

Bachelor of What, Master of Whom? The Humboldt Myth and Historical Transformations of Higher Education in German-Speaking Europe and the US¹

MITCHELL G. ASH

Introduction

Public debate on higher education reform today is dominated by a variety of competing, highly simplified views about what higher education institutions, particularly universities, are or should become. To a surprising extent, these views are based upon even more highly simplified characterisations of university history. The claims in question have been repeated so often that they have become clichés. They are accepted by most players in the game, not only by politicians or university rectors and presidents seeking convenient rhetorical formulae for the addresses they must give at jubilees and other important occasions, but also by many specialists in higher education policy research or in social studies of higher education. Historical research has challenged all these conventional claims Ash (Ed., 1997; McClelland, 2005; Rüegg, 2004). A central purpose of these remarks is to acquaint readers outside the field of higher education history with the most important of these challenging results. A second goal is to try to bring out some of the implications that a revision of such clichéd views of higher education history might have for current policy debates — or at least for the public constructions of such debates.

In the first part I will examine what I call ‘The Humboldt Myth’, describe how it came into existence and ask why it remains so powerful, despite the fact that it has very little relation to realities on the ground, especially in German-speaking Europe. In part two, I will ask to what extent it is actually correct to say — as is so often the case — that the American universities adopted the ‘Humboldtian’ or ‘German’ university model. I will argue that this can only be maintained with serious qualifications, even though some contemporaries wrote otherwise. In part three, I will ask to what extent we can speak of an ‘Americanisation’ of higher education in German-speaking Europe after 1945. I will argue, briefly, that such ‘Americanisations’ did happen to a limited extent, but were at least as often asserted or feared as carried out. Finally, I will try to state some implications of all this history — and the confusions, misunderstandings and mythologies at work — for current reform discussions, in particular for the Bologna process.

‘Humboldt’ as Myth — The Invention of a Tradition

The history of the ‘classical’ German research university is generally thought to have begun with the founding of the University of Berlin in 1810 (Anderson,

2000). For the past 100 years, the name of Wilhelm von Humboldt has been used as a symbol for this 'classical' model of the research university. Its components have been described quite differently in different contexts, but the following four elements appear to be common to all descriptions:

Freedom of teaching and learning (*Lehr- und Lernfreiheit*). Central here is that Humboldt was a liberal in the traditional sense. He believed in individual freedom, and therefore argued that students had as much right to choose their instructors and subjects as professors had to decide what and how they taught. This implied a radical break with any form of set curriculum.

The unity of teaching and research (*Einheit von Lehre und Forschung*). For Humboldt and those who cite him, learning is a collaborative enterprise, in which 'the professors are not there for the students, but rather both are there for science (and scholarship)' (Humboldt, 1809/1990, p. 274).

The unity of science and scholarship (*Einheit der Wissenschaft*). For Humboldt at least there was no fundamental distinction in principle between the natural sciences and the humanities, because the concept of *Wissenschaft* applies to both.

The primacy of 'pure' science (*Bildung durch Wissenschaft*) over specialised professional training (*Ausbildung, Spezialschulmodell*). Humboldt and those who cite him claim to understand science and scholarship as processes of inquiry — 'not a finished thing to be found, but something unfinished and perpetually sought after', as he put it — not the discovery and repetition of things to be learned from textbooks, but an approach to learning, an attitude of mind, a skill and a capacity to think rather than specialised knowledge (Humboldt, 1809/1990, p. 274).

Each of these principles appears admirable in itself, but they all become problematic once we try to determine what they actually meant in historical practice (Schubring, 1991). More important for this discussion is another point. The claim that 'the modern research university' was founded in Berlin according to Humboldt's ideals is also problematic for the following reasons:

1. The conception of the university symbolised by Humboldt's name had many authors and was not even linked with the person of Humboldt until the turn of the 20th century.

More prominent at the time were names like Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Daniel Schleiermacher, Johann Gottlob Fichte and others (Vom Bruch, 2001. On the central role of Schleiermacher, see Rüegg, 1997. For a collection of contemporary texts, see Müller (Ed), 1990). Sylvia Paletschek (2001) has shown that Humboldt was known in the 19th century as a founder of modern language studies, not as a university reformer. Humboldt's actual writings on university education remained unpublished at first, and were therefore not widely known until the late 19th century. Thus, the often repeated claim that it was 'Humboldt's' university that was internationally admired, imitated or exported in the 19th century, and then spread throughout the world (Krull, 2005) is in a literal sense untrue. Using such formulations as accepted clichés makes it difficult to ask just what higher education reformers, for example in the Habsburg Empire from 1848 onwards,

actually had in mind and where they got their models for university reform, given that they had no knowledge of or access to Humboldt's memoranda. Recent studies suggest that the narrow linkage of 'the' German research university model to the name and ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt is a myth, a tradition invented around 1900 for reasons specific to the situation of the German university at that time (vom Bruch, 1997; Paletschek, 2001; see below).

2. Certain institutional structures and practices associated with the modern research university arose before the founding of the University of Berlin, while others arose much later.

For example, the seminar as a teaching and research institution originated in Göttingen before 1800 (vom Brocke, 1999). Humboldt studied at Göttingen, and the seminar for classical philology there was one of the models for his ideal of the unity of teaching and research. Other institutional structures and practices associated with the modern research university arose long after 1810. The natural scientific and medical research institutes with their own lecture halls, teaching laboratories, and the associated division of labour in the production of new knowledge emerged in the 1860s and 1870s. Contemporaries denounced them as 'knowledge factories', and they would surely have astounded Humboldt himself, had he lived to see them at work (Perkin, 1984; Schubring, 1991).

3. The primacy of 'pure' science removed from practical concerns was never uniformly established as a governing policy principle throughout the German-speaking universities.

Scientific medicine, for example, was never divorced from, but always linked to clinical training, at least rhetorically and often enough in fact as well (Coleman & Holmes, 1988; Lenoir, 1992, esp. pp. 53–106; Tuchman, 1993). The same is true for the other two traditional university faculties, law and theology.

The claim has greatest credibility, on the surface at least, for the so-called Philosophical Faculty. It was indeed in Berlin that this part of the university first acquired independent and co-equal status with the traditional faculties, though this occurred not under Humboldt, but ten years later (Mittelstraß, 1994). Yet even in this Faculty linkage to the state credentialing system was firmly established by way of the state examination for secondary school teachers. Professors in the relevant disciplines of the Philosophical Faculty sat on the examination boards and often drafted the exams. This part of Humboldt's contribution, and this alone, was known to contemporaries, because it resulted from the Prussian school reform that he indeed originated, which established the Gymnasium certificate (*Abitur*) as the formal entrance requirement for university study.

The brilliance of Humboldt's idea was the claim that basic science (*Wissenschaft*) was itself practical in humanistic teaching. In context, this meant that Gymnasium teachers with university training were best fitted to prepare secondary school students for university (Ringer, 1969). Thus, it is not at all peculiar, and yet profoundly ironic, that one of the earliest professional associations for academic scholars and teachers, the Association of German Philologists and School Men, founded in 1838, was the creation of classicists — members of the very discipline that Humboldt expected to embody his ideal unity of knowledge (La Vopa, 1990).

The point is that there was a fundamental intellectual tension, *and at the same time a tight institutional linkage*, between the ideal of 'pure' science and the practical

societal function of the modern German university from the beginning. The tension increased as the 19th century went on, and the natural sciences and laboratory medicine acquired more weight in the research system, while their representatives struggled with the philologists for space in the Gymnasium curriculum.

4. The rediscovery of Humboldt's original writings on higher education policy in the late 19th century coincided with a perceived crisis of the very system he was later supposed to have created.

As contemporaries noted, by the turn of the 20th century, both the unity of teaching and research and the primacy of 'pure' science — insofar as they had ever existed — were in deep trouble, both in the natural sciences and in the humanities. The key slogans of that time seem eerily familiar today: contemporaries complained about overcrowded lecture halls, seminars and laboratories; university enrolments had indeed increased nearly fivefold, from about 13,000 in 1850 to 64,657 in 1914 (Titze, 1983). That does not sound like very much now, but appears to have been frightening at the time. They warned against the danger of an 'intellectual proletariat' of unemployable academics, or an 'invasion' of foreigners (and Jews), and finally they diagnosed an 'exodus of research from the university' (vom Bruch, 1997).

At just this time, in 1899, the German technical academies acquired the right to grant doctoral degrees. The claim that science was becoming a matter of large-scale institutionalised knowledge production (*Großbetrieb der Wissenschaft*) rather than of individual creativity also comes from this period; its author was not a natural scientist, but the theologian Adolf von Harnack (1905), and he was referring not to industrial laboratories but to the great editorial projects and source collections organised by classical philologists and scholars of ancient history at the Prussian Academy of Sciences.

The response to all this in the natural sciences was to move 'Humboldt' to the post-doc level by establishing the Kaiser Wilhelm Society for the Advancement of the Sciences in 1911. This continued an already established tradition of institutionalising innovations by founding new institutions, while leaving the institutional structure of the university more or less as it was. In the humanities, the name of Humboldt became a symbol for a 'renewal' of the supposedly 'classical' humanistic German university ideal — which meant in practice that the adherents of that (mythical) ideal remained at odds with modernity for the next 100 years.

5. The tension between the mythical 'Humboldtian' ideal and the reality of modern higher education therefore did not begin in the 1960s, as many, especially politically conservative critics have assumed, but much earlier.

That tension, and the mythical discourse around 'Humboldt' have continuously shaped, and in many ways continue to distort higher education policy debates in German-speaking Europe. Genuine university reform appears finally to be under way, both in Germany and in Austria, but the process may be difficult, because many of Humboldt's ideals retain much of their attraction today.

How can this be so, given that Humboldt's ideals were created for a university at which at most 1% of a given age group studied, and therefore bear little relation to the realities of present-day mass higher education, especially in German-speaking Europe? The following reasons account to some extent, if not fully, for the continued power of the 'Humboldt Myth':

1. 'Humboldt' is a symbol for the autonomy and predominance of the professoriate in university affairs.
2. 'Humboldt' is a symbol for the primacy of basic over applied research.
3. 'Humboldt' is symbolic of ideals in which many teachers (and even some students) sincerely believe, and try, despite enormous obstacles, to achieve. This is true in particular of the unity of teaching and research. Myths need not be lies, but can instead constitute 'corporate identity', albeit in the form of a 'counter-utopia'.

Did American Universities Adopt the 'Humboldt' or any 'German' Model?

It is often claimed, not least by American scholars of the subject, that German universities served as models for the American research university, which later went on to dominate the world science system. German writers on the subject share this view; indeed, Rüdiger vom Bruch (1997) recently suggested, with deliberate irony, that Humboldt found his true home in America. The relevance of that claim to current debates on the alleged 'Americanisation' of German-speaking higher education in the context of the Bologna process seems clear. If this claim were true, 'Americanisation' would mean nothing less than re-importing the real 'Humboldt' back to his European homeland. I will return to that point. Here, I want simply to ask to what extent this often-repeated claim, or cliché, is actually correct.

As context for this discussion I cite a statement made by the historian Harold Perkin 20 years ago. He argued that the German university influenced the worldwide dispersion of the research ideal 'for reasons that owe more to accident than to real understanding of what was being imitated' (Perkin, 1984, p. 33). A recent volume with the title 'Humboldt international' (Schwinges (Ed), 2001) shows that, while many countries indeed looked to Germany as a model for the modernisation of their university systems in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was no longer 'Humboldt's' university by that time — if 'Humboldt's' university ever existed! And what they took from 'the' German model had more to do with local circumstances than with the German model. That is certainly true for the US, to which I now turn.

The following central points seem important to emphasise here:

1. The American universities which emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were far too diverse to be described as imports from any single country. Rather, they were unique creations which combined elements from the British, German and other European university systems with local inventions (Turner, 2001; see also Shils & Roberts, 2004).

Specifically, the first or Bachelor degree programme was and remains a specifically American variant of the English college rather than the German Gymnasium or university curriculum. Its purpose was never to train future researchers or professionals, but to build character; thus it had moral or citizenship, rather than purely scientific or professional goals. Around 1900, supporters of liberal arts undergraduate education spoke of preparing 'well rounded men'. Perhaps this goal did not apply at the already numerous women's colleges; be that as it may, this ideal persists at least in nostalgic form until today. Later, 'general education' was substituted for character formation as the ideal aim. But the point remains valid nonetheless that 'science' in Humboldt's sense was never central to the pedagogy of American undergraduate education. It is true enough that German idealisations

of ‘Humboldt’ also stressed the claim that systematic scholarship builds character — this is what *Bildung durch Wissenschaft* is supposed to mean. As noted above, however, Humboldt himself said that neither teachers nor students should be there for themselves, but rather for *Wissenschaft*.

In the US, insofar as ‘German’ elements entered higher education at all, they did so in graduate education, which was added on to the first degree, whereas the doctorate was then and remained for many years the only tertiary level degree in Germany and Austria. Even Johns Hopkins University, which initially offered the Ph.D. only in imitation of the German model, soon added the Bachelor degree, in order to conform with its American sister institutions. However, as is well-known, even graduate degree programmes in the US have always been more highly structured than in Europe. A two-degree system (*Magister* or *Diplom*, then the doctorate) was introduced into German-speaking universities only in the 1960s and 1970s and is now the norm there as the Bologna process begins; but the first degree in Germany and Austria continues to be much more oriented — at least ideally, if not always in practice — towards research training than is the case in the US. Though it is surely correct that leaders in American higher education at that time often cited the German universities as world leaders, overemphasis on the German origins even of American graduate education distorts historical reality.

2. In any case, the original cliché is based on a nearly exclusive focus on American elite, mainly privately-funded, universities.

The symbolic figures are men like Daniel Coit Gilman of Johns Hopkins or Charles W. Elliott at Harvard (Thwing, 1928; Veysey, 1965; Herget, 1992). It is surely correct that a very high percentage of the faculty at Hopkins as well as other new American graduate degree programmes had studied at German institutions (Fallon, 2001, p. 101). Yet even at the elite institutions the introduction of graduate degrees did not escape criticism. America’s great philosopher, William James, denounced ‘the Ph.D. octopus’ (James, 1918). However, once we ask to what extent the publicly-funded universities in the US, which arose at the very same time as the famous private institutions, actually followed the lead of Harvard, Yale, or Johns Hopkins, a serious gap becomes clear.

One example will suffice here. In 1905, Edmund S. James, then President of the University of Illinois, published a paper entitled ‘The Function of the State University’ in the journal *Science* (James, 1905). There, he cited the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, which granted substantial amounts of public land for the establishment and support of higher education institutions ‘whose leading object shall be . . . to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts . . . in order to promote *the liberal and practical education* of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life’ (p. 609; emphasis mine). In the succeeding decades, he added, the state of Illinois had ‘provided for the other departments necessary to transform the original college of agriculture and the mechanic arts into a full-fledged university of the modern type’ (p. 610). As he noted with pride, this modern university included colleges of liberal arts (with its associated graduate schools), law, medicine and dentistry, as well as schools of music, library science, pharmacy, and education. Given this structure, it was only logical that James defined the university, not as an institution of pure learning and research, but rather as ‘the institution which furnishes a special, professional, technical training for some particular calling’ — training which,

however, should be ‘scientific in character and must be based upon adequate preliminary preparation of a liberal sort’ (p. 612).

Needless to say, this was precisely the opposite of Humboldt’s utopia. Indeed, it was not in the elite private institutions, but in the public universities that the Bachelor degree became a first professional qualification in some fields, such as nursing, education, or social work. Perhaps it will be no surprise when I now argue that

3. Not the adoption of the ‘German’ model — ‘Humboldtian’ or not — but certain unique features of American higher education have accounted for its extraordinary success.

I will list three such features here, without claiming to be exhaustive.

- a. Institutional openness and diversity.

Simply listing the types of schools from a recent comprehensive history of American higher education (Lucas, 1994) is sufficient to make this point: State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, Municipal Colleges and Universities, Women’s Colleges, Black Colleges, and Catholic or other confessional institutions. Daniel Fallon (2001, p. 100) has argued that American reformers understood from the beginning that a modern higher education system would and should combine broadly accessible liberal arts education with graduate training concentrated in a small number of research-oriented institutions. Perhaps most significant in this context are the women’s and historically Black colleges, many of which were founded before 1900. These were not conceived as research institutions, and there is little or no indication that they were influenced by the ‘German’ model. We might also ask whether confessional institutions such as Georgetown, Notre Dame or the Catholic University of America followed the ‘German’ model or took their cues instead from Catholic institutions elsewhere in Europe, but that would lead us too far afield.

- b. The combination of professional programmes and academic research departments, placed alongside one another in the same institution rather than rigidly separated, as in German-speaking Europe.

This institutional approach undermined the elitist ideal of ‘pure’ science, without eliminating the tension between basic and applied research. Actually, as Daniel Kevles (1979) showed long ago, the ideal of ‘pure’ science was replaced in the US by the notion of ‘best science’, but, even then, critics, citing untutored geniuses like Thomas Edison, argued that such elitism was foreign to American democratic, pragmatic values. Over time, professional training programmes (such as schools of education, social work, or even hotel management) were also introduced into private institutions. The ultimate result was what Clark Kerr (2001/1964) once called the ‘multiversity’; later he spoke instead of a ‘pluralistic’ university (Kerr, 1991). As such structures became common in both private and public institutions, they fostered an awareness that in modern societies there was no distinction in principle between the scientific profession and any other.

- c. Combination of outstanding research at the upper levels with broad accessibility to basic higher education.

According to definitions used in the US census, the US crossed the threshold to mass secondary education (50% of citizens aged 25 years or older reporting more

than eight years of schooling) in 1910, and the threshold to mass higher education (50% of citizens aged 25 years or older reporting more than 12 years of education) in 1968 (Fallon & Ash, 1999).² Of course, this definition of 'higher education' includes undergraduate institutions and the so-called 'junior colleges', because these are understood to be higher education institutions in the US. Limiting the count to research universities would achieve seemingly easier comparability with Europe, but at the cost of severe distortion, since American research universities also offer undergraduate education. Research universities are far smaller in number than other American higher education institutions, but they are among the largest in enrolment. In the Federal Republic of Germany and in Austria enrolment in higher education institutions increased more than tenfold between 1950 and 1990, and yet, by this measure, the threshold of mass higher education in German-speaking Europe has not been crossed, although the transition is clearly far advanced.

More recent developments, such as increasing racial and ethnic diversity of student bodies and the spectacular increase in women's participation, have only built upon and complicated the structural basis already described, rather than changing it in any fundamental way. As a result, American universities have come to deal with the three purposes of the university — teaching, research, and professional training and certification — in a way that is quite different from that supposedly practised in German-speaking Europe (Clark, 1995). In the American system, as in Germany and Austria, the same institution performs all of these functions; but in the US the functions of teaching and front-line research were (and remain) unified, if at all, primarily at the graduate level.

4. An additional element of the overemphasis on the impact of 'German' models is a particular conception of the impact of the émigrés from Nazism after 1933.

Space does not permit a full account of this issue; a few words must suffice to make my point. There can be no doubt about the triply destructive results of Nazism for the German and Austrian universities, as well as for science and scholarship more generally in those countries (for an overview, see Ash, 2003).

- (1) 'Decapitation' or rather 'self-decapitation', though the impact of the Nazis' dismissal of Jewish scholars and scientists differed across disciplines.
- (2) The failure of German and Austrian university teachers to resist the Nazi dictatorship in any meaningful way. Their failure to protest against mass dismissals of colleagues labelled as Jews and their hasty rush to collaborate with the regime undermined the credibility of the ideal of academic freedom that Humboldt had allegedly propagated, revealing it to be the mythical utopia that it had always been. If we redefine 'academic freedom' to mean the autonomy of the full professors as a corporate body, in conformity with the way it was understood at the time, even this was maintained under Nazism only to the extent that it served the ends of the regime.
- (3) The most important of these destructive results in the long run was a loss of international standing from which it took more than two generations to recover. The émigrés' encounter with new academic and scientific cultures led to cultural transformations of profound scope.

- (4) But the émigrés, even the most prominent among them, had no transformative impact on the structure or philosophy of American higher education, though some of them surely had significant impact on the content of certain disciplines. Roger Geiger (1986) clearly stated the point nearly 20 years ago: ‘The intellectual migration tended to confirm rather than cause the ascendancy of American science’. Moreover, ‘when viewed from an institutional perspective, however, the major effects of the intellectual migration seem to be somewhat out of the American mainstream’ (p. 244).

What the émigrés did notice was a discrepancy in academic cultures and intellectual styles that indicated limits to the claim that the ‘German’ model took root in America (for examples, see Ash & Söllner, 1996; Harwood, 2004). They constantly wrote to one another — natural and social scientists, as well as humanists — that their American colleagues were often highly specialised, knew little outside their specialties, had little awareness of or respect for humanistic culture, and were much more interested in foolproof methods for producing exact factual knowledge than in the broader theoretical implications of their research. Of course, such observations appear stereotypical when stated so briefly — as do Americans’ complaints from the same period about the Germans’ tendency to behave arrogantly, or to engage in abstract speculation without empirical support. None of these views was empirically correct, but we are talking here about images and discourse, not about nuanced realities; and the differences thus marked had a real basis in different institutional arrangements in the two university establishments.

Was there an ‘Americanisation’ of German-speaking Universities after 1945?

‘Americanisations’ of various kinds certainly did happen, at least in West Germany after 1945, for example in economic policy (the West German currency reform was initially proposed not by Ludwig Erhard, but by an American economist who was serving as an occupation officer in Munich at the time), and to some extent in business management (Berghahn, 1986). In higher education, however, ‘Americanisation’ was more often asserted or feared than actually carried out. American (and British) occupation officers initiated numerous ‘re-education’ programmes, and these were followed in the 1950s by cultural exchanges such as the Fulbright programme (Füssel, 2004). Many of these programmes were undoubtedly effective. The impact was particularly high in the social sciences; for example, the discipline of ‘political science’, in many respects an American invention, was established in post-war West Germany primarily by returned émigrés (Söllner, 1996). But resistance against intervention from without, fearful references to ‘massification’ in 1950’s discourse (Beyler, 2003), and the self-assertion of German research and intellectual traditions proved to be stronger than these reform initiatives on balance. Ironically, the name ‘Humboldt’ was often invoked to legitimate restored professorial privileges after 1945 — which in turn set back internationalisation of German science by a second generation (Jaraus, 1997). In the German Democratic Republic, the University of Berlin was even renamed for the Humboldt brothers in 1946 — as a symbol of ‘Socialist humanism’ (Connelly, 1997).

‘Americanisation’ — such as it was — began in earnest in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the context of re-orientation to serious international cooperation

and coincided with generational change. By the 1960s and 1970s, it had become customary for West German natural and many social scientists to acquire a new, informal degree, jokingly called the 'iAg' (*in Amerika gewesen*). The science transfer and intellectual exchange that resulted were considerable, and have yet to be studied in detail. But even then, limits to 'Americanisation' were obvious. I will name only three here.

1. The 'department system' — with limits

In the Federal Republic, the 1960s and 1970s are well-known as an era of extraordinary expansion in higher education. The Ruhr University in Bochum and the University of Bielefeld, both in North Rhine-Westphalia, exemplify this development; their architecture alone embodies a strong commitment to modernisation (Lundgreen (ed.), 1994; Stallmann, 2004). Interestingly enough, the consensus on expanding higher education came from rather different sources; while Social Democrats supported improving access and proclaimed higher education to be a human right, conservatives supported expansion as technocratic modernisers. But did that expansion lead to the import of American-style institutional structures?

Actual policy proceeded on three tracks: expanding the capacity of existing universities; founding new universities to meet increasing demand and open up new regions; and creating new reform universities as innovative experiments, for example in Konstanz. The new universities in Bochum and Bielefeld represented the second and third strategies, respectively, though both broke with the traditional Faculties and instituted department-like structures. To what extent such changes were actually based on the American university structures remains an open question. Rudolf Mössbauer, a German physicist who won a Nobel Prize in 1961, made waves on his own by forcing the implementation of a department system as a condition of accepting a professorship at the Technical University of Munich in 1965 when he was called there from Cal Tech, but his example was by no means universally followed. Indeed, when he returned to Munich in 1977 after an appointment at the ETH in Switzerland, he found that his reform had been reversed (see the biography on the website of the Nobel Institution).

2. The student revolt: 'democratisation'?

The student revolt of the late 1960s was not directly caused by nor did it cause any of this, but it posed a still more radical challenge to the traditional elitist university model. Its leaders advocated 'democratisation' of university and research administration at all levels. Pressure from this quarter led in part to the creation of the so-called 'group university', giving students and mid-level staff equal voice in university governance for the first time in German history. But this cannot be called 'Americanisation' because it never happened in the US! Seen in historical context, this was actually an extension of the already existing European corporatist model of university governance from the professoriate to include new constituencies.

3. Teaching and (or versus) research — pressure for degree reform

The utterly inadequate financing of the expanding universities by German *Länder* governments produced a crisis that blocked reform for decades. The most relevant aspect of that crisis was the extreme pressure it put on a central component of the 'Humboldt Myth' — the unity of teaching and research. Dieter Simon wrote in the 1990s that the ideal had long since ceased to be effective in practice; many

university teachers, he claimed, had long since departed from the forefront of research and were engaged, at best, only in what he called *Lehrforschung* — work in secondary literature needed to prepare classes. In response, German professors began to call for a three-degree system, or at least a two-track model to the first degree, one for future scientists and scholars and one for those ending their studies with the first degree. Perhaps it will be surprising to some readers to learn when this first happened — it was in 1966 (Wissenschaftsrat, 1966). That date alone speaks volumes about the slow pace of change in higher education, especially in German-speaking Europe. And with that we come, finally, to the present situation.

Relevance for Current Reform Debates

It is important to remind ourselves, at least briefly, of the wider context within which current higher education reform discussions are taking place in German-speaking Europe, before turning specifically to the Bologna process itself.

1. The wider context: four key words

Seen from the perspective of wider cultural and political debates in German-speaking Europe and the use of historical constructions in such contexts, a short list of key words comes quickly to the fore: ‘globalisation’ (here often portrayed in a foreshortened and distorted manner as ‘Americanisation’), ‘privatisation’ (rather than ‘marketisation’, the term often used in Britain (Lawn, 2001, 2003; Wright, 2004), ‘autonomy’, and ‘elite’. Such terms have become common scare-words in European discourse generally, and not only in university policy debates. Sometimes it almost seems as though the critics of reform have the discursive upper hand in Germany and Austria. These words mean different things to different people, and that is one reason for their frequent use. Such key words have acquired power in part because they appear useful to political players across the spectrum — for conservatives seeking to retain corporatist privileges as well as for those on the left seeking to defend what they take to be fundamental qualities of the European welfare state. The common denominator appears to be the defence of European achievements — grand intellectual and elite traditions if the speaker is conservative, social state structures and open access to higher education if one is more to the left — against a perceived threat from without (Stucke, 2001; Jarausch, 2003).

‘Americanisation’. Recent efforts at higher education reform in Germany and Austria have drawn to some extent from elements of the American university system, but they have also looked to certain European models as well as to Australia and other places for guidance. It is thus incorrect to describe the changes now underway in Europe solely as ‘Americanisation’. Taking recent changes in German higher education law and the new Austrian university law as examples, it might be more interesting to ask whether the reformers have understood those features of the American system that they may think they have imported.

Space does not permit me to do that here, but the fundamental point seems clear: the core issue, not only in higher education but quite generally in the current transformation of welfare state regimes now under way, is the relationship of state and civil society, and the correlative question in this field is whether higher education is a private or a public good. For Americans, this question is a non-issue. It is obviously both, so the issue is whether university legal status, institu-

tional arrangements, and financing should reflect that screamingly obvious fact or not. Is that what is happening in Europe today?

'Privatisation' — 'Humboldt' or Darwin? Or neither? If one were to believe all the noise in public discussion, it would seem as though German and Austrian universities were instituting 'social Darwinist'-style, entrepreneurial structures, with wild, free-for-all competition substituting for legally ordered relationships. Serious higher education reform has indeed begun in Germany and Austria, but what is happening there can hardly be described as 'privatisation'.

In Germany, a series of revisions in the Higher Education Framework Law passed since 1998 has had the effect of loosening, though not entirely removing, the restrictive structures that had inhibited change until that time (Welsh, 2004). One of the most important of these is the 'Experimentation Clause' which allows *Länder* governments to institute reforms without waiting until all *Länder* have come to a consensus. This provision has released considerable energy and initiative, and is surely partly responsible for the rapid introduction of first-cycle degree programmes as part of the Bologna process, at least in some universities and subject areas. A second change is the possibility — not the obligation! — of establishing so-called 'global', i.e. flexible, instead of line item budgeting, as well as a large degree of university control over faculty hiring. But of course budget flexibility does not equal 'privatisation'! And the very idea of the 'Experimentation Clause' presupposes a situation in which everything not addressed by such a 'clause' is still subject to strict, if not rigid regulation by the *Länder*. In fact, two of the central problems of the German system are still very much in place: the insistence on civil service or government employee status for all teaching staff, with all of the associated rigidities; and the legal fiction directly resulting from this, that all universities are to be treated in the same way with regard to policy implementation, despite obvious qualitative differences amongst and within them.

The Austrians have gone much further, without being widely noticed (at least in public) by Germans until recently (an exception is Nickel, 2002; Por Austrian accounts, see Schnedl & Ulrich, 2003). The University Law of 2002 releases all Austrian universities from their previous status as subordinate organs of the state and declares them to be 'corporations at public law' (Universitätsgesetz, 2002). German universities also have this legal status in principle, but remain subject to the federal states in fact. In Austria the change means that new teaching staff no longer have civil service status, but are treated as employees with time-limited contracts; full professors can be granted exceptional status equivalent to permanent tenure. The law also mandates fundamentally new legal and institutional arrangements at the top of the system, including governing boards and a strong rectorate, but leaves internal university structures largely free to be shaped as the local leadership wishes. For the first time, the possibility has emerged of a situation in which serious developmental planning can take place, funding and positions can be redistributed among university faculties, and there are clear winners and losers. This appears to be rather like the situation in American state-supported universities on the surface. However, decoupling from civil service affiliation does not equal privatisation! In fact, state influence, even predominance, continues in practice, for at least two reasons: because representatives selected by the Ministry of Education sit in significant numbers on all university Advisory Boards (in the case of the University of Vienna, by far the largest Austrian university, the number

is four out of nine); and because direct state contributions still account for most of the budget (the figure at present is 80%) — however flexibly that budget can now be administered.

'Autonomy'. As was just pointed out, legal autonomy is not the same as 'privatisation', but in public debate under the rubric of 'Americanisation' the linkage of 'autonomy' with 'privatisation' seems obvious on the surface. In this discursive framework, 'autonomy' appears to have become a code word for the delivery of higher education into the tender hands — or rather the gaping maw — of the market. In such polemics, the word is often coupled with 'privatisation' to hammer the point home. (In Britain, perhaps due to the different legal status of universities there, the preferred term is 'marketization' (Lawn, 2001; Wright, 2004). Ironically, opponents of reform in Germany and Austria also use the word 'autonomy,' but in this case they are referring nostalgically to the supposedly golden days when they were left alone to do as they wished — with the help of friends in the Ministry, of course!

For observers coming from other political cultures, it appears paradoxical in the extreme to use the term 'autonomy' to describe a situation in which such 'autonomy' was in fact guaranteed by the State and therefore implied, both in law and in practice, actual dependence upon ministerial bureaucracies. But of course such usage makes perfect sense when we remember the formulation 'freedom of teaching and learning', part of the invented tradition described in part one. The historical facts that such 'freedom' could be abrogated at any time at the behest of the State, and that this actually occurred with the willing collaboration of teachers and learners under Nazism, are suddenly forgotten in such usages — even or precisely by those on the left who are normally intent, with good reason, on reminding their colleagues of that very past.

Because opponents of change in German-speaking Europe ignore the situation in publicly-supported institutions in the US, such polemics often overlook two simple facts that ought to be emphasised here:

Legal 'autonomy' is not the same as actual autonomy. As stated above, in Austria heavy dependence on state funding remains in place for the time being, despite the change in legal status brought about by the University Law of 2002. As the strongly contrasting situation in the US clearly shows:

Autonomy means mixed financing! In the US, the states have been withdrawing from commitments to support higher education institutions for decades. Opponents of the process have castigated state governments for a failure to fulfil commitments of various kinds, but given the civic culture of the US, which had a weak central government until the 1930s, it has occurred to almost no one there to claim that higher education is a public good *in toto*.

And indeed, the gradual or sudden reduction of funding from the states in the US has led to two extraordinary developments, which might be news to many readers of this text and which were not predicted in America. The number of 'state-supported' universities of any size that obtain more than 50% of their budgets from the state governments is now ZERO, and yet public university budgets have actually INCREASED as a result of mixed financing. Contrary to public polemics about the 'corporate university', by no means all of that increase comes from support of research by large business corporations. Rather, publicly-supported

universities have responded to the withdrawal of financing by their state governments by moving to increase funding from numerous other sources, including research funding from the federal government; sales of services; and third-party gifts from alumni and other, civic-minded individuals. In the process, they have INCREASED rather than decreased their freedom of action, because no single funding source is sufficient any longer to give any single actor the final say in university affairs.

Here we return yet again to the fundamentally different relations of the state and civil society in the US and continental Europe. What is happening in America today is easily understood in a historical context as a renewed mobilisation of civil society — and NOT only market — forces in support of higher education that is part of a long tradition in that country. That is why informed American visitors never cease to be astonished by questions that are constantly repeated in German and Austrian debates, such as how many universities or higher education institutions ought to exist in a given place, whether particular programmes of study are too numerous and the like. Simply recalling the number of higher education institutions in Boston, Massachusetts, and comparing it with the figures for Berlin or Vienna, shows how strange such discussions can appear to be. In a system that combines state and private or civil society financing and control, the ‘how many’ question ceases to be of any relevance; higher education institutions are created and survive in the numbers and to the extent that various sorts of people are willing to pay to support them. The obsessive focus on distributive questions is characteristic of and perhaps understandable in a state-centred system with limited budgets. Seen in this light, higher education policy debates become a subset of a larger dispute on the reform or future of the welfare state. That is another reason why allegations of ‘Americanisation’ carry weight.

‘Elite’. The ‘elite’ issue is currently a hot topic in Germany and Austria, whereby the meaning of the terms ‘elite’ and ‘university’ appears to have become rather flexible indeed. In Germany, even the SPD-Greens coalition government talked for a time about awarding certain universities the title ‘top universities’ on a competitive basis. Funding has now been jointly agreed by the federal and *Länder* governments to support innovative graduate programmes and other centres of excellence on a competitive basis. In Austria an effort to establish a new ‘university of excellence’, focused primarily on the natural sciences, has excited controversy. But the proposed annual budget will be in the range of 80 to 120 million euros, which indicates clearly enough how seriously Americans can take all this. Comparing such sums with the annual budgets of true elite institutions such as Harvard or Stanford, one remembers a statement made by the former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, in another context: ‘Show me the money!’ Or, as a television sitcom actor might say: get real!

German-language debates on this issue and on higher education in general constantly evoke examples from the famous American elite universities, like Harvard, Stanford or Chicago, along with Switzerland’s ETH — but not Oxbridge! All this utterly inane babble goes on as though Harvard or Stanford were the only higher education institutions in the United States, and state-supported universities like Wisconsin, Michigan or the Texas and California systems simply did not exist. And yet these institutions combine multiple-source financing, high levels of access to higher education at the entry level, and world-class research facilities. As at least some higher education administrators in Germany and Austria — if not the

larger public or the media — have finally begun to realise, these institutions, and NOT the elite private universities, are the relevant comparators for serious higher education policy in Europe (Ash, 1999). Apparently neither the media nor media-savvy higher educationists think that it is sexy enough to orient policy towards such real-world models, and believe it more exciting to dream about German-style elite universities without having a prayer of finding the cash to pay what they really cost per student! In any case, as informed Americans know well, neither quality nor access problems are limited to the ‘public’ sector — there is a wide range of prices and quality in the private sector as well. This only increases Americans’ astonishment when they are confronted with the simple-minded stereotypes that dominate public German-language discussion.

2. The Bologna process: will the right degree names be enough?

I turn now to the ‘Bologna process’ itself and the claim of at least some of its proponents that its aim is to establish a European higher education area compatible with the ‘Anglo-Saxon model’. It is well-known that the primary aim of the ‘Bologna process’ is to establish a common European higher education architecture by 2010, and thus to assure more effective mobility of students, researchers and teachers within the European Union. This is not a cliché, but a serious policy goal, the possibilities and problems of which can and should be examined on their own terms. An additional claim is that the ‘Bologna process’ will result in a system corresponding to, and therefore degree programmes compatible and competitive with, the so-called ‘Anglo-Saxon’ model — whatever that may be. A third claim, at least in later communiqués, is that the Bologna process will stimulate curriculum reform and thus begin a transformation from research- to student-centred teaching. Let me focus on the second of these aims here.

The programme outlined in the Bologna Declaration calls, amongst other things, for the ‘adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of the first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years’ (Bologna process 1999).

What is missing from this picture is the use of the English terms Bachelor and Master for the degree programmes themselves. These were added later — *nomen omen est*, to coin a phrase. Of course, both terms come originally from the Latin, and the irony that degree names from the Medieval European universities are now to be transferred from the Anglo-Saxon world to the continent from which they came has not been lost on historically informed users. Symbols are important, especially in higher education and science, which deal, after all, primarily in symbolic capital. Is the decision to use these names a master stroke, so to speak, or one of the biggest mistakes in the history of higher education policy?

In October 2004, German newspapers reported results of a survey allegedly carried out by the Educational Credentials Evaluation Agency (a private organisation funded mainly by university associations) and the Institute of International Education in New York (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2004). The survey showed that 71% of respondents believed that a foreign Bachelor degree must certify four years of study in order to be accepted as equivalent to an American Bachelor. As many as one-half of Bachelor degrees already issued in Europe by that time had not been recognised in the United States, because they are three- rather than four-year degrees. It is important to emphasise here that there is no state body in the United

States responsible for certifying the compatibility of degree programmes. Rather, individual state bodies or even single institutions make their own determinations; accreditation associations can and do issue guidelines, but these need not be and often are not slavishly followed in practice. The hope that a single accreditation body in the US could make such formalistic determinations in a way that would be binding for all institutions accredited by that body is a projection from European state-centred institutions, and has little basis in fact. Important in such assessments is the distinction between formal and content-oriented comparisons.

The report just cited focuses primarily on formal criteria for compatibility, such as the number of years to degree and the number of credits or courses per year. Much more important, however, for determining the actual market value of degree programmes — regardless of what sort of ‘market’ we mean — is the content of the programmes themselves. Americans take it for granted that individual institutions, and even departments, will still examine each student’s credentials individually, as they already do for those of students transferring into their institutions from other states in the US. Any serious comparison of Continental European and American degree programmes must take note of a fundamental difference in structure, expressed in the quantitative relationship between the number of credit hours in a major field, and the rest (minor field, general education, electives). American first-degree programmes require a carefully distributed mix of these four types of courses, with the ‘major’ rarely taking up more than half the total credits. Most European programmes, in contrast, are focused on training in one or two disciplines or special fields of knowledge, with relatively little space for general education or even the free exploration of other subjects.

This is not an incidental matter, but a fundamental structural difference deeply rooted in history, as I tried to make clear in the first part of my remarks. The architects of the Bologna process may have thought they could avoid confronting the form and content issues simply by instituting the three-degree system and giving the new degrees the right names. If that is indeed what they thought, they could not have been more mistaken. One wonders what the British Minister thought he was signing! Given that the Blair government introduced the Foundation Degree in 2001, located below the Bachelor, it seems reasonable to ask to what extent the Bologna process is now binding in Britain.

The claim that the three-degree progression of the Bologna process will establish programmes compatible with those in the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ world will only be accurate if one of the following conditions is met:

- (1) if all European institutions institute four-year first-cycle degrees, and eliminate the three-year programmes;
- (2) if the US and Great Britain are actually prepared to convert their Bachelor degree programmes in all fields into the sorts of three-year, narrowly specialised first degree programmes envisaged in Germany and Austria and eliminate the very general education components that make them distinctive; or
- (3) if all parties are prepared to structure their Bachelor degrees in the way such degrees are organised in professional areas such as business management, journalism, nursing or social work in the US (i.e. with very small general education components and much larger practice-oriented course work than is the case for degrees in the so-called liberal arts).

Obviously, none of these outcomes is likely to happen. In any case, as someone who has already acquired extensive experience in examining transfer or credit applications by foreign students at the University of Vienna, I can attest that American students will face a rude awakening if they think they can simply transfer into a German or Austrian university once the Bachelor has been established there. The same will be true for German or Austrian students hoping to transfer into American M.A. or even Ph.D. programmes. The report I just cited indicates that such rude awakenings are already happening to German students seeking to transfer to American institutions.

Of course, it may well be asked whether or not such issues actually get to the heart of the real hopes and motives driving the 'Bologna process' from the political side. It is an open secret that financial concerns also play a role in driving the Bologna process, at least in German-speaking countries. If state financial assistance to students could be limited to the first degree only, and the duration of the first degree were limited to six semesters rather than the present eight (on paper — real time to degree is often longer), this would make it possible to cut state support to students by one fourth! From the Master level onwards, financing would then be personal or external. In somewhat more optimistic, but for many still frightening scenarios now in play in some of the German *Länder*, rigid limits are to be placed on the numbers of students allowed to proceed beyond the first cycle, thus limiting potential claims on state support for second- or third cycle programmes. Whether universities will be allowed by *Länder* governments to acquire supplementary funding from other sources, including tuition, in order to finance more places in second- and third-cycle programmes is still an open question. Though some *Länder* appear to be preparing to introduce modest student fees, German slowness to move in this direction suggests that there are still limits to 'marketisation' in this part of Europe.

As stated above, another central claim for the benefits of the Bologna process is that the new Bachelor degrees will reduce the percentage of early leavers and raise the numbers of nominal 'academics', thus improving the OECD statistics on this subject for Germany and Austria and making these countries appear to be making progress towards competitiveness in the knowledge-based economy. Unfortunately, precisely the American experience suggests that scepticism about the possibility of actually achieving such technocratic goals is appropriate. In the state-supported universities in the US, the percentage of early departures without a degree is alarmingly high, especially in the first two semesters. It is generally agreed that this is due to inadequate preparation at the secondary level, as well as insufficient emotional maturity, and thus inadequate concentration on studies among the students. The assumption that the new European Bachelor degree programmes can and will actually be completed in six semesters — the basis for the hoped for savings in student assistance — appears to be equally unrealistic. For years, actual time to completion for Bachelor degrees in the US has been closer to five years or longer, rather than the traditional four years. A major gap yawns here between the dream of achieving social change by administrative fiat and the realities of student life.

Of course the success of the optimistic version of this scenario depends on labour market acceptance of 'Bachelor' degrees — so where is it? Unfortunately, policy-makers appear to be agreed that this is one of the major problems of the Bologna process thus far. One of the goals stated in the Glasgow Declaration, for

example, is to work on making government employment systems accommodate the new first- and second-cycle degrees (Glasgow Declaration, 2003). This suggests that there has been little movement in this area so far, but if the largest employers of university graduates in European countries have not yet changed their standards, then why should other employers do so? This is also why the process is being stoutly resisted in Germany and Austria by groups like the associations of technical universities or secondary school teachers (Herrmann, 2005). These are precisely the fields in which existing degrees (the Diploma for engineers) and state examinations (for teachers in Germany) are tightly linked with employer requirements, and no such link seems to be given as yet for Bachelor degrees.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I return to 'Humboldt'. As I suggested in the introduction, any separation of past and present in this context is artificial, since constructions of tradition function primarily in the present and only secondarily as claims about history. And indeed, 'Humboldt,' too, has its place in the current opposition to reform, alongside 'Americanisation'. The claim — one shared again by conservatives and Social Democratic opponents to reform — is that the Bologna process will lead to the 'death' of 'Humboldt'. For example, Heike Schmoll wrote the following in a lead article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in May 2005: 'What is happening in the context of a politically desired accommodation of the European higher education system is the destruction of universities in the Humboldtian mould through Americanisation, as well as the political and economic influence on research and teaching and a general equalization of degrees . . . The issue is neither education (*Bildung*) nor quality, the issue is numbers and graduates' (Schmoll, 2005).

Such polemics might well be expected from conservatives, though they do not match well with the claim, also advanced by conservatives, that 'Humboldt' already died with the opening of the universities in the 1960s. Interestingly enough, fears of the 'death' of 'Humboldt' can also be found on the left, many of whom entered academic life precisely as a result of the opening of higher education and have apparently grown attached to the utopian ideal described in part one of this article, even though it bears almost no relation to the realities of mass higher education (Stölting, 2005). This may help to explain why it is no coincidence that resistance to the Bologna process has been stronger in the humanities and social sciences than in the natural sciences and technical fields. But the Humboldt Myth has also been persistent in these disciplines because the ideal of freedom of teaching and learning has become a dignified label for a *laissez-faire* approach to teaching and unwillingness to take responsibility for learning outcomes (Pechar & Pellert, 2004).

Given the multiple pressures involved and issues and interests at stake, what can be expected? Here is my personal opinion, for what it is worth. The creation of a European higher education sphere is a fascinating project, likely to result in something far different from and in many respects more interesting than the 'Anglo-Saxon' system with which it is supposed, erroneously, to be compatible. As shown in part three, the division of existing *Diplom* or *Magister* programmes into two degree cycles, with the first for foundational studies and the second for

the first steps towards research, fulfils a long-standing demand from within the German system. It has the additional advantage of being in accord with the wishes of the vast majority of students who have little understanding of or desire to do academic research and are at university for rather different reasons in any case. Whether European employers, including state Ministries, will eventually recognise the value of the new Bachelor degrees remains to be seen.

The difficulties in the way of actually achieving a common European structure — and the potential for innovation within that structure — are great enough, given the labour market problems just mentioned, as well as long-standing differences in the organisation of degree programmes and academic standards within Europe and institutional inertia. Perhaps it is most worthwhile to focus efforts on this goal, rather than to delude oneself about the degree to which the results will actually be compatible with American (or British) models. It is too late to change the degree names, but it is illusory to pretend that the content of these wine flasks is or will be comparable with that of American ones, at least. In any case, as economists well know, ‘competitiveness’ can also be achieved by offering different — and better — programmes instead of duplicating those offered by competitors.

NOTES

1. Revised and expanded version of a keynote address to the conference, ‘The Bologna Process and the Shaping of Future Knowledge Societies’ (Third Conference on Knowledge and Politics), University of Bergen, Norway, May 19, 2005.
2. OECD statistics have not been used here deliberately, because these generally cite numbers of ‘academics’ based on degrees completed, which is not the same thing as numbers of years in school.

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