University Reform in Germany
Wilhelm von Humboldt

Among communities of organisms and among communities of universities, there are episodes of innovation and hybridisation when new forms appear. For universities one of these episodes occurred in the nineteenth century. It was due largely to Wilhelm von Humboldt. Not only Germany but the whole world of learning is in his debt. The great ascendency of the German university in the nineteenth century and its great prestige and influence in the universities in all the leading countries of the world are now memories. The National Socialist regime by its dismissal of Jews and socialists and its anti-intellectual university policy severely damaged an already weakened university system. The war added material damage to the intellectual and moral damage done by the government. After the war, the vast increase in numbers of students, the emergence of new demands on universities, the rapid growth of scientific and scholarly disciplines interacting with organisational laws have produced a crisis in the German university, the end of which is not in sight. The Science Council has tried with courage and imagination to adapt the German university to the new circumstances while holding fast to Humboldt's ideal of the university.

In the present issue of MINERVA, I am publishing an abridgment of the recommendations for the reorganisation of courses of study at higher educational institutions which were recently produced by the Science Council. I thought that it would be instructive for the public to which MINERVA is addressed to have a translation of the charter of the modern German university, Wilhelm von Humboldt's memorandum written some time between the autumn of 1809 and the autumn of 1810.

I

ON THE SPIRIT AND THE ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF INTELLECTUAL INSTITUTIONS IN BERLIN

The idea of disciplined intellectual activity, embodied in institutions, is the most valuable element of the moral culture of the nation. These intellectual institutions have as their task the cultivation of science and scholarship (Wissenschaft) in the deepest and broadest sense. It is the calling of these intellectual institutions to devote themselves to the elaboration of the uncontrived substance of intellectual and moral culture, growing from an uncontrived inner necessity.

Their essence, manifested in the individual, consists of the combination of objective scientific and scholarly knowledge with the development of the person; in institutional terms, this essence lies in the articulation of the mastery of transmitted knowledge at the school stage with the first stages of independent inquiry. In other words, the task of these intellectual institutions is to effect the transition from the former to the latter. The main consideration is the cultivation of science and scholarship. Insofar as science and scholarship are kept free of corruption, they will be correctly apprehended in their essential nature and as a whole, whatever the variations in particular instances.

Since these institutions can only fulfil their purpose when each of them bears continuously in mind the pure idea of science and scholarship, their dominant principles must be freedom and the absence of distraction (Einsamkeit). The intellectual exertions of men, however, only prosper through a process of collaboration. This does not mean merely that one individual supplies what another lacks. Collaboration operates through a process in which the successful intellectual achievements of one person arouse the intellectual passions and enthusiasm of others, and through the fact that what was at first expressed only by one individual becomes a common intellectual possession instead of fading away in isolation. Given this collective character of individual accomplishment, the inner life of these higher intellectual institutions must be such as to call forth and sustain a continuously self-renewing, wholly uncoerced and disinterested collaboration.

One unique feature of higher intellectual institutions is that they conceive of science and scholarship as dealing with ultimately inexhaustible tasks; this means that they are engaged in an unceasing process of inquiry. The lower levels of education present closed and settled bodies of knowledge. The relation between teacher and pupil at the higher level is a different one from what it was at the lower levels. At the higher level, the teacher does not exist for the sake of the student; both teacher and student have their justification in the common pursuit of knowledge. The teacher's performance depends on the students' presence and interest—without this science and scholarship could not grow. If the students who are to form his audience did not come before him of their own free will, he, in his quest for knowledge, would have to seek them out. The goals of science and scholarship are worked towards most effectively through the synthesis of the teacher's and the students' dispositions. The teacher's mind is more mature but it is also somewhat one-sided in its development and more dispassionate; the student's mind is less able and less committed but it is

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2 See Minerva (this issue), p. 250.
4 Von Humboldt uses the term wissenschaftliche Anstalten to cover both academies and universities. I have used "intellectual institutions" as the English equivalent. For Wissenschaft, I preferred to use "science and scholarship" which I think is more correct than the more usual alternatives of "science" or "higher learning". Here and there I have interpreted rather than translated. On the whole, however, I have adhered closely to the German text while trying to produce a translation which is closer to the intellectual idiom of early nineteenth century learned German than the twentieth century idiom of university discussion. [Editor.]
nonetheless open and responsive to every possibility. The two together are a fruitful combination.

Higher intellectual institutions are, if we disregard their formal position in the state, nothing other than man's intellectual life which external opportunity and deeper motivation have led towards scientific and scholarly research. Thus, one person might burrow and collect information on his own, another might pursue learning through associating himself with men of his own age, while a third will do so by assembling around himself a circle of disciples. Even the state must respect these motives and dispositions to cultivate science and scholarship, when it seeks to give a more consolidated structure to what are by their nature un gov ernable and, in a certain sense, contingent intellectual activities. It must therefore seek to maintain intellectual activity at its liveliest and most productive level; in order to prevent it from declining in its standards, it must maintain a sharply and firmly defined distinction between the higher intellectual institutions and the schools. (This applies both to general theoretical as well as to the most varied practical educational institutions.)

The state must always remain conscious of the fact that it never has and in principle never can, by its own action, bring about the fruitfulness of intellectual activity. It must indeed be aware that it can only have a prejudicial influence if it intervenes. The state must understand that intellectual work will go on infinitely better if it does not intrude. The state's legitimate sphere of action must be adapted to the following circumstances: in view of the fact that in the real world an organisational framework and resources are needed for any widely practised activity, the state must supply the organisational framework and the resources necessary for the practice of science and scholarship. The manner in which the state provides the organisational framework and resources can be damaging to the essence of science and scholarship; the very fact that it provides such organisational structures and resources, which are quite alien to the nature of the activity which they are to serve, can result in the degradation to a basely material level of what should be intellectual and lofty. Finally, that it must bear in mind, above all else, the essential nature of science and scholarship in order to foster what it might have, even quite innocently, sullied or obstructed.

Even if this is only another view of the same procedure, it has the substantial advantage that the state, if it considers this aspect of the matter, will exercise more self-restraint in whatever intervention it undertakes. In the practical sphere of state action, a theoretically incorrect view, whatever is said to the contrary, always does damage, since nothing the state does is a merely mechanical or superficial action without repercussions.

Once this is clear, it is easy to see that in matters of the spirit, i.e., of the intellectual and moral component of higher intellectual institutions, effective accomplishment depends on strict adherence to the principle that science and scholarship do not consist of closed bodies of permanently settled truths; effective intellectual accomplishment is to be sought in ceaseless effort.

As soon as one ceases to pursue scientific and scholarly knowledge or imagines that it need not be pursued from the utmost depths of the mind and when one comes to believe that it can be cultivated simply by piling up unconnected facts, then the cause of learning is irretrievably and permanently lost. If such an attitude is held for a long time, science and scholarship become dissipated; when this happens only their language survives as an empty shell. The state also has to suffer their loss in such circumstances. 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 gains as little as mankind from mere facts and discussion. They are both more concerned with character and conduct.

Now, in order to avoid this wrong path, there must be a lively and spirited exertion of the intellect in three directions: first, all understanding in the wider sense must be sought by the application of a fundamental principle to explanations of natural events which penetrate from mechanical to dynamic, organic and ultimately psychological levels; all efforts at understanding should be directed towards an ideal; and ultimately, the principle and the ideals should be fused into a coherent idea.

Of course, this cannot be brought about simply by a contrived promotional scheme, nor will it occur to anyone that Germans would seek to do so by such superficial methods. It is an inherent tendency of the German intellectual tradition not to have recourse to such superficial procedures. We need only make sure that the right tendencies are not suppressed either by force or by hostility, which it must be admitted, does in fact exist.

Since every form of one-sidedness must be excluded from higher intellectual institutions, there will naturally be many who are active in them to whom this tendency towards depth and breadth is alien and there will be some to whom it is repugnant. In its pure and unqualified form, this tendency will, in any case, be found only in a handful of persons. It need, however, find expression only occasionally, here and there, to have a widespread and enduring impact. What is, however, very necessary is that this tendency towards depth and breadth should be respected by those who have an appreciation of it and that those who would damage it should be restrained.

This tendency towards depth and breadth is found mostly and in its most pronounced form in philosophy and art. Quite apart from their inherent inclination to decay, little is to be expected of them if their essential spirit is not appropriately expressed in other branches of knowledge and categories of research, or if it is applied there only in a logically or mathematically formalised manner.

If, however, the principle of cultivating science and scholarship for their own sake is placed in a dominant position in higher intellectual institutions, other matters may be disregarded. Neither unity nor full- roundedness will then be lacking; each naturally fosters the other and a proper balance will thereby be maintained. This is the secret of good research method.

With this, all of the requirements are satisfied as far as the spirit of things is concerned.

Now as regards the organisational and material side of the relationship of the institution to the state, the only concerns of the latter must be the
profusion (in the sense of mental power and variety) of intellectual talents to be brought together in the institution. This can be achieved through care in the selection of persons and the assurance of freedom in their intellectual activities. This intellectual freedom can be threatened not only by the state, but also by the intellectual institutions themselves which tend to develop, at their birth, a certain outlook and which will therefore readily resist the emergence of another outlook. The state must seek to avert the harm which can possibly arise from this source.

The heart of the matter is the appointment of the persons who are to do the intellectual work. When we come to discuss the differentiation of the total system of intellectual institutions we will propose a method for avoiding certain dangers in the process of selection. Once appointment policy is taken care of, the next thing is the drawing up of organisational statutes, which should in general be few and simple but more effectively articulated than is usually the case. As in the previous case, organisational statutes can be dealt with only when the subdivisions are discussed.

Equipment must of course be considered and, in this respect, it must be remembered that the accumulation of dead collections is not the main thing. It should not be forgotten that it is quite easy for them to deadden and degrade the mind. After all, the richest academies and universities are by no means always those in which science and scholarship have grown most deeply and most imaginatively. The relationships of the higher intellectual institutions to the secondary level of education, on the one hand, and the relationships of scientific and scholarly activity to practical affairs, on the other, are of primary concern in any discussion of the role of the state in the total system of intellectual institutions.

The state must not deal with its universities as Gymnasium or as specialised technical schools; it must not use its academy as if it were a technical or scientific commission. It must in general—with certain exceptions among the universities which will be considered later—demand nothing from them simply for the satisfaction of its own needs. It should instead adhere to a deep conviction that if the universities attain their highest ends, they will also realise the state’s ends too, and these on a far higher plane. On this higher plane, more is comprehended and forces and mechanisms are brought into action which are quite different from those which the state can command.

On the other side, it is above all the state’s obligation to organise the lower levels of its educational system so that they are harmonious with the higher intellectual system. Success in doing this rests on a correct understanding of the relationship of the schools to higher intellectual life and the increasingly fruitful conviction that the schools are not expected to anticipate the instruction offered by the university. The state must understand that the universities are neither a mere complement to the schools within the same category, nor merely a further stage in school. This conviction requires that the transition from school to university constitute a stage in the life of a young person which—when it is successful—brings him to a point where physically, morally and intellectually he can be entrusted with freedom and with the right to act autonomously. The young person, on entry into university, should be released from the compulsion to enter either into a state of idleness or into practical life, and should be enabled to aspire to and elevate himself to the cultivation of science or scholarship which hitherto have only been pointed out to him from afar.

The way thereto is simple and sure. The aim of the schools must be the harmonious development of all the capacities of their pupils. Their powers must be focused on the smallest possible number of subject-matters but every aspect of these must be dealt with to as great an extent as possible. Knowledge should be so implanted in the mind of the pupil that understanding, knowledge and creativity excite it, not through any external features, but through their inner precision, harmony and beauty. To this end, and for the preliminary training of the intellect for pure science and scholarship, mathematics above all should be employed, and what is more, from the first moment that the mental powers are capable of it.

A mind which has been trained in this way will spontaneously aspire to science and scholarship. Others with the same diligence and the same talent but with different training will immerse themselves in practical affairs—either immediately or before their education has been completed. They will therewith render themselves useless for science and scholarship, or, lacking the diligence to attain the higher plane of science and scholarship, they will disperse their abilities over unrelated fields of knowledge.

On the Criteria of Classification of Higher Intellectual Institutions; Types of Higher Intellectual Institutions

Ordinarily, when one speaks of higher intellectual institutions, one refers to universities and to academies of the sciences and arts. It is not difficult to derive these institutions which developed in a haphazard way as if they were the manifestations of an idea. But such derivations, which have been much favoured ever since Kant, are partly wrongheaded and partly useless.

It is more important to consider whether an academy should be created or maintained alongside a university, what tasks and jurisdiction should be assigned to each separately and to both together in order to aid each to accomplish what is possible for it alone to accomplish.

If one assigns to the university the tasks of teaching and dissemination of the results of science and scholarship and assigns to the academy the task of its extension and advancement, an injustice is obviously done to the university. Science and scholarship have been advanced as much—and in Germany, even more—by university teachers as by members of academies. University teachers have made these contributions to the progress of their disciplines by virtue of their teaching appointments. For unconstrained oral communication to an audience, which includes a significant number of intelligences thinking in unison with the lecturer, inspires those who have become used to this mode of study just as surely as does the peaceful solitude of a writer or the less institutionalised activities of the members of an academy. The progress of science and scholarship is obviously more rapid and more lively in a university where their problems are discussed back and forth by a large number of forceful,
vigoros, youthful intelligences. Science and scholarship cannot be presented in a genuinely scientific or scholarly manner without constantly generating independent thought and stimulation; it is inconceivable that discoveries should not be frequently made in such a situation. University teaching is moreover not such a strenuous affair that it should be regarded as a distraction from the calm needed for research and study; it is, rather, a help to it. At every large university, there are always some men who teach little or not at all and who devote themselves entirely to solitary study and research. It would be entirely safe to entrust the growth of scientific and scholarly knowledge to the universities as long as they are properly conducted; this is why the academies can be dispensed with.

The organised societies (gesellschaftliche Vereine) in which university teachers do not necessarily participate to the same extent everywhere, are scarcely on this account justified, in view of the fact of the costliness of their establishment. For one thing, these types of society are very loosely organised even in the academies; furthermore their usefulness is found mainly in those observational and experimental disciplines where the rapid communication of particular facts is important. Furthermore, in such disciplines, private scientific societies are formed readily and quite without the supplementary assistance of the state.

If one looks at the matter more closely, one sees that academies have flourished primarily in foreign countries where the universities are not as effective as the German universities or are not as well recognised. In Germany itself, academies have flourished in places where there have been no universities and in periods when universities did not exist in any liberal, many-sided form. In more recent times, the academies have not distinguished themselves especially and have played little or no part in the real rise of German science, scholarship and art.

In order to keep both of these types of institution functioning in a fruitful way, they should be linked with each other in such a way that, although their activities remain distinct, their individual members do not belong exclusively to the one or to the other. Linked in this way, their distinctive and separate existences can assume a new and superior form.

The utility of such a separation rests much less on the characteristic activities of each of the institutions than on the distinctiveness of their form and on their relations with the state. In fact, university teachers, quite without the establishment of their own academy, can achieve all the purposes assigned to an academy; they can form, as they did in Göttingen, their own learned society which is different from a genuine academy.

The university always stands in a close relationship to practical life and to the needs of the state, since it is always concerned with the practical affair of training the younger generation. Academies concern themselves only with science and scholarship. University teachers are generally integrated with each other simply through the internal culture and the organisational framework of their disciplines. But regarding their proper business of science and scholarship, they communicate with each other only insofar as they are inclined to do so. The academy is in contrast a society constituted for the purpose of subjecting the work of each member to the assessment of all the others.

In this way, the idea of an academy must be maintained as the highest and ultimate sanctuary of science and scholarship and as that corporation which is freest of the control of the state. The risk must be run that such a corporation, through feebleness or one-sidedness, will show that what is right and desirable does not always occur even under the most favourable external circumstances. Nonetheless one must run this risk because the idea in itself is lofty and beneficial and because it might be realised at any time in a really worthy manner.

Through this relationship, the university and the academy can compete with and be critical of each other. The process of interaction between them will be such that any excesses or deficiencies which might give reason for apprehension will automatically balance themselves.

The disagreements between universities and academies arise in the first instance in connection with the selection of members of the two bodies. Every member of an academy must have the right to give lectures without having "habilitated" and without becoming, by virtue of that qualification, a member of the university. It is perfectly reasonable that many learned men should be both university teachers and academicians, but each of the institutions will have other members who belong to it exclusively.

The right of appointment of university teachers must be reserved exclusively to the state; it is certainly not a good arrangement to grant more influence to the faculties than a prudent and fair-minded body of trustees (Curatorium) would allow. Although disagreements and disputes within a university are wholesome and necessary, conflicts which might arise between teachers because of their specialised intellectual interests might unwittingly affect their viewpoints. The condition of the university is too closely bound up with the direct interest of the state to permit any other arrangement.

The choice of members of the academy, on the other hand, must be left to the academy itself, subject only to royal confirmation which will not lightly be withheld. The academy is a corporation in which the principle of unity is of the highest importance and, because of its purely scientific and scholarly concerns, what happens in it is not of immediate interest to the state as such.

It is at this point that it is relevant to discuss the previous corrective which will operate in elections to higher intellectual institutions. For insofar as the state and the academy have about the same share in the decision, the spirit in which each acts will soon become evident; where they go astray, public opinion will impartially set them back on the right path. But since it is not likely that both at the same time will go astray, at least not in the same way, not all decisions regarding appointments will run the same risks and the system as a whole will be safe from one-sidedness.

The diversity of talents and interests is further guaranteed by the fact that in addition to those who are appointed by the state and those who are elected by the academy, there will be the Privatdozenten, who at the beginning, at least, are dependent on the approbation of their audience.

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1 Humboldt originally wrote "refuge" (Zufluchtswesen), and it was subsequently replaced by "sanctuary" (Privatdozenten). [Editor]
The academy can, in addition to the performance of its regular duties, play a distinctive role in the systematic conduct of observation and experiments. Of these, some should be decided on entirely by the academy acting on its own free choice, others should be proposed to it and the university should have some influence in the making of these proposals. This will provide another occasion for reciprocal influence among the various intellectual institutions.

In addition to the academy and the university, the category of intellectual institutions includes the institutes which have no life of their own.

These latter must remain separate from the other two and should be directly under the supervision of the state. But both the academy and the university should have the use, with certain qualifications, of these institutes, and they should also have some supervisory powers over them.

They can exercise these supervisory powers over the institutes only if they present memoranda and proposals for their improvement, not directly to the institutes, but to the state.

Through the university, the academy will obtain the right to use such facilities of the institutes as the anatomical and comparative anatomical theatres. These have not been connected with the academy because hitherto the subjects which have fallen within their terms of reference have been dealt with from a narrow medical point of view rather than from the broader standpoint of natural science.

The academy, the university, and the auxiliary institutes constitute three autonomous, integral units of the total system of intellectual institutions. All of them, particularly the latter two and to a lesser degree the academy, are under the supervision and guidance of the state.

Academy and university are equally independent. They are linked through having common members, through the university’s power to grant the right of delivering lectures to all the members of the academy and through the academy’s carrying out the observational and experimental projects proposed by the university.

The university and academy both utilise and supervise the auxiliary institutes, although the supervisory function has to be exercised through the state.

Regarding the Academy

Here the manuscript ends.

II

THE REFORM OF COURSES OF STUDY IN WEST GERMAN UNIVERSITIES

When the Science Council promulgated its recommendations for the reorganisation of courses of study in higher educational institutions, it did so as part of its long-term task of elaborating a comprehensive plan for the advancement of knowledge and the development of academic institutions. It had already surveyed the higher educational institutions themselves, as well as libraries and research institutes not part of universities. Now it had to face the question of the role to be assigned in future to the various fields of science and scholarship. Only in this way could a comprehensive plan be framed for which the required resources and the mode of their distribution could be specified. This was especially true of the plans for the development of higher educational institutions up to 1970 and for the programme of “centres of concentration”. All this prepared the way for the present set of recommendations.

The Recommendations of the Science Council for the Development of Scientific Institutions (1960) 2 were intended to make the institutions function productively. It became clear at that time that in the long run it would be impossible to create the necessary conditions for full productivity in research and teaching unless the conditions which had led to the critical situation of higher education in Western Germany were analysed. Only then would it be possible to organise academic studies in relation to research and to the objectives of higher education so that students could complete their studies in a reasonable time and with adequate preparation for their future professional responsibilities. Until the direction of future developments was established, it was impossible to predict the necessary increase in the numbers of teachers and to undertake the development of seminars and research institutes.

In the present recommendations, the Science Council will confine itself to general principles appropriate to the reorganisation of courses of study. It recognises that conditions differ from discipline to discipline. The Science Council is aware that the fulfilment of the recommendations regarding the organisation of courses of study will have extensive consequences for the nature and tasks of the teaching staff as well as for the organisation of academic institutions. The same is true of the distribution and allocation of “centres of concentration” in research. The present recommendations form only part of a more comprehensive reform of higher education.

THE TASKS OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS:

THE RELATION BETWEEN RESEARCH AND TEACHING

Ever since the time of the Humboldt reforms and the resulting foundation of the Prussian universities, educational institutions in Germany have adhered to the principle of the unity of research and teaching. This principle, which was an essential factor in the growth and accomplishments of the German universities during the nineteenth century and the first part of the present century, has left a deep impression on their structure. The question now arises as to whether the traditional unity of research and

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