The invention of Humboldt and the impact of national socialism: the German university idea in the first half of the twentieth century

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In the twentieth century, the term *Humboldtsche Universität* (Humboldtian university) became the catchword for identifying the German university system. Until the present day in German academic culture and university politics the Humboldtian ideal figures as 'creating identity *per se*'. It developed a 'force which shaped mentality' and created 'dynamics which formed reality' (Schubring/Hültenschmidt 1991: 10). The term 'Humboldtian university' refers to the view that the modern German university emerged with the new humanistic university idea which was developed around 1800 by idealistic scholars such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, Johann Fichte and Friedrich Schleiermacher. According to the historical myth of the Humboldtian university, the founding of Berlin University in 1810 was the first manifestation of the new humanistic university idea and the later model for other German universities. It is supposed that Wilhelm von Humboldt, as Prussian minister of culture and as philosopher, played a leading role in the foundation of Berlin University (Anrich 1956; vom Bruch 1997; Boehm 1983). The concept of the Humboldtian university as it is used in today's scholarly discussion comprises the following elements: the unity of research and teaching; the function of the university as a research institution; the freedom of research and teaching which allows the university to function in furthering pure science (which is to say a science free of vested interests. Science in the German understanding refers to sciences
and the humanities); the assumption that science provides moral education (sittliche Menschenbildung durch Wissenschaft); the idea that all academic disciplines should be represented within the university, and that the faculty of philosophy should function as the core, as the glue between the different disciplines and faculties.

Interestingly enough, throughout the nineteenth century the term 'Humboldtian university' was not used to characterize the German university system. In the definitions of Universität in encyclopaedias, books or speeches of that time, the name of Wilhelm von Humboldt does not even appear. The idea of a new humanistic university appears only marginally, if at all. From the nineteenth-century perspective, the foundation of the University of Berlin did not represent a major break with tradition. The development of the modern university was instead associated with the triumph of rationalism and organizational reform of the new Reformuniversitäten of Göttingen and Halle during the Enlightenment (Paletschek 2000b). According to the definitions in widely-read encyclopaedias, contemporary German universities were characterized by three responsibilities: first and above all, they were institutions of training for the academic professions; secondly they had to further develop the humanities and sciences; and thirdly they were agencies of Allgemeinbildung ('general education'). Freedom of teaching and research was regarded as the German university's special feature and its recipe for success. This freedom was derived as a historical tradition from the university's earlier corporate independence. It was not rooted in an idealistic philosophy.

It was only after 1900 that the origins of the modern German university began to be identified with the new humanistic university idea and the University of Berlin. But from the beginning of the twentieth century, the question of the university has been dominated by the recourse to this so-called German university idea. A long tradition of continuity from the university of the early nineteenth century to the present day has been constructed. Since then, reference to the Humboldtian ideal has served as a stratagem to justify contemporary university concepts. Between 1920 and 1960, major scholars within the German humanities such as Eduard Spranger, Carl Heinrich Becker or Helmut Schelsky postulated an ahistorical, everlasting German university idea (Spranger 1919; Spranger 1930; Becker 1925; Schelsky 1963). At the same time they played an important role in German university politics. In interpreting the writings of Humboldt, Fichte and Schleiermacher they formulated the contemporary image of the ideal university. The embedding of
Spranger's, Becker's and Schelsky's historical works in the context of concrete applications within university politics initiated the invention of the classical university, or, as I prefer to call it, the invention of Humboldt. This 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm) underwent various metamorphoses in the first half of the twentieth century. The first stage between 1910 and 1930 embraced the enthronement and consolidation of the new humanistic university concept as a permanent ideal. The second stage under National Socialism represented the overthrow of this new humanistic university ideal. The third stage began in the period after 1945. At that time, the act of going back to Humboldt served to signify a decisive break with National Socialism. The return to the neo-humanistic university idea as a reaction to National Socialism furthered, however, the restoration of obsolete conditions at the universities after 1945.

The Invention of Humboldt — First Stage: 1910–1930

From 1910 onwards, leading scholars and university politicians showed a growing tendency to refer to the new humanistic university ideal. This can be explained first by the fact that around that time the term seems to describe the existing contemporary type of university. From the 1880s onwards, the universities had increasingly developed into research institutions (Wittrock 1993: 342).

First it was possible to legitimize this emphasis on research by referring to Humboldt's definition of research as an ongoing, incomplete project and his concept of the university as an institution of research. These essentials of Humboldt's university idea are found in his famous and unfinished essay Über die innere und äußere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin ('On the internal and external organization of higher academic institutions in Berlin'). It was probably written around 1810, but unpublished and unknown until 1900. This unfinished text is 'perhaps the most discussed document in the modern history of universities' (Wittrock 1993: 317). This short essay, which has been quoted in innumerable publications on the history of universities and scholarship, was discovered in an archive by Bruno Gebhardt in the 1890s. In the nineteenth century, the contemporaries did not know this text. The whole essay was first published in 1903 (Gebhardt 1903: 250–60). All the well-known Humboldtian quotes are found in this text: Einsamkeit und Freiheit
(loneliness and freedom) are supposed to be the driving principles of the *reine Idee der Wissenschaft* (pure idea of science). The institutions of higher scientific learning are to treat science (in the German understanding as sciences and the humanities) as 'etwas noch nicht ganz Gefundenes und nie ganz Aufzufindendes' (something not yet completely found and something which will never be recovered completely) and their task is 'unabläßig sie als solche zu suchen' (to continue to search for it for ever). Extension of knowledge is a function of the universities; the progress and promotion of science in Germany is due much more to university scholars than to scholars in academies of science (Humboldt 1809–10/1982: 255, 257, 262).

Secondly, this view was supported by the leading tradition of German historiography which interpreted ideas as driving forces in history and which regarded the Prussian state as the leading force in Germany's national development. According to this view, the new humanistic university idea was brought to life with the foundation of Berlin University by the state of Prussia, which thus fulfilled its national mission and created the *true* German university. Thirdly, the turn to the new humanistic university idea was supported by the advance of neo-idealistic thinking after 1900.

In the 1920s, this 'invention of Humboldt' was consolidated in the actual discussion about universities. After the First World War, demands were made for university reform in Germany since shortcomings in the education system were also blamed for the defeat (Becker 1919: viii). Now problems that had already been discussed before the First World War gained a new importance. Critics complained that students were over-stressed by the sheer load of specialist knowledge and by the freedom to study what they wished. Critical contemporaries argued that the courses were too unstructured and too theoretical and that the professors spent too much time on research and paid too little attention to teaching.

A further factor was the increasing number of students in the 1920s. By 1930, there were approximately twice as many university students as in 1910. The growth of student numbers brought with it a dramatic social change. By 1930, approximately 70 per cent of all students came from the middle and lower middle classes. Female students made up about 20 per cent of the total student population. At the end of the 1920s, there was a discussion about an academic overload which presented the horror scenario of a generation of unemployed academics (Titze 1995; Titze 1990). From 1930 onwards, the universities were increasingly analysed in terms of crisis. The key terms used here were
depersonalization, feminization, and the fear of an intellectual decline, which merged into a gloomy prognosis for the future.

For the majority of professors, Germany's defeat in the First World War represented a decisive turning point. Like other members of the educated upper middle classes, they mourned the loss of the constitutional monarchy. Thus, the majority of professors took on a hostile or at least a sceptical attitude towards the Weimar Republic. They saw themselves as pillars of national culture, towering over political parties and interest groups (Ringer 1969; Jansen 1992; Vogel 1991). However, there was also a smaller, but not insignificant, group of professors – frequently natural scientists – who regarded themselves as scientific experts and worked in a pragmatic manner on specific problems (Harwood 1993: 189).

This was the political and social background to the emerging discussion of university reform in the 1920s. Hardly any of the reforms proposed in the 1920s were implemented. In the discussion about the university, two positions stood out: one side wished to retain the existing university structure, the other to change universities radically. Max Scheler, for example, was among the radical critics. He held the view that the various functions of the university – professional training, research, general education – could no longer be unified within a single organization. According to Scheler, this 'functional universality' had its origins in the Middle Ages (Scheler 1926: 493, 496–502). In his view the new humanistic university idea had merely added general education (Menschenbildung) to the responsibilities of the university. According to Scheler, this concept had been developed at a time when neither modern research nor specialized academic education were known. Scheler argued in favour of a functional separation and the restructuring of universities into institutions for professional academic training.

Opposing this position, the second camp wished to retain the university's multiplicity of tasks. The Prussian Minister of Culture and former Professor of Oriental Studies, Carl Heinrich Becker, and the Professor of Educational Science, Eduard Spranger, were leading advocates of this position. They popularized the idea of a German university outside or above temporal or historical restrictions. Their recourse to the new humanistic university idea served as a defence of the university system's status quo against those advocating radical changes. However, they also expected that the new interpretation of the Humboldtian ideal would provide the solution of the universities' current problems. Carl Heinrich Becker wrote in 1925:
In Becker's view, the German university had nothing to do with utilitarian considerations or professional training. It pursued a 'selfless search without goals' ('selbstloses und zweckloses Suchen') (Becker 1925: 2). Becker pleaded for the restoration of the new humanistic university idea and a holistic approach. In his view, the current problems of specialization, egoism and materialism were rooted in positivism, rationalist thinking, and the era of natural sciences and technology, which had supplanted idealism in Germany since the 1830s. According to Becker, science had lost 'contact with life'. This was why the 'youth of all ages' would demand an extended concept of scientific thinking (erweiterter Wissenschajtsbegraf) which took into account the desire for cohesion and included non-rationalist impulses (Becker 1925: 22, 25). In terms of concrete measures for reform, Becker argued for the establishment of new disciplines which would promote intellectual synthesis, such as sociology (Müller 1991: 335-95). He argued for improved university teaching. He also demanded more participatory rights for lecturers (Nichtordinarien) and students, so that new ideas might be implemented more quickly.

The educational scientist and philosopher Eduard Spranger argued along similar lines, but with different proposals for reform. He also wished to return to the core of idealist thinking. He thought all individual items of knowledge should be assembled into an 'organic totality'. According to Spranger, the German universities had been disrupted by the 'accelerated speed of the industrial and technological era' (Spranger 1930: 33). In his opinion, the university crisis could also be attributed to the democratization of education and the 'inevitable reduction in quality associated with it' (Spranger 1930: 36). The solutions proposed by him were the restriction of student numbers and the return to the concept of the classical university on a new basis. In response to the radical critics, he insisted that it was still possible to link scientific research and professional training as well as scientific research and education, and that this was the key to
success. If scientific thinking reverted from positivism to idealism, it would, in his view, also satisfy the need to provide education. In his opinion, a theoretical academic education provided better preparation for a career than professional training (Spranger 1930: 13). He felt that research without defined goals was the most useful form, as it provided solutions for unforeseen requirements which would be overlooked by scholarship based on practical matters and utilitarianism.

Basing their arguments on the neo-humanistic ideal of the university, Spranger and Becker defended the institution's traditional purposes and endorsed an elitist self-confidence among professors. In doing so, they confirmed the self-image of a university which pictured itself primarily as a research institution and which assumed that by disseminating research methodology it would simultaneously fulfil its other tasks. What they ignored was the increasing establishment of research institutions in the natural sciences outside the university since the turn of the century, which can be taken as an indication of the limitations of knowledge production within the university (Vierhaus/vom Brocke 1990). Where they took note of this development, they criticized it as a deviation from Humboldt's ideal. All in all, it seems fair to say that the recourse to an ideal picture of an eternal university model served the purpose of assigning a higher value to the humanities. Becker's and Spranger's concept of the university was drawn up entirely from the viewpoint of the humanities. The recourse to Humboldtian ideals also legitimized reforms: the deficits attributed to positivism and specialization were to be made good by a new synthetic concept.

In their reflection on universities, Becker and Spranger reacted to the yearning for a holistic world view capable of embracing rational and irrational impulses. This spirit of the time (Zeitgeist) was strong among students, but was also to be found in other circles of society. It characterized not only völkisch (nationalistic-ethnic) circles, but also reached far into the liberal, Weimar-supporting camp. It is possible to interpret the longing for a holistic world view as a reaction to rapid social change and as a response to the costs of modernization. For the traditional academic elite this modernization crisis was coupled with a loss of prestige and power, and the defeat in the First World War aggravated this crisis. There was an increasing alienation from the ideals of positivism, pluralism and parliamentarism, a strong rejection of a Western way of thinking and Western form of politics. This presented many anchorage points for the growth of National
Socialism, which promised to fulfill the widespread longings for a holistic world view, for a cohesive national community, and for a strong state.

The University Concept under National Socialism: The Defeat of the Humboldtian Ideal

With the National Socialist accession to power in 1933, the universities were integrated into the new state in a mixture of enforced conformity and self-induced Gleichschaltung (‘coordination’). Only very few university members offered resistance. As institutions, the universities did not resist (Langewiesche 1997: 618; Seier 1984: 143). In 1933, the self-administration of the university was replaced by the Führerprinzip (the leadership principle). Jewish staff members and those who were members of left-wing parties were dismissed. In total about 1,100 to 1,500 persons, that is approximately 15 per cent of the professors and lecturers at German universities, were affected by these measures (Ash 1995: 6). At some universities, up to 30 per cent of the university lecturers departed without any significant protests from their colleagues.

There are no exact figures about the university teachers who were dismissed on political grounds by the Nazis. Mostly it is estimated that by 1938 one third of all university teachers had been replaced (Titze 1989: 225). But these estimates also include professors who retired on grounds of age. Therefore these figures are too high. More recent publications estimate that about 20 (Langewiesche 1992: 345) or 15 per cent of the lecturers were dismissed (Fischer 1991; Ash 1995: 6). There were, however, large differences between the German universities. While, for instance, around 30 per cent of the lecturers at the universities of Berlin and Frankfurt were removed from office, the dismissals at the universities of Göttingen, Hamburg and Cologne amounted to 18–20 per cent. In comparison, only 2 per cent of the lecturers at the university of Tübingen were dismissed (Adam 1977: 37). The differences were due to the higher or lower proportion of Jewish scholars at these universities.

National Socialists also planned a reduction in student numbers. They could expect that these measures would be met with approval considering the academic overproduction that had become a problem since 1930 (Titze 1990). In the first year after having seized power, the National Socialists intervened in cases of new appointments to
professorships and sought to appoint professors who were convinced National Socialists. But during the following years the universities increasingly regained their ability to impose their academic standards in cases of new appointments (Adam 1977: 210-11; Seier 1983: 264).

The various attempts to educate the next generation of scholars as National Socialist professors by means of training camps for lecturers (Dozentenlager) failed (Losemann 1980: 107; Kelly 1980: 61). From 1935 onwards, the consolidation and adaptation of these measures took place and a daily working routine in teaching and research was re-established. The outbreak of war in 1939 opened up new opportunities to some extent and also some new financial resources.

What was the stance adopted by the remaining university professors towards National Socialism? The majority of professors hoped that the Third Reich would bring about the rebirth of the nation. With this slogan, the National Socialists impressed the 'professorial seekers of the past' (professoraler Vergangenheitssucher; Langewiesche 1992: 376, 375-81). During the Weimar Republic these professors mourned the end of the Kaiserreich and the ideal of a state superior to political parties. However, the National Socialists also affected the 'anti-republican innovators' (antirepublikanischer Erneuerer, Langewiesche 1992: 378), who primarily comprised young scholars who criticized the fossilization of the universities. By a mixture of collaboration and private reservations the professors helped the regime to maintain itself. Yet although quite a few professors allied themselves with the new regime, the National Socialists were nevertheless sceptical of the club of professors. In their view they were remote from real life and were the representatives of a despised liberal science (Kleinberger 1980: 10). The party's ill will towards them reinforced the professors' elitist conceptions of themselves. They withdrew into ideals such as objectivity, the autonomy of the sciences and their supposedly timeless national and cultural importance. (Seier 1984: 161)

Only relatively few studies have been published on National Socialist university policies and an archive-based study is still lacking (Chroust 1993: 64; Seier 1984: 145; Heiber 1991; Losemann 1994). So far, the support of academics for National Socialism has not been studied in sufficient detail. In some cases, this support led to scientific research and teaching based on racism and völkisch thinking. In other cases, academic standards were maintained, but research and teaching were directed towards the aims of National Socialism (Langewiesche 1997: 620). According to the existing research, the National Socialists did not undertake a systematic reconstruction of the university system.
This is not to say that they did not intervene heavily in academic life. Their most persistent and farthest-reaching intervention was the dismissal of Jewish and leftist university lecturers and professors. Yet despite their interventions in the self-administration of the universities, they failed to introduce a new order. This lack of a fundamental university reform was caused by the brevity of the pre-war period and the competing authorities responsible for the university system (Seier 1984: 143, 148). There were no clearly defined responsibilities for the organization of the university system, although there was much wrangling about them. Many authorities were involved: the Reichserziehungsministerium (the Reich Ministry of Education), the Nationalsozialistischer Dozentenbund (the National Socialist Lecturers' Association), Himmler's Ahnenerbe (Ancestral Heritage), the university commission of the Führer's representative Rudolf Heß, the party's Weltanschauungsbeauftragter (official for questions of ideology) Alfred Rosenberg, as well as regional and local rulers such as the Gauleiter (the heads of the Nazi party's administrative districts), and university rectors. The failure of National Socialist university reform was also due to the lack of a conceptual framework (Hammerstein 1999: 118–20). National Socialist ideology offered hardly any reference points for dealing with the university. Only racial theories and völkisch thinking could be adopted as postulates. Instead, it is possible to detect the beginnings of a systematic National Socialist science policy in research institutes outside, rather than within, the universities — for example in the Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des neuen Deutschland (Reich Institute for the History of the New Germany) or in Himmler's Research Community, Ahnenerbe.

The political 'coordination' of the universities (Hammerstein 1999: 235–47) and the lack of fundamental reform were juxtaposed. Nevertheless, in the Third Reich a debate about university reform went on for several years without any practical outcome (Seier 1984: 148–50). It reflected divergent views. Moves towards a genuine National Socialist university concept can be detected in the project of the Hohe Schule (Bollmus 1980; Losemann 1994). This project of an alternative university was pursued from 1937 by Alfred Rosenberg, the NSDAP's official for Weltanschauungsfragen (questions of ideology). His alternative university was meant to carry out research and to educate future leaders for the Party and the state. However, Rosenberg did not have a mature concept of this alternative university nor did he have a strong position within the Party. He was unable to resolve the confusion over who should be responsible for university policy.
The Hohe Schule was planned for the period after the war, and was not supposed to replace the universities, but rather to take up a position above them as the ‘highest institute for National Socialist research, teaching and education’. According to Rosenberg in 1940, it should provide universities ‘with concretely formulated tasks . . . in the sense of our Weltanschauung’ (Bollmus 1980: 125). The research produced by the Hohe Schule was intended to link National Socialist Weltanschauung and science. According to Rosenberg, the experience gained in the Hohe Schule would allow for the later planning of a National Socialist university reform. From 1940 onward a few external institutes of the Hohe Schule were founded in cooperation with existing universities (Hammerstein 1999: 319), like the Institute for Indogermanische Geistesgeschichte in Munich, but these institutes had not much influence on further university and research policies.

Two other concepts of the university were more widely discussed than Rosenberg’s model of an alternative university. They had been formulated before 1933 and were then taken up by the National Socialists in the absence of any ideas of their own. Both dealt with the problems of universities which had been discussed in the Weimar Republic. The concept of the ‘political university’ was propagated by Adolf Rein. Rein was a national-conservative professor of history at the university in Hamburg. His idea of the political university was supported by a large proportion of the professors and students, who saw in it a means of reinforcing the vanishing prestige of the university. The other, more radical concept originated with Ernst Krieck, who had been an influential educator in the 1920s and 1930s. Krieck, who might best be described as an anti-democratic innovator, demanded an anti-bourgeois and anti-positivist university. Both professors forged a career through National Socialism, received university professorships and became university rectors. They sought to implement the plans for reform at their universities in Hamburg and Heidelberg, but these efforts petered out. Inasmuch as the National Socialists took up both these concepts, they were pursuing different types of reform. Thus both the conservative ‘seeker of the past’ and the ‘anti-republican innovator’ found support.

A common element in the university concepts of Krieck and Rein is that they sought to overcome the new humanistic university ideal but in fact adopted parts of it. They pleaded for a final commitment to scientific research and university teaching, against the ideals of absolute freedom to choose the objects of research (Zweckfreiheit). At the same time, however, they wished to permit academic freedom
within this framework. They spoke out against research and teaching steered by direct practical or state interests. Both maintained the idealistic concept of education through research. Rein and Krieck, like Spranger and Becker, traced the faulty development of the university to the defeat of idealism by positivism and the natural sciences around the 1830s.

With his concept of a political university Adolf Rein disassociated himself from the humanistic university of the nineteenth century and the mass university with its tendency towards the 'Americanized adult education classes'. The national-conservative Rein complained that the unity of scholarship had been lost and that 'department stores of specialized science' had been created (Rein 1933: 20). Following Max Weber, he argued that the sciences and the humanities cannot give answers to fundamental questions of life, but merely provide methods of making rational decisions. For Rein it was therefore necessary for every scholar to choose his ultimate set of values, whether based on religion, a philosophical system or politics. In his view, the guiding principle of the age could only be that of politics. Thus, the political university was the university which was aligned with the state. Nevertheless, this university should not only serve the purpose of professional training and be slavishly devoted to the interests of the state. It should work in a critical manner while still being basically committed to the state. The centre of the proposed political university was supposed to be the new faculty of politics, where humanities and social sciences were to be combined. Rein was a convinced opponent of democracy. He was committed to a national-conservative view, which was widespread among professors in the 1920s (Vogel 1991: 43), but radicalized it into an alignment of the university with the state and the nation. He considered the idea that the university might hold a neutral world view to be a fiction of the liberal and natural scientific era. He also felt that in historical reality the new humanistic university had never been dedicated solely to reason, but rather that it had been — despite all denials — tied to its religious, political and sociological context. More precisely, that it had been tied to Protestantism, the liberal-constitutional nation-state and the bourgeoisie (Rein 1933: 6). Rein's concept of the political university was not realized, as there were no corresponding initiatives from the universities themselves. He himself tried to implement his concept while he was rector of the university at Hamburg, but failed (Giles 1980: 57).

In contrast with Rein, Ernst Krieck criticized bourgeois educational privileges and the existing elitist educational ideology. Krieck came
from a lower middle-class background; he was an elementary schoolteacher and largely self-educated. In the 1920s and 1930s he became an influential pedagogue (Müller 1978). Disappointed because his demands with regard to educational policies had not been met in the 1920s, Krieck turned to national-revolutionary circles and joined the NSDAP as early as 1932. In 1933 he gained a chair, and was rector of the universities of Frankfurt and Heidelberg, where he tried, with relatively little success, to make progress with university and academic reform. In 1938 he had a fierce dispute with race theorists. Thereupon he resigned from his offices in the Party and at the universities and retired as an embittered man.

Krieck criticized the upper class’s educational privileges, which, according to him, were secured by a hierarchical educational system and an elitist theory of education (Müller 1978: 440). In his view, the educated elites had lost touch with the present and the needs of society. He hoped that National Socialism would establish a realm of human dignity and humanity which would guarantee the right to ‘endless education’ and would thus redeem the promises of the Enlightenment and liberalism. He felt that contemporary universities had no contact with real life. In Krieck’s opinion, science was ‘of use to nobody and nothing, without meaning, without educational purpose, without ethos, surviving on the basis of a traditionally fostered prejudice’ (Krieck 1932: 162). He felt that science had lost its synthetic power with the downfall of idealism. It no longer had any educational value and restricted itself to technical utilization. Only via an external link to a völkisch-politische Weltanschauung would science once again regain its educational function. This would put an end to ‘the liberalistic illusion, arbitrariness, the senseless and disconnected plurality’ (Krieck 1932: 164).

Unlike Rein, Krieck pleaded for the dissolution of the existing universities into separate institutions for professional training, each with its own special branches. Each special branch of study should follow its particular perspective, always keeping in mind the linking concept, the nation, so that a connection between all disciplines could be achieved. The university professors should once again concentrate more on teaching, and not merely see it as an appendix to research. The universities should primarily provide professional training, whereas research should be done at the academies. In 1935, after it was seen that university reform ‘from above’ was out of the question, Krieck, having become rector of the university of Heidelberg, tried to experiment with his idea of university reform. Various study groups
thus tried to achieve 'a critical distance from the spiritual tradition of the German university linked with the name of Humboldt and their own, mostly upper-class past'. At the university of Heidelberg a 'cultural offensive' against 'western ideology' should be started (Müller 1978: 125). Krieck criticized the philistinism of the technologists, the cheapening of the humanities in the Third Reich, as well as the preferential treatment of the natural and technological disciplines within the framework of the four-year plan of 1936. The educational function of science should not be permitted to be stifled by the technical function (Müller 1978: 131).

The concepts of Rein and Krieck grew out of the discussion about universities of the 1920s. They were intended as a renunciation of the new humanistic university, but ultimately retained its concept of education through science, which they wished to achieve in a new way. They also held on to the freedom of research and teaching but within a framework in which the universities were explicitly linked to the goals of the state and the nation. This could be used by the National Socialists as an instrument for the accomplishment of their political ideas, although these concepts were not realized in the end. The absence of a thoroughly formulated National Socialist university concept and the vague guidelines of racist and völkisch thinking provided considerable scope for interpretation by convinced National Socialists and those professors who wished to conform. With great inventiveness they sought specific solutions for linking National Socialist Weltanschauung and science. On the basis of the Führerprinzip ('leader principle'), those who were rectors had the power to experiment in implementing new university concepts. Thus, the rector of Tübingen University, for example, the convinced National Socialist and psychiatrist, Hermann F. Hoffmann, attempted to produce a synthesis of Weltanschauung and science by means of his 'biological Weltbild' (Leonhardt 1996: 61; Langewiesche 1997: 644–6). He considered this Weltbild, which was rooted in racism, to be a guideline for the humanities. He altered the traditional precedence of the faculties. The faculty of theology no longer occupied the first place, but instead, he transferred the faculty of natural sciences, which was last in the traditional hierarchy, to the top (Hoffmann 1940: 114–26). Thus, the faculty of natural sciences was placed at the centre of his university. It remains unclear to what extent Hoffmann’s view of the university was typical for natural or medical scientists. It appears that in public the National Socialists did not propagate a concept of the university based on the perspective of the natural sciences,
although they invested much money in research projects on natural sciences outside the universities.

The debate about universities and the development of the universities under National Socialism can be briefly summarized as follows: The severe losses of German university teachers after 1933 due to dismissals, persecution and emigration meant in the long run a loss of innovation and cultural diversity in the German university scene. A modernization of the universities did not take place. It was only in the first years after the Nazi takeover that some small steps into this direction were discernible. However, these attempts either fell flat or were abandoned, being seen as suspicious democratic tendencies within the university. These modern elements consisted of the initially planned and partially implemented participation of students in the universities' self-governing bodies, the extended opportunities for lecturers below the ranks of full-professors to exert influence, and the creation of material security for them. All this, however, was only achieved at the expense of conformity with the system. The main reason for the National Socialists' attempts to break the power of the established professors in the universities was their expectation that they could achieve a National Socialist orientation of the universities if more influence were given to the younger elements, who were more likely to hold National Socialist views than the older professors. Some younger professors quickly obtained chairs and influential positions at universities through their political offices, for example as Dozentenführer ('lecturers' leaders'). However, in the daily routines of the universities the institution's inertia soon began to show again. The introduction of the 'leader principle' suspended the traditional collegial principle of the university's self-administration, but the rule of the full professors was maintained. There were even tendencies towards its consolidation.

When the National Socialists seized power they did not have a clearly defined concept of university reform. Their vague guidelines could be interpreted rather broadly and therefore seem to have encouraged a range of different expectations of the professoriate. The debate on the university under National Socialism must not be perceived as completely distinct from that of the first half of the twentieth century, since the National Socialists took up concepts which had developed from the discussions of the 1920s. And the ideas about university reform after 1945 were, ultimately, formulated in order to disassociate universities from their development under National Socialism. On quite different premises and imbued with quite
different opinions than in the 1920s, this again led to an idealization of the neo-humanistic university idea. This ideological papering-over of university problems helped to ossify conditions at German universities until the 1960s and beyond.

The ‘Invention’ of Humboldt - Second Stage: 1945–1960

After the end of the Second World War and the collapse of the National Socialist regime there was a return to the Humboldtian ideal in the discussion about universities and in the legitimization of university reform – in both East and West Germany. In the Soviet Occupied Zone and the later GDR, university policies were presented as bridging the gap back to the Humboldt tradition (Connelly 1997). A symbolic expression of this continuity was the renaming of the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Berlin as the Humboldt-Universität in rememberance of Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt and ‘in recognition of what has so far been achieved in the fight for the democratic university and as a commitment for the future’ (Humboldt Universität 1960: 132). Now, a democratic inheritance was derived from the ‘neo-humanistic tradition. The recourse to Humboldt legitimized the political guidelines of Soviet university policies, the elimination of fascism and militarism, and the transmission of basic democratic principles as well as the opening up of bourgeois educational privilege. However, it failed to recognize the break with the tradition of the research university, which was resulting from a tendency towards a gradual transfer of research away from universities to the academies of science.

The return to the ‘everlasting’ (überzeitlich) university ideal of Humboldt was taken far more seriously in West Germany and has left its mark on the discussion about universities up to the present day (Jarausch 1997 and 1999). The new humanism and classics were understood as a form of safeguard against National Socialism, which had broken with this cultural tradition. After 1945, issues discussed in the 1920s reappeared, showing the restorative tendencies in post-war Germany. The well-known Blaues Gutachten (Blue Audit) of 1948 demanded above all a renewal of the educational functions of the universities (Gutachten 1948). An attempt was made to introduce a studium generale and to lead the students in the direction of a humanistic education, so that the barbarism of National Socialism would
never be repeated. This proposed *studium generale* was not really accepted by the students and was withdrawn in the mid-1950s (Studium Generale 1951).

The reference to the Humboldtian ideal allowed a multiplicity of university responsibilities. It reinforced the self-image of the university as a research institution and made it possible to link it up with supposedly democratic traditions in German history. The reaction to National Socialism led to a renewed fixation with the university ideal of neo-humanism, which had been propagated as timeless since the 1920s. Linked with this right up to the 1960s was a desire to preserve university institutions which had already existed in the 1920s. The National Socialist rejection of the timeless concept of the German university discredited from 1945 onwards any proposed deviation from the Humboldtian ideal. National Socialism was presented as a sharp break in the history of the German university, as a time of ruin into which the university was forced for twelve years, as Karl Jaspers put it in 1945 (Jaspers 1945/1986: 103).

From 1945 onwards a denazification of the universities took place, but with the exception of a small number of confirmed National Socialists the majority of professors was soon lecturing and carrying out research again. This corresponded with the common formulation which had been conjured up in many speeches and which had already been used in the 1920s after the defeat in the First World War: ‘The core of our universities is healthy’ (*Der Kern unserer Universitäten ist gesund*) (Becker 1919: 17; Gutachten 1918: 291). According to Jaspers ‘it has not yet been possible to destroy the academic spirit’ (Jaspers 1945/1986: 103). Until the 1960s and in some aspects until the 1980s, this idea prevented further questions about the previous academic alignment with National Socialism and with racist and völkisch premises. Though many professors had conformed to National Socialism during the Third Reich, they could now hide behind the ‘timeless’ ideal of Humboldt.

The reaction to National Socialism signified one more stage in the dissemination of the Humboldtian university ideal in the discourse about universities. Further stages of the invention of Humboldt followed. At the beginning of the 1960s for instance, a third stage became apparent. Here, Helmut Schelsky’s book *Einsamkeit und Freiheit* (Loneliness and Freedom) played a pivotal role (1963). Schelsky took up a postulate of the sociologist René König, which was adduced by the latter in defence against the political university of National Socialism. ‘The idea of the university as it was put forward in German
idealism is the normative framework by which every true German university reform will have to be verified’ (König 1935: 13). For Schelsky, this meant that each renewal of the university in Germany had to take place within the normative framework of the neo-humanistic idea. As late as 1963 Schelsky described the foundation of Berlin University 1810 as the ‘present past’ (aktuelle Vergangenheit, Schelsky 1963: 48). In his demands for a contemporary university reform Schelsky referred to the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt, reinterpreting them and emphasizing the research imperative. He called for a concept of scientific education in keeping with the times and a new theory of science as starting point of a university reform and the intended theoretical university. He rejected, however, a view of education and science derived from the Humboldtian ideas after 1945 which was 'merely idealistic, only rooted in the history of ideas' (‘eine nur ideenhaft-geistgeschichtliche Vorstellung von Bildung und Wissenschaft’, Schelsky 1963: 8)

Argumentation in the supposed tradition of Humboldt extends well into the present-day university debate. It is used by defenders of the existing university system as well as by its critics and reformers. Here, a long arch of continuity from the neo-humanistic university idea and the foundation of Berlin University in 1810 to the present is drawn. This arch of continuity covers the manifold changes the university has experienced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a result, in the twentieth century a discussion of the university's self-concept was only possible by an intricate recourse to the presumed positions of the early nineteenth century.

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