university into practice. That is to say, he does not appear as either a thinker or a synthesist.

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that Jaspers found no reason to evoke Humboldt. But in his efforts to vitalise the German university, Jaspers nevertheless looked back to what others have come to associate with Wilhelm von Humboldt. Many of the ideals that Jaspers associated with the classically-humanistic university belong to the Humboldtian tradition. One example of an ideal to which he often returned was the conviction regarding the unity of science. Like many others in the university debate during the years of occupation, Jaspers was concerned about academic specialisation and opposed to the fragmentation of knowledge.⁷¹ Ultimately, this had to do with the educational mission of the university. In *Die Idee der Universität*, he argued for an idea of scholarly-scientific unity in several places. It is true, he wrote, that students come to the university in order to prepare for a profession. But they expect more than that. The university must represent the unity of science, and on the basis of this unity students should be able to form their own worldview.⁷²

In addition, Jaspers repeatedly safeguarded ‘die Verbindung von Forschung und Lehre’ (‘the connection between research and tuition’). He opposed the forces that wanted to create a separation and turn the university into a pure research institution. It could not be denied that a good teacher was not necessarily a good scholar or scientist; but unless research and teaching were united, the students could not come into contact with the genuine knowledge process.⁷³

Academic freedom, with its many facets, was another major topic where Jaspers worked within a classic German tradition without referring to Humboldt to any noteworthy extent. The very opening

71 Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*, pp. 453–61.

72 Jaspers, *Die Idee* (1946), pp. 37, 43, and 47.

73 *Ibid.*, pp. 41 and 47.

of *Die Idee der Universität* emphasises ‘die Freiheit der Lehre’ (‘the freedom to teach’) and ‘die Freiheit des Lernens’ (‘the freedom to learn’) as fundamental principles. Jasper returned to this issue several times: researchers shall themselves formulate their tasks and find their way to solutions; students shall have the freedom to choose the direction of their studies themselves.⁷⁴ Closely connected to this aspect of academic freedom was the university’s relationship to the state. Jaspers acknowledged that the university depended on the state; but in the wake of the Second World War, it seemed self-evident to emphasise a demand for freedom from the state.

The brief mention of these three ideals – the unity of science, the combination of tuition and research, and academic freedom – does not amount to a sufficient characterisation of Jaspers’s philosophy of the university. However, these examples from his most central writings illustrate how he worked within the classic German tradition and wished to inject new life into it. With hermeneutic terminology, it can be said that Jaspers attempted to actualise the classically-humanistic heritage, but without actually referring to Wilhelm von Humboldt. He felt that the university to some extent had to be adapted to the modern world, and he emphasised the necessity of strengthening academic freedom after the violent rule of Nazism. He also knew that breathing new life into the German university called for arduous, long-term effort, with little hope of immediate success. But it was the only option.⁷⁵

Karl Jaspers was a prominent figure in the university debate of the early post-war years. But other people also provided important contributions to the discussion. The main issues for them, as for Jaspers, were how the German university could be revived and what direction it should have. And like Jaspers, many people referred to the tradition of the German university, but evaluated it differently and drew dissimilar conclusions. Two examples, Gerhard Ritter and Werner Richter, help to provide a more multifaceted picture of the exchange of ideas during the post-war years.

Gerhard Ritter and the liberal university

Gerhard Ritter, born in 1888, was one of the leading historians of his generation. He mainly devoted himself to the great political,

74 *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12 and 277–78. See also Jaspers, *Erneuerung der Universität*, p. 277.

75 Jaspers, ‘Erneuerung’, p. 105.

military, and religious figures in history. As early as 1925, Ritter had become a professor at Freiburg im Breisgau; he remained faithful to that university, also during the Third Reich. The appreciation that he, with his national-conservative leanings, had initially felt for the new Nazi regime had soon turned into aversion. During the Second World War, he showed his resentment towards Nazism by joining resistance bodies such as the *Freiburger Kreis* and the Confessing Church. Directly after the end of the war, he wholeheartedly committed himself to rebuilding the demolished German academy. He took part in the local denazification of Freiburg, contributed to the intellectual examination of the origins of Nazism, and played an important role as the first post-war chairman of the German society of historians.⁷⁶

Gerhard Ritter also supplied an elaborate contribution to the discussion on the idea of the university. In October 1945, he delivered the opening address in the first series of public lectures in Freiburg following the war. His contribution was entitled ‘*Die Idee der Universität und das öffentliche Leben*’ (‘The idea of the university and public life’) and would later be printed.⁷⁷ It was not the first time that he reflected on the conditions of academic life. In 1936, he had written a volume on the history of Heidelberg University; and he was well acquainted with the Prussian reforms at the beginning of the nineteenth century after having written a biography of Karl vom und zum Stein.⁷⁸

Ritter began where so many other people who spoke out during this time tended to begin: with the Nazi disaster and the search for a new, permanent order. He called for a reliable guide that could indicate a general direction. Society should turn towards science and scholarship in order to get its bearings and understand the deeper causes of the present circumstances. However, the questions were

76 Christoph Cornelißen, *Gerhard Ritter: Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf, 2001), pp. 371–456; Klaus Schwabe, ‘Change and Continuity in German Historiography from 1933 into the Early 1950s: Gerhard Ritter (1888–1967)’, in *Paths of Continuity: Central European Historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s*, ed. by Hartmut Lehmann & James van Horn Melton (Cambridge, 1994).

77 Gerhard Ritter, *Die Idee der Universität und das öffentliche Leben* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1946).

78 Gerhard Ritter, *Die Heidelberger Universität: Ein Stück deutscher Geschichte. Das Mittelalter (1386–1508)* (Heidelberg, 1936); Gerhard Ritter, *Stein: Eine politische Biographie* (Stuttgart, 1931).

many. In his pursuit of answers, Ritter wrote a historical exposition on the idea of the university in Germany.⁷⁹

In quick strokes, Ritter sketched the emergence of the German universities during the Middle Ages. For a long time, at least until the seventeenth century, they were primarily institutions of the intellect, he pointed out. The philosophical-philological missions were more important than professional training programmes. In the absolute monarchies and principalities, however, the practical elements multiplied and pure science and scholarship were pushed back. The dazzling development of the natural sciences during this era primarily occurred outside the university. The same was true of the philosophy of rationalism. There was too little scope for real research at the small, semi-clerical German provincial colleges. In addition, the enlightened rulers of the time showed little understanding for the autonomy of the university or for science and scholarship as an end in themselves.⁸⁰

For Ritter, the centuries of Reformation and confessional division were a period of decay in the history of the university. It was therefore among the major achievements in German intellectual history, he argued, when the university was able to rise from the ruins through internal renewal. He spoke of a ‘German movement’ which allowed the nation to step forward as the leader of the Occident at the intersection of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although ‘the reform of the German universities during the era of Humboldt, Fichte, and Schleiermacher was merely one aspect of the greater movement’, we should today, more than ever, be grateful for this renewal. At the very hour of political defeat, these thinkers achieved a cultural revival of a most unusual kind. One significant result was the reinforcement of scholarly-scientific autonomy, not by means of a reconnection with mediaeval ideals but through the birth of a new kind of university, *the humanistically-liberal state university*.⁸¹

Ritter next developed a long argument about the features that had characterised the new university. His argumentation was distinctly historical rather than analytic or systematic. It adhered to a chronological line and in many ways took the form of a narrative. From this presentation, it is possible to distinguish the main principles that he believed to be characteristic of the humanistically-liberal university.

79 Ritter, *Die Idee*, pp. 3–4.

80 *Ibid.*, pp. 4–6.

81 *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

First and foremost, Ritter emphasised the importance of academic freedom. The German university of the nineteenth century was, according to him, characterised by autonomy, in contradistinction to the system of centrally governed state schools that Napoleon had introduced in France. This was a golden age of German science and scholarship, when the free university was allowed to interact with a protective state. Today – yes, especially today – there was hence every reason to reflect once more on the basic principles of the humanistically-liberal university.⁸²

Ritter found the first signs of the new university programme in Wilhelm von Humboldt's *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen* from 1792. For a long time, this little text was considered to be a subversive pamphlet in German-nationalist circles; but after the failures of the totalitarian system, many people realised that the activities of the state had to be surrounded by boundaries. For Humboldt, Ritter pointed out, a limitation of the power of the state could liberate repressed energies, and for this reason his liberal state philosophy was closely linked to his educational vision. Here character formation was at the centre, not professional skills. The goal was free scholarly-scientific research conducted by teachers and students acting together, Ritter stated, referring explicitly to Humboldt.⁸³

Even so, the question was whether academic freedom did not risk leading to abstractions and sophistry. 'Of course', replied Ritter, 'freedom for science and scholarship is, like all other freedoms, a very dangerous thing'. But if true scholarship was to be produced, one must dare to take that risk; for as soon as there was interference from the state, the sole results were tendentious writings and propagandistic speeches; this had been proved once and for all by the National Socialist state.⁸⁴ On the basis of the Nazi experience, Ritter thus argued that academic freedom had its price, but that one had to be prepared to pay it. The examples to the contrary, taken from the Third Reich, were deterring. The person who provided Ritter with arguments for this cause was Humboldt the liberal.

In his interpretation of the humanistically-liberal university, Ritter connected academic freedom with two other fundamental principles. The first was the pure search for knowledge. Here, too, he referred

82 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

83 *Ibid.*, pp. 7–9.

84 *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

to Humboldt and claimed that science and scholarship formed ‘an eternally ongoing process’ whose sole purpose was knowledge. According to Ritter, the state must be aware that such science and scholarship could only be realised by free, creative forces, not on the basis of commissions from the state. It could only flourish ‘in Einsamkeit und Freiheit’ (‘in solitude and freedom’).⁸⁵

The second principle had to do with the educational mission of the university. The prominent figures of German idealism had never doubted that free scholarly-scientific work contributed to the formation of character. ‘Only science and scholarship which come from the inner depths of the mind and which are cultivated only at those depths can contribute to the transformation of character. [...] [The state and mankind] are both [...] concerned with character and conduct’, he quoted approvingly from Wilhelm von Humboldt’s memorandum of 1809/1810. Consequently, Ritter concluded, the humanistically-liberal university was not at all cut off from society and its practical needs. On the contrary, the objective, independent search for truth would provide young people with precisely those qualities they needed to work in the service of the public.⁸⁶

Thus far, Ritter had emphasised those ideals that formed the basis of the classic German university. But how well had they been realised? he wondered. The first generations after 1810 were still influenced by impulses from the new educational centres, and he described the following decades as a happy period. ‘Never before and never since have German academics played a greater part in social life than between 1815 and 1866’, he wrote.⁸⁷ Against this golden age, Ritter placed what he himself had experienced during the previous decades: anarchy, individualism, egotism. This decay did not, however, begin under the National Socialists but in the latter part of the Bismarck period.⁸⁸

Two golden ages thus emerged in Ritter’s account of modern German history: the first was a time of intellectual innovation in the period around the year 1800, the second came in 1815–1866 when harmonious conditions existed and the humanistically-liberal state university could be realised.⁸⁹ During the latter half of the nineteenth century, this unity dissolved. Idealistic philosophy lost its grip on

85 Ibid., pp. 7–9.

86 Ibid., pp. 11–12. The quotation comes from Humboldt, ‘On the Spirit’, 245.

87 Ritter, *Die Idee*, p. 11.

88 Ibid., pp. 11–12.

89 Ibid., pp. 12–13.

the human sciences and was replaced by naked materialism and positivism. Academic *Bildung* distanced itself more and more from Humboldt's ideals of comprehensiveness, declared Ritter.⁹⁰ After the First World War the situation became more and more critical. Many people experienced a crisis for science and scholarship, and there were resounding calls for total reform of the university. The generation of students that returned from the battlefield was disappointed that the university could not offer any guidance on the major issues of life. Even so, the great reform failed to materialise; and when the universities were filled with women and the unemployed, the university was in danger of becoming an educational facility for the masses. 'And yet the close connection between research and tuition, the very element that forms the distinctive characteristic of our German university as well as its primary advantage, necessarily presupposes close cooperation between teachers and students', declared Ritter, thereby establishing a link to one of the great topics in the Humboldtian tradition: the combination of research and education.⁹¹

The university had not been in step with the times. It could not offer what young people needed during the 1920s. At the same time, overpopulation was a risk that could result in levelling. This entire threat of superficiality became that much more tangible through the vehement attempts of the Nazis to turn the universities into propaganda centres for a racist worldview. Fortunately, Ritter pointed out, the party's attacks on German scholarship were not carried out with so much determination that the university structure was destroyed. He characterised most representatives of the party as half-educated and claimed that they had failed to make the great majority of professors into spokesmen for a racial ideology. At the same time, he was anxious to avoid whitewashing and pointed out that adaptation to the regime's line varied from subject to subject. Most members of the academy assumed an apolitical stance, however, safeguarding the neutrality of science and scholarship. Ritter's conclusion was that the Nazis, in spite of everything, had had a limited effect on actual research at the universities.⁹²

90 Ibid., p. 14.

91 Ibid., pp. 14–16.

92 Ibid., pp. 14–17. In another contribution, Ritter had maintained that the German professors who had kept to science and scholarship had not been compromised under the Third Reich. Using himself as an example, he showed that it had been possible to resist the regime even as an academic. See

But what will happen today, when everything is in ruins after the dreadful destruction? Ritter asked. In spite of colossal difficulties, he set his hopes on the German university. He was well aware of the hate and contempt that the Nazis had spread around the world, but the road to rehabilitation for the German people was via science and scholarship. We will not succeed using cheap popular science or the mere transmission of knowledge, Ritter argued. What was required was genuine research for truth and pure scholarship.⁹³

Towards the end of the address, Ritter returned to his conviction that science and scholarship must have no other master than pure truth. The university and its lecturers did society the most good when they devoted themselves to their main task, non-utilitarian research. Genuine, pure science and scholarship turned away from the immediately practical needs of life, but that did not mean that they were alienated from life. It was undoubtedly true that academic studies and exams were not guarantees of reason and insight, Ritter rounded off, once more reminding his readers of the previous twelve years. But he wanted to believe, just as Wilhelm von Humboldt once did, that a scholarly-scientific education also had an ethical effect on young people, that it built a free, independent character.⁹⁴

Gerhard Ritter's address had been genuinely historical in nature. He had taken the Middle Ages as his starting-point and moved in a great arc up to the modern era. Like Jaspers, he had searched the past in order to find the sources that could breathe new life into the German university; but to a greater extent than Jaspers, he referred to Wilhelm von Humboldt in the process. It was obvious that Ritter had read Humboldt and saw him as one of several people who contributed to reforming the German university at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He drew special inspiration from Humboldt the young liberal and from his ideas about imposing limitations on the state. A few years after the end of the Second World War, Ritter emphasised academic freedom in the form of university autonomy.

Gerhard Ritter, 'Der deutsche Professor im Dritten Reich', *Die Gegenwart*, 1:1 (1945), pp. 23–26. Readers encountered a diametrically opposed view in Max Weinrich, *Hitler's Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes against the Jewish People* (New York, 1946). This book, written by a German-speaking writer of Jewish descent, promoted the thesis that German scholarship had supplied the ideas and technologies that had resulted in and justified the Nazi bloodbath.

93 Ritter, *Die Idee*, pp. 17–18.

94 *Ibid.*, pp. 21–27.

Only by safeguarding freedom of research and the pure quest for knowledge could the university regain its importance.

Christopher Cornelißen, Gerhard Ritter's biographer, has emphasised that Ritter's political ideas during the early post-war period were characterised by an increasingly dominant conviction: an absolute and uncontrollable power must at all costs be prevented from ever again gaining dominion over Germany. From this perspective, his ideal of the university can be regarded as an application of a general ideological principle.⁹⁵ Samuel Moyn has captured another characteristic of Ritter's from the same period. In 1948, Ritter gave a lecture in Basel about the history of human rights, a lecture which formed the basis of a long article printed the following year in *Historische Zeitschrift*. Moyn demonstrates how Ritter pursued the origins of human rights in specifically Christian sources. He maintains that the Freiburg professor thereby wished to reconstruct and defend a Christian Western identity in a period of crisis and loss.⁹⁶

These examples thus show that Gerhard Ritter attempted to find a new basis to build upon following the Second World War, and that these attempts took place in more than one sphere. As a prominent historian and conservative intellectual, he employed an approach amounting to a revival through the re-establishment of connections. Ritter united a fervent German patriotism with a conviction that Germany must be inspired by the Christian West. His commitment to truth-seeking and unlimited academic freedom, embodied by Wilhelm von Humboldt and the young Berlin university, should be seen in this light.

Ideals under review

Werner Richter (1887–1960) adopted a completely different perspective on the history and future of the German university. He was at bottom a German philologist and had been a professor in this subject at both Greifswald and Berlin. In addition, he had been active in the Prussian Ministry of Culture and Education between 1920 and 1932. As a close colleague of Carl Heinrich Becker, he had participated in drawing up the university reforms of the Weimar Republic. However, because of his Jewish descent he had been forced

95 Cornelißen, *Gerhard Ritter*, pp. 416–18.

96 Samuel Moyn, 'The First Historian of Human Rights', *The American Historical Review*, 116:1 (2011).

to leave Germany in 1933 and had eventually ended up in the United States. During the 1940s, he came into contact with several American academic environments and was profoundly influenced by them. Richter returned to his native country a couple of years after the end of the war, initially as a professor and then as rector in Bonn. His interest in the politics of the university and educational policy had by no means faded, and he took an active part in the public debate on research and higher education. During the 1950s, Richter played a decisive role in re-establishing the links between West Germany and the international academic community, not least as the first president of the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, DAAD).⁹⁷

Werner Richter made his first important intervention in the post-war debate on the German university with a lecture that he gave in Marburg and Munich in the summer of 1948. The following year, he had this lecture published under the title *Die Zukunft der deutschen Universität*. In just over forty pages, he developed his ideas about the German tradition and what the future should hold. Like so many others who engaged with these issues after the Nazi disaster, Richter sought means through which to renew the German university. However, his convictions were partially dissimilar, being influenced by his American experiences and by a critical attitude towards elements in the German heritage.⁹⁸

Accordingly, Richter began his lecture by emphasising that his points of departure were different. If the German university wished to lead German culture, the way it had done during the nineteenth century, it had to support a new programme, he declared. But it was inconceivable to talk about its future without considering its magnificent history prior to 1933.⁹⁹

Like Jaspers and Ritter, Richter consequently devoted a significant part of his lecture to a historical exposition on the German university. 'The German university of the nineteenth century [...] has idealistic philosophy and classical-romantic literature to thank for its inception', began Richter. An idealism that reached transcendental heights developed on German soil. 'For Humboldt and his circle, serving scientific truth was a religious experience', wrote Richter,

97 Lothar Reinermann, 'Richter, Werner', *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (Berlin, 1953–), vol. XXI (2003), pp. 539–40.

98 Werner Richter, *Die Zukunft der deutschen Universität* (Marburg, 1949).

99 *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

meaning that there was a kind of religious motive for Humboldt, Fichte, Schelling, and Schleiermacher in their desire to establish a connection between research and tuition as a fundamental principle of the German university. According to him, Humboldt wanted teachers and students to serve science and scholarship and unite in a joint quest for truth.¹⁰⁰

At the same time, the scholarly-scientific idea that supported what Richter called *the humanistic university* was characterised by a kind of individualism. Richter pointed out that for Humboldt there was no tension between academic research and life, the way there could be today. In the humanistic university a synthesis of scholarship, *Bildung*, and life would be generated, as it had once been in ancient Greece. Today one could look back at these early nineteenth-century dreams with an elegiac wistfulness, contemplating a time that united bright optimism, faith in human greatness, and a romantic desire for all aspects of life. ‘Humboldt himself appeared to have become an archetype for this ideal of life’, wrote Richter.¹⁰¹

Although Richter cast yearning glances at the humanistic university of the early nineteenth century, he was convinced that it belonged to a bygone age. He reminded his readers that the first phase in the history of the humanistic university had soon reached its end.¹⁰² Leopold von Ranke, professor of history in Berlin between 1825 and 1871, represented the following period. The unifying idea, which had been so central to the founders of the humanistic university, now faded into the background. Gradually – argued Richter – two scholarly-scientific tendencies took shape: a politically-moralising historiography and the expansion of the natural sciences.¹⁰³

In contrast to many of his contemporaries, Richter did not believe that the scholarly ideals of the past provided answers to contemporary questions. What could Humboldt’s dreams offer to those who struggled in an age of machines, industry, and overpopulation? he asked.¹⁰⁴ It was obvious that Richter believed that the ideal of the humanistic university which he associated with Humboldt had had its day. Now, with the war a fresh memory, it was difficult to uphold a classically individualistic university ideal. The old idea of

100 Ibid., p. 9.

101 Ibid., pp. 9–10.

102 Ibid., pp. 10–11.

103 Ibid., pp. 12–13.

104 Ibid., pp. 13–14.

the full-scale university, *universitas litterarum*, was still cherished by an older generation; but according to Richter, it increasingly came across as a fiction. Richter made comparisons with developments in America, and he predicted that the ideal of professional training would inevitably become predominant in Germany, too. He saw how many young people turned against the old ideas of *Bildung* and affirmed the practical needs of life.¹⁰⁵

At this point, almost half-way through his text, Werner Richter stopped and asked himself why he had spent so much time on a historical survey. The answer he gave was that Germany at the moment found itself in a political, economic, and intellectual vacuum, and that it must orientate itself guided by those beacons that did exist. Consequently, it was necessary to take a stance with respect to the past, but at the same time Richter was convinced that it was not enough to look back to the nineteenth century. The German university needed to develop a new concept of *Bildung*, a concept that was in harmony both with the political and cultural demands of the time and with the older tradition.¹⁰⁶

Richter's contention was that one had to listen to criticism of German science and scholarship coming from the Anglo-Saxon countries. This criticism, he said, could be summarised in four points. The first had to do with a tendency on the part of Germans towards pedantry, and the second with their inclination towards the absolute and the abstract. The third critical point had to do with German education being focused so exclusively on preparing students for research and not for the needs of practical life. Finally, the British and the Americans criticised the German university for being incapable of promoting what Richter called 'social life'; it could support individualists and geniuses, but not people who worked in and for collective society.¹⁰⁷ Richter had obviously been permanently influenced by the vitality and innovation that he had encountered during his years of exile on the other side of the Atlantic. Instead of stubbornly holding on to their native ways of thinking, Germans should learn from Anglo-Saxon criticism without automatically imitating American or British models.¹⁰⁸

Next, Richter turned to the issue of what the educational programmes at the German university should include. His fundamental

105 Ibid., pp. 14–17.

106 Ibid., pp. 17–18.

107 Ibid., pp. 19–21.

108 Ibid., pp. 22–24.

opinion was that these programmes had to be based on a respect for Western values.¹⁰⁹ In 1945 he had published a book in English in the United States, *Re-Educating Germany*. Referring to this book, Richter reminded his readers that in it he had promoted an educational ideal aimed at making ‘good Europeans’ of the Germans. Now, a couple of years later, he was still completely convinced that an orientation toward Western Europe and America was right for Germany. Science and scholarship could contribute to recreating a sense of Western affinity after the discord of the world war. One requirement was that academic scholars, in particular humanists, liberated themselves from their national narrow-mindedness and instead contributed to increasing knowledge of other countries.¹¹⁰

Consequently, Richter supported a variant of the *Abendland* (‘Occident’) rhetoric. However, in contrast to many others who wanted to see a German rapprochement with the West, he had a great deal of respect for the United States and not just for Europe.¹¹¹ Like many others, he held up dechristianisation as a major problem. On the one hand, secularisation had led to nihilism and relativism; on the other, it had produced secular utopias. A prerequisite for a real comeback for Europe and Germany was, according to him, a return to religion. Above all, he called for a living Christianity, with Christian humanism as an element of a general cultural and ethical rebirth in the West.¹¹²

In addition to the necessity of a renewed Western affinity, Richter drew attention to another issue of the greatest importance: Germans must, once and for all, genuinely embrace democracy. In future, democracy – in the sense of personal freedom, human rights, and human dignity – should permeate both politics and everyday life. Richter fully realised that democracy was only weakly rooted in German soil. That was all the more reason to mobilise all available forces for the cause of democracy, including the institutions of higher

109 Ibid., pp. 25–26.

110 Ibid., pp. 26–28. In *Re-Educating Germany* (Chicago, 1945), Werner Richter adopts a broad perspective on the German educational system and discusses both school and university, partly via comparisons between American and German circumstances. Towards the end of the book he pleads for ‘a new ideal for German education’ and states that the only way forward is the ‘inclusion in a European, social, and Christian world order’ (p. 187).

111 Moyn, ‘The First Historian’, 67.

112 Richter, *Die Zukunft*, pp. 32–39.

research and education. The university must under no circumstances be content with 'Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen' ('Reflections of a non-political man', the title of a 1918 treatise by Thomas Mann), he wrote, using a well-known literary reference. It must open its doors to the world; it must promote freedom and social justice. Richter was astonished that it was precisely the German university that was so reluctant to involve itself in work geared to the benefit of society at large. The reason, he believed, was the close relationship between the state and the university. In the United States, academic institutions were happy to stand up for a basic democratic attitude in spite of their generally not being as bound to the state. In contrast to Germany, where the extensive academic freedom had, if anything, isolated the university from the rest of society, Richter believed that American universities had managed to simultaneously promote individual freedom and common responsibility. That was a healthy combination which had strengthened American democracy.¹¹³

In summary, Richter clearly attached great importance to the Berlin university, on whose initial phase he looked back with a degree of admiration. At the same time, he was utterly convinced that the professors in Germany could not rest on their laurels. When it came to a future programme for the German university, he drew his inspiration from completely different sources than did the other two mandarins. Richter did not emphasise the classic German principles about *Bildung*, academic freedom, or the combination of research and education; instead, he argued for the importance of opening up to the world and supporting democracy. Here, his experiences of having been a German Jew in North American exile shone through.

The mandarins and the Humboldtian tradition

The idea of the university was thus under debate during the years following the Second World War. As we have seen, a number of prominent professors and rectors felt called upon to formulate generally applicable thoughts about the role of research and higher education in post-war Germany. Few, if any, offered a particularly detailed plan for how the university of the future should be organised, however; the more precise outlines usually remained unclear. On certain points they disagreed as to how the German heritage should

113 Ibid., pp. 28–30.

be managed and what conclusions should be drawn from the Nazi disaster. But seen from a wider perspective, they were all part of the same academic culture of knowledge. They took up positions on common issues and adapted themselves to the same rhetorical pattern.

There was great unanimity to the effect that the German university must undergo a rebirth. The title of Karl Jaspers's lecture, *Erneuerung der Universität*, could have served as a title for many contributions. After the Nazi period of decay, it was necessary to breathe new life into an old institution. With respect to how the university should be vitalised, it is possible to discern two main paths. One led back to classic German culture, a kind of 'Heimkehr zu Goethe' ('return home to Goethe'). Germans should look inwards and backwards in order to find the rich literary, musical, and philosophical heritage that was part of Germany's history. The other path brought the Germans back into contact with the Christian West. Europe became an *Ersatzvaterland* during the early post-war years, Carlo Schmid pointed out: 'After the collapse of 1945 there were virtually only Europeans in Germany.'¹¹⁴ The two paths could cross or even be incorporated into a greater whole: by embracing the classic German tradition, Germans understood that they were in the deepest sense a civilised European nation that obviously belonged in a Christian *Abendland*. This was what Jaspers, Ritter, and Richter argued, though the last of these three had a more ambiguous attitude to the German line of thought.¹¹⁵ It was as if the appropriation of the language and eternal values of idealism were especially attractive after the military and moral bankruptcy of Nazism. The classic German university ideal became a dream of a more dignified and stable order.

Views on how the university could be regenerated were closely linked to a person's opinion on what had historically constituted the modern German university. For Jaspers, the core of the university remained intact in spite of all the destruction that had been caused by Nazism and the world war. In order to remedy the current miserable state of affairs, Jaspers argued for a return to the rich sources of idealism and the German Enlightenment. He imagined that an actualisation of this heritage would be edifying, spreading an atmosphere of creativity while simultaneously contributing to the

114 Quoted in Führ, *The German Educational System*, p. 4.

115 In other texts from the same time, 1946–1947, Jaspers displayed an even more unambiguous allegiance to Europe and the Western heritage. See, for instance, 'Europa der Gegenwart' in Jaspers, *Erneuerung*.

re-establishment of the idea of a comprehensive university. Ritter's faith in the capacity of German science and scholarship was also fundamentally undiminished. He did not develop sophisticated ideas about how the university should be reconstructed, but he emphasised that the only way in which it could regain its vigour was by means of concentration on true research and scholarship. To a greater extent than the other two, Werner Richter, for his part, questioned just how sound the German university tradition really was. To him vitalisation meant an opening up, in geographical terms towards Europe and the United States and in political terms towards true democracy. A prerequisite for the university having a bright future was that it became involved in working for the general benefit of society and did not close its doors to the world around it.

One characteristic of the early post-war years is that the ideas about the university that were formulated at that time did not appear most clearly in the form of detailed visions for the future. One explanation for this is that they were expressed in the form of lectures, often as opening or inaugural addresses. Several of them would later be published in the universities' series of publications or in one of the many journals that flourished at the time. The rector's speech was the most frequent format, but many of the more elaborate lectures were given by other professors. On the other hand, few extensive expositions on the university were published during these years. Jaspers's *Die Idee der Universität* was a notable exception.¹¹⁶

A more fundamental explanation of the lack of well-developed thoughts about the future was that the discussions were historically orientated. The lines of argument advocating a certain kind of university ideal rested on a backward-looking presentation. This distinctive feature had to do with the fact that the leading actors were academics who were trained historians. However, even more than this, the situation must be viewed in the context of the late 1940s desire to intellectually examine the ways of thinking that had led to Nazism. The historian in the trio, Gerhard Ritter, allowed almost the whole of his lecture to become a recapitulation of the phases of the German university, but Jaspers and Richter also supported their theses with historical analyses.

116 That these lectures could attract attention is illustrated by, for instance, Karl Vossler's contribution. The first edition of his *Forschung und Bildung an der Universität* (Munich, 1946) soon sold out, and a second edition had to be printed. See Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*, p. 326.

At the same time it is striking that none of these scholars dealt with the recent past, for instance by attacking the many Nazis who had populated German universities. Rather, there was a tendency to tone down the effects of Nazism on academic institutions and to gloss over issues that could lead to a conflict in the present. The contributions to the university debate were philosophical or historical in nature, not openly political. Like many other intellectuals during the initial post-war years, these scholars primarily attempted to create an over-arching understanding of the German catastrophe.¹¹⁷

And here the depths of history opened up. If the horizons of expectation were limited during the years immediately after the war, the range of experiences was all the greater. Reflections on the idea of the German university were underpinned by centuries-long retrospective reviews. In this respect, Jaspers and Ritter adhered to a historiography that was close at hand. Both turned back to a golden age that was now only a faded memory. They saw how the decay of the German university had begun during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Therefore, neither of them saw 1933 as an absolute turning point, but rather as a culmination. But with the Nazis the university finally lost all its dignity, all of its original spirit. In addition, their experiences of Nazism reinforced their convictions about the value of unlimited academic freedom and the blessings of pure truth-seeking.

However, an interesting difference between them has to do with what they foregrounded as the exemplary era in German university history. Jaspers praised 'the classically-humanistic university' and placed its origin in the eighteenth century. In the middle of the nineteenth century this was replaced by 'the modern university', a pejorative term for Jaspers. In contrast to Jaspers, Ritter ascribed critical significance to the shift from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. That shift, according to Ritter, was decisive for the creation of a new kind of university, 'the humanistically-liberal state university', with Wilhelm von Humboldt as a prominent figure.

Jaspers and Richter are illustrative of two different attitudes to the Humboldtian tradition. Jaspers's nominal relationship to Humboldt was, as we have seen, weak. He mentioned Humboldt's name on a few occasions, but did not evince any familiarity with

117 In other contexts, however, they intervened more obviously in the denazification process. By writing a very critical report, Jaspers, for instance, contributed in a very real sense to Heidegger's inability to retain his appointment after 1945. See Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, pp. 313–23.

his texts and attributed significantly greater importance to other thinkers. Conversely, Ritter referred to several of Humboldt's works and quoted approvingly from them. He repeatedly emphasised the heritage from Humboldt and argued for its continued importance. This was especially true of the university's independence from the state, but also of the importance of a close connection between research and teaching. Generally speaking, Humboldt and the humanistically-liberal state university were incarnations of an ideal of a harmonious unity between practical and theoretical reason, between truth-seeking and *Bildung*.

The historical course of events was at the centre of Werner Richter's line of argument as well, but he put a different emphasis on it and drew dissimilar conclusions. Like Jaspers and Ritter he went back in time, highlighting the 'New Humanist university' of the early nineteenth century. Richter identified a pronounced individualism in its predominant ideal of *Bildung*. This would eventually become disastrous for the German academy, because the inherent individualism distanced the German university from society at large. Richter's relationship to the Humboldtian tradition was hence ambivalent. He was attracted by the New Humanist idea of *Bildung* and scholarly-scientific ideals, but he was convinced that this was a bygone stage. In clear opposition to Ritter, but also to Jaspers, he did not advocate a return to a classic German university ideal. On the contrary, he promoted the idea that tradition had to be renewed through a democratisation of German universities and an overcoming of their national limitations.

In Richter's version of German university history, Wilhelm von Humboldt was a central point of reference. There was thus no self-evident connection between a nominal reference to Humboldt and an intellectual appreciation of (or favourable identification with) the Humboldtian tradition. Ritter referred fairly often to Humboldt, greatly valued the university ideal he associated with him, and advocated a renaissance for the dominant principles of this tradition. Jaspers rarely referred to Humboldt but maintained that the classic humanistic university in a modified form, adapted to contemporary times, could vitalise the German post-war period. Richter referred to Humboldt in appreciative terms and relatively frequently – but held the opinion that the Humboldtian tradition was antiquated and in certain respects even dangerous.

The differences between these three scholars can in many respects be explained by their varying experiences and dissimilar intellectual profiles. For Jaspers, his scholarly and practical activities during

the early post-war period had to do with examining the German tradition and creating a new foundation upon which to build. He was anxious for both the German nation and the country's universities to find their places in a changed world. Ritter worked in a related way with a view to re-establishing German academic life, but with conservative overtones. He looked backwards in history and saw an unsullied national line which he now wanted to revive. Richter, with his experiences of exile, adopted a critical fundamental attitude and promoted a radical renewal based on an Anglo-Saxon model. These three thinkers hence fit into the general picture that Axel Schildt and others have drawn of the conceptual landscape of the post-war years; but one must also be aware of variations and nuances. With their different experiences and visions for the future, the three mandarins were thus also representatives of different intellectual and political positions in the late 1940s.¹¹⁸

The wider stage

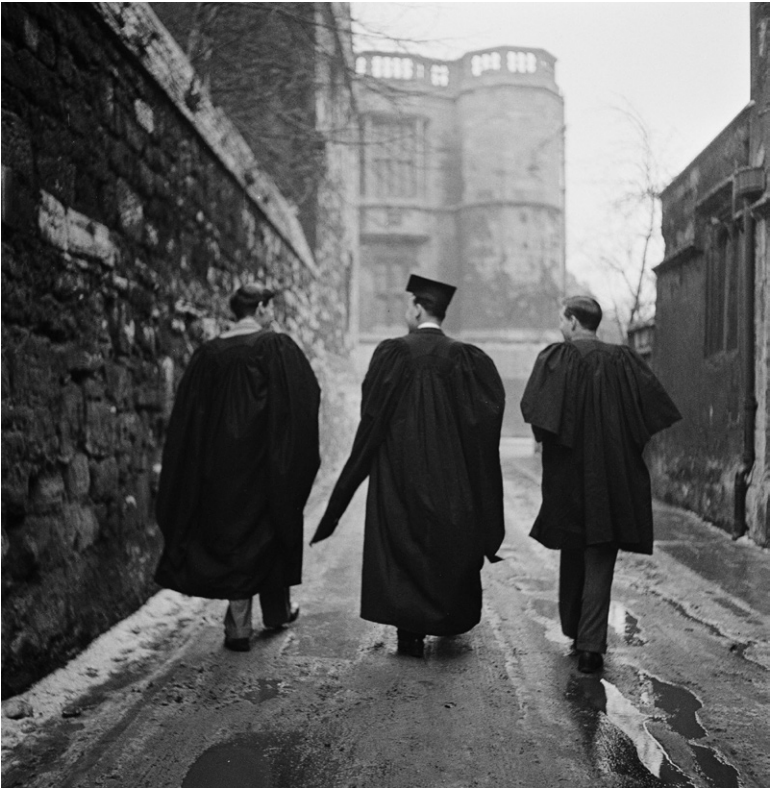
Karl Jaspers, Gerhard Ritter, and Werner Richter all belonged within the *Geisteswissenschaften*; they were all well established, and they had already been professors during the Weimar Republic. While they were behind three of the most substantial contributions to the post-war debate on the university, there were of course other actors too. These actors also adopted a position with respect to the classic tradition, more or less associated with Wilhelm von Humboldt: Was it *im Kern gesund* or *im Kern verrottet* ('healthy or rotten at the core')? This was a question that engaged almost all of the leading academics.¹¹⁹

One particular group in the discussion about the university consisted of the rectors. Many of them were elderly humanities scholars, not infrequently shaped by the world of the early twentieth century. In a study of a large number of rector's speeches, Christina Schwartz has distinguished three overarching themes that characterised the initial period after the end of the war: general reflections on human culture, expositions on the current crisis, and ideas about the mission of the university.¹²⁰ All the rectors agreed

118 Jeffrey K. Olick, *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943–1949* (Chicago, 2005); *Rückblickend in die Zukunft*, ed. by Gallus & Schildt. See also Moses, 'Intellectual History'.

119 See Jessen, 'Zwischen Bildungspathos und Spezialistentum', pp. 364–65.

120 Schwartz, 'Erfindet sich die Hochschule neu?', p. 47.



9 Oxford students around 1950

that the university had a crucial role to play. Similarly, they all agreed that the Third Reich had been a disaster and that it would be very difficult to restore the university that had existed prior to 1933. Many representatives of science and scholarship had a share in this guilt, the rectors admitted; but that was not the same thing as questioning the academic institution itself.¹²¹

Schwartz establishes that the rectors expressed a kind of desire for reform in their speeches. Because the universities had not been able to resist Nazism, it was necessary to transform them. This, however, was not primarily a matter of an internal transformation of hierarchies or organisational structures. What the rectors seized upon was the question of *Bildung*: how would the university be able to contribute to the formation of individuals who simultaneously possessed political judgement and a wide professional range? *Bildung durch Forschung* ('*Bildung* through research') was a leitmotif, supplemented by an ideal regarding the formation of character. *Universitas*, the original mediaeval ideal of the all-comprehensive university, was a kind of model for the rectors. They embraced a holistic idea in which individual academic subjects would engage in dialogue with one another and not remain separate. In this spirit, the students would not specialise but instead strive to obtain a comprehensive education that ultimately benefited society. However, the rectors rarely devoted much space to the question of how these university reforms should be realised.¹²²

Karl Vossler is an illustrative example. He was a respected Romance philologist who had survived the Third Reich in spite of his anti-Nazism. In his twilight years, he became rector in Munich. In his inaugural speech in 1946, he said that the university had neglected its more fundamental mission of *Bildung* in favour of a narrower scholarly-scientific education even back in the Wilhelminian period. The ultimate consequences had been experienced during Nazism, when, for instance, physicians had allowed themselves to be enrolled in euthanasia programmes. Science and scholarship must not be isolated from society, was his conclusion.¹²³

Another academic leader was law professor Hans Peters. During the period around 1930, he had worked under Werner Richter in the Prussian ministry of education and had devoted time to Carl

121 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

122 *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

123 Vossler, *Forschung und Bildung*; Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*, pp. 326–27.

Heinrich Becker's university reform. During the war he had belonged to the conservative opposition against the regime, becoming a dean of the faculty of law in Berlin after 1945 and eventually rector in Cologne.¹²⁴ In an unusually critical set of reflections about the university, Peters argued that what was required was not simply a genuine break with Nazism but with the German tradition as such. So far, the re-inauguration of the German universities after the war had been carried out by way of a return to a Humboldtian basic idea, though that idea had arisen in a completely different social and cultural environment.¹²⁵ Against this stood the Marxist college with its focus on professional-occupational education. Peters was dismissive of both alternatives.¹²⁶ In spite of his attack on the tendency to relapse into old ideas, Peters's own suggestions contained many things that were in line with an older German university tradition. For instance, he repeatedly returned to the need for a vitalised concept of *Bildung* and a renewed combination of research and education.¹²⁷

Vossler, Peters, and many of the rectors belonged to the mandarin class; and they pursued a tradition, established during the nineteenth century, of expounding on the idea of the university. In their evaluations of German university history, they placed their emphases differently and their opinions varied in respect of which conclusions should be drawn. At the same time many things united them, as becomes obvious when their views are compared with other positions held during the years of occupation.

One of the most vocal politicians on university issues was the lawyer Erwin Stein. He belonged to the left-Catholic wing of the Christian Democratic Party and was the minister responsible for culture and education in Hesse from 1947 to 1951. In many contexts, Stein strove for a democratic renewal of the German university system, not least by opening it up to other social classes than the bourgeoisie that had dominated it for so long. Students and politicians took an active interest in this issue, but not so many university professors. However, in other instances Stein had reason to engage with leading academics at close quarters. His view was that academic autonomy

124 Hans Peters, *Zwischen Gestern und Morgen: Betrachtungen zur heutigen Kulturlage* (Berlin, 1946); Ulrich Karpen, 'Peters, Hans Carl Maria Alfons', *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (Berlin, 1953–), vol. xx (2001), pp. 240–41.

125 Peters, *Zwischen Gestern und Morgen*, p. 65.

126 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

127 *Ibid.*, pp. 52 and 58.

had to be limited, because the university had proved itself incapable of working for the good of society. In Nazi Germany the professors had betrayed their ideals, and after the war they had simply safeguarded their own privileges. But his criticism was more fundamental than that, and it was directed against the ideals that formed the very basis of academic freedom. In Stein's eyes, Wilhelm von Humboldt's ideas on the classically-liberal university were harmful. They had contributed to the neglect of social responsibility and to academic life having been cut off from society at large.¹²⁸

Erwin Stein is an example of a politician who intervened in the academic debate about the idea of the university, combining analyses of the Humboldtian tradition with concrete suggestions. His historical examination could not match those of the leading mandarins, but his assessment of the classic German tradition was in line with those of, for example, Ritter and Peters.

Similar strains could be heard from the other side of the Atlantic. A sizeable number of German refugees had been employed at American universities, and they followed the reconstruction of the old country from their exile. Frederic Lilge had begun his studies in Germany, but from the mid-1930s he had been active in the United States. In 1948, he published the book *The Abuse of Learning: The Failure of the German University*. Lilge was an educationalist by profession, and against the backdrop of the great catastrophe he subjected the university to a thorough scrutiny. In his historiography, the eighteenth century was presented as a miserable period for the German university; but towards the turn of the century in 1800 came what he called 'the brief flowering of German humanism'. Humboldt stood out as one of the major facilitators. With idealism, however, embodied in Fichte, began what Lilge called a political misuse of the educational tradition. During the course of the nineteenth century, there emerged an alloy of idealistic abstraction and worship of science and scholarship that eventually turned into irrationalism and fascist mythology. The universities did not manage to resist the assault of unreason.¹²⁹

Lilge's book had a patent affinity to Richter's contribution. Both men regarded German history from a shared American viewpoint. They had high opinions of Humboldt and the university that he had

128 Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*, pp. 137–42, 275–78, and 379–85.

129 Frederic Lilge, *The Abuse of Learning: The Failure of the German University* (New York, 1948).

helped create. But unlike Richter, Lilge concentrated on a historical analysis, and he had few suggestions as to what the future should hold. In a wider perspective, it is possible to see how Lilge's study fitted into a critical line of thought in the historiography on modern Germany that developed among German researchers in American exile during the early post-war period. In the focus of their analyses were the trends and structures that had led Germany on to its fatal historical path. Lilge's book was never published in his mother tongue, and it probably influenced the Anglo-Saxon image of the German university more than it did the native German debate.¹³⁰

Ambivalence toward the German university tradition could also find expression in other ways. The 'Blaues Gutachten', the above-mentioned reform proposal from 1948, contained a number of concrete suggestions regarding organisation, financing, exams, and so on. In addition, the document contained basic reflections on the nature and the fundamental ideals of the academic system. The commission agreed that a reform of the university was necessary. The university had not been able to keep pace with the transformations in society and had educated specialists rather than persons. Without reform, a new political disaster would be inevitable. This being said, the commission wanted to emphasise that the German university was the bearer of an old and 'im Kern gesunde[r] Tradition' ('tradition [that was] healthy at the core'). Every institution of such a kind had to be continually reformed; those who merely wanted to create something

130 Many of the leading American researchers on Germany had fled from the Third Reich. They might differ when it came to their ideological and scholarly orientation, but they were united in a critical attitude to the traditions in the German state and intellectual life that had supported Nazism. The basis for their interpretations of Germany's past was not infrequently a kind of unspoken idea of a unique path of German development. This was true of figures who were as different from one another as Franz Neumann, Hajo Holborn, Ernst Fraenkel, Leonard Krieger, Hans Rosenberg, George L. Mosse, and Fritz Stern. During the decades after 1945, several of these German-born researchers in exile published studies that anticipated the West German *Sonderweg* ('special path') debate of the 1970s and 1980s. Younger German researchers working at American universities were inspired by these interpretations. See Johan Östling, 'Tysklands väg mot moderniteten: Hans-Ulrich Wehler och *Sonderweg*-tesen', in *I historiens skruvstäd: Berättelser om Europas 1900-tal*, ed. by Lennart Berntson & Svante Nordin (Stockholm, 2008) and Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton, 2015).

completely new risked killing the very essence of the institution. The commission pointed to the fact that the European university had trained the leading social classes ever since the Middle Ages, and that it still bore a living heritage of Christian humanism. 'The German university can be particularly proud of its characteristic tradition, derived from Humboldt, which embodies the unity and freedom of research and tuition in an exemplary manner', they wrote, maintaining that the upcoming reform had to safeguard this healthy core and promote further development in accordance with the requirements of the time.¹³¹

In spite of this professed allegiance to the German university tradition, the 'Blaues Gutachten' also contained critical reservations. It warned against blind faith in pure scientific thought. Academic studies risked leading to specialist knowledge only. In order to remedy this shortcoming a *studium generale* was recommended, a kind of general educational programme according to an American model whose ultimate purpose was to strengthen political democracy. Instead of a New Humanist concept of *Bildung* where individual studies of art, literature, and philosophy predominated, an ideal was emphasised where political science, economics, and sociology would strengthen democratic involvement. This socially orientated attitude had its proponents among German rectors and professors; but not a few of them, Jaspers being one, disliked seeing character formation give way to an education of citizens. Student associations also reacted unfavourably to the enlisting of the concept of *Bildung* in the service of political democracy. They welcomed the *studium generale*, but felt that it should promote independent scholarly-scientific thinking and a classically based idea of *Bildung*.¹³²

The 'Blaues Gutachten' and the ideas about a *studium generale* illustrate the fact that there were several competing opinions regarding the concept of *Bildung* during the years of occupation. In a wider perspective one also has to ask how unique the German debate was, and whether there were contemporaneous parallels in other countries.

Many European universities had suffered badly during the Second World War. The rapid recovery after 1945 has been characterised by Walter Rüegg as 'one of the most astonishing post-war achievements'. At the same time, he notes that 'this phenomenon has only been partially studied'. The number of students at the universities

131 *Dokumente*, ed. by Neuhaus, pp. 290–91.

132 Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*; Phillips, *Pragmatismus und Idealismus*.

increased significantly during the initial post-war years, and all across Western Europe higher education was considered to be a major issue in relation to the future – technologically, economically, and intellectually. Even so, radical changes of the academic system failed to materialise. In Italy and France, reconnections were made with the ideals of the interwar period. The same applied to many countries that had been under German occupation. In cases where the university became the subject of wider public scrutiny, for instance in the work of the 1945 Swedish parliamentary drafting committee on universities, this did not lead to a substantial transformation of the system. It would be at least another decade before a real discussion of reforms got off the ground.¹³³

This, however, does not amount to saying that there was an absence of exchanges of opinion about the nature and fundamental mission of the university. On the contrary, the Germans seem to have been far from alone in discussing these issues in the wake of the war. It is true that Robert D. Anderson in his work on the history of British universities pointed out that neither of the world wars was a real watershed: between the turn of the century and the early 1960s, academic culture retained its social and intellectual character in all essentials. However, there had long been a conflict between advocates of utilitarian and free knowledge respectively. During the years prior to and during the Second World War, the idea of disinterested science and scholarship gained more adherents.¹³⁴ For example, in *Red Brick University*, the most influential publication about the university from the 1940s, Bruce Truscot argued for the importance of free research. He felt that this was being neglected, not least at the newer universities in the large English industrial cities. Truscot also eagerly promoted a vitalisation of the academic sense of community, partly with religious overtones.¹³⁵ Indeed, a pervasive spiritual undertone could be detected in the British university debate during the years following the Second World War. That undertone was especially apparent in philosopher Walter Moberly's *The Crisis*

133 Rüegg & Sadlak, 'Relations with Authority', pp. 74–76.

134 Robert D. Anderson, *British Universities: Past and Present* (London, 2006), pp. 113–24.

135 Bruce Truscot, *Red Brick University* (Harmondsworth, 1951). Bruce Truscot was a pseudonym for Liverpoolian Hispanic philologist Edgar Allison Peers, who published his book in two parts, in 1943 and in 1945, respectively, and in 1951 in an omnibus volume. See Anderson, *British Universities*, pp. 124–25.

of *the University* (1949). According to him the world was in a crisis, and the university had an obligation to deal with it. He defined the university as ‘a community in pursuit of truth’, but at the same time claimed that the cult of research and objectivity had led to a neglect of societal engagement.¹³⁶

The comparison with Britain shows up both similarities and differences between the United Kingdom and Germany. On both sides of the English Channel, there was a strong idealistic undercurrent in the academic debate during the initial post-war years. At a time of spiritual crisis, it was felt that the university had a vital obligation. In both countries the debaters, who were mainly active in the humanities, felt that it was an essential task of the university to furnish moral and cultural education, not to provide practical skills. In contrast to the situation in the West German zones of occupation, a critical examination of the national tradition was not a key theme in the British discussion. Nor was the strong emphasis on academic freedom, in the form of a line of demarcation between state and university, anywhere near as marked in Britain. The British case underlines how interwoven the German discussions were with the greater national processing of the impact of Nazism following its demise.

Similarly, it is difficult to find an equivalent of the German examination of the university tradition in Britain. Systematic historical reflection on the origins of academic ideals and their importance for the future was a German speciality. However, during the early post-war period in Norway there were debaters who rejected the German university model (without mentioning Wilhelm von Humboldt by name). It was branded old-fashioned and conservative. In a country that had been under Nazi occupation from 1940 to 1945, Germanness in itself was a counter-argument. Prominent scholars from Oslo and Bergen promoted an Americanisation of the Norwegian university instead – in line with what Richter had advocated, but expressed in more categorical terms.¹³⁷

The university reborn

This brief geographic survey indicates that the German debate had a distinctive character. It was exceedingly historical in nature, and it

136 Walter Moberly, *The Crisis of the University* (London, 1949), pp. 106–47.

137 Fredrik W. Thue & Kim G. Helsvig, *Universitetet i Oslo 1945–1975: Den store transformasjonen* (Oslo, 2011).

was so in two respects: partly because the coveted academic principles were drawn from the past and the arguments were supported by historical narratives, partly because many contributions referred – directly or indirectly – to older commentaries, primarily from the early nineteenth century or the interwar period. In addition, the German case was characterised by its intensity and extent. The debate was wide-ranging and passionate; the vitalisation of the university was seen as a decisive issue for the future of the nation. Finally, the divergence of opinion about the fundamental academic values was integrated into a greater national processing of the German catastrophe. Ultimately, the discussion had to do with how post-war Germany would overcome the calamities of history.

In all this, the Humboldtian tradition was of great significance. Regardless of whether Humboldt's name was mentioned, one can see how variants of a classic German university were used as an exemplary or dissuasive model. The historical argumentation hence provided the debaters with a rhetorical arsenal, but also with a point of orientation in a tumultuous period.

However, to evoke – as was done in several earlier studies – an image of a Humboldtian renaissance in the wake of the Second World War is simplistic. There was never anything akin to the Goethe cult which the Bard of Weimar inspired in connection with the bicentenary of his birth in 1949.¹³⁸ On the other hand, an idealistic pathos and an invocation of an older tradition did characterise the discussion about the university. None of the influential mandarins recommended that nineteenth-century ideals should be re-established without modification; they all said, in different ways and with differing emphases, that the university had to go through a process of rebirth. In this process Wilhelm von Humboldt and the young Berlin university was a source of inspiration, although certainly not for everyone.

Konrad H. Jarausch, one of the few scholars who have presented a comprehensive interpretation of the importance of the Humboldtian tradition after 1945, has claimed that the rhetoric of *Bildung* brought the university back to 'the problems of elitism, arrogance, and apoliticism'. A consequence of this was that West Germany has been haunted by what Jarausch called a Humboldt syndrome which prevented a democratisation of the university.¹³⁹

138 Karl Robert Mandelkow, *Goethe in Deutschland: Rezeptionsgeschichte eines Klassikers: 1919–1982* (Munich, 1989).

139 Jarausch, 'The Humboldt Syndrome', pp. 35–38.

Jarausch's critical assessment is reminiscent of the 1960s accusations against those leading professors who after the war had remained silent about the academics' ideological support of Nazism, thereby placing obstacles in the way of democratic reform.¹⁴⁰ Peter Uwe Hohendahl, however, has warned about the dangers of too facilely appropriating the way in which the 1960s understood the early post-war period. Hohendahl asks whether Jaspers and his contemporaries adopted a conservative attitude and argues that we have to distinguish between different types of conservatism. According to his classification, the mandarins can be considered conservatives in the sense that they wanted to establish connections to a classic tradition; but they were not necessarily conservatives in the political sense, or in the sense of being opponents of change.¹⁴¹ Above all, it is mandatory to get away from simple dichotomies of the 'conservative versus modern' type. The majority of the mandarins had experienced the research and educational policy of the Third Reich at first hand, where innovative investments in cutting-edge research were combined with traditional educational models and authoritarian academic governance. When they formulated their ideas on the university after 1945, they did not simply evoke a classic model. They also drew conclusions from their experiences of Nazism.

In a wider perspective the university debate of the early post-war period was linked to other major topics in the intellectual history of modern Germany. The theme of crisis was such a topic. Already during the Weimar Republic, a discourse of crisis had developed that to a very great extent included the university. After the heyday of the German Empire, German science had fallen into disrepute; but the academic crisis was also seen as a symptom of the serious crisis for all of classic modernity that many people experienced during the interwar years.¹⁴² After the Second World War the crisis discourse appeared in different guises, and the question might be asked whether twentieth-century German university history could be written as a history of continuous crises.¹⁴³

140 Moses, *German Intellectuals*, pp. 131–59.

141 Hohendahl, 'Humboldt Revisited', p. 162.

142 John, "'Not deutscher Wissenschaft"?)

143 Stefan Gerber et al., 'Einleitung', in *Traditionen – Brüche – Wandlungen: Die Universität Jena 1850–1995*, ed. by Stefan Gerber et al. (Cologne, 2009), p. 5; Paletschek, 'The Writing of University History', p. 154.

Another major theme was the masses. The fear that the university would become overcrowded existed as early as the nineteenth century. When this metaphor showed up during the early post-war period, for instance in Ritter, it was not, however, simply a matter of rising student numbers and a lowering of the level of knowledge. Rather, the criticism was connected to a conservative distanciation from mass society as such. In Friedrich Meinecke's oft-quoted book *Die deutsche Katastrophe* (1946) the origin of Nazism had, in a similar manner, been sought in the rise of the masses and their infatuation with power. The discussion on the mass university would continue throughout the post-war period.¹⁴⁴

In her extensive study of the university debate during the years of occupation, Barbara Wolbring advances the thesis that restorative tendencies have been exaggerated in earlier research. The early post-war period cannot merely be described as a series of failed attempts at reform or as a return to older academic ideals. In the debates about the university that took place directly after the Second World War, new arguments and oppositional positions took shape that would in due course characterise the Federal Republic. She uses the debate on the meaning of the concept of *Bildung* as an example, but also the discussions that were held about the university as a socially closed unit, a stronghold of the bourgeoisie. The latter view was a criticism that would return with renewed vigour fifteen years later.¹⁴⁵

However, my own findings do not support Wolbring's conclusion that the basic patterns of the West German university policy emerged already during these early years. At least when it comes to the contributions of the leading debaters, I find it difficult to be persuaded that she is right. Rather, both Wolbring's book and my investigation show how the discourse was shaped during a very specific phase in the history of modern Germany. The proposals that Jaspers, Ritter, Richter, and several others formulated during the early post-war period were anything but timeless; they were expressions of the experiences and ideals of a particular generation. These debaters sought a rebirth of the university, but what they witnessed was the swan song of the mandarins.

When discussions about the university flared up again in the early 1960s, a new generation had assumed power, and the focal

144 Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe: Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen* (Zürich, 1946).

145 Wolbring, *Trümmerfeld*, pp. 12–13.

point had shifted. The main actors took a stand with respect to the place of the developing mass university in a modern, democratic, industrial society. They, too, posed questions about the freedom of research, the meaning of *Bildung*, and the orientation of studies against the backdrop of the German university tradition; but their answers were based on dreams of the future and notions of reality which belonged to another era.