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978-0-521-10206-3 - State, Society, and University in Germany, 1700-1914
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Introduction

Universities all over the world have become the object of unprecedented curiosity and study in recent decades. Spectacular growth in some cases, student agitation in others, and an alarming sense of rapid change in all cases have focused attention on the universities. Even before these events, the universities were quietly participating in a process termed by some authors an "academic" or "educational" revolution. Like the industrial revolution and the broader series of political revolutions begun in 1789, the educational revolution must be seen as a long process rather than an explosive event. Increasingly, the universities of the world have emerged, in the words of an important recent study, as "the current culmination of the educational revolution." The university has become "the lead component of an extensive process of change permeating modern society at many levels."[1] This sense of involvement in social change is not a mere reflection of the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, for as Abraham Flexner wrote in the 1920s: "The restraints which for centuries slowed down or limited adjustments have largely been removed. Societies have to act – intelligently, if possible – if not, then unintelligently, blindly, selfishly, impulsively. The weight and prestige of the university must be thrown on the side of intelligence. If the university does not accept this challenge, what other institution can or will?"[2]

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Historians have come to realize more than ever the importance of education in the evolution of modern societies, just as they have more generally come to appreciate the importance of social evolution as a part of historical explanation. The history of higher education, and particularly of universities, has consequently become a matter of some importance for understanding the development of the modern world.

Of all the universities in Western society, those of Germany have probably had the greatest significance in modern times. They were the first to fuse teaching with research functions and thereby to create the very model of the modern university. They were the fountainheads of a large part of modern scholarship and science. By the beginning of this century, the German university system was the most admired in the world. Its internationally famous professors, many of whom counted among the great discoverers, scientists, and theorists of the age; its thorough critical training of students; its research-oriented teaching methods in seminars and institutes; its academic freedom, dignified spirit, and colorful folklore; and even its impressive buildings, such as libraries and laboratories, excited envy, scrutiny, and emulation around the globe. After such glory, its precipitous descent into the dark night of Hitler's era gave a chilling example of the fragility of the achievements of the human spirit.

The German university system had an unusually significant place in the history of Germany, as well. The impact of the German universities on the society was surely deeper than that of their American or British counterparts. Moving directly from lecture hall to government bureaus or professional offices, university graduates commanded the modernization of the German lands; the men who shaped its cultural and scientific life were also closer to universities than in most other parts of Europe. It was in Germany around the beginning of the nineteenth century that scientific investigation moved out of the overburdened academies of science and into the universities, beginning a process still perceptible today. More than in

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the relatively open societies to the west and the closed ones to the east, the German universities served as the breeding ground for a peculiar social stratum, an academic bourgeoisie (*Bildungsbürgertum*), the recruiting pool for both cultural and administrative elites. The universities also served as shelters for the emerging political and social doctrines of the nineteenth century: German professors and students were on the forefront of national oppositional leadership before 1848, just as they were to become leaders in nationalist agitation before and during the First World War. The universities' monopoly over access to the professions was also much stronger than in America or Britain and more exclusive than that of universities in much of Europe.

In informal ways, too, the German universities played an important role in national life. They were among the few places in a provincial country where the young could transcend the limits of provincialism and gain an introduction to cosmopoltian thought patterns and life-styles. The friendships and connections made at the university, both between students and teachers and among students themselves, were often invaluable in a country where regional, class, religious, and other petty social distinctions tended to discourage change and mobility. The university was often called the "republic of letters"; this republic was of the utmost importance in a country having so few liberal institutions.

Finally, the German university system is useful for a case study of the evolution of the European university in modern times. Despite the many peculiarities of German universities, the general lines of their development bear significance for the analysis of university history everywhere. They were the most brilliant and successful examples of adaptation of a medieval European institution to the demands of the age of expansion of the nineteenth century. That the German universities were the first in the world to become objects of a state science and educational policy should alone make them interesting to us today.

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State, society, and university

If the history of higher education can help us gain a better understanding of the evolution of modern society, it is because higher education has evolved partly in response to the needs of society. Universities have usually been surrounded with liberties and immunities that set them apart from other social institutions, and university professors and students have traditionally resented and resisted encroachments from broader social forces. As Lawrence Stone recently put it:

> The university, like the family and the church, is one of the most poorly integrated of institutions, and again and again it has been obstinately resistant to changes which were clearly demanded by changing conditions around it. And yet, in the long run, no institution can survive indefinitely glorious isolation, and the interaction between the university's own built-in conservatism and the pressures upon it to adapt to new external conditions is one of the most potentially illuminating, but most practically obscure, aspects of the process of historical change.[3]

The traditional university of medieval and early modern Europe, and originally of America as well, was "poorly integrated" into society partly because it originated as an arm of the church and as an extension of the educational responsibilities of the family. On the other hand, it had from the start vital secular functions such as the training of agents of Europe's expanding state authority, and its corporate immunities to the everyday laws and customs of society sheltered socialization processes and intellectual innovations.

It is this dualism of the university's role that makes studying it so difficult. Whether merely a teaching institution, as it has been throughout all of its history, or a research center as well, as in more recent times, the university has required two almost contradictory things: to be supported by society and to be left alone by it. The need for support has at times been minimal, as in the Middle Ages, but it has grown to be a crucial matter in our own times and was already significant by the eighteenth century. On the other hand, *Freiheit und Einsamkeit* – freedom

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and solitude – are also necessary to the proper functioning of the university, as Wilhelm von Humboldt, the great German reformer, noted.

The purpose of this study is to explain how the modern German university system evolved through interaction with the forces of German society and politics. Few will deny that such an explanatory model can shed considerable light on the evolution of the German university system. For peculiar reasons to be discussed later, the traditional histories of German universities have avoided precisely this model.

It is doubtful whether one can fully understand the history of any university or higher educational system purely in terms of internal developments: It is certain that one cannot understand the German system thus. Without viewing the process of interaction, a perpetual dialectic between the university and society, the historian can obtain only a superficial and often misleading picture of the past. Furthermore, one must not be content with such abstractions as "university" and "society." One must also investigate exactly what persons and forces in both were the most active participants in the dialogues between university and society.

Rarely were universities so intimately tied to the powers of the state and the interests of social groups as in modern Germany. There are several reasons for this close relationship. First, German universities were placed under the protection of the state earlier and more completely than in other large European countries. Although this tendency was strong in the eighteenth century, it became the universal relationship between state and society in the wake of the reorganization of Germany during and after the Napoleonic wars. The lack of private universities by the beginning of the nineteenth century meant that Germany had a state higher education monopoly unsurpassed in its completeness by that of any other major European country. Not only were private universities forbidden; private contributions to public universities were neither much encouraged nor generously given. The major counterweight to

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the authority implicit in the state's rights as patron was the residue of corporate rights and immunities granted to individual universities in charters and statutes and by long-standing practice. Because it was in the interest of the universities to uphold these rights and immunities, it is understandable that the universities stressed them, rather than the role of the state. By the same token, functionaries of the various state educational bureaucracies often wrote and spoke as if the univerisities had no rights except those granted by the whim of the government and revocable at any time; in practice, they were much more indulgent.

Not only were the German universities nominally under the patronage of the states; the latter progressively reorganized their agencies of bureaucratic control and extended their supervision and initiative in university affairs. In this, Germany was not alone; indeed, some countries, for example France, had developed highly centralized educational administrations by the early nineteenth century. Yet there is a peculiar and interesting quality about the evolution of German educational bureaucracy. Responsibilities for higher education were allocated to the states of the Holy Roman Empire, the Germanic Confederation, and the German Reich. In some states, particularly smaller ones, this federalism softened the tendency toward greater bureaucratic control and initiative, and relations between state and university were, if not necessarily better, at least more personalized. In some of the large states, particularly Prussia, the state educational bureaucracy became quite large and imperious during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In practice large states tended to set patterns for small ones. The state governments had far more control over universities than was the case in America and Britain, yet there was no central educational administration, as in France. Whereas Russia and other East European countries had centralized educational bureaucracies, their efficiency and intelligence were generally not on the same high level as Germany's.

The exercise of state authority over the universities is only

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one of the ways in which state, society, and university influenced each other in the course of their development. In few other countries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the life of the state so bound up with that of the university; and in few did the universities play such a prominent role in the life of the society at large.

The crucial role of the universities in the evolution of the German state bureaucracies derived from the monopoly of the former over the training of the higher personnel of the latter. The introduction and gradual raising of partly meritocratic standards of recruitment and promotion supported the function of the universities as producers of trained civil servants. The importance of the bureaucracy in the German states, in the absence of other forms of modern policy-making apparatus such as parliaments, assured the universities an indirect sort of influence over the mentality of the administrative elites. In no other country was academic training so important a prerequisite for high office as in the German states by the late eighteenth century.

Conversely, in few other countries were the universities such rich breeding grounds for political opposition to the established order. It is difficult to think of a single major political ideology of the nineteenth century that did not issue from or have decisive support in the German universities. Oppositional professors and students of many political colorations used the universities in the early nineteenth century as bases for the propagation of their ideas about a just social and political order. In many places the professoriate even provided a surrogate leadership group for the disorganized and timid German middle classes. The election of many academics to the "parliament of professors," the Frankfurt National Assembly of 1848, underscores this important role of universities in national political life.

The German universities played an exceptionally strong role in the life of the German churches, too. In most parts of Germany the clergy was better trained than its counterparts in

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other European countries, thanks in part to government pressure for such training and to the high standards of theology faculties from the late eighteenth century onward. The close ties between churches and states in Germany since the Reformation involved the universities, as well. The struggle against domination by church orthodoxy is a major element in the history of German universities; but even when this struggle was won, the interests of the churches continued to be represented in the universities.

Even outside the organized realm of the state, in the more diffuse and heterogenous arena of German society, the universities developed relationships that gradually broke down the walls of the ivory tower.

Because the universities were increasingly exclusive channels of access to careers in the civil service, science, and the professions, certain groups in society began to take a heightened interest in the teaching and, in the nineteenth century, research activities of the universities. More and more social groups joined the relatively narrow spectrum of university alumni and pressed the universities to aid them in their search for professional or other advantage. As elsewhere, the German universities both legitimated the social status of existing elites and conferred higher status on other social strata. The university is not necessarily a major vehicle for upward social mobility, though it usually promotes mobility to a certain degree; it has also been a means for the reproduction of elites. Given the comparatively exclusive qualities of these elites in Germany, access to them through university training gradually heightened the interest of broader social groups in such training. In many other countries, either elites were more open or access to them lay through channels other than the university – the Inns of Court in England, for example. It is therefore no wonder that groups in German society viewed the university as important to their own social position and tried to exert their influence in questions of curriculum, admissions, size, function, and style of the universities.

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The universities played a significant role in the shaping of a specifically "German" society, because they were among the first institutions in Germany to foster a sense of national community. After the French Revolution, the universities acted increasingly as centers of national communication. They drew students from all across the German states and helped infuse in them an outlook broader than the traditional *Kirchturmhorizont,* the horizon limited by the view from the village steeple, which had been the characteristic mentality of many of the dozens of small German states and cities. National reviews and journals, national professional congresses, and outright agitation for national union were all primarily based in German universities beginning in the early nineteenth century.

Finally, one must consider the relationship between the development of the modern university system and the development of the German economy. The university system and the industrial economy experienced their most rapid growth and drive to maturity at roughly the same time, in the late nineteenth century. The relationships between such sectors of modern German industry as chemistry and some German universities have begun to come to light in recent studies, but the relative positions of the leading sectors of the national economy and the system of higher education are still largely unknown. What is clear, however, is that the relationships were not nearly as negligible and casual as has long been assumed. Even before the industrial revolution, the German universities had to make adjustments to modern economic conditions. For example, the universities' change to a complete money budget and the surrender of the last remnants of payment in kind had a serious effect on the future of the university system.

Questions to be asked

The central question raised by this study has already been mentioned: How did political and social forces condition the change of the German university system from its nearly moribund state

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in 1700 to its pinnacle in 1914? Within this broad question lie many smaller ones. First, restricting our questions to the relationship of the state and the university, we find that there are subsidiary areas involving the state's role as administrator, innovator, lawgiver, financier, and promoter of values. The universities in their turn had roles to play in the life of the state. Second, looking at the relationship between the university and society, we must ask how the latter used the former and pressed for changes to enable further use, as well as how the former resisted or accommodated pressures for change. Third, we must ask a number of specific questions about the contribution of state and society to the evolution of the university system: How was it saved from extinction in the eighteenth century; how did it achieve a breakthrough to modernity in a country that was relatively backward; how did it achieve qualitative change in times of quantitative stagnation; how did its individual parts and academic specialties develop; how did research concerns intrude on traditional pedagogical functions; and how did the structure of the teaching body alter?

The role of the German states in the affairs of their universities was not a simple one, and it changed considerably during the period under discussion. The loose rights of supervision implicit in the prince's status as patron of the university were extended gradually to include tight control of personnel appointments and finances. We shall see how the states viewed their prerogatives of regulation over such internal university matters as curriculum, enrollment, admissions and examination standards, the activities and discipline of university members, and the standing of science and scholarship. We shall ask how the administrative machinery changed, and what inducements and powers were used to control the universities. We shall see how the universities reacted to directives and requirements from the state, and what weapons they possessed and used to retain their autonomy.

What role did the state play in the introduction or retardation of change? Did the states simply administer the universi-

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