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**The Classical German Idea of the University
Revisited, or on the Nationalization
of the Modern Institution**

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to provide a philosophical and historical background to current discussions about the changing relationships between the university and the state (and the university and society) through revisiting the classical “Humboldtian” model of the university. This historical detour is intended to show the cultural rootedness of the modern “idea of the university”, and its close links to the idea of the modern national state. The background is provided by the discussion of such German philosophers and scholars as Wilhelm von Humboldt, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Friedrich W.J. Schelling (the founding fathers of the University of Berlin) in the 19th century, as well as the controversy between Karl Jaspers and Jürgen Habermas in the 20th century. The paper consists of the following sections: the university and society: basic questions; the modern university, the nation-state, and “retrospective constructions; the three main principles of the Humboldtian university; the nationalization of European universities: serving the nation; the national aspect of the German *Bildung*; the pursuit of truth vs. public responsibilities of the modern university; the (foundational) idea of the university vs. its embodiments (the exposition of the Jaspers/Habermas controversy); the university and the state: a modern pact; the renewal of the university vs. the regeneration of the nation; knowledge for its own sake and Wilhelm von Humboldt; Humboldt’s university vs. the “Humboldtian” university; the University of Berlin: new weapons to continue the struggle lost in the battleground; Humboldt and the role of *Bildung*; the rebirth of the German nation through education (Johann Gottlieb Fichte)?; giving birth to a new world and the Heideggerian overtones; the state, the university, and academic freedom (Friedrich Schleiermacher); philosophy and education (Friedrich W.J. Schelling); and conclusions.

MAREK KWIEK

**THE CLASSICAL GERMAN IDEA OF THE UNIVERSITY REVISITED,
OR ON THE NATIONALIZATION OF THE MODERN INSTITUTION**

The university and society: basic questions

The aim of the paper is to provide a philosophical and historical background to current discussions about the changing relationships between the university and the state (and the university and society) through revisiting the classical “Humboldtian” model of the university. This historical detour is intended to show the cultural rootedness of the modern idea of the university, and its close links to the idea of the modern national state. The background is provided by the discussion of such German philosophers and scholars as Wilhelm von Humboldt, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Friedrich W.J. Schelling (the founding fathers of the University of Berlin) in the 19th century, as well as Karl Jaspers and Jürgen Habermas in the 20th century.

The basic questions about the relationship between the university and society have remained fundamentally the same throughout recent centuries; what changes from time to time is the answers to them – which may become inadequate or irrelevant. Guy Neave in his discussion of “Universities’ Responsibility to Society” presents six questions each society should pose itself with respect to its universities:

How is the “community” to which the university is answerable conceived? What is the role of central government in controlling or steering the university? What is the place of Academia in the Nation? Is the University an institution for stability or change? What purpose does the knowledge transmitted and generated by the University play in society’s development? Should society – through government – determine the type of knowledge which should have priority in the University? (Neave 2000: 4).

These questions were central to the Humboldtian reforms of the Prussian universities as discussed below, but also to the French reforms of universities at roughly the same time (giving rise to the “Napoleonic” model of the institution), as well as to the evolution of both British and American universities.

Today, in contrast to the beginning of the 19th century when the German idea of the university was born, the community to which universities are answerable does not have to be the nation or the nation-state anymore; increasingly, it may be the region or the local community – or the globe, for major world-class universities. National literature, national history and civic education conceived within a national framework are no longer at the center of the university; the university seems increasingly answerable to the community of its “stakeholders”: students, employers’ associations, and the economy more generally. The role of central governments in controlling the university, and in subsidizing its operations, is decreasing. The place of academia in the nation is changing: from a provider of national glue to hold society and its citizens together – to a provider of the skills and competences necessary to flourish in emergent knowledge-based societies; as well as from the pursuit of knowledge mostly for its own sake – to the pursuit of constantly redefined and mostly “useful” knowledge. Instead of fostering national identity, the university becomes an increasingly important part of (global) production processes. The university today is conceived of as an institution designed for change rather than for stability; its links with industry are getting closer and much more natural than in the past, and research funds are increasingly “strings-attached”. Knowledge produced is increasingly “useful” to the national economic development, while what counts as useful is having to be renegotiated with research-funding agencies. Knowledge produced and transmitted by the university no longer serves to maintain national ideals and inculcate national consciousness; it is increasingly technical knowledge which is independent from the national, linguistic and ideological context in which it was produced. Finally, society through its government agencies is increasingly influencing academic priorities through state funding mechanisms and research areas are being prioritized by the market and corporate funding. This is a fundamental reformulation of the German philosophical ideas of the university as presented below.

The modern university, the nation-state, and “retrospective constructions”

There are certainly several parallel readings of the historical coincidence which caused German Idealist and Romantic philosophers to engage in conceptualizing the new research-centered university (known as the “Humboldtian” university), and certainly some of them may be a “retrospective construction” (Rothblatt and Wittrock 1993: 117). But the historical, sociological and philosophical narrative of the coterminous birth of the modern institution of the university and the emergence of the nation-state in the 19th century seems both convincing

and interesting. Assuming the narrative gets the picture right, the state during a large part of this century wanted the university to serve the dual purpose of national knowledge production and the strengthening of national loyalties. As Björn Wittrock argues in his essay “The Modern University: The Three Transformations”,

It is only too obvious that this institutional process [the emergence of the modern university – MK] is intimately linked to another one, namely the rise of the modern nation-state, whether in newly formed politics on the European continent, such as Italy or Germany, or through the reform of older state organizations, such as France or the United States of America (Wittrock 1993: 305).

Even though I fully agree that the reason for the emergence of the modern institution of the university in Germany was *political*, I will be providing an alternative explanation to what Lenore O’Boyle (in her paper on “Learning for Its Own Sake: The German University as Nineteenth-Century Model”) claims to be the real reason: to divert the intellectual and cultural elites from a serious concern with political thought. I am attributing here the development of the modern university in the form known to us as the “Humboldtian” university to the needs of the rising nation-state (and I will argue along the lines sketched out by Björn Wittrock (1993), Gerard Delanty (2001), Bill Readings (1996), Andy Green (1997), Jürgen Enders (2004) and others). To recall Wittrock’s memorable expression, “universities form part and parcel of the very same process which manifests itself in the emergence of an industrial economic order and the nation state as the most typical and most important form of political organisation” (Wittrock 1993: 305). There is certainly no single narrative (or “history”) of the rise (and possibly fall?) of the modern (especially “Humboldtian”) university; there are competing narratives based on competing historical, political, cultural, social and economic accounts. Here I am presenting one of them.¹

The three main principles of the Humboldtian university

Historically speaking, the status of the institution of the university in Germany at the turn of the 19th century when the new (modern) idea of the university was about to be born was very questionable and it was German philosophy that helped resurrect the very notion of a university. At that time in Europe, the institution had been “more threatened than perhaps at

¹ For the context of the presentation, see my forthcoming book *The University and the State. A Study into Global Transformations* (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, 2006, 424 pp).

any time before or afterwards” (Wittrock 1993: 314).² There are three main principles of the modern university to be found in the founding fathers of the University of Berlin. The first principle is the unity of research and teaching (*die Einheit von Forschung und Lehre*); the second is the protection of academic freedom: the freedom to teach (*Lehrfreiheit*) and the freedom to learn (*Lernfreiheit*)³; and the third is the central importance of the faculty of philosophy (the faculty of Arts and Sciences in modern terminology) (see Fallon 1980: 28ff.; Röhrs 1995: 24ff.). The three principles are developed, to varying degrees, in Schelling, Fichte, Schleiermacher and Wilhelm von Humboldt.⁴ Together, the three principles have guided the modern institution of the university through the 19th century to the 20th century. To what extent these principles are being questioned today, by whom and in what segments of the diversified systems of higher education is a different issue. Very briefly, and without the necessary nuancing of the answer, the principle of the unity of teaching and research still guides the functioning of our *universities*, but not so much our higher education sector in general⁵; academic freedom is under severe attack in both developed and developing countries, from a variety of directions, including threats from the state and business in selected areas; and the third principle, the centrality of philosophy to the functioning of the

² Timothy Bahti in his “Histories of the University: Kant and Humboldt” describes the situation of the German universities of the period in the following way: “the eighteenth [century] had been a lowpoint for German universities: unruly students, dropping enrollments, little apparent correlation between subjects taught and post-university positions available, financial marginality, etc. At this very time, the last decade of the eighteenth century, there was talk of abolishing the university; its place could be taken by the already existing academies of science and by new, practical vocational schools (*Hochschulen*). And yet in 1810, the University of Berlin was founded” (Bahti 1987: 438).

³ Kazimierz Twardowski when receiving his honorary doctorate at the University of Poznań (the present author’s home university) in 1932, argued that “the opportunity to perform the task specific to the University is conditioned by its *absolute spiritual independence*. ... scientific research can develop and bring its work to fruition only if it is completely free and not threatened in any manner” (Twardowski 1997: 11–12).

⁴ By contrast, Newman’s idea of the university did not refer to the German notions of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit*. As Sheldon Rothblatt remarked about Newman’s university, “since teaching was the function of a university, it was important to teach the right things” (Rothblatt 1997: 14).

⁵ It was Ortega y Gasset who argued strongly against the unity of teaching and research and questioned the Humboldtian unity of the two activities; he claimed that “the teaching of the professions and the search for truth *must* be separated. They must be clearly distinguished one from the other, both in the minds of the professors and in the minds of the students. ... As a general principle, the normal student is not an apprentice to science. ... Why do we persist in expecting the impossible?” (Gasset 1944: 76–77).

university, seems to be the most endangered, if not already abandoned, both in theory and in practice.⁶

The nationalization of European universities: serving the nation

The crucial step in the historical development of European universities is what Guy Neave termed the process of their *nationalization* – bringing the university formally into the public domain as a *national* responsibility. With the rise of the nation-state, the university was set at the apex of institutions defining national identity: “the forging of the nation-state went hand in hand with the incorporation of academia into the ranks of state service, thereby placing upon it the implicit obligation of service to the *national* community” (Neave 2001: 26). The emergence of the Prussian and French (Napoleonic) models of the university did not only mean the shift from revealed knowledge – characteristic of Medieval (and early modern) universities – to verifiable scientific knowledge. The Humboldtian reforms and their French counterparts were also

a crucial step in the definition of the Nation-State itself, by putting in place those institutions for upholding national identity, providing the means of perpetuating particular ‘knowledge traditions’ to which the emergent Nation attaches importance as unique expressions of its exceptionalism, and formalizing the type of knowledge necessary both for citizenship and for assuming the highest administrative responsibilities the Nation may confer (Neave 2000: 5).

The emergence of the universities in Berlin (expressly directed against the Napoleonic model, see Rüegg 2004: 47 ff.) and in Paris marked the termination of the long process for the incorporation of the university to the state (Neave 2001: 25). The process of the “nationalization” of the university settled the issue of what the role and responsibilities of the modern institution in society should be. The emergent nation-state defined the social place of the emergent modern university and determined its social responsibilities. The nation-state

⁶ Perhaps it is interesting to note that both current philosophy and philosophers do not seem to be inclined to return to the issue of the future of the university (not to mention: the future of the *idea of the university*). It is very rare indeed to see contemporary philosophers discussing the issue more than in passing (exceptions include e.g. Jürgen Habermas in papers discussed later in the paper or Martha Nussbaum in her *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, 1997).

determined the community to which the university would be answerable: it was going to be the *national* community, the nation.

The idea of what constituted “useful knowledge” was being renegotiated in the course of the history of the modern university. With the advent of the nation-state, useful knowledge assumed a new form: it was the type of knowledge which “underpinned national cohesion, provided techniques, skills and understanding to ensure the administration of public order, health and the maintenance of the rule of law”. The university became “the prime source of such knowledge and the repository of the Nation’s historic, cultural and political memory, the preservation and diffusion of which was its paramount task” (Neave 2000: 12). The production of this type of knowledge at the university became its public responsibility. At the same time, though, as Neave stresses, there was the other obligation of the institution: the second duty, conceived of under the influence of German Idealists in the form of the *pursuit of truth*. It was disinterested scholarship driven by the curiosity of free individuals, scholars searching for truth.⁷

The national aspect of the German Bildung

While Neave in his historical papers stresses that aspect of the German Idealists’ interpretation of the university in which “culture, science and learning existed *over and above the state*” and in which “the responsibility of the university was to act as the highest expression of *cultural* unity” (Neave 2001: 25, emphases mine), I would like to stress the *national* aspect of *Bildung* and the role of the university as conceived by the German thinkers in the production of *national* consciousness, providing the national glue to keep citizens together, fostering national loyalty and supporting not only the nationhood in *cultural* terms but also the nation-state in *political* terms.

Consequently, I would like to weaken the sharp opposition presented by Neave between the Napoleonic model of the university and the *political* unity of the nation on the one hand, and

⁷ Or as Kazimierz Twardowski, a famous pre-war Polish philosopher, describes an academic in his “The Majesty of the University”: “a university teacher is first of all a servant of objective truth, its representative and herald *vis-à-vis* the young people and society at large. It is an extremely honourable service, but it is demanding as well... He who decides to serve under the banner of science must renounce all that which might turn him away from the path indicated by it” (Twardowski 1997: 13–14).

the German model of the university and the *cultural* unity of the nation on the other hand. The opposition is clearly there, but the *political* aspect of the Humboldtian reforms to the German university, fully complementary to the ideal of the “pursuit of truth”, should be emphasized as well. The political motif was present in German thinking about the idea of the university from Kant to Humboldt and reached perhaps its full-blown shape in Martin Heidegger’s *Rectorial Address* pronounced at Freiburg in 1933 and in his attempts to use the modern university and his philosophy-inspired reforms of it directly for the political purposes of the new Germany.

I am stressing here the combination of cultural and political motifs in their formulations of the idea of the university rather than (following Neave) merely cultural ones; perhaps even the political *cum* cultural motif. The classical German notion of *Bildung* from that period, and from the writings of these philosophers, to a varying degree depending on the exact historical moment and a given author, is very strongly politicized. It refers to the cultivation of the self and of the individual but also to the cultivation of the individual *as a nation-state citizen*. I am in agreement here with the late Bill Readings who emphasizes in his *The University in Ruins* that in German Idealists,

under the rubric of culture [i.e. *Bildung* - MK], the University is assigned the dual task of research and teaching, respectively the production and inculcation of national self-knowledge. As such, it becomes the institution charged with watching over the spiritual life of the people of the rational state, reconciling ethnic tradition and statist rationality (Readings 1996: 15).

Consequently, I do not see the distinction between what was the political unity of the nation and what was the cultural unity of the nation (in their relationship to the institution of the university) as sharply as Neave does and I want to soften this distinction considerably. In my view, the *national* component in the German idea of the university, and the role assigned to the German nation in the writings of German philosophers accompanying the emergence of the University of Berlin, were considerable. I will discuss this component in more detail later in the paper.

The pursuit of truth vs. public responsibilities of the modern university

The tension between “the pursuit of truth” and “public responsibility” (be it cultural or political dimensions) in the evolution of the modern university, Neave stresses, has been very

clear in German writings on Academia. There is a clear tension between thinking about science and the community of scholars and students, truth and universality on the one hand, and the national consciousness, nationhood, the state and academic responsibilities to them on the other. The immediate reason to rethink the institution of the university, was *political*, though (the defeat by the French on the battlefield). It was clearly Fichte who was the most nation-oriented in his ideas of the university, and it is no accident that it was Fichte's thinking that influenced Heidegger's ideas on the university most, slightly more than hundred years later.

Increasingly, at the beginning of the 19th century, culture in the sense of *Bildung* became mixed with political motivations and aspirations, focused around the notion of the German national state. It is interesting to note that in a global age, *both* motifs have been put under enormous pressure. Forging national identity, serving as a repository of the nation's historical, scientific or literary achievements, inculcating national consciousness and loyalty to fellow-citizens of the nation-state, do not serve as the rationale for the existence of the institution of the university any more; at the same time, the disinterested pursuit of truth by curiosity-driven scholars in the traditional sense of the term is no longer accepted as a *raison d'être* for the institution either. Consequently, no matter whether we focus more on the cultural unity of the nation or on the political unity of the nation, or more on the search for truth through a disinterested, curiosity-driven research as the two distinct driving forces behind the development of the modern university, both motifs are dead and gone in post-national and global conditions. Neither serving truth, nor serving the nation (and the nation-state) seem to be the guiding principles for the functioning of the institution today, and neither of them are even mentioned in current debates about the future of the university on a global or European level.⁸

The move towards the "nationalization" of the university was strong and the process of linking the university to the national state continued throughout the 19th century (as one commentator remarked, "the universalization of the nation-state went hand in hand with the 'nationalization' of culture", Axtmann 2004: 260). The social purpose, missions and roles of the university in the emergent national state were redefined anew. Emergent higher education

⁸ It is sufficient to read the recent communications of the European Commission about the role of the university and research and development activities in knowledge-based societies or World Bank's and OECD's views on the future role of the university which are underpinning reforms of higher education in most transition and developing countries today, see European Commission 2003, 2005, 2006, World Bank 2002, OECD 1998.

systems were clearly national systems, with their own national priorities and distinctive patterns of validation and certification of knowledge and education. Civil service in the nation-state was closely linked with national universities and at the same time scholars (especially full professors) – in some countries – gained the status of public servants. The “nationalization” of higher education was inseparable from the “nationalization” of scholars (Neave 2001: 30).

The (foundational) idea of the university vs. its embodiments (the exposition of the Jaspers/Habermas controversy)

In this paper the delicate relationship between the university and the nation-state in particular is discussed, the coterminous emergence of two modern products. The way the modern university was born strongly influenced its relationship with the state. Without a clear vision of this relationship at the point of the inception of this specific power/knowledge nexus, it would be much more difficult to see the difference today when the place of the nation-state in the economy, the concept of nationhood and the role of the nation in culture are different under global pressures. Narratives about the modern university and the modern state need a historical background which is briefly sketched in this paper.

Historically speaking, the status of the institution of the university in Germany at the turn of the 19th century when the new idea of the university was about to be born was very questionable. Universities were seen at the time as “sites of rote disputation inhabited largely by pedants” and intellectuals regarded universities with “disdain”, as Daniel Fallon describes them in his book on *The German University*.

During the eighteenth century, universities were increasingly described as “medieval”, a term that had a clear pejorative connotation. A phrase often used at the time described the universities as “atrophied in a trade-guild mentality”. It was widely believed within universities that knowledge was fixed within closed systems and the only task of the university was to transmit what was known to students, usually by reading aloud from old texts (Fallon 1980: 5–6).

Fallon goes as far as to claim that one of the lesser contributions Wilhelm von Humboldt made was the retention of the name university itself, as universities were in such disrepute among intellectuals that the Prussian reformers who sought a new institution in Berlin

avoided the very word “university” in their essays (Fallon 1980: 30).⁹ Also Björn Wittrock, the author of an excellent paper on “The Modern University: the Three Transformations” argues that radical German philosophy helped resurrect the notion of a university at a time when the university in Europe had been “more threatened than perhaps at any time before or afterwards” (Wittrock 1993: 314).¹⁰

Karl Jaspers in his classic book on *The Idea of the University* returned to the Humboldtian notion of the university, drawing from the same intellectual sources in thinking about the institution as Hans-Georg Gadamer (in *Truth and Method*) and Helmuth Schelsky (in *Solitude and Freedom* i.e. *Einsamkeit und Freiheit: Idee und Gestalt der deutschen Universität und Ihren Reformen*). Jürgen Habermas, on the other hand, in such texts as “The University in a Democracy: Democratization of the University” (a lecture given at the Free University of Berlin in 1967 which reopened the German debate on the social role of the institution) and “The Idea of the University: Learning Processes” (a lecture given in Heidelberg in 1986) stood more in the Kantian tradition of the university as a site of critique (Delanty 2001: 64). It is very interesting to put Jasper’s book in the double context of the original idea of the university born at the turn of the 18th century and its radical questioning performed by Habermas as part of the new German debate on reforming higher education.

Jaspers’ book was based on an address given at the University of Heidelberg in 1945, “The Renewal of the University”, which was based in turn on his book *The Idea of the University* (originally published in 1923 and reprinted in 1946). It referred to the basic assumption

⁹ I am thinking of the titles of some classic German books and lectures of interest to us here, indeed Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote on the one hand “Antrag auf Errichtung der Universität Berlin” but on the other “Über die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin”. While Fichte published *Deducirter Plan einer zu Berlin zu errichtenden höheren Lehranstalt*, Schleiermacher wrote *Gelegentliche Gedanken über Universitäten in deutschen Sinn, nebst einem Anhang über eine neu zu errichtende*. Schelling published his *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*, Fichte his *Über das Wesen des Gelehrten, und seine Erscheinungen im Gebiete der Freiheit* and finally Kant his *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, of minor interest to us here. In general, the titles confirm the prevalent ambivalence towards the very term “university” at the time.

¹⁰ Timothy Bahti in his “Histories of the University: Kant and Humboldt” describes the situation of the German universities of the period in the following way: “the eighteenth [century] had been a lowpoint for German universities: unruly students, dropping enrollments, little apparent correlation between subjects taught and post-university positions available, financial marginality, etc. At this very time, the last decade of the eighteenth century, there was talk of abolishing the university; its place could be taken by the already existing academies of science and by new, practical vocational schools (*Hochschulen*). And yet in 1810, the University of Berlin was founded” (Bahti 1987: 438).

originating from the German founding fathers of the university that the institution of the university rests on a *foundational idea*. To put it in a nutshell, Habermas' main line of criticism is that "organizations no longer embody ideas" (Habermas 1989: 102). Jaspers and Habermas stand on two opposite sides and no reconciliation between them is possible; paradoxically, Habermas, in his discussion of the university, is much closer to the postmodern position of Jean-François Lyotard (in his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* of 1979) than to the classical German tradition in viewing the institution (see Roberts 1998). There does not seem to be any direct debate between Habermas and Lyotard about the university, even though they were engaged over the years in exchanges about many other topics. It is interesting to note the parallelisms in Lyotard's critique of Wilhelm von Humboldt and the German Idealists in general and Habermas' critique of Jaspers in his classic book.¹¹

Jaspers, following the ideas expressed at the time of the founding of the University of Berlin, believes in the post-war (first, and then second world war) renewal of the university on the basis of its *idea* – he believes in preserving the German university through a rebirth of its foundational "idea". As Habermas comments on this line of thinking in his paper on "The Idea of the University: Learning Processes" (included in *The New Conservatism*), its "premises derive from the implicit sociology of German Idealism. Institutions are forms of objective spirit. An institution remains capable of functioning only as long as it embodies in living form the idea inherent in it" (Habermas 1989: 101). Indeed, in Jaspers, there is a strong Platonic dualism between the idea and its embodiment, the essence of the university and its earthly occurrence, the idea of the institution of the university and its living form. In thinking about what the university *is*, it is impossible to forget what it *should* be. Consequently, students and professors ought to "assimilate the idea of the university" and be "permeated by the idea of the university as part of a way of life" (Jaspers 1959: 75, 68). As Jaspers put it in an edition of the book commented on by Habermas, "only someone who carries the idea of the university in himself can think and act appropriately on behalf of the university" (Habermas 1989: 101). Both students and professors become guardians of the idea of the university, checking whether the institution is performing according to its ideal, serving the purposes it was meant to serve, and functioning properly i.e. in the way inherently present in its very idea. Habermas, following Friedrich Schleiermacher, finds communication crucial to the self-understanding of the university:

¹¹ See especially the section "Narratives of the Legitimation of Knowledge" in *The Postmodern Condition* (Lyotard 1984: 31–37). For Lyotard (already in the 1960s) on the university, students, and faculty, see his *Political Writings* (Lyotard 1993: 33–83).

The ingenious thing about the old idea of the university was that it was supposed to *be grounded in something more stable*: the permanently differentiated scientific process itself. But if science can no longer be used to anchor ideas in this way, because the multiplicity of the disciplines no longer leaves room for the totalizing power of either an all-encompassing philosophical fundamental science or even a reflective form of material critique of science and scholarship that would emerge from disciplines themselves, on what could an integrative self-understanding of the corporative body of the university be based? (Habermas 1989:124).

The institution may be successful in living up to the idea, or it may fail. The idea can never be “perfectly realized” though. Therefore “a permanent state of tension” exists at the university between the idea and the reality (Jaspers 1959: 70). The quality of the university is measurable against its ideal:

The university exists only to the extent that it is institutionalized. *The idea becomes concrete in the institution*. The extent to which it does this determines the quality of the university. Stripped of its ideals the university loses all value (Jaspers 1959: 70).

According to Jaspers, the university is the only place where by concession of state and society “a given epoch may cultivate the clearest possible self-awareness. People are allowed to congregate here for the sole purpose of seeking truth” (Jaspers 1959: 1). Following the German ideal of “knowledge for its own sake”, an academic’s role is to pursue truth “unconditionally and for its own sake” (Jaspers 1959: 1).¹² The university derives its autonomy from the imperishable idea of academic freedom. The idea of truth figures prominently throughout the book, defining the purpose of the university (“seeking truth”), defining research as its foremost concern (“because truth is accessible to systematic search”)

¹² Leszek Kołakowski in his address “What Are Universities For?” hits the mark when he links the university with the foundations of our culture: “it is, in fact, impossible to prove that every taxpayer derives visible and tangible advantages from the fact that someone knows the Hittite language and the layout of Japanese gardens. The question to be posed should be that which is more general: why should we have a culture that does not serve technological progress nor increase material well-being? The only answer to that question is: in order to let mankind be that which it has always been. If culture means luxury then this is perhaps because mankind itself is a luxury of Nature” (Kołakowski 1997: 29–30). Somewhat in a similar vein, parallel questions could be posed with respect to philosophy itself, and the answer could go along the same lines. The Lyotardian criterion of “performativity” is increasingly applied to both university teaching and research, including philosophical teaching and research. In his formulation, “research sectors that are unable to argue that they contribute even indirectly to the optimalization of the system’s performance are abandoned by the flow of capital and doomed to senescence” (Lyotard 1984: 47).

and defining the unique character of scholars (those “who have committed their lives to the search for truth”). Referring to Plato, one can say that human beings are beings wishing to know; the will to know determines human beings and separates them from animals. Consequently, the university is an institution

Uniting people professionally dedicated to the quest and transmission of truth in scientific terms (Jaspers 1959: 3).

Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Humboldt, Hegel and other German thinkers from the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, felt the need to discuss the idea of the university from a radically new perspective. The new concepts from Jasper’s definition referred to above are the following: “uniting people” for the sake of science (students and professors working together, rather than professors working merely for students), “professionally dedicated” staff (rather than dedicated in an “amateurish” way characteristic of the institutions of the Enlightenment), “the quest and transmission” of truth (rather than merely transmission to students, i.e. instruction becomes accompanied by research) and its pursuit “in scientific terms” (originally referred to the German ideal of *Wissenschaft*). So almost all the components of this definition contrast the new concept of the university with the old one. The scholar, in a Platonic manner in which truth, beauty and goodness are united, becomes a special sort of person: he must “dedicate himself to truth as a human being, not just a specialist”, so what is required of him is the “serious commitment of the whole man” (Jaspers 1959: 3). Also the aim of instruction and research is the “formation of the whole man”, “education in the broadest sense of the term” (Jaspers 1959: 3). The German ideal of *Bildung* which lay at the foundation of the projects for the university of Berlin and was fundamental to all German thinkers of the time, retains its force in Jaspers a century and a half later.¹³

It is interesting to follow the theme of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and the relationships between the institution of the university, society and the state in Jasper’s presentation. According to Habermas, Humboldt and Schleiermacher connected two notions

¹³ The German ideology of *Bildung* goes back to German discussions about the “Enlightenment” in both Immanuel Kant’s and Moses Mendelssohn’s famous writings on the subject, as well as to Kant’s *On Teaching* and his *The Conflict of the Faculties*. As Sven-Eric Liedman argues in his paper on the notion of *Bildung*, it was probably Johann Gottfried Herder in his journal *Account of My Travels* who was the first to use *Bildung* to denote the education of man and mankind generally. The institution that appeared to have had the biggest potential for encouraging the spread of *Bildung* was the modern university (see Liedman 1993: 77ff).

with the idea of the university: the first was how to institutionalize modern science and scholarship (released of the tutelage of religion and the church) “without their autonomy being threatened by the state or the influence of bourgeois society”; the second was “why it is in the interest of the state itself to guarantee the university the external form of an internally unlimited freedom” (Habermas 1989: 108–109). The solution Humboldt and Schleiermacher found was a *state-organized autonomy*; science and scholarship shielded both from political intervention and societal imperatives, and the university as a place where “the moral culture, indeed *the whole spiritual life of the nation* would come to be concentrated” (Habermas 1989: 109, emphasis mine). The two notions merged to form the idea of the modern university.

The university and the state: a modern pact

The modern university held an “affirmative” relationship with the state. As Gerard Delanty comments on the relationship in his *Challenging Knowledge. The University in the Knowledge Society*,

The university needs the state to guarantee its autonomy. In return for this autonomy the university will *provide the state with a moral and spiritual basis*, becoming in effect a substitute for the Church (Delanty 2001: 33, emphasis mine).

Habermas in his lecture about “The University in a Democracy” claims that the task of the university is “to provide a political education by shaping a political consciousness among its students” and complains from a historical perspective that “for too long the consciousness that took shape at German universities was apolitical” (Habermas quoted in Delanty 2001: 65). This was the price that the university had to pay for the state’s authorization of its freedom, its consequent “abstention from politics” (Habermas 1989: 113). At the same time, in his view, the idea of the university presented by Jaspers’ predecessors was “daring and impossible”:

One does not realize *just how daring and impossible the idea of the university* defined in these famous founding documents was until one realizes the conditions that would have to be fulfilled for such a science to be institutionalized – a science that is to make possible and ensure, solely on the basis of its internal structure, the unity of research and teaching, the unity of the scientific and scholarly disciplines, the unity of science and scholarship with general education, and the unity of science and scholarship with enlightenment (Habermas 1989: 111).

Delanty states that “though universities were always important sites of intellectual resistance to power, the institution was primarily designed to *serve the national state with technically useful knowledge and the preservation and reproduction of national cultural traditions*” (Delanty 2001: 2, emphasis mine). Does the state need useful knowledge and national cultural traditions today as much as it used to in the era of competing nation-states, one may wonder? How do the two dimensions relate to the contemporary institution of the state in a globalizing era? The answer is complicated, and needs to be nuanced. Traditionally, the knowledge in question was knowledge for the state apparatus and its personnel: state officials and administrators, engineers, teachers, lawyers etc. Cultural traditions (in Germany embodied in the idea of *Bildung*), on the other hand, were crucial for the development of emergent nation-states. Both basic assumptions are being questioned today though. Delanty goes on to argue that “the university formed *a pact with the state*: in return for autonomy it would furnish the state with its cognitive requirements. The great social movements of modernity ... had little to do with the ivory tower of the academy and its posture of splendid isolation” (Delanty 2001:2, emphasis mine). But this historical pact is slowly beginning to “unravel” today, as the state is no longer “the sole guardian of knowledge production” (Delanty 2001: 4). There are certainly several interrelated dimensions to the unraveling of the pact between the university and the state; the emergence of new knowledge producers and the consequent shifting patterns in financing knowledge production is one of them, others are the massification of higher education in advanced countries which has questioned the direct link between higher education and the state’s need of it, and the changing relations between the state and public services. The state is retreating from being the *provider* to merely being *regulator* and is no longer the sole funding body for knowledge production. This development “fundamentally alters” the historical pact between knowledge and the state worked out in the late 17th century when state control over the production of knowledge was institutionalized in the university and the royal academies (Delanty 2001: 103). Wittrock described the social processes of the time as the search for

A new political order to address the social and cultural questions. The solution, arrived at gradually, was *the notion of a modern nation-state*. *Higher education institutions greatly benefited from this solution*. *They were given access to much greater resources than had previously been the case*; and for almost a century, it largely seemed as if the knowledge explosion and occupational specialisation were but two different aspects of one and the same pervasive process of modernization (Wittrock 1993: 344, emphases mine).

Not surprisingly, from the perspective of academia, the state's role was to assure that sufficient resources were channeled to universities so that a society was provided "with a steady stream of competent personnel" (Wittrock 1993: 344).

Jaspers in his account of the relationships between the university and the state follows closely the classical German ideal of the university but is much more realistic. Habermas considers both the German Idealists' and Jaspers' views of the social, political, and cultural role of the university to be oversimplifications:

When the classical German university was born, the Prussian reformers sketched an image of the university that suggests an oversimplified connection between scientific and scholarly learning processes and forms of life in modern societies. Taking the perspective of an idealist philosophy of reconciliation, they attributed to the university a power of totalization that necessarily overburdened this institution from the beginning (Habermas 1989: 108).

The enthusiasm of his predecessors is gone in Jaspers though; the belief in the healing social and political powers of the university, most vividly expressed in Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* of 1808 ("it is education alone that can save us from all the ills that oppress us", the state "will soon have no other big expenditures to make" and there will be a gradually decreasing need for armies, prisons, and reformatories based on the introduction of the new national German education, etc), is gone too. In Jaspers, the university and the state are closely interrelated but the influence of the state on the university is overriding; there are no traces of dreams (Platonic in origin) of philosophers-kings, scholars who would be leading the leaders of the nation, that were still present in his predecessors. As Jaspers expresses the essence of the relationship between the university and the state:

The university exists through the good graces of the body politic. Its existence is dependent on political considerations. It can only live where and as the state desires. The state makes the university's existence possible and protects it (Jaspers 1959: 121).

It is only the good will of the state and society in letting the institution function by funding it, meaning the modalities of its functioning are clearly determined by the state. The university "can only live *where and as the state desires*", which brings in a dimension which was largely absent in the philosophical discussions about the University of Berlin. Thus while the founding fathers believed the relationship had a much more reciprocal nature, imagining the renewal and rebirth of the German state and German nation (and even of the human race in

some formulations, like in Fichte and Schelling when the notion of *Bildung* was transformed to refer also to humanity) through the medium of the new university, Jaspers is much more moderate in his conception of the university. The institution in his formulation basically serves the state and the nation and is fully dependent on their good will to keep funding it. The balance of power is certainly different, even though in general Jaspers follows his classical German predecessors very closely in many other aspects. The university does not exist as a place of “knowledge for its own sake”; the university, rather, “owes its existence to society, which desires that somewhere within its confines pure, independent, unbiased research be carried on. Society wants the university because it feels that the pure service of truth somewhere within its orbit serves its own interests” (Jaspers 1959: 121). The difference is crucial, even though the formulation may sound misleading: it is society that finds “knowledge for its own sake” useful, and serving its own interests; in the declarations of his predecessors, it was actually the very ideal that was most important, not its usefulness for society or for the state.

The relationships between the university and the state are no longer metaphysical, and even when they are good, they can never be taken for granted; they are tense. They are strongly determined by time and place, that is, by historical contingencies. To put it in a nutshell, the university exists in the way it is allowed to exist, and is transformed as the state and society – and evolving social and political needs – are transformed. Despite the idea of the university, its living forms or earthly embodiments may differ considerably according to varying political and social influences. As Jaspers conveys the idea, “society provides the university with legal and material support ... Thus *the university is continuously serving the needs of state and society, and bound to change as society and the professions change*” (Jaspers 1959: 122, emphasis mine). The changes in “educational outlook” parallel the changes “which a nation undergoes in the course of its history” (Jaspers 1959: 48). Consequently, Jaspers goes as far as to characterize education as “the manner by which these social bodies [church, class, nation etc – MK] perpetuate themselves from generation to generation. Hence education becomes transformed when there are social revolutions” (Jaspers 1959: 48). It is interesting to note in Jaspers a peculiar mixture of strong philosophical beliefs and strong assumptions taken directly from the sociology of knowledge, which in some passages bring him close to Max Weber, Karl Mannheim or Pierre Bourdieu.

The renewal of the university vs. the regeneration of the nation

While his German predecessors referred largely to the *philosophical idea* of the university, Jaspers, especially in defining the relations of the university with the state, is much more a student of contemporary political sciences than of the German philosophical classics.

There is an ever-present historical conflict between the idea of the university (derived from philosophy) and the actual changing demands of society and the state, Jaspers claims. The university is being influenced by political and sociological factors. But “behind its many changing forms looms the timeless ideal of intellectual insight which is supposed to be realized here, yet which is in permanent danger of being lost” (Jaspers 1959: 123). It is not possible to find such realistic/pessimistic passages in any of the founding fathers of the German university. What never occurred to them before was obvious to Jaspers after one hundred and fifty years in the history of the modern university and of its relationships with the state: “the relations between state and university are almost always tense, often marked by an open conflict. ... For without the state the university is helpless” (Jaspers 1959: 124). The last sentence would have most probably been unthinkable to them.

The difference could be expressed in the following way: Jaspers’ predecessors emphatically believed in the regeneration of the German *nation* through the new idea of the university; Jaspers, by contrast, believed merely in the renewal of the *university* on the basis of its classical idea. The scope of their intent is radically different: the former meant huge social transformations in which the university, and education more generally, was supposed to be a leading force; the latter, in turn, wanted to transform the university itself, hardly ever expressing the desire to transform the social or political world around him, be it the German nation or humanity, by the medium of the institution. After a century and a half, it became obvious that in the relationships between the university and the state, there would be periods of fruitful cooperation and periods in which “the philosophical ideal suffers utter defeat”, and the history of the university would be an “alteration of periods of sterility with periods of vitality” (Jaspers 1959: 123). Jaspers’ realism/pessimism is further testified to by such statements as e.g. “while the university can never become ‘a state within a state’ in the full sense of the word, the converse, its degradation to the rank of a public institution bereft of all individuality, is quite conceivable” (Jaspers 1959: 124).¹⁴

¹⁴ See the current discussions of the university as part of the public sector, and the university’s relative loss of its (social, political and economic) uniqueness. To recall again a brief quotation about the impact of “new managerialism” on higher education: “indeed, by

It is interesting to note Jaspers' clear dismissal of the possibility that the state does not want to help realize the idea of the university (Jaspers 1959: 124). Perhaps what was inconceivable to Jaspers half a century ago is becoming more and more probable today, and in this context Jaspers' point sounds fundamental. What is the attitude of the state to the (German) idea of the university, as developed by its German founding fathers, and as glossed over by subsequent philosophers, sociologists and thinkers from John Henry Newman to Max Weber, Martin Heidegger, Ortega y Gasset, Karl Jaspers, Jürgen Habermas, Jaroslav Pelikan, Martha C. Nussbaum and the whole bunch of recent postmodern critics of the modern university, from Jean-François Lyotard to Jacques Derrida to Bill Readings?¹⁵ The state and society evolve, and based on Jaspers own assumptions, so should the university evolve. In Jaspers' account though, the worldly embodiments of the university still bear a direct relation to its ideal, to an almost Platonic Idea of the university; it was inconceivable to Jaspers that the worldly embodiments of the university could diverge from the ideal too far and consequently could begin to lose contact with the idea of the university. Habermas in this context criticized both Jaspers and his predecessors.

The state in Jaspers is the "ubiquitous overseer of the university's corporate independence". The university, in turn, "confidently accepts state supervision so long as this does not conflict with the cause of truth" (Jaspers 1959: 125). It is incompatible with the idea of the university that the state demands "any more direct services from the university than to supply professionally trained people" (Jaspers 1959: 127). The role of the state in education in

implementing it right across the entire public sector, education systems have lost their *sui generis* character. Organisation, structures and basic practices look similar in education, health, welfare and other public sector bureaucracies" (Henry et al. 2001: 33). Or in the slightly different formulation of Susan Robertson and Roger Dale, the basic element of neo-liberal governance that impacted on education was that it became "mainstreamed": "the whole public sector was to be administered and managed according to the same principles, with no exceptions or concessions to be made in respect of 'sectoral special pleading'" (Robertson and Dale 2003: 8–9).

¹⁵ The following works have been of interest to me, even though they have in general not found their way into the present paper (due to its focus on the future of the German-inspired version of the university, rather than on its American, heavily transformed, counterparts): Newman's *The Idea of the University*, Max Weber's *On Universities. The Power of the State and the Dignity of the Academic Calling in Imperial Germany*, Martin Heidegger's "Rectorial Address", Ortega y Gasset's *Mission of the University*, Jaroslav Pelikan's *The Idea of the University. A Reexamination*, Martha C. Nussbaum's *Cultivating Humanity. A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, and Derrida's "Mochlos; as well as the Conflict of the Faculties" and "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils".

Jaspers' account may be downplayed with reference to the past, but overestimated with reference to the present though. Jaspers argues that the state has a direct stake in education because it wants "civil servants, doctors, ministers, engineers, chemists and the like" (Jaspers 1959: 127).

There are certainly several parallel readings of the historical coincidence which caused German philosophers to engage in conceptualizing the new research-centered university, and certainly some of them may be a "retrospective construction" (Rothblatt and Wittrock 1993: 117), but the historical, sociological and philosophical narrative of the coterminous birth of the modern institution of the university and the emergence of the nation-state seems very much convincing. Assuming the narrative gets the picture right, the state during a large part of the nineteenth century wanted the university to serve the dual purpose of national knowledge production and the strengthening of national loyalties. As Björn Wittrock argues in his essay "The Modern University: The Three Transformations",

The emergence of the modern university is by and large a phenomenon of the late nineteenth century. It is only in this period that universities are resurrected as primary knowledge-producing institutions and that the idea of a research-oriented university becomes predominant. It is only too obvious that this institutional process is intimately linked to another one, namely the rise of the modern nation-state, whether in newly formed politics on the European continent, such as Italy or Germany, or through the reform of older state organizations, such as France or the United States of America (Wittrock 1993: 305).

So the university may have been much more useful to the state than Jaspers actually assumes in his thinking (and which is testified to by the philosophical writings which provided the underpinning of the institution in its "Humboldtian" version, discussed later in this paper). At the same time though, thinking about the present, the state no longer "wants" engineers, doctors, chemists etc, even though it "wants" ministers and civil servants. In higher education that has achieved a massive, if not universal, reach, the state is increasingly becoming one of the less important stakeholders in academia, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries. The whole concept of education as a "public good" as opposed to a "private good", as well as the changing role of the state in the social production of competent "civil servants, doctors, ministers, engineers, chemists and the like" comes to the fore. Again, to return to Wittrock's arguments, "far from being detached from the basic societal and political transformations of the modern era, universities form part and parcel of the very same process which manifests

itself in the emergence of an industrial economic order and the nation-state as the most typical and most important form of political organisation” (Wittrock 1993: 305).

Jaspers, at least declaratively, maintains the role of philosophy at the university accorded to it by German Idealists and Romantics.¹⁶ As Habermas puts it, “the reformers attributed to philosophy a unifying power with regard to what we now call cultural tradition, socialization, and social integration” and “philosophy presents itself as a reflexive form of culture as a whole” (Habermas 1989: 110, 119). Jaspers argues along the same lines as his predecessors and presents philosophy as a guardian of both culture and the idea of the university. The philosophical faculty, that is more or less the faculty of arts and sciences, enjoys a “unique position” at the university; from the viewpoint of research, it “by itself comprises the whole university” (Jaspers 1959: 87), and without the uniqueness and unity of the philosophical faculty, the university becomes “an aggregate, an intellectual department store” (Jaspers 1959: 88).¹⁷ Certainly his belief in the emancipatory and culture-producing powers of philosophy is much smaller than originally presented by his predecessors, but nevertheless it is still relatively strong. The attitude of his predecessors is vividly described by Habermas in the following passage:

By grasping its age in thought, as Hegel was to say, philosophy was to replace the integrative social force of religion with the reconciling force of reason. Thus Fichte could see the university, which merely institutionalized a science of this kind, as the birthplace of an emancipated society of the future, even as the locus of the education of the nation (Habermas 1989: 111).

¹⁶ The uniqueness of the modern German university was its *reliance on philosophy*; as one commentator put it, “the Berlin type of university was unique because the research mission added to the official duties of the professor. But it was also unique because, just as Kant once proposed, it made the philosophy faculty central. It was most of all there that the student received *Bildung*, and it was also there that research had its natural home. Remarkable, too, was the crucial role allotted to philosophy itself. The spirit of philosophy was intended to imbue all branches of the university; the universality and unity of the university were to be guaranteed by philosophical research and the philosophical training of students” (Liedman 1993: 82).

¹⁷ As Sheldon Rothblatt comments in his *The Modern University and Its Discontents*, “the disciplinary crown of the German idea of a university was philosophy (and philology, as incorporated into the faculty organizational structure of the Continental university). Philosophy was the means for unifying the disciplines” (Rothblatt 1997: 22).

While John Henry Newman saw teaching as the university's main concern,¹⁸ both for the German Idealists and Romantics, as well as Jaspers following in their footsteps, the essence of the university was in its *unity of teaching and research*.¹⁹ The very first sentence of Jaspers' book states clearly that a university is: "a community of scholars and students engaged in the task of seeking truth" (Jaspers 1959: 1). The university is the place "where truth is sought unconditionally in all its forms. All forms of research must serve truth" (Jaspers 1959: 63).²⁰ As Sven-Eric Liedman argues in his paper on the notion of *Bildung*, "Berlin was the first university in the world where research and not only instruction was regarded as a primary duty of its professors" (Liedman 1993: 82). The place of research is fundamental to the university and it determines the relations between students and professors: "the university itself exists for research, fulfills its meaning through research. *The student is the scholar and*

¹⁸ Newman wrote a program for a proposed new Roman Catholic university in Ireland – the famous *The Idea of a University* (or rather *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated: I. In Nine Discourses Delivered to the Catholics in Dublin, 1852, and II. In Occasional Lectures and Essays Addressed to the Members of the Catholic University, 1858*) – and in the first sentence of his "Preface" he states his positions clearly: the function of the university is *teaching* (or the dissemination of knowledge). The university in this view is "a place of *teaching* universal *knowledge*. This implies that its object is, on the one hand, intellectual, not moral; and, on the other, that it is the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement [of knowledge]. If its object were scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a University should have students; if religious training, I do not see how it can be the seat of literature and science. Such is a University in its essence, and independently of its relation to the Church. But, practically speaking, it cannot fulfill its object duly, such as I have described it, without the Church's assistance; or, to use the theological term, the Church is necessary for its *integrity*" (Newman 1996: 3). For excellent historical commentaries on the Newmanian version of the university, see the contributions to a recent new edition of Newman's lectures, especially Frank M. Turner, "Newman's University and Ours" and Sara Castro-Klaren, "The Paradox of Self" (Newman 1996). A major part of Sheldon Rothblatt's *The Modern University and Its Discontents* is focused on Newman's legacy (Rothblatt 1997). For a thorough rereading of Newman in a current American context, see especially Jaroslav Pelikan in his *The Idea of a University. A Reexamination* who is interested mostly, if not exclusively, in Newman; as Pelikan puts it explicitly, "throughout this volume I am engaged in an ongoing dialogue with one book", i.e. Newman's (Pelikan 1992: x).

¹⁹ Jürgen Habermas links the origins of this view of "scientific process as a narcissistically self-enclosed circular process of teaching and research" to the philosophy of German Idealism that required this unity by its very nature (Habermas 1989: 110).

²⁰ Or as Kazimierz Twardowski, a famous pre-war Polish philosopher, describes an academic in his "The Majesty of the University": "a university teacher is first of all a servant of objective truth, its representative and herald *vis-à-vis* the young people and society at large. It is an extremely honourable service, but it is demanding as well... He who decides to serve under the banner of science must renounce all that which might turn him away from the path indicated by it" (Twardowski 1997: 13–14).

scientist-to-be” (Jaspers 1959: 54, emphasis mine).²¹ Certainly, in an age of widespread higher education, the latter assumption no longer holds with respect to students in general, although it might still be tenable with PhD students in those higher education systems in which they are students.

Despite the fundamental role accorded to research, Jaspers defines the core activities of the university in the following manner:

Three things are required at a university: professional training, education of a whole man, research. For the university is simultaneously a professional school, a cultural center and a research institute (Jaspers 1959: 40).

The institutions ought not to choose between the three because in the idea of the university they are “indissolubly united”. He goes on to argue that “one cannot cut off one from the others without destroying the intellectual substance of the university. ... All three are factors of a living whole. By isolating them, the spirit of the university perishes” (Jaspers 1959: 40–41). Research is related to human beings’ will to know: “within the life of the university teachers and students are driven by a single motive, man’s basic quest for knowledge” (Jaspers 1959: 41). A good teacher must be a good researcher, this is a constant motive throughout the book: teaching needs the substance “which only research can give”.²² Therefore the combination of teaching and research is “the lofty and inalienable basic principle of the university” (Jaspers 1959: 45). Jaspers’ figure of the professor is fully consistent with the professor in the German ideal of the university and echoes traditional German formulations: “only he who himself does research can really teach. Others only pass on a set of pedagogically arranged facts. The university is not a high school but a higher institution of learning” (Jaspers 1959: 45).

After Jaspers, there seem to be no major attempts to redefine the role and tasks of the institution of the university along the lines suggested by the classical German idea of the

²¹ Ortega y Gasset in his *Mission of the University* comments on the issue of students and scientists thus: “whether we like it or not, science excludes the ordinary man. It involves a calling most infrequent, and remote from the ordinary run by the human species. The scientist is the monk of modern times. To pretend that the normal student is a scientist, is at once a ridiculous pretension... But furthermore it is not desirable, even under ideal circumstances, that the ordinary man should be a scientist” (Gasset 1944: 75–76). In a similar vein, Max Weber in 1919 gave a lecture at the University of Munich about “science as a vocation” and the academic “calling”, the famous “Wissenschaft als Beruf” (Weber 1944: 54–62).

²² Jerzy Kmita asks a number of important questions about the role of (Florian Znaniecki’s) “creative man of knowledge” in university teaching. His answer is clearly

university. Let us go back now to Jaspers' and Habermas' predecessors and the historical and intellectual circumstances in which the so-called Humboldtian idea of the university was born.

Knowledge for its own sake and Wilhelm von Humboldt

Hermann Röhrs claims in his study on the *Classical German Concept of the University and Its Influence on Higher Education in the United States* that the philosophy of the German universities was dictated by the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. The most significant fruit of this new identity – the classical German concept of the university – “defined the mission of scholarship as the quest for truth within the framework of methodically organised research”. The new university was guided by the spirit of the search for truth, with the involvement of the students as partners and collaborators in the research process (Röhrs 1995: 12–13).²³ In more historical terms, he goes on to argue that

After Halle (which was in fact the Prussian reformed university) had been assigned to the newly established kingdom of Westphalia by Napoleon after the war of 1806–1807, the need for modern foundation arose simultaneously with the plan for internal reform with a well-developed nucleus of scholarship, which would be able to provide guidance and security together. *Compensation for material loss by an intellectual revival* which would be able, through deepening of learning and an awakening of the moral sense, to fortify Prussia's authority in the world, was the objective, selected in the bitterest need; it's a part of the comprehensive reform of the state under Stein, a reform which gives this period its continual fascination as *a model for the renewal of the state by the power of thinking* (Röhrs 1995: 17–18, emphases mine).

Lenore O'Boyle (in “Learning for Its Own Sake: The German University as Nineteenth-Century Model”) describes in general terms the role of the new German idea of knowledge for its own sake, and states that in the 19th century the German university was the most admired institution of higher education in the Western world:

Rortyan: he or she is needed by “the culture of Liberalism”, not only in academic teaching (Kmita 1997: 189).

²³ As J.A.G. Thompson argues in her *The Modern Idea of the University*, “when educational reformers imported the German research model in the late 1800s, with its emphasis on the technical aspects of scholarship and exact research, they failed to import the idealistic philosophy that lay behind the German investigative methods: their search for underlying spiritual unities, and the German concept of *Wissenschaft*, where investigation must proceed in a broad, deep, contemplative context” (Thompson 1984: 25).

Much of this admiration arose from the widespread assumption that Germany's universities exemplified the ideal of pure learning, the disinterested pursuit of truth, knowledge for its own sake. German contemporaries saw the university in these terms, contemporary observers elsewhere agreed, and modern historians have accepted the statement of purpose. Yet one may wonder why such phrases, relatively new ones in Germany, where eighteenth-century thinking had moved in the direction of utilitarianism in higher education, were so easily accepted there or elsewhere. Neither their exact meaning nor their practical implications were clear, and even a cursory examination should have revealed their ambiguities. "Knowledge for its own sake" raised questions about the over-all place of teaching in the university, and particularly about the interest of the state in furthering the universities as schools for future government officials and clerics. What was the connection with the ideal of *Bildung*, or general culture, the full development of a man's capacities? And how to explain that in practice the aim became increasingly identified with an imperative of research and publication (O'Boyle 1983: 3–4).

How are we to explain these developments? O'Boyle provides an explanation on the grounds of the sociology of knowledge. The ideal of "knowledge for its own sake", derived from the German Idealists and Romantics in the context of the emergence of the conceptual grounds for the University of Berlin, was to serve to legitimize the creation of a new profession for the representatives of the lower middle class, for whom the opportunities for upwards social mobility were scarce. Gradually, university teaching became a full-time occupation, professors became salaried university clerks and they could devote all their energies to teaching and doing research at the university. They began forming their own organizations and journals and building their communities of inquiry; they saw each other as peers and wrote with each other in mind; they judged each other in terms of "intellectual merit" rather than social background or personal factors. Members of the emergent academic profession came to use universities to build up their "power to certify competence and thus control their own succession" (O'Boyle 1983: 6).²⁴ Through the system of selection of their own

²⁴ How different it is today, in the age of the "network society". As Zygmunt Bauman stresses, "it was the opening of the information superhighway that revealed, in retrospect, just how much the claimed, and yet more the genuine, authority of the teachers used to rest on their *collectively exercised, exclusive control over the sources of knowledge and the no-appeal-allowed policing of all roads leading to such sources*. It has also shown to what extent that authority depended on the unshared right of the teachers to shape the 'logic of learning' – the time sequence in which various bits and pieces of knowledge can and need be ingested

successors²⁵, university professors gained the power of imposing their judgments in areas vital to those seeking careers. O'Boyle emphasizes the voluntary nature of the transformation processes when she argues that:

The acceptance of the new academic profession in Germany was made evident in the public's willingness to confer money, autonomy, and status. Professors were not rich, but they had security and resources sufficient for a bourgeois existence. Their rights of academic self-government were considerable if not unlimited, as was their ability to define what students must study. Status increased abundantly throughout the century; professors secured a ranking system that paralleled their titles with those of the government bureaucracy (O'Boyle 1983: 8).

The above processes seem to be slowly coming to an end today (though to varying degrees in different systems of higher education and in different parts of the world, with major differences to be born in mind between e.g. developed and developing countries, Anglo-Saxon and Continental European countries, European and European transition countries, including new EU Member states etc).

According to the German model, O'Boyle argues, the professor existed "to write scholarly books and to train successors". Or, as Gerard Delanty put it, "the professors constructed themselves as the representatives of the nation and in this way *made themselves indispensable to the state* for whom they were the 'interpreters' of the nation" (Delanty 2001: 34, emphasis mine). The major question O'Boyle asks is why did the new ideal of the university, and the corresponding model of its professor, succeed in Germany? Why were professors permitted by society to go on working at the university in the way they were working? Her answer is that the new type of university and its teaching was "politically useful, personally congenial, and economically and socially justifiable" in terms of German needs (O'Boyle 1983: 12).

and digested. With those once exclusive properties now deregulated, privatized, floated on the publicity stock exchange and for grabs, the claim of academia to be the only and the natural seat for those 'in pursuit of higher learning' sounds increasingly hollow to the ears of everybody except those who voice it" (Bauman 2001: 130–131, emphasis mine).

²⁵ To recall here Karl Jaspers, and Jürgen Habermas' criticism of his model of the university: "the student is the scholar and scientist-to-be" (Jaspers 1959: 54) and "professors are to train their own successors. The future researcher is the sole goal for the sake of which a university composed of teaching scholars takes on the tasks of instruction" (Habermas 1989: 111). Certainly these assumptions no longer hold, except for top PhDs in some top academic institutions.

Humboldt's university vs. the "Humboldtian" university

Jürgen Habermas claims in his lecture on "The Idea of the University: Learning Processes" that Humboldt and Schleiermacher connect two notions with the idea of the university. The first is related to the question of how modern science and scholarship (*Wissenschaft*) can be institutionalized without losing their autonomy either to the state or bourgeois society. The second is related to their will to explain why it is in the interest of the state itself to guarantee the university an external form with an internally unlimited freedom.²⁶ They found the solution to the first problem in a "state-organized autonomy of science and scholarship that would shield institutions of higher learning from both political intervention and societal imperative" (Habermas 1989: 109). The two notions merged to form the idea of the university and they explain some of the most striking features of the German university tradition:

They make comprehensible (1) the affirmative relationship of university scholarship, which thinks itself apolitical, to the state, (2) the defensive relationship of the university to professional practice, especially to educational requirements that could jeopardize the principle of the unity of teaching and research; and (3) the central position of the philosophical faculty within the university and the emphatic significance attributed to science and scholarship for culture and society as a whole. ... Thus the idea of the university produced on the one hand an emphasis on the autonomy of science and scholarship ... This autonomy, of course, was to be made use of only in "solitude and freedom", at a distance from bourgeois society and the political public sphere. From the idea of the university there also comes, on the other hand, the general culture-shaping power of science in which the totality of the lifeworld was to be concentrated in reflexive form (Habermas 1989: 109).

Both notions mentioned here by Habermas are found in Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Fichte and Schelling, in different versions and with different intensity. Regarding Humboldt's two main texts on the university, both are very practical and relatively short. One is "Antrag auf Errichtung der Universität Berlin" ("Proposal for the Establishment of the University of Berlin") written in 1809 to King Frederick William III and the other is "Über die innere und

²⁶ Kazimierz Twardowski when receiving his honorary doctorate at the University of Poznań (the present author's home university) in 1932, argued that "the opportunity to perform the task specific to the University is conditioned by its *absolute spiritual independence*. ... But those who fund and maintain Universities would totally misunderstand the University if they wished to restrict its work in any way whatsoever by making reservations in advance against some of its results and indicating what results would be desirable. ... For scientific research can develop and bring its work to fruition only if it is completely free and not threatened in any manner" (Twardowski 1997: 11–12).

äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin“ (“On Internal and External Organization of Higher Scientific Establishments in Berlin”) written in 1810 (one could also add to this list a third and minor text, “The Education Program for Königsberg and Lithuania”, written in 1809). It is an interesting historical fact that Wilhelm von Humboldt spent a mere 16 months in the Prussian Ministry and actually did not take part in the German discussions about the institution of the university which had started before the end of the 18th century and lasted until the opening of the University of Berlin in 1810. As Daniel Fallon expressed his reservations,

The tribute lavished on Humboldt is so extravagantly adulatory that the contemporary observer is led to believe that he not only devoted his life to the university but also created the institution alone from whole cloth. ... [T]here is little to suggest that he did much more than synthesize and bring to fruition, through competent management within the government bureaucracy, an idea developed in large measure by others (Fallon 1980: 11).

Nevertheless, for a few generations, academe has been discussing the “Humboldtian” university, as well as the “Humboldtian” idea and ideal of the institution, rarely mentioning the names of Kant, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Fichte and others. The answer given by Fallon lies in the intersection of two historical circumstances. First, Humboldt was a “clear-thinking intellectual with practical government expertise”; second, the *Zeitgeist* gave rise to “the possibility for an individual person, one could say a hero, to unify and resolve authoritatively the tension generated by various passionately held ideas of similar intent but very different detail” (Fallon 1980: 14). It is a very Hegelian explanation but seems to fit the age perfectly: at some point, following Hegel’s teachings, an individual develops a world-historical dimension and it is the spirit (or *Geist*) that makes him a hero (Hegel strongly believed he was such a hero in intellectual matters himself, being complemented in political matters by Napoleon; and a century and a half later, one of the greatest Hegelians of all time, Alexandre Kojève, in his famous *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, believed himself to be an intellectual hero, with Stalin as a complementary figure in politics²⁷). Whatever explanation we present, the facts are there: the “Humboldtian” – rather than any other – university has been a constant point of reference for university reformers in major parts of Continental Europe for two centuries now.

²⁷ I have written a book on the relations between philosophy and politics, and intellectuals and politics, in the Hegel-inspired intellectual climate of post-war France (see Kwiek 1998).

New weapons to continue the struggle lost in the battleground

In Humboldt's "Proposal for the Establishment of the University of Berlin" there are several interesting motives to be highlighted here: the clear link between the university and the state, the will to retain the name "university" for the new institution (in contrast to many other proposals from the period in which the word was avoided as carefully as possible), and the issue of university funding. The timing was not favorable for founding a university, Humboldt argued, considering "recent unfortunate events", and the plan proposed by the Education Section of the Ministry should perhaps be based on an assumption of "calmer and happier times" (Humboldt 1989: 233). The city of Berlin is the only location the King and the Prussian government should think of: "The institution which is focused on everything that university science and arts is composed of cannot be located in any other place than next to the seat of the government" (Humboldt 1989: 235). The new institution should be called the "university" and should "include everything that the notion of the university carries with itself" (Humboldt 1989: 235). Finally, the "fundamental task of its administration will always be the following: to keep trying to gradually ... lead to the situation in which the whole of education will no longer be a burden on the coffers of His Majesty" (Humboldt 1989: 237).²⁸

The text "On Internal and External Organization of Higher Scientific Establishments in Berlin" is much more substantial and we are going to focus more on this official memorandum here. At the university (and we shall stick to this word rather than to "higher scientific establishment", following both Humboldt's original intent expressed in the text briefly discussed in the preceding paragraph and the actual point of departure for the whole process: the University of Berlin) "everything that is occurring in the *spiritual culture of a nation* comes together" (Humboldt 1979: 321, emphasis mine). Universities are destined to "develop science and scholarship in the deepest and widest sense of the terms and transmit it not as an intention but as material intentionally prepared for internal and moral education" (Humboldt 1979: 321). Science is a never-fully-solved problem and therefore it is still in progress; consequently, one can think of the notion of research as suggested by Humboldt as a never-ending story. As Humboldt formulates the point,

²⁸ Looking at university finances from a historical perspective: "A constant element of the history of the universities, and certainly in the Middle Ages and early modern times, is the lack of financial resources. ... there is no doubt that many institutions were hardly able to function decently, and always lived, as it were, below the breadline" (de Ridder-Symoens 1996: 183-184).

In the internal organization of higher scientific establishments, everything is based on the principle that science should be treated as something not discovered and something that *can never be fully discovered* and as such science should be permanently sought (Humboldt 1979: 323, emphasis mine).

Following the emergence of research as a core activity, Humboldt suggests a new relationship between the professor and the student (still retained in Jaspers' idea of the university a century and a half later): "the relationship between the teacher and the student becomes something different than before. The former is not destined for the latter but both exist for science" (Humboldt 1979: 322). The fundamental principle of the new university becomes "knowledge for its own sake": "when the principle of knowledge for its own sake becomes dominant, there will be no need to worry about anything else" (Humboldt 1979: 324). What the higher education establishment in Berlin was supposed to provide was the "moral education of the nation" and its "spiritual and moral formation" (Humboldt 1979: 321). Its guiding principles – recalled by the title of Helmuth Schelsky's book – are solitude and freedom (*Einsamkeit* and *Freiheit*). The role of the state is, first, to make higher education institutions function smoothly and, second, make sure that they do not cease operation, keeping a clear and constant division of labor between them and high schools and keeping in mind that the state "rather disturbs when it intrudes" in the functioning of higher education institutions (Humboldt 1979: 322). The main role of the state, apart from providing funding, is to make the right selection of men for university posts and to give them full freedom to act. Consequently, as he formulated the overriding principle in founding the university in Berlin, "the crux of the matter is the selection of men to be placed in activity" (Humboldt 1979: 324). Humboldt does not seem to be concerned with the details of the functioning of the university. He links the university to the state; as Fallon observes, there is little evidence that Humboldt ever seriously questioned that the state had a "natural responsibility to provide education for the people on all levels, including a sound university. Humboldt's position on this matter was essentially that of the leading intellects of classical Greece, such as Plato" (Fallon 1980: 21–22). His idealistic conception is to support the state in the following manner:

Everything depends upon holding to the principle of considering knowledge a something not yet found, never completely to be discovered, and searching relentlessly for it as such. As soon as one ceases actually to seek knowledge or imagines that it does not have to be pulled from the depths of the intellect, but rather can be arranged in some exhaustive array through meticulous collection, then everything is irretrievably and forever lost. It is lost for knowledge, which disappears when this is continued for very long so that even

language is left standing like an empty casing; and it is lost for the state. This is because knowledge alone, which comes from and can be planted in the depths of the spirit, also transforms character; and for the state, just as for humanity, facts and discourse matter less than character and behaviour (Humboldt quoted in Fallon 1980: 25; Humboldt 1979: 323).

So while the university was to humanize the state, the state had an obligation to control the nature of the university (and in this respect Humboldt appears as a “wise paternalist” (Fallon 1980: 25).²⁹ He states that “the naming of university professors must be held exclusively as the prerogative of the state. ... [T]he nature of the university is too closely tied to the vital interests of the state” (Humboldt quoted in Fallon 1980: 25; Humboldt 1979: 328, emphasis mine). As Frederick Gregory comments on the relationships between the university and the state, “according to Humboldt the duty of the state was to be restricted mainly to providing money and to ensuring freedom to professors in their work” (Gregory 1989: 30)

David Sorkin in his ground-breaking paper about Humboldt and the theory and practice of *Bildung* highlights the political dimension of the plans to establish the University of Berlin:

With the Prussian state at the mercy of Napoleon, *new weapons had to be forged to continue the struggle*. Humboldt advocated a decisive commitment to science and learning which would win back for Prussia some of her lost prestige at home and abroad. While the university would thus serve a political goal, Humboldt endeavored to guarantee its freedom from state interference by arguing that state interference was necessarily deleterious (Sorkin 1983: 65).

²⁹ The assumed link between knowledge-acquisition and moral refinement, or between knowledge and *Bildung*, was strong in the idea of the modern university. As Zygmunt Bauman states, “science – so it was believed – was a most potent *humanizing* factor; so was aesthetic discernment, and culture in general; culture ennobles the human person and pacifies human societies. After the scientifically-assisted horrors of the twentieth century this faith seems laughably, perhaps even criminally, naïve. Rather than entrusting ourselves gratefully to the care of knowledge-carriers, we are inclined to watch their hands with suspicion and fear. The new apprehension found its spectacular expression in Michel Foucault’s exceedingly popular hypothesis of the intimate link between the development of scientific discourse and the tightening of all-penetrating surveillance and control; rather than bring praised for promoting enlightenment, techno-science was charged with responsibility for the new, refined version of constraint and dependency” (Bauman 1997a: 50).

Humboldt and the role of Bildung

Humboldt's variant of the conception of self-formation (*Bildung*) developed in 1809–1810 has been considered the doctrine that “legitimized the alliance of the intelligentsia and the state through the university” (Sorkin 1983: 56).³⁰ In *Limits of State Action* (1791–92), Humboldt formulated the first condition for *Bildung*: the freedom of the individual. But, according to Sorkin's analysis, he had not been able until 1809–1810 to find a way to satisfy the second condition for self-formation: the social bonds enabling the free interchange of individuals: “In 1809–1810, Humboldt found the means to satisfy the second condition of *Bildung*. He endeavored to establish the educational system itself, with the University of Berlin at its pinnacle, as the institutional setting in which the free exchange of varied personalities can occur. This resolution depended upon Humboldt's new conception of the nation” (Sorkin 1983: 61). The resolution of the theoretical problem lay in a single practical move: “his reform of the Prussian educational system aspired to return control of education to the nation” (Sorkin 1983: 61). The theoretical problem posed in *Limits of State Acton* was solved when Humboldt brought together the discovery of the nation and the reform of educational institutions.

The whole concept of *Bildung* had been evolving in the decades preceding the founding of the University of Berlin: since Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, and Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* where the notion was aestheticized from the revival of Hellenic culture onwards. *Bildung*, emerging with neo-humanism, became “Protestant Germany's secular and social ideal” (Sorkin 1983: 69). It evolved in philosophers, reaching its patriotic and political extreme in Fichte's famous *Addresses to the German Nation* of 1808. As Wittrock observes, *Bildung*

[R]eflected broad efforts to come to terms with a period of fundamental change. The University of Berlin was the *institutionalised form of Bildung*, and together they represented an attempt to recreate and reinvigorate national culture after the traumas of military defeat and political disruption. *Bildung* therefore was ... a re-created national culture in a reformed polity (Wittrock 1993: 317).

³⁰ For a different reading of *Bildung*, depriving it of its civic (not to mention, national) dimension, see Andrew Valls' paper on “Self-Development and the Liberal State: The Cases of John Stuart Mill and Wilhelm von Humboldt” (Valls 1999).

The tensions between the individual and the state were clear in all the writings about the university of the period. Education was increasingly seen as a middle ground between the two and consequently the very notion of *Bildung* became transformed to varying degrees in different thinkers.³¹ The university of Berlin became *a model for the renewal of the state by the power of thinking* (Röhrs 1995: 18). Although Humboldt opposed the strong movement for national political education (whose patron was Fichte) and rejected it in his conception of the university, his opposition to Fichte led him to suppress the civic conception of *Bildung* (see Sorkin 1983: 70ff.). So it is a paradox of history that out of two fundamentally opposed notions of self-cultivation, Humboldt's and Fichte's, even though Humboldt had already applied his own notion to the idea of the university by the 1820s, "*Bildung* ... became the first servant of the Prussian state" and Humboldt's educational reform in the end became the basis for what Sorkin called "the capitulation of the intelligentsia to the state".

Sheldon Rothblatt and Björn Wittrock are therefore certainly right when they describe the current apolitical undertones of the Humboldtian tradition: "We can, nevertheless, fully appreciate how an educational philosophy and theory of self-fulfillment *could in time lead away from politics and the responsibilities of active citizenship to become a 'Humboldtian tradition' of intellectual freedom embodied in research*, especially when research was of direct and practical interest to the State" (Rothblatt and Wittrock 1993: 12). The university, over the course of time, ended up totally bereft of any social transformative force and lost all the emancipatory power maintained for it in the German writings of the period. The relations between the new university and the state are clear in Humboldt's memorandum: as Daniel Fallon comments on the issue, "Although a liberal on record as a critic of the authoritarian state, Humboldt wedded the University of Berlin in close and unbreakable union to the State

³¹ As Jean-François Lyotard argued in *The Postmodern Condition* about the emergent new relationships between the suppliers and users of knowledge and knowledge itself: "the old principle that the acquisition of knowledge is indissociable from the training (*Bildung*) of minds, or even of individuals, is becoming obsolete and will become ever more so. The relationship of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by *the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume* – that is, the form of value. *Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold*; it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its 'use-value'" (Lyotard 1984: 4–5, emphases mine).

of Prussia” (Fallon 1980: 19). This relationship seems to have been paradigmatic for the period marking a historical contract binding the state and the university in the modern age.³²

The rebirth of the German nation through education (Johann Gottlieb Fichte)?

I would like to focus now briefly on two works by Johann Gottlieb Fichte: his lectures on “The Vocation of the Scholar” (translated into English as *The Purpose of Higher Education*) and his *Addresses to the German Nation*. Fichte advocated a much more radical organization of the university, compared to Friedrich Schleiermacher in his *Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense*. Fichte’s lectures on the vocation of the scholar were given at the University of Jena in 1794 and his *Addresses to the German Nation* were delivered at the Academy of Sciences building in Berlin, before crowded audiences, during the winter of 1807–1808. He elaborated a detailed plan for the proposed university in Berlin and was appointed its professor and then Rector. In Fichte, the political and social role of the university, and that of scholars, was one of the highest among German advocates of university reforms. The vocation of a scholar, clearly a hero of a Hegelian type, is “the supervision of the real progress of humanity in general, and the constant support of this progress” (Fichte 1988: 54). “The scholar is to supervise the progress of all professions, to further them: could that be done without progressing oneself?”. The scholar is “the *teacher* of humanity” and “the *educator* of humanity” (Fichte 1988: 56, 58, 58). Following a long line of thinking in philosophy in which the philosopher himself or herself gives the example (*exemplum*, beginning with Socrates and later on extending through Kant, Nietzsche and Foucault³³), Fichte states that

³² The influence of Humboldt’s ideas on the traditional relations between the state and the university has been tremendous. A recent example can be provided by the general attitude of the state and the public towards the private sector in higher education in German-speaking countries. As Daniel Fallon comments on this, “to the present day there have never been any private universities in Germany and the presence of successful private universities elsewhere in the world, particularly in the United States, has often raised the question of their complete absence in Germany. The fact that Humboldt ... gave the notion no serious thought is of more than passing interest”. And he goes on to say that Humboldt’s lack of sympathy for a private university stemmed most likely from “his basic conception of the state as a natural part of society, a conception probably little different from that of most of his colleagues” (Fallon 1980: 22, 24). In more general terms, the role of private higher education in Europe is totally neglected in current debates on, and documents related to, the process of the integration of higher education in Europe – which is discussed in Kwiek 2005e and 2006. The difference between the major higher education systems of Continental Europe (with Germany and France in the lead), and several Central European systems (especially Poland, Romania and Estonia) with large and still increasing enrollments in private institutions, is important.

³³ On Nietzsche and education, see Allen and Axiotis 1998.

The ultimate purpose of every human being, as well as of society as a whole, and thus of all the work that scholars do on behalf of society, is the moral ennoblement of the entire human being. It is the duty of the scholar to always keep this ultimate purpose in mind, and to aim at this goal, no matter what he or she does for society. Nobody, however, can successfully work toward moral improvement without being a good person himself or herself. *We teach not only through words, we also teach, much more intensively, through our example* (Fichte 1988: 59, emphasis mine).

Consequently, the scholar must be morally “the most outstanding human being of his or her time” and must represent “the highest possible education of the then current age” (Fichte 1988: 60). Fichte’s understanding of his own role in history follows the same lines when he states about himself that

my labors, too, will influence the course of future generations, the world history of nations that is to come. I am called upon to give testimony of the truth. ... I am a Priest of Truth; I am at her service. I have committed myself to act on her behalf, to take risks for her, and to suffer (Fichte 1988: 60).

Giving birth to a new world and the Heideggerian overtones

Fichte’s *Addresses to the German Nation* were a clear appeal for a spiritual regeneration of the German people through education following the defeat at Jena in 1806 (especially through the methods of the Swiss educator and reformer, J. Heinrich Pestalozzi, see Soëtard 1994). Trying to reconcile the primacy of the moral individual with the primacy of the state, Fichte constructed “a platonic educational structure that transformed *Bildung* into mere pedagogy with a pre-determined patriotic content”, as David Sorkin claims. Fichte’s ideas, Sorkin goes on to argue, were not those of an isolated individual: “he represented the theoretical tip of an iceberg, a middle-class movement for national education” (Sorkin 1983: 70). Napoleon’s defeat of Prussia gave the movement a unified purpose: the defeat of the French (Fichte wanted education to “wipe from our memory the shame that has been done to the German name before our eyes”, Fichte 1979a: 194). Consequently, national education became political and patriotic education. *Bildung*³⁴ itself was subordinated to patriotism and political training:

³⁴ In David Sorkin’s words, “*Bildung* was created by philosophers and belletrists who aestheticised religious and philosophical notions under the aegis of the Hellenic revival. It emerged with neo-humanism in the 1790s and became Protestant Germany’s secular social ideal” (Sorkin 1983: 66). Lenore O’Boyle argues regarding academics that “deep involvement in classical studies and the preoccupation with *Bildung* reinforced the assumption that the

“*Bildung* in Fichte’s hands was a political instrument with a determinate content and preordained goal” (Sorkin 1983: 71). His views need to be discussed as standing in opposition to those of Humboldt who rejected the movement for national political education (especially through the prism of Greek history in his 1807 essay on the “Decline and Fall of the Greek Free States”). As a result of his opposition to the Fichtean movement for national education, Humboldt, as already mentioned, suppressed the civic conception of *Bildung* to avoid similarities with the *Bildung* of national political education.³⁵ As Hermann Röhrs argues, against the background of the French revolution, two antithetical strands of thought need to be remembered here: the philosophy of the Enlightenment against German idealism and the neo-humanist philosophy of education. The discussions about higher education were on how to provide university studies with a basis detached from the narrowly vocational and utilitarian arguments of the Enlightenment:

To speak generally: the fascination of the classical idea of the university lies in the fact that in spite of its striving for intellectual concentration and profundity it is so close to real life that it combines professional and civic elements with a striving for (self-)education and religious certainty. The formation of the state and the personality, together with civic responsibility, are not in conflict, but rather in a relationship in which they expand and complement each other. To this extent the classical idea of the university shows quite modern features of significance for the future. The “further creation of the world” is for Fichte the task of scholarship within the university (Röhrs 1995: 17).

learned formed a kind of aristocracy of intellect. Men of the ancient world were accepted as the embodiment of the classical ideal. They had developed all the capacities natural to man. ... This hope of a satisfying human fulfillment answered a deep need of German society, where the pressures of provincial *bürgerlich* existence were acutely felt” (O’Boyle 1983: 9).

³⁵ It is important to remember that Fichte’s views on the question of state intervention in education evolved dramatically from earlier works such as “The Vocation of the Scholar” (1790s) through *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (1807/8) to their final form in his political theory of *Die Staatslehre* (1813). This evolution, in the most general terms, went from wishing the state to keep away from education as much as possible, confining the state’s action in education to the narrowest limits, to a resolution of the problem of creating the perfect state by educating perfect men through national and state education. As George H. Turnbull argued long ago in “The Changes in Fichte’s Attitude Toward State Intervention in Education”, “this education, if given to the citizens, will make a nation; for it produces the stable and certain spirit which is the only possible foundation of a well-organized state – the spirit which includes that love of fatherland from which spring of themselves the courageous defender of his country and the peaceful and honest citizen. The community in which this education takes place, being self-supporting and independent, will make the pupil realize that he is indebted to it absolutely...” (Turnbull 1925: 238). Turnbull stresses that it is doubtful whether the views of *any other* thinker on the question of the relations between the state and education have gone through such a profound change.

Fichte describes the unique historical circumstances in which *Addresses* were delivered in an elevated, emotional way: “it is the general aim of these addresses to bring courage and hope to the suffering, to proclaim joy in the midst of deep sorrow, to lead us gently and softly through the hour of deep affliction. This age is to me as a shadow that stands weeping over its own corpse, from which it has been driven forth by a host of diseases, unable to tear its gaze from the form so beloved of old, and trying in despair every means to enter again the home of pestilence” (Fichte 1979a: 17–18). Clearly referring to the political situation, he says briefly: “the present is no longer ours. ... [T]he hope of a better future is the only atmosphere in which we can still breathe” (Fichte 1979a: 193–194). Also “the dawn of the new world is already past its breaking” (Fichte 1979a: 18). This is no different from what F.W.J. Schelling says in his *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums* of 1803 (translated into English as *On University Studies*):

An epoch such as our own is surely bound to give birth to a new world. Those who do not actively contribute to its emergence will inevitably be forgotten. The noble task of shaping the future devolves upon the fresh, unspoiled energies of youth (Schelling 1966: 7–8).

The rhetoric of newness, uniqueness, and the feeling of a new world approaching, is very powerful in Fichte’s work (and it was no accident that in 1933 in his *Rektoratsrede* Martin Heidegger referred clearly to the Fichte from *Addresses*³⁶, see Sluga 1993). The role Fichte ascribes to education, and as we shall see in a moment, especially to higher education, is enormous; if German states are not to be completely destroyed from the surface of the world, another “place of refuge” must be found – and this is exactly the role of education. Not

³⁶ Thinking of Fichte and Heidegger: it was Hans Sluga in his excellent book about Martin Heidegger’s involvement in Nazi politics in 1933 (*Heidegger’s Crisis. Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany*, 1993) who asked why Heidegger turned to Fichte in his *Rektoratsrede* when he was assuming the post of the rector of the University of Freiburg and gave the following answer: “Fichte saw himself as living at a moment of historical decision, at a unique turning point in human history”. The Nazis “focused on Fichte, Nietzsche ... who shared their sense that the times had gone astray and that a radical reordering was imminent”. In the winter of 1807 Fichte delivered his *Addresses to the German Nation* under political conditions that the Nazis could consider like their own (Sluga 1993: 30–31). Parallels were seen between Fichte, the defeat of Prussia by Napoleon and the lost battle of Jena; and the Nazis, the defeat in the First World War and the shame of the Treaty of Versailles. The model for Heidegger’s *Rektoratsrede* were Fichte’s *Addresses*. As Sluga argues, “Heidegger’s use of the themes of crisis, nation, leadership, and order derived, in fact, directly from Fichte’s *Addresses*. It was Fichte who put this fourfold thematic together and made it its own bridge for crossing from philosophical speculation to political engagement. ... My point is ... that Fichte was the first philosopher for whom these four conjoined notions had both a philosophical and a political meaning, and that he could bequeath it to later German philosophers” (Sluga 1993: 32). In one of my books I have devoted a whole chapter to Heidegger and the German university in the context of French and American discussions (known as *l’affaire Heidegger*) (Kwiek 1998: 172–233).

surprisingly, education turns out to be “the only possible means of saving German independence” and “education alone can save us from the barbarism and relapse into savagery that is otherwise bound to overwhelm us” (Fichte 1979a: 154, 195). As Hans Kohn remarked over fifty years ago, “of all the German intellectual spokesmen for nationalism in the Napoleonic age none was more eager to lead and mould his people and the world according to his will than Johann Gottlieb Fichte” (Kohn 1949: 319). Fichte did not view Napoleon in the way Hegel or Goethe did, as the embodiment of reason (“reason on horseback”, as Hegel vividly described him in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*). Prussia’s defeat meant the destruction of true *Kultur*, of the spiritual mission of mankind.³⁷

In *Addresses*, Fichte was passionate, emotional and quite unlike the rational disciple of Kant:

Under the stress of the times and of his own emotions, the rational philosopher, the disciple of Kant, rejected the power of reasoned argument; the intellectual challenged the dignity of words and speech; the power of individual sentiment seemed to him a sufficient foundation for truth (Kohn 1949: 333).

He had no clear vision about the political future of Germany though. All he knew with certainty, and believed in passionately, was that only a German national education system could bring power back to the German nation. Education was supposed to provide a solution but only long-term though; in the short-term his recommendation for Germany was to be united and independent from alien influences. As Fichte stated about the German nation in his eighth address, “it must here be obvious at once that only the German – the original man, who has not become dead in an arbitrary organization – really is a person and is entitled to count as one, and that he alone is capable of real and rational love for his nation” (Fichte 1979a: 130). Why the Germans only? The Germans owed this position to the fact that they could understand Fichte’s philosophy. Only the acceptance of true philosophy – i.e. of Fichte’s philosophy – could save the nation, if not the European continent, from the flood of barbarity. Germans as people owe their identity to the uniqueness of the German language; and it is the uniqueness of the German language that Fichte invokes to prove the uniqueness of the people who speak it, which, as one commentator put it, is a “strangely sublime tautology” (Martyn 1997: 311).

³⁷ The origins of the German university are related to historical events and to *discursive* changes: the University of Berlin was born out of the discourses of German philosophy and may be treated as a discursive event, as Adam Schnitzer argues in his “A History of Translation: Schleiermacher, Plato, and the University of Berlin” (2000: 66ff).

In his *Addresses*, written in an antiquarian, Lutheran style (on their style, see again Martyn 1997), he proposes a “total change of the existing system of education” which would be “the sole means of preserving the existence of the German nation” (Fichte 1979a: 13). The existing system in Fichte’s view was “blind and impotent”, the old system was at best able “to train some part of man”, while the new system of education “must train man himself” (Fichte 1979a: 14–15). What is at stake is not “popular” education, but “real German national” education – as well as “the moulding of the race by means of the new education” (Fichte 1979a: 15, 24); what he means is “the fundamental reconstruction of the nation” through new education and “the salvation of the German nation”, as well as a “complete regeneration of the human race” (Fichte 1979a: 17, 156). The remedy for the “preservation” of the German nation is “an absolutely new system of German national education, such as has never existed in any other nation” (Fichte 1979a: 19). The mistake of the old system of education is its reliance upon the free will of the pupil; the new system, by contrast, must completely destroy “freedom of will in the soil which it undertakes to cultivate”. Consequently, it is Fichte’s firm view that all education aims at producing a “stable, settled and steadfast character, which no longer is developing, but is, and cannot be other than it is” (Fichte 1979a: 20). Education for manhood (but also for nationhood) is a “reliable and deliberate art” (Fichte 1979a: 22). The background ideas are put straightforwardly:

If you want to influence him [the pupil] at all, you must do more than merely talk to him; you must fashion him, and fashion him in such a way that he simply cannot will otherwise than you wish him to will. ... The new education must produce this stable and unhesitating will according to a sure and infallible rule. It must itself inevitably create the necessity at which it aims (Fichte 1979a: 21).

The present problem, to sum up, is simply to “preserve the existence and continuance of what is German” (Fichte 1979a: 152). But who ought to carry out the plans presented by Fichte? Fichte’s answer is unmistakable: “it is the State ... to which we shall first of all have to turn our expectant gaze” (Fichte 1979a: 187). The costs of national education are high but proper education will, with the passage of time, make other expenses unnecessary: there will be no need for an army, a reduced need for prisons and no longer any need for reformatories (which will “vanish entirely”, Fichte 1979a: 191). Education alone “can save us from all the ills that oppress us”, Fichte claims (Fichte 1979a: 193). He believes strongly in the emancipatory power of philosophy, especially his own philosophy, and the power of national education. He presented his *practical* ideas about the future university in his “Deducirter Plan einer zu Berlin zu errichtenden höheren Lehranstalt”, written in 1807 (see Fichte 1979b). Humboldt’s

task was to make a choice between the radical proposal of a new organization for higher learning proposed by Fichte and Schleiermacher's more traditional project for a university's organization presented in *Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense*. Humboldt's choice clearly favored Schleiermacher over Fichte, even though it was Fichte who became the first rector of the University of Berlin.

The state, the university, and academic freedom (Friedrich Schleiermacher)

The committee drafting the provisional statutes for the University of Berlin had already asked Schleiermacher in 1808 to prepare the final drafts of these statutes and he used his earlier essay *Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense* for this purpose. The final permanent statutes were only approved in 1817. As Daniel Fallon observed in 1980, Schleiermacher's model university structure became the "basic organizational pattern for all German universities up to the present time. This form of administrative organization ... leaves a substantial controlling share of academic administration exclusively to the state through its Ministry of Culture" (Fallon 1980: 36). Schleiermacher held strong views about science and scholarship as a communal effort; based on his philosophical assumptions, about the role of communication in attaining knowledge, and about the role of the state in education and the relationships between the state and the university. He claimed that science "must be a communal effort (*ein gemeinschaftliches Werk*) to which each contributes a share, so that for its purpose each is dependent on all the rest and can by oneself possess only an isolated fragment and that very incompletely" (Schleiermacher 1991: 2). As far as the fundamental notion of "communication" is concerned, he stressed that communication is the primary law governing every effort to attain knowledge, and "nature itself has quite clearly enunciated this law in the impossibility of scientifically producing anything exclusively without language" (Schleiermacher 1991: 3). Finally, as far as the state is concerned, he saw its close links to the university:

Yet the more extensive such institutions become the more they require means, organs of various kinds, the entitlement of those involved to associate even as such with others in a solid legal fashion. *These goals can be attained only through the state*, to which is thus issued the charge of recognizing, suffering and protecting as a moral person, as we are wont to say, those who have joined with others for the sake of science. ... Still, if the evidence were not so obvious, anyone might have doubts about whether, in viewing the precise connection of all scientific endeavors in a given cultural period, those that have arisen within a certain state would really wish voluntarily to divorce themselves from the

rest and attach themselves so tightly to the state, which is actually alien to them. To be sure, there is also *no lack of striking opposition on the part of the scientific association against such a tight connection to the state* (Schleiermacher 1991: 4, emphasis mine).

Schleiermacher provides one of the clearest pictures of the mutual dependence of the state and the university. The state needs information that is provided by the sciences. The state presupposes that all this information must be “grounded in science” and that only through science can it be reached. Therefore the state “takes on institutions which it would have had to establish if they were not already to be found; ... However, the state works only for itself, historically it is chiefly self-seeking through and through; thus it tends not to offer support to science except on its own terms, within its own boundaries” (Schleiermacher 1991: 6). To describe the nature of the relationships between the state and the university, he refers to the Platonic tradition of philosophers-kings from *Republic* (Schleiermacher was the translator of the entire corpus of Plato into German):

The state customarily has quite a different view from that of scholars regarding the way scientific institutions must be ordered and led, since scholars enter into closer association for the sake of science itself. Certainly the two aspects would be in accord if the state truly wanted to give currency, in the full sense, to the demands of a wise old head: if not to the first demand that those who know shall govern, then to the second that those who govern shall know (Schleiermacher 1991: 8).

The state seems to prefer “real” information rather than (philosophical) speculation (“scientific activities that preponderantly relate to the unity and common form of knowing”). Consequently, members of the scientific community will always strive to work towards independence from the state by trying to remove their association from the coercion and direction of the state and to enhance their own influence upon the state. “Wherever possible they infuse within the state a more worthy and scientific mode of thinking. Where this is not possible they at least seek increasingly to obtain trust and respect” (Schleiermacher 1991: 8). Schleiermacher describes how the university as an institution comes between the other two: the school and the academy. Schools are occupied with “information”; academies, in contrast, presuppose that their members already possess all the qualities necessary in cultivating science. The university’s role is to provide “the idea of knowledge, the highest consciousness of reason” (Schleiermacher 1991: 17). The idea is shared among academics in academies but it does not emerge out of nothing: it is the essence of the university to breed the scientific (philosophical) spirit in young people:

Herein lies the essence of the university. This breeding and education is its charge, whereby it forms a transition between the time when the young are first influenced for science through a grounding in basic information, through authentic learning, and the time when adults in the mature power and abundance of scientific life inquire on their own so as to expand or improve the domain of knowledge (Schleiermacher 1991: 16).

Thus the “business of the university” according to Schleiermacher is the following:

To awaken the idea of science in the more noble youths, who are already supplied with many kinds of information, to aid the idea’s holding sway over them in the area of knowledge to which each chooses to be especially devoted, so that it will become second nature for them to contemplate everything from the viewpoint of science, to perceive nothing for itself alone but only in terms of the scientific connections most relevant to it, and in a broad, cohesive manner bringing it into continual relation to the unity and totality of knowledge, so that they learn to become conscious of the basic laws of science in every thought process and precisely in this way gradually develop in themselves the capacity to investigate, to contrive and to give account (Schleiermacher 1991: 16).

The university is not to assemble more information, or assemble it on a higher level. What is to be presented at the university is the “totality of knowledge” (Schleiermacher 1991: 17). In academies, philosophy (or “speculation”), concerned with the “unity and interconnectedness of all knowledge” and with “the very nature of coming to know”, lies in the background. It is not possible, in Schleiermacher’s view, to cultivate any branch of science without a philosophical³⁸ (or “speculative”) spirit:

the two cohere in such a way that an individual who has not cultivated a definite philosophical mode of thinking will likewise not produce scientifically and originally anything that is either noteworthy or sound. ... Accordingly, the reason philosophy is put way in the background within the academies is that if the sciences are, in academic fashion, to be furthered as a common effort, then *everything of a purely philosophical nature must already have been settled so that almost nothing is left to be said on the subject* (Schleiermacher 1991: 18, emphasis mine).

So academies would not be capable of existing without universities concerned with resolving fundamental, philosophical issues first.

³⁸ As Lyotard describes the structure of the Humboldtian university and the resulting ban on interdisciplinarity: “each science has its own place in a system crowned by speculation. Any encroachment of one science into another’s field can only create confusion, ‘noise’ in the

Philosophical instruction, as in the other German projects of the time discussed in the present paper, is the basis of all that is to be carried on at the university. But transcendental philosophy is not enough: “real” knowledge is needed, and therefore both more advanced information and other information that was not included in the school curricula is provided at the university. As a result, the university is both a “post-school” and a “pre-academia”. But as in other German founding fathers of the university, “the scientific spirit is awakened by philosophical instruction” (Schleiermacher 1991: 19). For the purposes of awakening the scientific spirit in young people formal speculation alone will not suffice but must be embedded in “real’ knowing”. The university “has to embrace all knowing” and “must express its natural internal relation to knowing as a whole” (Schleiermacher 1991: 24). Not surprisingly at the university everything begins with philosophy, but mathematics, geography, natural philosophy and natural history are crucial too (Schleiermacher 1991: 28).

Schleiermacher claims that the traditional division of the university into four faculties – the theological, legal, medical, and philosophical – gives universities a “grotesque” appearance. The “authentic university” is contained “solely in the philosophical faculty”. The three others are specialized schools which the state has either founded or placed under its protection (Schleiermacher 1991: 34). The three “positive” faculties have been passing on information. The theological faculty has been formed for the church; medical schools have been necessary to take care of the human body, and the legal faculty was formed to assist in building up the state. The faculty of philosophy instead

[R]epresents what the scientific union by itself would have established as a university. The other three, in contrast, represent what has arisen on account of a distinctly different kind of need, in face of which the purely scientific direction has an external and subordinate status. The order that they observe among themselves clearly indicates the dominating relation of the state even in public scientific institutions. More accurately viewed, moreover, it displays in part the historical precedence of the church before the state, in part the ancient and laudable habit of putting the soul before the body (Schleiermacher 1991: 35).

But it was not scholars who established the university; anything is possible but only in the future: “if a university ever arises through a free uniting of scholars, then what is now

system. Collaboration can only take place on the level of speculation, in the heads of the philosophers” (Lyotard 1984: 52).

conjoined in the philosophical faculty will naturally find the first place, and the institutes that state and church will wish to join to the philosophical faculty will take places subordinate to it. So long as this does not occur, it would be best for this faculty to separate from the others in that it sits in last place” (Schleiermacher 1991: 36). But no matter what the formal place of the philosophical faculty is, it is still actually the first: “the first, and in fact the head of all the others because all members of the university must be rooted in it, no matter to which faculty they belong” (Schleiermacher 1991: 36). At the outset, all students should be students of philosophy – and they should not be permitted to study anything else in the first year of their academic studies. Similarly, all academics should be rooted in the philosophical faculty.

Now let us refer briefly to a few practical points relating to the functioning of the university; in current vocabulary, these would be interdisciplinarity, tuition fees, student stipends, academic appointments, and accountability. Schleiermacher praises interdisciplinarity when he considers the question why an academic should not be allowed “to enter the territory of another faculty once in a while”. His answer to the question in practical terms is that once one has been allowed to teach, “one must be allowed to exercise the talent in whatever area one chooses” (Schleiermacher 1991: 38). Fees, in the historical version of the time as student lecture fees, are most welcome and natural: “certainly the circumstance of having one’s instruction paid for has never damaged the respect in which a teacher is held by the students Nor can it have seemed degrading to the teacher, since it also diminishes the feeling of one’s dependence on the state” (Schleiermacher 1991: 40). As far as stipends are concerned, the state should never distribute “benefits and inducements” but only “rewards and recognitions of distinction”. This is the only way to avoid humiliations and discriminations (Schleiermacher 1991: 42). As far as staffing policies are concerned, Schleiermacher is not willing to grant the right to appoint university professors to universities and presents a very vivid – and severe – picture of the profession:

Probably no one wants to let it [the university] make every selection by itself. As a group, the universities are so notorious for a spirit of petty intrigue that with such an arrangement no doubt anyone will fear the most harmful effects of party strife, of aroused passions in literary feuds and of personal favoritism (Schleiermacher 1991: 45).

As far as the faculty of philosophy is concerned, its description is not any better: “the universities are themselves constantly the battleground where the strife among the systems is carried on most vociferously and at times to the point of annihilation, so that if the decisions were left up to them the most vehement agitations would have to be feared” (Schleiermacher

1991: 45). The modern notion of accountability is questioned in Schleiermacher's essay when he states that the state may demand an accounting of "property and benefits" and require that these be managed by experts recognized by the state but "everything else is guardianship". The more mature science gets, the less guardianship will be necessary.

The notion of "academic freedom" is as strong in Schleiermacher as in other thinkers discussed here. The complementary figures of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit*, freedom to teach and freedom to learn, can be traced in all of them, providing the basis for the modern idea of the university. These concepts were clearly stated for the first time at the time of the founding of the University of Halle in 1694. Humboldt's contribution was to make clear that the protection of the university was essential, even if viewed in terms of the interests of the state (Fallon 1980: 29). As Herman Röhrs analyzes the concept of "academic freedom" in the context of other underlying assumptions regarding the modern university,

Academic freedom is not a passport to a life of privilege, free from social controls and responsibilities. The freedom from economic privation and cramping civic duties is by no means intended as a class-privilege but as a guarantee of the preconditions for a life devoted to scholarship. ... The independence of the university, academic freedom, the unity of research and teaching, together with the general education which supports them, are all expanding components of the classical idea of the university which must be combined in order to make possible that interior discipline and which make up the essence of the republic of learning in the sense intended by the idealist philosophy. If one of the components is broken off, the whole proves to be incapable of functioning. Academic freedom implies responsible citizens of Academe, capable of judgment, or at least such as develop, under the influence of the freedom of academic studies, the measure of responsible independence which must be the counterpart of freedom if a productive equilibrium is to be attained. If it is to succeed, it must have the scholar as its model; but it must not have regimentation (Röhrs 1995: 26).

The freedom to learn in Schleiermacher is far-reaching, and academic freedom with respect to students is discussed in detail. From a contemporary perspective, the differences are enormous, and the level of freedom postulated by Schleiermacher seems unattainable today. Clearly, the ideas professed by Schleiermacher belong to the period when modern paternalistic views of education were becoming prevalent. What he calls "freedom of students" means that students

are *not subject to compulsion of any kind*; never will they be forced in any direction, and nothing is closed to them. No one orders them to attend this or that course session; *no one can reproach them if they neglect or omit to do their work*. There is no control over any of their efforts save what they themselves may give over to a teacher. They know what will be required of them when they leave the university and what kind of examinations they will then face; but with what zeal they intend to work towards this goal at any given time, and how uniformly or not they distribute it remains completely up to them. Care is taken that they do not lack in aids and resources for going ever deeper into their studies; but even though notice may be taken of how well or poorly they make use of these, at least *they are not held directly accountable to anyone*. In this way they therefore have full freedom to give way to indolence or worthless diversions, and instead of showing a commendable industry *they can irresponsibly waste the finest time of their life* (Schleiermacher 1991: 50, emphases mine).

The purpose of the university is that students should be able to *know*, not to *learn*. Memory is not to be crammed but, instead, “a whole life is to be awakened”, “a higher spirit, the truly scientific spirit”. No coercion is possible – an atmosphere “supportive of a complete freedom of spirit” is necessary (Schleiermacher 1991: 5). “Even the slightest sign of coercion – any conscious influence of an external authority, however gentle – is ruinous” (Schleiermacher 1991: 52). The freedom in question here concerns students’ customs and habits, their way of life, the kind of clothes they wear, the language they use etc. Students “display a common spirit”, and all this is the essence of academic freedom. Student excesses – called here “small discomforts” – have to be regarded by the inhabitants of academic towns as a local evil.

Originally, the tradition of *Lernfreiheit* was more important than that of *Lehrfreiheit*, and its continual importance is reinforced in Schleiermacher’s essay. It was designed to provide students with full independence: freedom to study what they wished to study, to move between classes, disciplines and universities or to stay away from them. It was freedom “to run one’s affairs and live one’s own life. It was a reward for graduation, from the Gymnasium or the *lycée*, into adult life”, as the American commentator of both traditions of academic freedom remarks (Commager 1963). It was Schleiermacher from among the German thinkers of the time who went the furthest in giving freedom to students, and who actually favored the former tradition to the latter one, in an original manner.³⁹ Over the course of time, though, and

³⁹ What does academic freedom mean for students? Let us quote an American voice from the 1960s which seems to follow Schleiermacher’s path very closely: “it means freedom from many of the tyrannies which have been carried over from the high school into the college and the university: the tyranny of attendance, of courses, of classes, of grades, of majors and

especially in recent decades, academic freedom increasingly came to mean freedom to teach, so that the latter tradition became significantly more important. Both in common parlance and in higher education studies today, academic freedom refers much more, if not exclusively, to academics and their freedom to teach and to do research, than to students. This fact testifies how much the idea evolved from its German origins over a period of two centuries.⁴⁰

Philosophy and education (Friedrich W.J. Schelling)

Schelling delivered his *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums* (translated into English as *On University Studies*) at the University of Jena in 1802. As he states in a short “Preface”, “some of the ideas expressed may eventually influence the development of our universities” (Schelling 1966: 3). The book is often described as the best available introduction to Schelling’s thinking as a whole and his contemporaries saw it as a popular exposition of his philosophy (Preface to Schelling 1966: xvii). Even though Schelling was

minors, and of all the rest of the regulations that are entirely suitable for high school or preparatory school but have no real place in a university. Even in academic circles, where freedom is believed in and discussed a great deal, not much is done about these regulations. ... [W]e get more and more requirements, more and more courses, more and more prerequisites for this, that, and the other. ... As long as our graduate schools and our professional schools insist, as they commonly do, on courses, grades, and records, the colleges have very little freedom in which to experiment. Freedom for undergraduates requires freedom from the pressures to conform socially that weigh so heavily on some of them” (Commager 1963: 365).

⁴⁰ Philip G. Altbach in his recent paper on “academic freedom” stressed that it seems “a simple concept, and in essence it is, but it is also difficult to define. From medieval times, academic freedom has meant the freedom of the professor to teach without external control in his or her area of expertise, and it has implied the freedom of the student to learn. The concept was further defined with the rise of the research-oriented Humboldtian university in early 19th century Germany. The Humboldtian concept enshrined the ideas of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit* – freedom to teach and to learn. These concepts of academic freedom gave special protection to the professor within the classroom and the parameters of the field of expert knowledge of the professor. From the beginning, the university was considered a special place, devoted to the pursuit and transmission of knowledge. Academe claimed special rights precisely because of its calling to pursue truth. The authorities, whether secular or ecclesiastical, were expected to permit universities a special degree of autonomy. Academic freedom was never absolute, however. ... In the German university of the early 19th century, academic freedom was expanded as a concept as research became part of the academic mission. The professor was given almost absolute freedom of research and expression in classroom and laboratory. But academic freedom did not necessarily extend to protection of expression on broader political or social issues. Nor was it considered a violation of academic freedom that socialists and other dissenters were not eligible for academic appointments” (Altbach 2003: 13). Today, some countries assume the narrow Humboldtian definition of academic freedom; in others, like the USA, the broader ideal developed mainly by the AAUP (American Association of University Professors) at the beginning of the 20th century prevails.

only twenty-seven when he wrote it the book, together with other works discussed here, forms the actual “charter of the university in the classical sense” (Röhrs 1995: 18) and deserves our highest attention.

As already mentioned, Schelling shared general views about the role of philosophy at the university, the relations between the state and the university and about the unity of teaching and research with Fichte, Schleiermacher and Humboldt. His sentiments about his time and his own role in contemporary Germany were closest to those of Fichte; as already mentioned, at the beginning of his book he claims in a manner close to Fichte, but also to the young Hegel from *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that “an epoch such as our own is surely bound to give birth to a new world. Those who do not actively contribute to its emergence will inevitably be forgotten” (Schelling 1966: 7–8). As the editor of Fichte’s book remarks, “the apocalyptic sentiment expressed here is characteristic of Schelling’s philosophy which implies a desire to change the world, although Schelling himself scarcely ever offers any practical suggestions to achieve this metamorphosis. In his writings prophetic utterances about impending universal renewal occur constantly” (Editorial notes to Schelling 1966: 154). Why should a philosopher discuss universities rather than the philosophies taught there? Schelling provides the following rationale:

It might seem that a philosopher should confine himself to drawing a picture of the body of scientific knowledge and formulating general methodological principles, without going into organizational matters or the temporal forms of our institution. However, I hope to show that *these forms are not arbitrary, that they reflect the spirit of the modern world*, and that they make it possible for the disparate elements of modern culture to interpenetrate (Schelling 1966: 17, emphasis mine).

Schelling wonders whether it is proper to make *philosophical* demands on the universities “when everyone knows that they are instruments of the state and must be what the state intended them to be” (Schelling 1966: 22). The state is able to do whatever it wishes with the universities, Schelling claims – it can “suppress” them, or transform into “industrial training schools”. But the point is that the state at the same time “cannot intend the universities to be real scientific institutions without desiring to further the life of ideas and the freest scientific development” (Schelling 1966: 23). The relationships between the universities and the state are delicate; Schelling further developed his views in the form of a digression in a note:

The usual view of the universities is that they should produce servants of the state, perfect instruments for its purposes. But surely, such instruments should be formed by *science*.

Thus, to achieve such an aim through education, science is required. But science ceases to be science the moment it is degraded to a *mere* means, rather than furthered for its own sake. It is certainly not furthered for its own sake when, for instance, ideas are rejected on the grounds that they are of no use in ordinary life, have no practical application, are unrelated to experience (Schelling 1966: 23).

Universities should “further culture in the universal sense”, apart from serving as nurseries for knowledge (Schelling 1966: 28). They need, apart from the voluntary support of the state in its own interest, “*no further regulations than those rooted in the Idea itself*. Wisdom and prudence here agree: it is necessary only to do what the Idea of a scientific institution prescribes in order to make the constitution of a university perfect”. Not surprisingly, Schelling’s conclusion is that “universities can have only an *absolute purpose* – beyond that they have none” (Schelling 1966: 29, emphasis mine).

A historical hero: a short digression

Let us make now a short digression and focus on the issue of the role of the philosopher as cultural educator in periods of great historical transformations. The social role some German thinkers at the turn of the 19th century assumed and presented as universal deserve our attention, especially in the case of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.⁴¹ The way they viewed their philosophies, and their roles in changing (German and universal) history, has found much more radical imitators in the 20th century, mostly in pre-war Germany and post-war France. Consequently, bloody revolutions, freedom-depriving totalitarianisms, and the naked violence of the brave new worlds of the 20th century, have overshadowed philosophical modernity and pushed some 19th century ideas to extremes. Current questions about the role of philosophy and philosophers in history stretch from Plato with his notion of “philosophers-kings” to

⁴¹ Thinking of Fichte, let us recall what Hans Sluga claimed in his book on Martin Heidegger: “Fichte concluded that *he himself* was occupying a *pivotal place in world history*. ... He convinced himself, finally, that his own philosophy could be compared in its world-historical meaning only with the four Gospels and that his own role was similar to Christ’s” (Sluga 1993: 36, emphasis mine). Fichte appealed to the Nazis because of his nationalism, his elevation of Germanness to a metaphysical essence and his concern with the well-being of the whole nation. “Of even more significance to them, however – Sluga goes on to argue – was probably the fact that Fichte saw himself as living at a moment of historical decision, at a unique turning point in human history. ... It was natural ... that German philosophers should turn back to Fichte in their search for historical models. As they stood up to declare their allegiance to the Nazis, they found in Fichte’s *Addresses* a template. This was true even of philosophers who otherwise held no particular allegiance to German idealism, who identified

Martin Heidegger with his notion of *Führung*, coined during the period of his involvement with Nazism and his ideas for using the German university as the basis for a new world-historical revolution (like the post-war French leftist intellectuals). What I have in mind is the conviction often shared in the 20th century, but also traced in the German texts discussed here, that in moments of breakthrough in history, moments of historical shifts, *philosophers and philosophy* have to play some *specific and decisive role*, as if philosophers have to answer history's call. If they are not up to a particular task or do not treat the historical moment seriously, civilization would face catastrophe. Whenever the philosopher feels a higher need for action, a desire to be actively involved in changing his surrounding world, to accelerate historical events and to guide the leaders of society ("to lead the leaders", as Martin Heidegger put it in 1933), he himself risks falling into the trap of philosophy/politics. And the first moment at which, I suppose, an alarm should go off, and which in the 20th century nevertheless it often failed to do so, is the suddenly appearing conviction that one is taking part in unusual events, is living in a *critical moment*, in which the scales of history can go either way. A widespread world crisis, the absolute uniqueness of the moment, begets extreme modes of behavior;⁴² clocks start to measure out a new time. After the revolution, the philosopher can argue, there will be a "brave new world" that will legitimize the present suffering. Until then, the revolutionary cause requires of him immediate decisions, as does every unique moment in human history. It requires of him "constructive" thinking and acting, it requires his engagement. Yet, such participation ought to have been refused outright. The passage of time has confirmed that those intellectual exiles were right who did not believe in some sort of mission for themselves during these junctures of history (and in our context, Karl Jaspers stands in sharp opposition to Martin Heidegger, and it is the different political and existential choices that they made that provided the impetus for Jaspers' reworking of his pre-war lectures about the university into *The Idea of the University* in the post-war form discussed in this paper).

It may be, as Michel Foucault suggests, that one needs to have great humility to acknowledge that perhaps our time is not the only one when everything begins and ends anew. Perhaps

themselves instead with the thinkers of the later epoch of German philosophy. Heidegger was one of these" (Sluga 1993: 31).

⁴² I am thinking of Heidegger here, or the young Paul de Man in war-torn Belgium, but the edges of my consciousness are reinforced by Hegelian reflections on the French Jacobians and their terror and the interpretations of e.g. Charles Taylor (in *Hegel and Modern Society*) or Joachim Ritter (in *Hegel and the French Revolution. Essays on the "Philosophy of Right"*), see Taylor 1979 and Ritter 1982. On the de Man "affair" in a French philosophical context, see Kwiek 1998.

Hegel was right when he said that peaceful times are “blank pages in history”. Perhaps it is natural that a faster pace of events imposes a faster pace of reflection, that revolutionary times require revolutionary thinking, during which temptation can often prove irresistible. However, such a “heroic” vision of the world and of the philosopher appeared in philosophy no earlier than Fichte, Schelling and especially, in fuller form, Hegel (and in the aftermath of the French Revolution in general). It was in *Phenomenology* that he acknowledged that history was at a turning point: “it is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era.” Likewise, one can find in Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* the same belief of participating in great politics and great changes; in a great crisis and of Nietzsche’s own role – individual and philosophical – to be played in it; in setting the clock to a new time. It is, I suppose, an intellectual structure common to much of German philosophical thought, where one can easily find such passages in *The Communist Manifesto* or Marx’ most famous thesis on Feuerbach (according to which changing the world is better than merely interpreting it, or *Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert; es kommt aber drauſen, sie zu verandern*). Current philosophy seems to be perfectly aware of the dangers outlined above because it has learnt the lesson of extremes from the modern odyssey of culture, in which a leading role was played precisely by philosophy. Although the extreme forms of the beliefs described above did not appear in the German philosophers discussed here in the context of the classical German idea of the university, their softer versions with respect to their own role as philosophers in history and to the role of the university in transforming both Germans and humanity as such can be clearly seen.⁴³ Because no social and political excesses followed, in contrast to the 20th century, the history of the 19th century ideas and institutions analyzed here

⁴³ I have discussed in detail Martin Heidegger’s views on the university expressed in 1933 in his published writings – and actions taken – after the Nazis had won the elections and took power in Germany, and beyond (see Kwiek 1998). The analysis of Heidegger’s vision of the role of the university in transforming society, nation, and possibly humanity – as well as his own role in leading politicians to national renewal and national regeneration through his philosophy – goes well beyond the scope of the present book but certainly deserves our highest attention. It is no accident that Allan Bloom’s major points of reference in his criticism of the American university in *The Closing of the American Mind* are Plato’s Socrates and Heidegger’s “Rectorial Address”. We have a new Germany, Heidegger argued, and we have the university which is about to assume new tasks, but for the time being real education takes place in the *Wissenschaftslager*, the knowledge camp – because the revolution has not reached the university yet (*In Deutschland ist Revolution, und wir müssen uns fragen: ist Revolution auch auf der Universität? Nein*). But it is at the Heidegger-inspired, reformed university that the education of future state leaders of the new Germany will take place. In Heidegger, the university and its ill-famed “academic freedom”, current “research” carried out and current “teaching” provided there – all this had to be transformed through a “bitter fight in the spirit of national socialism”. See especially Guido Schneeberger’s edition of

“marks one of the few instances in which a philosophical anthropology formed the explicit basis of a successful program for social change”, as Carla R. Thomas remarked (Thomas 1973: 219).

Conclusions

In discussing current and future missions and roles of the institution of the university, it can be useful to revisit its foundational (modern) German idea. In many places, for a variety of internal and external reasons, what we call the “Humboldtian” tradition of the university has been forgotten in practice for a long time. The university is a specific, historically-rooted institution, proud of its origins and its traditions. In thinking about its future it can be constructive to reflect on the evident current tensions between traditional modern expectations of the university (on the part of both society and the state), and the new expectations intensified by the emergence of knowledge-based societies and market-driven economies. From the perspective of the tensions between old and new tasks of the university, looking back at the turning point in its history could turn out to have more than a historical dimension. It might happen that we may need to look for patterns of how to reformulate the roles of the institution (for both internal and external reasons – the evolution of the university and the evolution of the societies and economies it is serving), and the German philosophy of the period could teach us interesting lessons. We know the odyssey of the modern university (in its “Humboldtian” version): the current new ideas about social missions, cultural tasks and economic and political roles of the university (especially as being elaborated by the European Commission, OECD, UNESCO or the World Bank) are increasingly distant from their modern forms discussed in this paper. While discussing rapidly transforming European universities, and trying to answer the basic questions societies have always been asking about them, let us not forget about the modern story of changing relationships between the university and the state which had started back 200 years ago, and about lessons it could teach us today.

Heidegger’s works from the period, *Nachlese zu Heidegger. Dokumente zu seinem Leben und Denken* (Berne 1962).

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