

OVERCOMING THE EMPTY YEARS: THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE
HUMANITIES IN WEST GERMANY AFTER 1945

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In Memory of
J. V. S. (1964-2003)

Acknowledgments

At the end of a long project, one becomes acutely aware of their own limitations. While cause for my own sense of uneasiness in bringing this work to a close, this moment also provides the happy occasion of acknowledging that I could not have reached this point alone. This realization—that I needn't go it alone—is at least as important as any of the intellectual insights or practical know-how that I have accumulated through the course of researching and writing this dissertation. In any case, it was only after I sought the help of friends and colleagues that this project really progressed to its final stages.

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ABSTRACT

OVERCOMING THE EMPTY YEARS: THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE
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The close relationships formed between teachers and students in the materially impoverished and politically compromised postwar universities in western Germany are the central focus of this dissertation. I analyze how a divided generation of politically overburdened intellectual youth negotiated the new possibilities opened up by the collapse of cultural restrictions imposed by the twelve-year dictatorship and the new expectations, stemming from the changing ideas and realities of the university and philosophy in an expanding middle-class, consumerist society. In spite of the limitations of their institutional and cultural environment, the younger philosophers and intellectuals I investigate develop highly productive models for the practice of philosophy and the ‘human sciences’ (*Geisteswissenschaften*), which have relevance beyond their own specific historical situation, national boundaries, and interests.

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Introduction

The Problems Stated

German scholars in philosophy and the humanities were equally affected by the material devastation, economic privation, and general spiritual decay that plagued the whole of German society with the collapse and humiliating defeat of the twelve-year National Socialist dictatorship at the end of the Second World War. This impoverished state presented the intellectual elite that remained, or who were often reinstated in their university positions shortly after the end of the war with a set of problems and restrictions that seemed to necessitate the reform, or at least, a rethinking of the traditional role accorded to philosophy among the sciences, the humanities in particular, and in a broader cultural domain beyond the university. The first focus of this dissertation is how these philosophers and scholars in the humanities coped with the material and human circumstances in the wake of defeat. I investigate the new ideas as well as the professional and institutional that developed from this time of initial experimentation in the late 1940s.

The circumstances of 1945 presented no “Stunde null” or “zero hour” for philosophers any more than this situation did for the rest of German society. Yet, the denial of this trope of absolute rupture and new beginning remains in large part a determination of historians and commentators in retrospect. As historians we must negotiate the tension between intellectual, structural, and institutional continuities and the

ruptures in experience that were certainly palpable for the intellectual youth and their teachers. This nexus of past and future manifested itself first in the conflict between political expectations and demands to confront and to answer for the crimes of the recent past and the understandable human feeling of political exhaustion, accompanied by the desire to move on, or make up for time lost through war and the years of politicized culture and education under the Nazi Regime. Thus, along with the issue of renewing philosophy and humanistic university education more generally, this study will focus on real needs expressed in the key relationships between teachers of philosophy and their students, who, though weary to different degrees of severity from their war experience, were nonetheless earnestly committed to their studies and energized by the new openness and discovery of cultural knowledge previously denied to them.

We will trace this dynamic interplay between teachers and students through the initial period of cultural reopening and relatively open discussion of the political past in the late 1940s, through the period of greater institutional articulation and professionalization in the 1950s up to the early 1960s, the period in which the philosophical youth take up their positions within the profession and the institutions that their teachers' generation created, or inherited but continued to shape. The synchronic development of ideas, institutions, and human relationships are difficult to narrate over even a period of two decades, particularly one which was characterized by the increasing demand for reforms in educational practices, institutions, and ideas of the instructor's role to accommodate the drastic increase in university enrollments and the changing needs of

socially more diverse student body. Therefore, continuities in German academic culture and intellectual life ran up against a new set of social realities that had been developing since the end of the First World War, with the proliferation of ‘mass’ culture and the expansion in the number of professions requiring university credentials. The German cultural tradition needed to be reassessed not simply because the recent political cataclysm had called its peculiarities and provincialism into question, but also because West German society and culture in the decades following the Second World War were changing far more rapidly than ever before. What happens when philosophy and the humanities, the *Geisteswissenschaften*, by their very name, the caretakers of German *Kultur* and ‘Spirit’ (*Geist*), must adjust forms of education and research that were based on the cultural outlook of classical German idealism to new demands for expert knowledge and professional practice that emanate from an expanding, affluent middle-class society? Furthermore, with the society of the *Wirtschaftswunder* went the increasing influence of a popular, ‘mass’ culture, which dealt in the commodified culture offered in short doses in the feuilleton pages of the quality press.

Certainly, the feuilleton was an invention of the nineteenth century. The eighteenth century had its share of *Popularphilosophen* and cultural dilettantes. However, in the 1950s and 1960s we find a tension between the elite of the academy and the purveyors of consumable culture that was exacerbated by the fears of academic philosophers that their status and relevance both inside and outside the university were in sharp decline. As we will see, while French existentialists and the few remaining extra-

academic superstars like Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers permeated the cultural pages of the high-brow and even middle-brow newspapers and journals, the practicing philosophers turned more towards closed professional institutions and adopted by disposition or necessity an even stricter academic *habitus*. Put simply, I set out to explain and assess this divergence between “professional philosophy” and philosophy as it was understood, or consumed in the sphere of popular culture. Certainly, one could ask, was philosophy, university philosophy ever ‘popular’? However, this misses the point. The issue is the possible missed opportunities for institutional reform of the universities, reforms which could have attuned the learning process in the humanities and concerns of philosophers to the social changes happening around them, not simply through diagnoses of cultural decline and the ‘crystallization of the personality’ or human helplessness before social and political institutions.

The chronological scope of this project is determined by the need to follow the responses of the philosophy profession to the changing concerns of the society that they are a part of. How did they attempt to accommodate these social pressures? Did the younger generation of philosophers manage to adapt to the changing needs of a more diverse student body? Was professionalization and ‘scientification’ (*Verwissenschaftlichung*) perhaps a short-sighted response prompted by the rise in importance of the natural and social sciences? Were there avenues open for the reassertion of the human sciences’ relevance in modern society that did not take the strict route of professional hierarchization, institutional seclusion, and scientific formalism?

Problems of Approach

An analysis of the position of the philosopher and the role of the humanities in West German after 1945 presents the intellectual historian with a unique set of difficulties. The most significant problem for the historian is that in our educational system today and, more generally, in our scientific culture, we continue to face the same issues and challenges as those academic intellectuals and cultural thinkers, who grappled with the reconstruction and reform of the West German universities in the first two decades following the Second World War. What future is there for the kind of learning and understanding offered by the humanities within societies that increasingly demand the rapid production of ‘experts’ and specialists to serve a rationally-administered, technological world? How can the traditional standards of research and teaching in the humanistic disciplines be maintained in ‘mass’ universities that seem compelled to take the form of bureaucratically administered institutions and of profit-driven corporations in order to meet the expectations of advanced capitalist, industrial society?

The conditions and expectations presupposed in these general questions about our scientific culture undoubtedly favor those disciplines that can maintain at least the semblance of transparency between the knowledge, skills, and credentials that they confer and the instrumental needs of an industrial, or a post-industrial, service-based economy. Here ‘relevance’ is conferred only on those sciences, whose method and form of reproduction matches what is valued in the broader cultural attitude towards science:

serviceable expertise, easily consumed and digested informational output, and the consistent, calculable behavior of the technician, or bureaucrat. It is telling that in this culture ‘science’ increasingly becomes identified with the method of the natural sciences, or, more specifically, a *caricature* of the natural sciences that is viewed as pure empirical research that produces positive, economical results by virtue of an imagined objectivity; in other words, a simplistic view of knowledge and education as historically-unconditioned and value-free and thus compatible with a mode of production considered ‘natural,’ or, in any case, unquestioned in society as a whole. This is simply economism of the educational and cultural realm.

These present concerns cannot and perhaps should not be bracketed off completely from the course of this study. Still, I have sought throughout to rely heavily on primary source materials from timeframe in question. The mundane sources, such as conference reports, scholarly journal articles and reviews, and studies undertaken of university philosophy and the humanities have proven invaluable in bringing to the fore the underlying assumptions of the field of German philosophy in a time of dynamic change. The familiar texts of the noteworthy thinkers find a place here too; however, instead of treating these works through internal exegesis alone, I seek to assess their reception and influence. In the case of a ‘great’ or ‘canonized’ thinker like Martin Heidegger, it has proven more illuminating to treat his figure not as a locus of genius with weighty though highly problematic intentions, but rather as a cultural signifier, or symbol and, for our young philosophers, a professional example, whose language,

behaviors, and image could be as much a liability as his intellectual output could be a provocative asset. Even the self-stylized solitary thinker has implications for the professional field; though Heidegger, and to some extent Jaspers, shunned academic conferences and the protocols of the profession, they still were regarded internationally as the chief representatives of German philosophizing, often to the consternation of their colleagues, who tried above all to shield the profession and their students from the errant behavior and mystical language of these outsiders.

Finally, I have found that the use of unpublished documents, letters and manuscripts essential for uncovering the nuances of professional philosophical practice. Naturally, the information in personal correspondence has a level of candidness that one does not find disclosed in published works. What is more, in the case of many of the younger thinkers, only in their correspondence and unpublished talks and lectures do they express their views on new teaching duties, university reforms, and often their disappointments with institutions and the frustration of their attempts to redefine the practices and ideals of the university to meet these new realities.

The younger philosophers, who by 1960 were taking up *Ordinarius* (full professor) positions attempted to mediate this problem of dissonance between the persistent, elitist forms of German academic culture and the new options for instruction and research in the humanities at a time when social and cultural reality no longer seemed to allow for the “freedom and solitude” that were the hallmarks of the traditional scholarly life. It can certainly be argued that younger professors of philosophy followed

in the footsteps of their teachers. No period saw greater academic, professional output in philosophy and the humanities than the 1960s, so much so that many criticized this new form of professional hierarchy and isolation for its business-like (*betriebsam*) quality. Yet much of the charges against academic philosophy stemmed from an erroneous view proffered by cultural critics that philosophical study was somehow meant to be popular and, further, that at some epic point in the past it had reached a wide public audience, which now found its professional exclusivity and its “rituals of science” uninteresting and off-putting.

Naturally, politics and the weight of the past intrudes on the sciences and the university regardless of the intentions of some academic practitioners and theorists to secure this space as the site of ‘value-free’ research, or, in the more traditional terms of the *universitas scholarum*, as a safe haven, secluded and free from the competing ideologies of the political sphere and the crass material demands of an increasingly consumerist, mass society. However, we cannot content ourselves with the summary conclusion that such a state of affairs could not hold out in late industrial society and in the bifurcated global political struggle of the Cold War, our study—and our presentist concerns for the humanities in our own time—depends on recreating the institutional environment of West German philosophy, which was in dynamic play and tension with external cultural pressures and socio-political intrusions.

Practically, the institutional context of these tensions amounted to a kind of “Methodenstreit” in which new disciplines, above all sociology and political science,

came to the fore and appeared to pose both a challenge and a new direction for the humanities that would allow philosophers and social theorists to reexamine not only the practices and “method” of the human sciences, but also the underlying “attitude” (in Fritz Ringer’s sense) that had directed scholarly exclusivity since the inception of the modern German university devoted to free research and teaching. There were indeed many missed opportunities for collaboration in this space of intellectual and institutional reformulation, often caused by the stubborn resolve to remain stuck in the supposed stand-off between the “two cultures”—on one side, the archaic humanism and purposeless knowledge of the human sciences, and on the other, the rigidity of the natural scientific method caught in a purely positivistic and instrumental relation to the objective world. However, this confrontation was not the zero-sum game it was made out to be. From the side of the humanities and the philosophers came a powerful reinvestigation of the meaning of tradition and of the historical development of science in general. We will investigate the efforts of important thinkers of the teachers’ generation like Hans-Georg Gadamer and Joachim Ritter and their students to rethink the role of the humanities and philosophy by means of a thorough investigation and reinterpretation of the German and greater Western philosophical tradition.

Seen from the inside, the new “generation,” in the active sense of the word, of professional philosophers attempted to mediate the tensions between the human and natural sciences. They fostered efforts towards exposing the falsity of this opposition that was based on very idealized notions and unrealistic presuppositions about what scientific

research and reason was meant to achieve. Natural science as well as the humanities was only hurt by the illusion of objective, value-free knowledge. Neither could live up to this hypertrophied standard of positivist, empirical research. Younger figures like Hans Blumenberg, Jürgen Habermas, Dieter Henrich, Reinhart Koselleck, Odo Marquard and Hermann Lübbe in collaboration with their teachers, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Joachim Ritter, Ludwig Landgrebe, and Theodor Adorno sought ways out of this unreasonable standard, without turning down the blind alley of Heidegger's supposedly post-metaphysical thinking. They all wanted to achieve something like a new unity through collaboration between the sciences that also did not position philosophy in an ephemeral realm above praxis, but rather saw its task in reestablishing the possibility for understanding in scientific research and teaching that was in dialogue both with the present and with tradition, or, to use the German term, *Überlieferung*—literally: what was handed down to us from the past. This also meant breaking the old Mandarin attitude, which was structured by an idea of struggle between pure research secluded in the university and the purposes of the social world. This attitude seemed to deny the historicity of all scientific practice and the situatedness of the prevailing conservative structures of the university in a dynamic historical process—a timeless apoliticism that left the German academy vulnerable to external ideologies and *Weltanschauungen* because they had done nothing to fortify themselves or their students against them. Many thinkers after the Second World War recognized the limitations and short-sightedness of the old Mandarin outlook. At the same time, they sought to rethink and repair the great

tradition of German idealism—the view that saw philosophy as critical reflection on the whole range of human endeavor; but this was done with the consciousness of the historicity of all truth claims and, more specifically, with attention to the very language, symbols, metaphors, and myths that registered this historical situatedness. Not one of the philosophers of these generation, irrespective of their political allegiances, denied the need for a philosophical reorientation of science as such that reached down to the very language and concepts through which its core assumptions were revealed. To be sure, we cannot blur the different positions they take towards this problem. However, it would be incorrect to reduce their efforts to an overtly political narrative of the gradual rehabilitation of German provincialism and anti-modernism through the introduction of ‘Western’ democratic norms—as if such a transparently singular standard ever existed in modern political and intellectual culture. Although many of the goals set by these thinkers for reflective understanding in the philosophy of the humanities ran aground in the struggle to reform the institutions of the university in the late 1950s and 1960s, it is the task of the intellectual historian to understand the motivations for their activities on their own merits—to reconstruct the intentions of these figures based on their most poignant formulations, which are often found not only in their most theoretical works, but in the practical efforts to make their projects understandable to a wider audience of non-specialists, their students, and the public, even when they had every reason to believe that their efforts would find little resonance. The uncertainty that followed this set of figures from the troubled years of apprenticeship in the early years after the war to the later

frustrations of their professional ambitions in face of the social upheavals of the late 1960s remains the living context for our own struggle to maintain the relevance and critical, reflective potential of philosophy and the humanities in a world that continues to resist its insights.

Chapter 1

The Generation of German Postwar Philosophy

Understandings of philosophy in the immediate postwar period are plagued by the problem of an apparent absence of a philosophico-political critique of National Socialism. Why did the postwar generation of German philosophy not generate a thorough-going, public critique of the Nazi dictatorship? Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, employing a social-psychological perspective, argued in 1967 that the postwar German youth were a generation unable to free themselves from authority, not so much of their fathers but of the dictatorship and the past.¹ By failing to or being prevented from confronting the past trauma, the postwar youth and, primary among them, the academic youth suffered a collective neurosis—an “inability to mourn”—that paralyzed their psychic development and left them in an exposed, vulnerable position in relation to authority, whether it be vis-à-vis the political order, or towards persons in positions of power above them, such as their teachers. This would seem to explain why the intellectual situation of the youth in the late 1940s and the 1950s was characterized by a search for orientation and direction primarily within the security of individual

¹ Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu Trauern: Grundlagen kolektiven Verhaltens* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1967). I will cite from the English translation, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, trans. Beverly R. Placzek (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1975).

relationships and small groups and with the goal of reconnecting with and understanding broken intellectual traditions.

The influence of the Mitscherlichs' study is just one example of how a general stylization of the postwar period can be appropriated for political ends. In this case, the postwar generation was destined to be unfavorably contrasted to that of the "1968er" movement; the former, a conformist and apparently 'skeptical' intellectual elite, became a useful foil for the latter political generation, whose pathos was one of rebellion and irreverence towards institutions like the university and the academic profession.

However, the expectation of an academic *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the 1940s and 1950s adopts without question the hindsight perspective of the 1960s. What is more, the way in which sociologists and historians have developed and employed the category of generation can distort our understanding of groups like the postwar German academic youth and, among them, young philosophers. For, as we shall see, from the concept's introduction into sociological and historical research by Karl Mannheim and others in the 1920s, and its application by older commentators after 1945 in appraisals of the postwar youth, the language of generations has carried with it the expectations of a clear political orientation and a willingness on the part of the young to assume an active, leading role in social and cultural life.

Philosophical culture in postwar West Germany allows such a refinement because of the unique position of the intellectual, academic youth after the collapse of the National Socialist dictatorship in 1945. Although many German thinkers at the time and

subsequent intellectual historians would claim that the overall tenor of this youthful cohort was one of skepticism and disillusionment—a post-ideological sensibility completely compatible with the restorative, conservative outlook or ‘realistic’ world view of 1950s West Germany, upon closer historical investigation, we find no such shared intellectual and political tendencies among this supposed “generation” of postwar youth.

To be sure, the young people who sought higher education in a devastated Germany had experienced common traumas in the war and, after the capitulation, a shared reaction of betrayal and a strong desire to make up, or at least to account for the lost, or “stolen years” of their youth. However, when we investigate ‘youth’ closely, we find that its characteristics are based on the expectations of those older thinkers and cultural commentators for whom political and cultural radicalism and romantic pathos had been the determining factor for their generation, and thus, for the theoretical approach they would take towards the youth at any historical moment. But the intellectual youth after 1945 did not fit the stereotypical image of the youth movement, or *Jugendbewegung* that had apparently revolted against bourgeois social values and conventions with radical artistic expression before the Great War. Then, so the myth of youth goes, these young people, disillusioned and politically radicalized by the experience of defeat, was mobilized amidst the highly original, but also highly ideological intellectual and cultural atmosphere of the 1920s. The Marxist left would then label the thinking of the 1950s and 1960s as the expression and consolidation of a

“bourgeois worldview.”² More moderate left-wing and socialist commentators would likewise fasten on to variations of what I would call the “restorative hypothesis,” the notion that 1950s intellectual life was characterized by a collective silence about the political past, and that, in the case of philosophers and academics in general, the 1950s represented a series of missed opportunities not only for working through the past but for concrete political reforms in the universities and academic culture as a whole.³ Finally, various neo-liberal and conservative thinkers, particularly after 1968, would adhere to the same view of restoration but in the “affirmative”—in other words, they would see the moderation and institutionally, or procedurally grounded efforts of liberal reforms as part of the successful process of Westernization of the German political and cultural outlook;⁴ which was only hampered and misdirected by radical, extra-parliamentary forms of protest that in any case, could simply be explained away as the “deferred disobedience”

² See, for example, Hans Heinz Holz, “Philosophie als bürgerliche Weltanschauung: Umerziehung und Restauration – westdeutsche Philosophie im ersten Nachkriegsjahrzehnt,” in *Dialektik* 11 (1986): 45-69.

³ Jürgen Habermas and Herbert Schnädelbach have adopted this view, though certainly with marked differences from their teacher’s famous formulation in Theodor Adorno, “Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit [1959],” reprinted in *Eingriffe: Neun kritische Modelle* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963), 125-146; for the clearest statements of Habermas’ revision of Adorno’s viewpoint, not simply of the failure, or inability to “work off” the Nazi past, and Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, see Habermas, “Die Moderne – ein unvollendetes Projekt [1980],” in *Kleine politische Schriften I-IV* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 444-64.

⁴ This is admittedly a broad characterization of the Neo-conservative viewpoint beginning in the 1970s, represented above all by the leading intellectuals who had been members of the circle around Joachim Ritter, or the “Ritter-Schule.” For the “affirmative” interpretation of the “repression” of the Nazi Past in the 1950s see Hermann Lübke, “Der Nationalsozialismus im Bewußtsein der deutschen Gegenwart [1983],” reprinted in H. Lübke, *Vom Parteigenossen zum Bundesbürger: Über beschwiegene und historisierte Vergangenheit* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2007), 11-38; and on Joachim Ritter’s *Collegium Philosophicum* as incubator of the affirmative outlook, see H. Lübke, “Affirmationen. Joachim Ritters Philosophie im akademischen Kontext der zweiten deutschen Demokratie,” in *Philosophie in Geschichten: Über intellektuelle Affirmationen und Negation in Deutschland* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006), 152-168.

of a youth spoiled by the abundance and security of the very affluent middle-class society against which they led their misguided revolt.⁵

Although in the late 1960s, the figures, who are the center of our study, the philosophers and scholars in the humanities born between 1920 and 1933, would first be accused of a lack of political engagement and blind conformity with restorative politics and cultural traditions, and then subsequently because of their own political conflicts and in-fighting in the 1970s and 1980s, would be claimed for various retrospective political projects as “intellectual founders” of the Bundesrepublik;⁶ we find nothing like a politically unified generation among these intellectuals in the first two decades after 1945. In fact, it is the polarized, divergent politics of post-1968 political and intellectual landscape that distorts our view of the constructive efforts of transgenerational groups of philosophers and *Geisteswissenschaftler* to reestablish an intellectual community after the Second World War and, particularly in the late 1950s and early 1960s, to renew and reform their disciplines and the university structure to accommodate the fast pace of social and scientific change, but also to retain elements of the German academic tradition that seemed to them indispensable.

⁵ The Ritter student, Odo Marquard draws on the Freudian notion of “deferred disobedience” and “reversed totemism” to describe the student revolts of 1968 in “Farwell to Matters of Principle,” in *Farwell to Matters of Principle: Philosophical Studies*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 8-9.

⁶ See most recently Jens Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit: die liberalkonservative Begründung der Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

The post-1945 youth, I will argue, was quite different from at least the highly stylized character of the youth movements in Western Europe from the fin de siècle to the 1920s and early 1930s. The former was a “disinherited” youth, which was separated from the cultural and intellectual traditions of the nineteenth century and the terrible, but exuberant politics and cultural flourishing before and directly following the First World War. Their displacement from the German cultural tradition and their inability to understand the political ‘adjustments’ of their elders during the Third Reich and then during the occupation, made the initial “years of apprenticeship” or “*Lehrjahre*” extremely difficult and also highly unique. First, we can hardly label this youth a ‘youth’ at all, any more than we can impose on them the traditional category of generation. The youngest among them knew only the values enforced during the 12-year dictatorship at the expense of much of the vibrant culturally legacy of the 1920s and before. After the collapse and defeat, they were implicated, despite their age, in the guilt born by all those who had blindly followed, or at least accommodated the policies of the murderous dictatorship. Worse than this insinuation of guilt, those intellectually inclined also were forced to come to the realization that they had lived a culturally deprived and morally reprehensible existence in the formative years of their lives. They entered the university by the late 1940s and early 1950s with a indomitable need to catch up (*Nachholbedürfnis*) in the light of the sudden return of suppressed cultural knowledge and imposition of new, alien political concepts that followed from defeat and occupation.

These young people matriculated with some difficulty—a *numerus clausus* on matriculation was imposed by most universities into the early 1950s—into universities that had been physically and materially devastated by the war, or when not physically damaged, still suffered from lack of able instructors because of the forced exile of many professors by the Nazis, and the initially strident but always irregular attempts by the Occupational Authorities to ‘denazify’ German academia. Still, this youngest cohort at least seemed to be entering university at the ‘correct’ age; born after 1927, they could experience the influx of new learning and culture in the stage of late adolescence, where trauma was somewhat ameliorated by the excitement of discovery. This was not the case for those older souls, already in their late twenties and thirties, who returned to their studies after often much more intense war experiences. They sat on crates and huddled around small furnaces, in makeshift seminar rooms with their much younger ‘peers,’ who had the resilience of youth and were thus in a much better position to make a fresh start. By contrast, older students were (re)starting too late; they had a more palpable sense of their years of education being interrupted or cut short by war service, or, in some cases, because of imprisonment and impressment into labor service. Moreover, many of these older students and even some who reached the level of assistants or *Privatdozenten* (free lecturer or instructor) knew life before Hitler’s takeover in 1933; they likely would have supported the regime, and they also went into the war and experienced defeat with a much greater awareness of what had been lost. For some of these figures, betrayal and loss—not simply of a political regime they believed in, but of the millions of their age

group cut down in a disastrous war—was the most powerful emotion, followed by recognition of their failure to resist, and even some early gestures of “retroactive resistance,” or “*nachgeholter Widerstand*.”

I will examine the divisions within this postwar ‘youth’ and the problem the generational approach in greater detail below; for the moment, however, it is important to acknowledge this early experiential divide within the intellectual youth in general as the background for activities and ideas of the philosophers and *Geisteswissenschaftler* (scholars in the humanities) among them during their *Lehrjahre* and eventually when they reach high positions in the academic field. Their early experiences actually brought them very close to the gifted instructors and mentors of the older generation—the latter born around 1900 and initiated into academic and intellectual life amidst the radical atmosphere of the 1920s and early 1930s. Under the adverse material and political conditions of the late 1940s and early 1950s, these teachers attempted to reintroduce the practices of and reconstruct the spaces for humanistic and philosophical education that had characterized their own experiences in the interwar period. The teachers were the students’ only guides to the newly rediscovered treasures of the German, and Western intellectual past; the former also introduced this disinherited youth to the practices and behavior of the scholar. However, while these reinstated forms of the academic field formed a basis of continuity and connection to tradition for the instructors, for the youth, this set of behaviors and attitudes imbedded in the academic lifestyle or ‘habitus’ of an older university form were not always easily assimilated and duplicated in the post-1945

academic environment. Age, divergent experiences of the recent political past as well as these more elusive, unthematized rules of academic practice embedded in institutions and the underlying expectations for humanistic education and scholarly behavior created barriers between teachers and students that had to be overcome. However, no easy implementation of the category of generation, or generation conflict will suffice to explain their relationship. The extraordinary circumstances of the immediate postwar period allow us to refine this traditional category as well as the assumptions that go along with it, not the least, those that led later political generations of in the Federal Republic to deem this first postwar generation skeptical and complacent.

The Problem of Generations

At least until recent attempts to complicate the category, a generation came to life most vividly as a political actor and/or an avant-garde cultural movement. Real generations have, since Mannheim's characterization of 1928,⁷ required a close association of young people of similar background—in most cases, bourgeois, male intellectual elites—who are oriented towards the same historical problematic and who must actively “participate in common destinies.”⁸ The characteristics presupposed in Mannheim's category of generation work better for the “retrospective self-styling” of a

⁷ Karl Mannheim, “Das Problem der Generationen,” first published in *Kölner Vierteljahrshefte* 7, nos. 2-3 (1928-1929): 157-85, 309-330; reprinted in Kurt H. Wolff, ed., *Wissenssoziologie: Auswahl aus dem Werk* (Berlin: Luchterhand Verlag 1964), 509-565.

⁸ Mannheim, *Wissenssoziologie*, 542.

political, elite movement like that of 1968ers, or for the generations of the *Jugendbewegung* before and after the First World War upon which Mannheim based his work.⁹ Our study of postwar West German philosophy will be complicated by the constant judgments leveled against the immediate postwar intellectual youth by the ‘political’ generations that came before and after them. Particularly, in the initial period between the political collapse of the so-called ‘Thousand-Year Reich’ and the ostensible ‘restoration’ of the early 1950s, at a time when a new world of formerly suppressed culture and learning was suddenly opened up before them, an understandably cautious intellectual youth sought out role models among the few teachers and cultural figures that remained active to help them navigate the new cultural terrain.¹⁰ At the same time, this intellectually “disinherited youth,” as I will refer to them, were overburdened by the questions of their share of guilt for past events, their social responsibility for the future, and the pressure forced onto them by their elders to immediately engage in a new political order. If the young failed or showed reluctance in these tasks, particularly the last, they could suffer indictments of political apathy and suspicions of residual obedience to the former authorities such as the *Hitlerjugend* or the *Wehrmacht*.

There are further, analytical reasons to be skeptical about the usefulness and applicability of the traditional generation category for understanding the German

⁹ Bernd Weisbrod, “Cultures of Change: Generations in the Politics and Memory of Modern Germany,” in Stephen Lovell, ed., *Generations in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 22-23.

¹⁰ Cf. Dirk Moses’ insistence on the general importance of the “forty-fivers’ relationship with their teachers” in *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 72.

intellectual youth in the first two decades after 1945. Jean-François Sirinelli has rightly pointed to the unavoidable consequences of using the category of generation: “It is by no means obvious that the intellectual milieu develops in a uniform way, the latter being very much the result of various different political, ‘ideological’ and cultural influences.”¹¹ Sirinelli points out that the concept of generation rests on the assumption that the political context can be regarded as being the same for everyone. The idea that an event, or series of events, brings a generation or cohort into existence demands that the event be of considerable magnitude, which will therefore affect other age groups and thereby lose any claim to a specific relationship to one age group of intellectuals.¹² As Bernd Weisbrod likewise concludes, “elite group behavior should not be mistaken for generational consciousness.”¹³ Sirinelli gives the French examples of the First World War generation and that of the youth movement after the Algerian war; in both cases the historian is hard pressed to make generalizations about an entire society, or even one age group within that society based on the actions and opinions of a small, intellectual avant-garde.

The “generation” of youth in western Germany following the war confronts the historian with similar empirical problems. What is more, the issue of discovering a “generational consciousness” is even more complicated in the German case by the fact

¹¹ Jean-François Sirinelli, “The Concept of an Intellectual Generation,” in Jeremy Jennings, ed., *Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France: Mandarins and Samurais* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 85.

¹² *Ibid.*, 86.

¹³ Weisbrod, “Cultures of Change,” 25.

that this youth was broken off from the traditions that predated the “event of magnitude”: they faced the social chaos in the wake of war and dictatorship not as an intellectually informed, self-stylized avant-garde directed toward the future, but as a defeated and disoriented youth that was reluctant to take on the responsibility for the future as well as the past. For this reason, this youth was much more vulnerable and sensitive to the judgments of its elders and resentful of but powerless before the alien political forces placed above them.

Hence, employing the traditional category of “generationality” (*Generationalität*) would direct us narrowly towards constructing the prosopography of a politically engaged elite, whose image would undoubtedly be based more on the interests of “retrospective self-styling” and self-promotion than it would reflect the experiences of generational interaction and conflict that characterized the post-1945 intellectual climate.¹⁴ It appears much more valuable for us to follow Sirinelli’s advice and to “analyze a generation from the inside, to see it in terms of the perceptions of contemporaries and in the context of its own day. In this way an *a posteriori* reconstruction of a generation can be avoided and there can emerge a picture drawn from the collective self-perceptions of the time.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Wiesbrod, “Cultures of Change,” 23-24.

¹⁵ Sirinelli, “Concept of an Intellectual Generation,” 87.

At the Marburg *Hochschulgespräche* in 1946,¹⁶ even Alexander Mitscherlich, then a 38-year-old *Dozent* posed the problem of the young generation in a very different way from his later psychoanalytic diagnosis of this generation's "psycho-social immobilism"¹⁷ in the 1960s. Mitscherlich spoke before an international audience on behalf of the German academic youth, who, particularly in relation to their teachers and to politics in the university, "find themselves in a doubly unfortunate position."

Mitscherlich continued,

Denn jede Kritik an bestehenden Zuständen, die sie laut werden läßt, wird ihr nur zu leicht (aus dem unbewußten, uneingestandenem Schuldgefühl der älteren Generation heraus wird der Vorwurf bestärkt) als verwerflich, gesellschaftsfeindlich, ausgelegt. Durch die Tatsache des für eine ungerechte Sache gerechterweise verlorenen Krieges, in dem wir unsere politische Mündigkeit neben der militärischen Gewalt verloren haben, sieht sie sich in eine Notlage manövriert, in der sie eigentlich das Schicksal eines Fürsorgezöglings erlebt. . . . So ist diese Jugend belastet durch Schicksalsverstrickungen, die fast jeder Spielbreite, jeder Zukunftsverlockung genommen haben.¹⁸

Mitscherlich's contemporary judgment reminds us of the importance of Sirinelli's inside view. Here we find a much more direct explanation of that which Mitscherlich later called this generation's "distant relation to politics" and "reluctance to identify" (*Identifikationsscheu*) with intellectual or social ideals.¹⁹ Analyzing the generation from the inside, that is, by virtue of its self-perceptions and the contesting judgments of its

¹⁶ *Marburger Hochschulgespräche*, 12-15 June 1946. Referate und Diskussionen (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1947).

¹⁷ Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, *Inability to Mourn*, 67.

¹⁸ Mitscherlich, "Politische Gesichtspunkte in Forschung und Leben der gegenwärtigen deutschen Universität," in *Marburger Hochschulgespräche*, 39-40.

¹⁹ Mitscherlich, *Inability to Mourn*, 218, 221.

contemporaries broadens the historical focus to the conflicts between generations and to the interaction of different groups within a generational moment. It is important to note, however, that in the case of the young, intellectuals of 1940s and early 1950s, we possess largely only later recollections from memoirs and interviews. Yet to understand the background and early intellectual development of this “generation,” we must rely on the commentary of the older generations of the 1940s and 1950s, who presumed to speak to or to diagnose the problems facing this war-torn and disoriented youth.

In 1946 Mitscherlich already equated the political skepticism of German youth with the trauma of the “loss of the father” and of the leader. However as a young *Doktor Dozent*, who interacted closely with medical students at the University of Heidelberg, he provided a more nuanced view than his later social psychoanalysis would allow. Before his international audience of distinguished *Hochschullehrer*, University Rectors, and the representatives of the U.S. occupational authority,²⁰ the young Mitscherlich, unflinchingly placed particular onus on the role of the teacher before and after 1945 as “*Vaterfigur*”:

Sie [die Jugend] hat sich, völkersonziologisch gesehen, als asozial erwiesen—indem sie tat, was man sie lehrte, und hiermit ist die erste prinzipielle Konfliktlage im Verhältnis der Generationen nochmals beleuchtet. Sie werden

²⁰ The main representative of the U.S. Military Government, Edward Y. Hartshorne convened the *Hochschulgespräche* in Marburg along with Julius Ebbinghaus, Rector and professor of philosophy. Hartshorne was the leading figure for educational and cultural Affairs in the American occupational zone, and chiefly oversaw early efforts at the denazification of German academia and the reopening and reform of the universities in the U.S. sector until his murder in the late Summer of 1946. On Hartshorne see Steven Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth: The Nazification and Denazification of a German University* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002), 128-131; on Marburg University and Hartshorne’s contact with Julius Ebbinghaus see Remy, 131-132.

verstehen, daß das Problem auch dann nicht in der uns interessierenden Seite erledigt ist, wenn man dieser Jugend, wie sie es fordert, ‘Generalamnestie’ gewährt. Die Skepsis gegen die ältere Generation wird damit nicht aus der Welt geräumt. . . . Nichts würde diese jungen Menschen mehr kränken als der Hinweis darauf, daß sie gut daran täten, schuldbewußt zu schweigen und sich sachliches Wissen anzuneignen, ehe sie es wagen dürften, in politischen Fragen das Wort zu nehmen.²¹

Still, in 1946 Mitscherlich had the hope that young German students would risk taking a position on political questions. By 1967, however, the hopes for political renewal through the agency of the initial postwar generation were seemingly frustrated by this generation’s own unwillingness to assume guilt for the past and their ostensible reluctance to lead the way toward national mourning and political renewal. Mitscherlich in this way provided the basis for the culpability of this generation, even though his own observations beginning in Marburg in 1946 (and indeed his retrospective social psychoanalysis of the mid 1960s) suggest a significant burden placed upon this youth by the demands of older academics and cultural commentators. As we will see throughout this chapter, the notion that this beleaguered youth of 1945 would accept guilt for the past and responsibility for the future at a time when everywhere the model promoted by many of their academic elders was largely “schuldbewußt zu schweigen,” has been the unrealistic expectation of intellectuals and historians with the ‘romantic ideal’ of political generations in mind, as Dirk Moses has argued in his recent study of West German intellectuals after 1945.²²

²¹ Mitscherlich, “Politische Gesichtspunkte,” 40.

²² Moses, *German Intellectuals*, 59-65.

Defining Generations

As an academic group within a generation, philosophers can be related to the general question of the politics of the students, the university and the issue of political education, but the category of generation, whether intellectual generations or otherwise, generally serves to link certain individuals and their personal narratives in retrospect and hindsight. Certainly it makes sense to talk of a “war generation” that emerged out of the Second World War, but the characteristics that defined these young people of different ages as an academic or intellectual youth do not lend themselves to a unified idea of generation.

As Heinz Bude’s influential study of the *Deutsche Karrieren*²³ brought to scholars’ attention, those born between circa 1910 and 1930 all had their studies disrupted by the Second World War but through vastly divergent levels and intensities of military service. Bude insists that the *Flakhelfer* (Anti-Aircraft Defense Auxiliary) cohort—those born roughly between 1926 and 1930—oriented themselves around their own experiences in the flack batteries late in the war and also earlier in the Hitler Youth and other Nazi organizations. These formative experiences differentiated them from the older age groups in military service, and left them with what Rolf Schörken has described as a “tenacious residual mentality” of obedience and belief in German’s final victory,

²³ Heinz Bude, *Deutsche Karrieren: Lebenskonstruktionen sozialer Aufsteiger aus der Flakhelfer-Generation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987); Bude builds on the claims made in Rolf Schörken’s earlier study, *Luftwaffenhelfer und Drittes Reich: Die Entstehung eines politischen Bewußtseins* (Stuttgart: Klett Verlag, 1984).

which distanced them from the politics of resignation and reparation after 1945.²⁴ Bude argues in a later summary that the *Flakhelfer* ‘generation’ drew its own lessons from the end of the war. Although they experienced the shock of defeat and the end of the Nazi order, the only world they had known, the *Flakhelfer* were not old enough to understand the demand to accept guilt, or the need to make amends.²⁵ Rather, according to Bude’s view and others who follow this argument, what was significant for this age group was “daß sie Jugendliche waren und insofern bei allem stillen Mitleiden Abstand zum Schicksal der älteren Generation wahren konnten.”²⁶

The retrospective reproach drawn from this argument is that the initial postwar generation was a group willing to opportunistically avoid political engagement. However, it never occurs to Bude that this distance or reluctance to identify with the fate of the defeated could very well be in response to the example provided by the older age-groups that were themselves unwilling to take responsibility for defeat and renewal. The older figures born earlier than those most active in the war—again between 1910 and 1927—were all too eager to project tasks of renewal and the necessity of reeducation onto ‘the youth,’ who always remained the ‘problem’ or ‘impediment’ to normative ‘westernization’ and ‘democratization.’ Of course, by the cunning dialectics of generational change, the

²⁴ Rolf Schorken, *Jugend 1945: Politisches Denken und Lebensgeschichte* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1990), 145-53.

²⁵ Also the young in 1945 did not possess the memory of the persistent reparations question of the interwar period. This was not lost on some commentators after the Second World War: see, for example, “Memento reparare,” in *Die Gegenwart* 2, 21-22 (Nov. 1947): 12.

²⁶ Bude, *Bilanz der Nachfolge: die Bundesrepublik und der Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992), 86.

youth of 1945 are then later judged in the 1960s for their apparent unwillingness to challenge the older generation through denunciation or subversion. We see that even more recent attempts like that of Jens Hacke, to capture the self-understanding of a group within this generation are very much based on an accepted political identity established *a posteriori*. Hacke's reconstruction of a "Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit" of the so-called "Ritter-Schule"²⁷ is conditioned by the complex ideological polarization of leading German intellectuals beginning in the 1970s. It is telling that Hacke judges a figure like Jürgen Habermas for the latter's reluctance to discuss the biographical details of his youth under the Nazi Regime until reaching a certain age.²⁸ However, this moratorium on speech has not been particular to Habermas—the 'Ritter-Schüler,' Odo Marquard and Hermann Lübbe certainly produced no autobiographical work prior to the 1990s that dealt with their childhood in the *Hitlerjugend* or as *Flakhelfer*. Rather this appears as a trait common to this intellectual age group that did not really understand itself as a political generation until much later. Although we can agree with Hacke that this apparently "skeptical generation" in fact "became the first political generation of the Bundesrepublik,"²⁹ it undeniably reached its most extreme period of politicization in response to the aftermath of 1968 and the so-called "Tendenzwende" of the mid 1970s.

²⁷ Jens Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit: die liberalkonservative Begründung der Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, GmbH, 2006).

²⁸ Ibid., 29. Hacke refers, of course, to Habermas' reluctance to say too much about his youth during the Nazi period in an interview with Detlef Horster from 1979. The interview is reprinted in Jürgen Habermas, *Kleine Politische Schriften I-IV* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981), 511-32.

²⁹ Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit*, 35.

The expectation that they would begin to speak openly about their youth under the Nazi Regime in the politically-charged atmosphere of the early 1970s seems a bit unfair. Ironically, it was only after the 1970s, when this generation began to break up along ideological lines, that it really entered into the fray with other political generations.

As Dirk Moses has pointed out, the idea of the complicity of the “45ers” in the silence after the war is based on an unfair comparison to the environment of public discussion of the past, which the “68ers” held as the norm.³⁰ The circumstances of the late 1940s and early 1950s were simply very different to those of the late 1960s. Active denunciation of teachers and university professors was not an avenue open to young students or *Hochschüler*. More importantly, even if such challenges were possible, they would have made no sense if one considers that these same teachers were the only conduit these eager young learners had to pre-Nazi cultural, intellectual, and political traditions.

As we shall see, for the youth gifted and fortunate enough to enter university³¹ and, specifically for us, to take up philosophical study in the years after the war, the first priority was not the opportunistic avoidance of guilt and the shallow focus on mere survival—according to the Brechtian “*erst kommt das Fressen...*” formula incessantly reiterated by the 68ers—but the search for good teachers and then perhaps the material

³⁰ Moses, *German intellectuals*, particularly p.65.

³¹ In the late 1940s entering university was not merely a question of merit, but of space and materials. Most universities in the West had imposed the *numerus clausus* policy of restricted admission in response to the deluge of students applying for entry and the marked lack of instructors, particularly of young assistants and lecturers.

means to learn. Furthermore, not merely a micro-group or avant-garde within a generation, German postwar philosophy students as a whole lacked the coherence of a specific age and, therefore, of similar wartime experience. In the postwar *Hochschulen*, the graduate schools, students of vastly different ages and experiences found themselves at the same level and in the same classroom.³²

The Expectations for a “Generation”

Not the least problem of viewing postwar philosophy through the generational lens is that contemporaries had quite distinct ideas of what they meant by the term generation. The theorists of generation were themselves an older cohort, who had developed their ideas in the 1920s in response to the very assertive political generations of the *Jugendbewegung* and what has been called the Front Generation—the generation of the First World War. The important theorists of generations and youth in the interwar and post-Second-World-War era were Karl Mannheim, who died prematurely in 1947 at the age of 54, but whose classic essay, “The Problem of Generations” has remained most influential, and Eduard Spranger (1882-1963), professor of philosophy and pedagogy at the University of Tübingen after 1945. Both adopted a qualitative approach to

³² Excellent primary source accounts of this phenomenon based on research at the University of Göttingen can be found in Waldemar Krönig and Klaus-Dieter Müller, *Nachkriegssemester: Studium in Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990), 159-63.

generations inspired by Wilhelm Dilthey's version of *Geistgeschichte*.³³ The determining factor, for Spranger and Mannheim, was not demographic details or the biological age of individuals and cohorts but the determination of what Mannheim called a *Generationslagerung*, the similar "positioning of a generation" as the potential for common experiences; and the *Generationszusammenhang*, the context, or literally, the "hanging-together of a generation." Regardless of their age, the key (but also the great challenge) for the study of generations was the isolation of individuals or groups of different ages that were connected by participation in the same social and intellectual tendencies or forces (*Strömungen*) that constituted an historical moment. Dilthey had written of a "deep relation" between individuals, who were in the position to have the same "directing influences" (*leitenden Einwirkungen*) in their "impressionable years" (*Jahren der Empfänglichkeit*).³⁴ For Mannheim, the connection created by similar social position (*Lagerung*) and the impressionability of late adolescence were significant factors.³⁵ Robert Wohl has also observed that Mannheim at times described generations as objective social formations much like social classes, or, more specifically, as "a

³³ The influence of Dilthey's work on Mannheim study has been noted in Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979), 74, 257-58n.55. For general contextualization of Dilthey's own use of the generational category in his intellectual histories, see the important study by Hans Jaeger, "Generationen in der Geschichte: Überlegungen zu einer umstrittenen Konzeption," in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 3 (1977):432-33.

³⁴ Wilhelm Dilthey, "Über das Studium der Geschichte der Wissenschaften vom Menschen, der Gesellschaft und dem Staat [1875]," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5: 31-73 (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1957), 37.

³⁵ An assumption that Mannheim took not only from Dilthey but from the extremely influential work of Eduard Spranger, *Psychologie des Jugendalters* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1924).

location in society that did not depend upon the consciousness of its members.”³⁶

However, Mannheim still insisted that the more significant level of association (*Verbundenheit*) for a generation was the participation of its members as an integrated group in common historical circumstances. In this way, the generation posed a broader social actuality as strata related by experience, whose connection could transcend class belonging. In a further refinement of the concept, Mannheim observed that there could exist differentiated groups within a *Generationszusammenhang* that displayed “more concrete” connection and unity. These *Generationseinheiten* (generational unities) could form their own distinct means of working through the experiences common to the rest of the generation, in much the same way that a social class distinguishes itself from others.³⁷ However, as Wohl has observed, “the generational mode of interpreting and organizing social reality was not merely like that of class; it was an alternative to it.”³⁸ As we will see later, particularly in Helmut Schelsky’s stylization of the so-called “skeptical generation,” the generational idea could potentially be employed as a powerful competitor to the notion of class and of class struggle.

Leaving aside for a moment later political appropriations of the concept of generation, for Mannheim and many of those thinkers of the 1920s, the appeal of constructing social reality in terms of generational tensions was the ability to provide an intellectual orientation that would transcend class interest and the crass competition of

³⁶ Wohl, *Generation of 1914*, 76.

³⁷ Mannheim, *Wissenssoziologie*, 543-44.

³⁸ Wohl, *Generation of 1914*, 82.

political parties in the chaotic atmosphere of Weimar politics. This falls in line with Mannheim's famous notion, borrowed from Alfred Weber, of the "free-floating intelligentsia" (*Die freischwebende Intelligenz*).³⁹ More than a "relatively classless stratum," a generation, particularly a young generation, could form within it concrete bonds between different social strata around common lived experience such as educational background. Still, even in the case of an intellectual elite, the sociologist was bound to view them as part of a *Generationszusammenhang*, which meant historicizing the generational strata from their own perspective and experience as well as understanding the internal polarities that can form between divergent generational unities.⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, in the studies of Mannheim and Eduard Spranger the internal, sometimes competing generational unities almost always took the form of intellectual or cultural elites that carried with them the expectation of political engagement or cultural subversion, particularly in times of social upheaval like the early 1930s.⁴¹

The qualitative emphasis on experience notwithstanding, Mannheim certainly did not overlook the fact that vastly different social groups lived at the same (objective) time. Mannheim in particular, but also Spranger, maintained a highly complex notion of time

³⁹ See Karl Mannheim, *Ideologie and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt, Inc., 1952), 155; in this translation "*freischwebende Intelligenz*" is rendered as "socially unattached intelligentsia," which is misleading since the intellectuals, for Mannheim, though able to form bonds based on education and training that may transcend class interest, still belong to social classes, Cf. Mannheim, "The Sociology of Intellectuals [1932]," trans. Dick Pels in *Theory, Culture & Society* 10, no. 3 (Aug. 1993): 75-76.

⁴⁰ Mannheim, *Wissenssoziologie*, 544.

⁴¹ Hence Mannheim's call to intellectuals in 1932 to take the lead in the current crisis, not as functionaries of a political party but as self-conscious, independent participants "who wield the capacity for sociological reorientation" (Mannheim, "Sociology of Intellectuals," 80).

and of modern time in particular, what was commonly referred to by various Weimar intellectuals and scholars as the *Ungleichzeitigkeit der Gleichzeitigen*.⁴² Different generations lived in the same objective time but in quite different ‘subjective’ times. Put simply, “the times” mean different things and have different significances for different generations, creating in most cases great conflict over the importance of experiences and events. Moreover, Mannheim emphasized that “generations are in a state of constant interaction.”⁴³ As a primary example for this interaction that is very relevant for our purposes here, Mannheim offers the example of the reciprocal relationship between teacher and pupil. This relationship, as will be seen, is crucial to understanding the generational situation of postwar German philosophy students and their instructors.

As both a pedagogue and a philosopher, Eduard Spranger centered his post-1945 studies of generations on the academic youth: what he called the “*studierende Generation*.” Perhaps in excessive employment of the category, Spranger counted no less than five youth generations between 1900 and 1949:⁴⁴ firstly, a “pre-[First World] war generation,” comprised of those who were already in the *Hochschulen* around 1900; secondly, a generation of particular importance to Spranger and to which he thought he himself belonged—the “actual [*eigentliche*] *Jugendbewegung*.”⁴⁵ For Spranger and many

⁴² Most notably in the work of art historian Wilhelm Pindar, *Das Problem der Generationen in der Kunstgeschichte Europas* (Berlin, 1926). Add Ernst Bloch...

⁴³ Mannheim, *Wissenssoziologie*, 541.

⁴⁴ Eduard Spranger, “Fünf Jugendgenerationen, 1900-1949,” in *Pädagogische Perspektiven: Beiträge zu Erziehungsfragen der Gegenwart*, 2nd ed. (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1952), 25-57.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 29-30. Below, I will use some license in translating the term “eigentlich” to help evoke the multiple meanings Spranger has in mind.

others this was the generation to which the succeeding generations, especially the *Nachkriegsgeneration* of 1945, would be compared.⁴⁶ Spranger favorably describes the “real *Jugendbewegung*” as a vital cultural movement leading into the First World War, which had the crucial characteristics of being simultaneously unpolitical, non-conformist—calling for “*kein Programm*”—and highly creative. This “authentic youth movement” was motivated by the “spirit of free self-determination of the personality [Selbstbesinnung der Persönlichkeit] coming from German idealism.”⁴⁷ Spranger was keen to distinguish this culturally oriented and non-conformist youth from the rise of the “*bündische Generation*”⁴⁸ which marked the politicization and the militarization of the *Jugendbewegung* by the experiences of war, defeat, and new sense of belonging discovered in politically-charged youth associations.⁴⁹ Fourth came the National Socialists, or the “*Jugendgruppen der Partei*,” themselves divided into three age groups: the *Jungvolk*, the *Hitlerjugend*, and the *SS-Männer*.⁵⁰ Lastly, came the *Nachkriegsgeneration*, who had to study under the “tragic situation” of 1946-49. Although Spranger favorably depicts the post-1945 youth as “the most serious and best” in relation to their studies and “zeal to learn,” he laments their political reserve or

⁴⁶ To cite just three important examples from the work of sociologists and pedagogues, who follow Spranger’s comparison, see Theodor Litt, *Das Verhältnis der Generationen ehemals und Heute* (Wiesbaden, 1947); Hermann Nohl, “Die geistige Lage im gegenwärtigen Deutschland,” in *Die Sammlung* 2 (1947):601-606; and Georg Weippert, “Zur Soziologie der Jugend,” in *Studium Generale* 4, no. 10 (Dec. 1951):610-20.

⁴⁷ Spranger, “Fünf Generationen,” 32.

⁴⁸ *Bündische Generation* is not easily translated. It is meant to evoke the tendency of, particularly the male, youth after 1918 to seek security and meaning in associations and groups outside the family, which could be purely recreational, but mainly political and paramilitary in nature.

⁴⁹ Spranger, “Fünf Generationen,” 38f.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 47-49.

“*Zurückhaltung*” and their understandable but sometimes stubborn refusal to take up clear intellectual positions.⁵¹ Earlier generations, for Spranger, especially his somewhat mythologized “*eigentliche Jugendbewegung*,” formed crucial alternatives that governed the representation of postwar German students and their apparent philosophical-political outlook. Here one needs to emphasize the additional character of generations as discursive constructions. After 1945, Spranger and others are making observations in the first instance, not as sociologists of generations or of the youth, but as cultural commentators, who judge the youth by means of retrospective, dramatized myths and the sedimented characteristics that have come to embellish the image of previous generations. These then become the didactic examples by which older figures attempt to diagnose and to influence the new youth culture.

Rearming the Youth with Ideas

Spranger published several articles at the end of the war that openly discussed the National Socialist past. He often sought to deflect accusations that initial support for the National Socialists came from the universities, particularly from the ranks of the *Hochschüler* and their teachers. Moreover, although a “fanaticization of the academic youth” through National Socialist propaganda and suggestion did succeed in the 1930s, Spranger insisted that it failed to produce a youth ideology that outlasted the Third

⁵¹ Ibid., 54-55.

Reich.⁵² The outlook of the postwar academic youth reflected the diffidence and loss of faith of all those who survived the collapse.

Man hat wenig ungebrochenes Vertrauen zu den Lenkern der öffentlichen Angelegenheiten. Man ist mißtraurisch und verschlossen, sieht sich einer Lage gegenüber, die niemand meistern zu können scheint. Daher ein grundsätzlicher Rückzug in sich selbst und eine abwartende Haltung. Am wenigsten spricht man auf irgend eine Form von Pathos als Alle hohen Werte und Worte sind für lange Zeit verbraucht. Was übrig bleibt, ist eine verschwiegene, manchmal stark arbeitende Innerlichkeit, oder die Sorge für den eigenen Weg und den engsten Kreis.⁵³

For all the potential desirability of the political reserve and political sobriety of the postwar generation, Spranger found it astonishing that the youth's "need for pleasure [Genußsucht] had not embraced the intemperate forms" as they had done so spontaneously after the First World War.⁵⁴ He admitted that he missed the spiritual and intellectual initiative that prevailed after 1918. Spranger could not engage the youth in 1945 as he could in the 1920s:

Wenn ich meine Eindrücke mit ähnlichen Aussprachen nach dem ersten Weltkrieg vergliche, so fällt stark ins Auge, daß nichts mehr von der romantischen Verträumtheit und den haltlosen Utopien der damaligen Generation zu spüren ist. Ein großer Ernst ist jetzt der Grundton.⁵⁵

What the former member of the "*eigentliche Jugendbewegung*" found missing in the West German youth was an ideology. "An ideology," Spranger insisted, "is comparable

⁵² E. Spranger, "Gibt es heute in Westdeutschland eine Jugendideologie?" in *Kulturfragen der Gegenwart* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1953), 75.

⁵³ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 83.

to an armament [*Rüstung*], in the domain of ideas.”⁵⁶ He meant not a political ideology as such, but a renewed cultural morality (*Sittlichkeit*) and intellectual movement that would absorb and even constructively channel some of the natural tendencies of the post-1945 youth to retreat into *Innerlichkeit*: “Es wäre zugleich die Art, die der Deutsche, der überhaupt geistig lebt, sich seit Alter Zeit einzustellen pflegt.”⁵⁷

In a move common to the resurgent ‘humanism’ of the time, Spranger gestured back to the legacy of German idealism; to the people of “Dichter und Denker” and to the cosmopolitan culture of Weimar and above all Goethe, albeit infused with the modern dynamic cultural activism of the *Jugendbewegung*. Such sentiments were echoed in postwar serial publications such as the Göttingen-based journal, *Die Sammlung*, edited by Spranger’s close colleagues, the leading voices of German pedagogy, Herman Nohl, Wilhelm Flitner, Erich Weniger, and Nohl’s former student, the philosopher, Otto Friedrich Bollnow. In Nohl’s short “Gleitwort” to the first volume, we learn the meaning of the journal’s title, *Die Sammlung*: it was the “summoning” of a renewed cultural strength poised towards the future; it was a trust in “the nonviolent power of the spirit” (*die gewaltlose Macht des Geistes*) for the “rebuilding of the German people.” Spranger echoed this sentiment in an article titled after Goethe’s famous call “Stirb und Werde!”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁸ Spranger, “Stirb und Werde,” in *Die Sammlung* 1, no. 4 (1945-46):389-94. See also Jost Hermand’s discussion of the journal and its commonality with the postwar humanistic pathos in *Kultur im Wiederaufbau: Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1945-1965* (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung GmbH., 1986), 72-73.

in which he evoked the “old truth” (*alte Wahre*) of “simple morality,” or “*einfache Sittlichkeit*” to which Bollnow devoted a four-part essay in the journal’s first volume.

We will discuss how these gestures to classical German culture had limited resonance with the postwar youth below. For the moment, it is enough to observe how such cultural and intellectual sentiments carried with them high expectations for the youth of the postwar period. First, there are the incessant comparisons to the culturally aware generations before and after the First World War. To be sure, these comparisons did not always favor the post-1918 youth. Herman Nohl, for example, derisively characterized the young agitators of 1918 as “loud little Rousseaus.” In the post-1945 youth, however, Nohl observed that “Bei aller Skepsis gegen die großen Worte und laute Propaganda, gegen die Theorien der Konfessionen jeder Art, ist ein ganz sicheres Gefühl da für die *einfache Sittlichkeit*, die elementare Tugend der Wahrhaftigkeit, Gerechtigkeit und Treue, eine tiefe Verehrung des Geistigen und der Schönheit und eine dogmenlose Frömmigkeit, die das Ewige sucht.”⁵⁹ Indeed, despite their lack of knowledge, culture, and direction, in the minds and glowing eulogies of their elders, the postwar youth had “spirit” and could bear the burden of Germany’s cultural renewal. Thus in the late 1940s, we already see older figures attempting to engage and provoke the postwar youth into a generational consciousness—an owning up to its potential, its own “ideology.” Of course, this call coming from the older generation could also be deeply problematic for the youth themselves. Above all the formation of an “ideology” for a new generation was hindered

⁵⁹ Herman Nohl, “Die geistige Lage im gegenwärtigen Deutschland,” 604.

by the censorship of the older generation, which spoke in clichés and catchphrases that provided only superficial and sometimes inane representations of German intellectual traditions. It was one thing to laud the youth as the inheritors of these new ideological components and to call them “the future” in the cultural pages of the quality press and *Feuilletons*. Yet students were faced with a different reality as they entered the ill-equipped, understaffed postwar universities and pursued academic disciplines, where there remained a traditional *habitus* that imposed limits on what was possible.⁶⁰ In Germany the restrictions governing behavior were compounded by the unthematized codes of silence about the past. In spite of all the talk of new academic freedom and the youth’s “productive intellectual strength,” it was farfetched to expect the young students and *Hochschüler* of the 1940s to assume responsibility in the manner their teachers set forth and to find the energy to assume the role of the intellectual elite of their generation. The postwar generation often simply lacked the resources—information, intellectual role models, material means, and the ability to navigate the unthematized practices of academic life—to answer this call.

⁶⁰ Pierre Bourdieu has also pointed to how structures of the *habitus* can influence and restrict the range of experience of a generation. Generation conflicts, in this way, can also be caused by “different *modes of generation*” in the early formation of a generational cohort which then directs its “perception and appreciation of all subsequent experience.” Although Bourdieu tends to discount the possible polarities at play within a generation (Mannheim’s *Generationseinheiten*), the conflict between generations, particularly in institutional frameworks like the university, is also a result of “conditions of existence which, in imposing different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable, cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa” (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977], 78).

A Lost Generation? And the Question of Silence

One is often too quick to interpret the silence of the postwar youth as complacency or indifference. The German word *schweigen* is a verb, and it implies an action. Those who had compromised themselves with the defunct dictatorship, whether “*echte Nazis*,” “*Mitläufer*,” “inner émigrés,” etc., were certainly deeply aware of this complexity as they filled in the “*Fragebogen*,” or political questionnaire required by the Occupational Authorities, where they selectively recounted their recent actions and inactions under the dictatorship. Actively remaining silent could have been the understandable response of the youth to the silence of the older generation from whom they expected more explanation. Hans Werner Richter pointed out in a famous article in *Der Ruf: Unabhängige Blätter der Jungen Generation* (“the independent pages of the young generation”) that the postwar silence of the young must be understood in the context of the 12-year silence of the older generation. It is thus not surprising that the call to political engagement or political education would be met with a pregnant silence that betrayed a degree of mistrust and even confusion:

Sie schweigt aus dem sicheren Gefühl heraus, daß die Diskrepanz zwischen der bedrohten menschlichen Existenz und der geruhsamen Problematik jener älteren Generation, die aus ihrem olympischen Schweigen nach zwölf Jahren heraustrat, zu groß ist, um überbrückbar zu sein.⁶¹

⁶¹ [Hans Werner Richter], “Warum Schweigt die junge Generation,” in *Der Ruf: unabhängige Blätter der jungen Generation* 1, no.2 (Sept. 1946): 1.

Neither evasive nor conformist, Richter went on, “Sie [die junge Generation] schweigt, weil sie mit den Begriffen und Problemen, die heute an sie herangetragen werden, nichts anzufangen weiß; sie schweigt, weil sie die Diskrepanz zwischen dem geschriebenen Wort und dem erlebten Leben zu stark empfindet.”⁶² In this conflict between generations over silence and speaking about the past, taking the older generation to task for their actions or inaction was restricted to a few critical journals and figures. The eminent Swiss theologian Karl Barth questioned the widespread assertion that the postwar youth was a “lost generation” due to their indoctrination with National Socialist ideology in the Hitler Youth and their army experience. In a speech before the student body in Bonn, republished in the *Göttinger Universitäts-Zeitung*—a journal edited by students and young *Dozenten*—Barth argued that the possible political unreliability of the students and their mistrust of the occupation was only part of the danger facing them. He was one of the few to discuss the issue of the trustworthiness of the older figures, whom the students would confront as their teachers and professors. For Barth, there were too many professors who, if they had not actively conspired with National Socialism, stood by or even welcomed the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. Certainly there were “honorable exceptions” among the German professoriate. But there were too many others, Barth warned,

keine Bösewichte, keine Nazis, nur unverbesserliches Nationalisten in der Art derer, die das zum ersten Mal frei gewordene Deutschland 1918-1933 dem neuen Verderben entgegengeführt, es schließlich ans Schlachtmesser geliefert ... Es ist

⁶² Ibid., 2.

fatal, daß so viele deutsche Studenten dem Unterricht, der Erziehung, dem Vorbild gerade dieses Professoren-typus ausgeliefert sind. In dieser Schule werden sie keine freien Männer werden.”⁶³

However, few commentators were as candid as Barth in their judgment of the older generation.

Certainly, between 1945 and 1949 there was a relatively frank discussion about the Nazi past in journals such as *Frankfurter Hefte*, *Die Wandlung*, *Der Monat* or *Die Gegenwart*. However, the political discourse of these journals was largely influenced by two elements. First, the editors of and contributors to these journals were of a considerable age and, therefore, had vastly different experiences from the youth. Second, these journals were subject to the politics of the occupational authority in each respective zone. None of this was lost on the German students. Niclaus Sombart, a contributor after 1947 to *Der Ruf*, recalled that, despite his respect for publications like *Die Wandlung* and its editors, Dolf Sternberger (1907-1989), Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), and Alfred Weber (1868-1958), the journal did not inspire his generation:

Die Wandlung [war] nicht meine Sache, nicht die Sache meiner Generation. Sie beurteilte die ‘geistige Situation’ der Zeit mit den Kriterien der Vergangenheit und setzte ein Wissen um diese Vergangenheit voraus. Sie war nicht für junge Leser gemacht, die von dieser Vergangenheit nichts wussten, für die Worte wie Schuld, Republik, Freiheit, Humanität inhaltlos waren, mit nichts aus ihrem eigenen Erfahrungsschatz in Verbindung zu bringen.⁶⁴

⁶³ Karl Barth, “Verlorene Generation?” in *Göttinger Universitäts-Zeitung* 2, no. 12 (May 1947): 2.

⁶⁴ Niclaus Sombart, *Rendezvous mit dem Weltgeist: Heidelberger Reminiscenzen* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2000), 122.

Indeed, such key words like “humanity,” “Humanism,” “Europe,” “Guilt,” “Spirit,” “Character,” and one should add the somewhat untranslatable “*Sittlichkeit*” as well as combinations in catch phrases like “European Spirit,” “Universal Guilt,” or “Spirit of humanity” were ubiquitously present in the cultural journals of the older generation. However, as Anson Rabinbach and other historians have observed, this rhetoric, though sometimes well-meaning, was caught up in the identity politics of older generations and especially in their own internal disputes about pre-Nazi intellectual and cultural traditions.⁶⁵ When these aging intellectuals attempted to invoke this language in their exhortations of youth and its new “mission,” the words could ring hollow and appear quite superficial to German students, particularly when the truly intellectually gifted and culturally-aware among them wanted *content*, learning material, books, as opposed to confusing rhetoric.

“A lost generation?” A “silent generation?”—perhaps it is Richter’s notion of the “Olympian silence” of their elders that was the true cause of the youth’s reluctance to identify with the political comportment of the older generation. However, Sombart may ultimately be closer to explaining the sensibilities of the postwar youth. For the incessant recapitulation of past imagery and the recitation of the *Modewörter* of the day in the pages of cultural journals and magazines, limited by the political restrictions, incipient

⁶⁵ See Anson Rabinbach, “Restoring the German Spirit: Humanism and Guilt in Postwar Germany,” in Jan-Werner Müller, ed., *German Ideologies since 1945: Studies in the Political Thought and Culture of the Bonn Republic* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 29-33.

Cold-War strategy, and the selective funding of the occupational powers,⁶⁶ could be just as much a cause for the apparent silence of the youth. Nicolaus Sombart (1923-2008), student of Alfred Weber in Heidelberg and the independently wealthy son of the sociologist Werner Sombart, had planned his own journal entitled, “*Verlorene Generation*” that was to appeal to the “intellectual sensibilities of the Generation between twenty and thirty years old,” the cohort to which he himself belonged. Although we find even in Sombart’s reminiscences of the goals of his failed journal some similar appeals to a youth emancipated from the past and directed towards the future, he seemed to grasp better the hunger of this disinherited youth for a new relation to the intellectual past and the newly opened culture:

In meiner Zeitschrift wollte ich weniger zu der Jugend sprechen als auf sie hören. Horchen auf die Befindlichkeiten, die ‘neu’, die anders, die bewerkenswert waren. Dass sie vorhanden waren, setzte ich voraus. Der Blick durfte nicht in die Vergangenheit, sondern musste in die Zukunft gerichtet werden. Die Jungen hatten ihr Leben vor sich, aber sie waren so tief gefallen, ohne eigenes Verschulden, dass etwas geschehen musste, sie aufzurichten. Sie brauchten Ermunterung, Perspektiven, Hoffnung. Sie waren gehungert, sie bauchten Nahrung.”⁶⁷

The meditation on the gap between the older generations and the youth was a central preoccupation among professors concerned with postwar education. Authors

⁶⁶ On the role of U.S. cultural agents, such as Shepard Stone, the Office of War Information, the Congress of Cultural Freedom, and the OSS, see Volker Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shepard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 35-36. On U.S. influence over *Der Monat* in particular, which became affectionately named “Die CIA Zeitschrift,” see Ibid., 215-18. The Munich-based *Der Ruf*, edited by Alfred Andersch and H.W. Richter had its license revoked in 1947 after its 17th issue by the U.S. Occupational Authority.

⁶⁷ Sombart, *Rendezvous mit dem Weltgeist*, 123-24.

writing in *Die Wandlung* often self-consciously noted this *Ungleichzeitigkeit*. Peter Heinrich von Blankenhagen, although drawing on a common trope in “Der falsche Charakter,” admitted that there was a difficult gap between the experience of the older generation of university teachers—those who had reached adulthood before 1933 and in 1945 were able to view the Nazi past as a parenthesis—and that of their students.⁶⁸ He hoped this gap could be overcome through clarity on the part of the elders, who he thought ran the danger of forgetting not the Nazi past but the situation of the young:

Die ältere Generation erliegt praktisch der Gefahr zu vergessen, daß wer heute zwischen 20 und 30 Jahre alt ist, in einer Zeit aufwuchs, die es nur in Ausnahmefälle erlaubte, etwas anderes zu sehen, zu hören und zu lesen als was in das “Weltbild” des Nationalsozialismus paßte.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, von Blankenhagen’s concern remained focused on the effects of the Third Reich and the war on the *Heimkehrer*, not the complicity of the old generation. He indicates this fear summarily when he states, “Fast jeder Student von heute hält es für absurd und empörend, wo nicht für verbrecherisch zu meinen, gerade der Patriot habe den Sieg Deutschlands fürchten, seine Niederlage wünschen müssen.”⁷⁰ The youth lacked the “true character” informed by “humanity” and a “humanistic image of man” because such values had been relativized by the National Socialist regime, and could not

⁶⁸ P[eter] H[einrich] von Blankenhagen, “Der falsche Charakter: zur politischen Haltung der studierenden Jugend,” in *Die Wandlung* 1, no. 5 (1946): 377-83.

⁶⁹ von Blankenhagen, “Der falsche Charakter,” 377.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 379.

truly be reintroduced by the occupational forces so long as ‘western’ influences were seen simply as another competing ideology imposed by their conquerors.⁷¹

Not everyone judged the youth quite so narrowly. Other authors identified a crisis of trust, but better captured the complexity and nuances of inter-generational conflict. Writing in the *Frankfurter Hefte*, Hans-Peter Berglar-Schröer noted that mistrust in the postwar era did not necessarily correspond to a trusting comportment to the defunct Nazi regime. As he put it in his article, “Die Vertrauenskrise der Jugend,”

An dieser Stelle muß etwas über das Mißtrauen gesagt werden. Auch das Mißtrauen ist kein Denkergebnis, sondern eine Gefühlsregung. Es kann sich ebenso täuschen und ebenso getäuscht werden wie das Vertrauen. Fehlendes Vertrauen ist noch kein Mißtrauen und umgekehrt, fehlendes Mißtrauen noch kein Vertrauen. Beides sind aktive Haltungen. Die breite Masse der Jugendlichen, die dem Dritten Reiche nicht vertraut hat, mißtraut auch heute nicht dem ‘Vierten.’ Die Mißtrauischen von heute setzen sich aus einem Teil der Vertrauenden von gestern und aus denen zusammen, die schon gegen das Hitlerreich mißtrausich waren.⁷²

Berglar-Schröer thus warned the older generation not to misinterpret the mistrust of the younger generation; for this would only exacerbate a “crisis of trust” which threatened to make any influence on the young impossible. The context of generational misunderstanding required patience on the part of the elders; yet only the young themselves could resolve the problem of mistrust: “Der Junge aber muß erst das Geleise finden, in dem er sich fortbewegen kann, er muß die Impulse erst empfangen, die ihn dann wie Raketen in seine Bahn hineinschießen und in ihr kreisen lassen sollen. Aus

⁷¹ Ibid., 382-83.

⁷² Hans-Peter Berglar-Schröer, “Die Vertrauenskrise der Jugend,” in *Frankfurter Hefte* 2, no. 7 (1947): 695.

diesem Grunde ist der Verlust jeglichen Vertrauens, aus dem eine Leere oder ein aktives Mißtrauen hervorgehen, in ganz besonderer Weise ein Problem der Jugend.”⁷³ Clearly, the expectation is placed on the young to find the new “track” (*Geleise*) that would lead towards orientation and trust; however, again, very little is said about the role of the older figures, who were still active and influential in the university and wider culture and thus bore the clear responsibility to set this youth on the right track.

Of course, this discrepancy was not lost on some youthful commentators. Writers in the journals edited by students, *Hochschüler*, and *Dozenten* did not always accept this tactic of buck-passing present in most of the older generation’s conceptualizations of the postwar generational problem. As one student wrote in the *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau*:

Über wenig Dinge ist man sich heute so einig wie darüber, daß das Neue nur von der Jugend kommen könne. Plausibel wie die Behauptung auf den ersten Blick erscheint, ist sie gefährlich in ihrer Verschwommenheit und Voreiligkeit. Handelte es sich schon beim Nationalsozialismus weitgehend um die Kapitulation einer Generation vor ihren Kindern, so scheint sich heute das gleiche Spiel zu wiederholen.⁷⁴

In some respects, then, this commentator perspicaciously perceived a continuity between the cult of youth and spirit of the *Hitlerjugend* and BDM during the Nazi period and the way in which the old after 1945 symbolically ceded responsibility for the future to the youth. After 1945, however, it was no longer the National Socialist youth organizations

⁷³ Ibid., 699.

⁷⁴ Hans Joachim Lang, “Zum Generationsproblem,” in *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau* 1, no. 1 (1946-1947):38.

enticing the youth away from parental authority. All too ready to avoid confronting their own complicity in the past indoctrination of their children, the compromised elders simply passed responsibility onto the youth to find their way out and, indeed, the way for all of Germany into the future:

Eine Generation, gegen die die Geschichte scheinbar entschieden hatte, gab sich auf zugunsten einer sieghaft-frechen Jugend, die den Stein der Weisen nicht erst gefunden, sondern schon wieder vergessen hatte. Die Götter dieser Jugend haben sich als Götzen erwiesen. Ihre Ideale sind zerbrochen. In bedauerlicher Verwechslung von Wünschbarkeit und Wirklichkeit wird dieses Chaos ziemlich leichtfertig dem Chaos vor der Schöpfung gleichgestellt. Etwas Neues würde kommen, es würde von der Jugend kommen, und es würde das Gute sein. Es handelt sich nur darum, diskret Platz zu machen.⁷⁵

This contemporary analysis gives some credence to Mitscherlich's notion of a continuity in the "absence of the father" both during the Nazi period and after its collapse. As Mitscherlich himself wrote in 1947, this was a "Jugend ohne Bilder," one that had to overcome the experience of "cynicism towards all forms of authority" (*Vaterbilder*).⁷⁶ Although Mitscherlich too echoed the common sentiment that this was a youth for which "nothing was . . . more suspicious than ideas," it remained a youth in need of form

⁷⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁶ Mitscherlich, "Jugend Ohne Bilder," *Du* 7, no. 4 (1947), 40. Mitscherlich famously introduced the notion of "Vaterlosigkeit" into the discussion of collective, social psychology in his *Auf dem Weg zur vaterlosen Gesellschaft: Ideen zur Sozialpsychologie* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1965), though, as in the case of the *Inability to Mourn*, the prescriptive potential and relevance of Mitscherlich's work for the youth seemed to decrease due to a concern to propound a general social-psychological model, which gave little in the way of orientation.

(Bild).⁷⁷ For this Mitscherlich demanded a change on the part of their elders: “Man muß die Jugend anders ansprechen, anders bilden!”⁷⁸

The most astute commentators were more honest about the inability of the youth to traverse this path alone, without the guidance and the trust of their teachers. The émigré jurist, Fritz Pringsheim, then Oxford professor of Law,⁷⁹ reported on the “German students” in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*. Interestingly, the article was reprinted in the *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau*, the student journal of Hamburg University.⁸⁰ Pringsheim was perhaps reminding the professors as much as the students when he insisted that German university students were “as diligent as ever” and that their desire for guidance was unmistakable.⁸¹ Though he noted the difficulty of traversing “the desert which Nazism achieved,” Pringsheim affirmed that

der Boden zeigt sich bereits, auf dem nüchterne, geduldige und harte Erziehungsarbeit geleistet werden kann. Die Studenten sind nicht mehr so leicht verführbar. Wenn man ihnen keine einzige Entscheidung abnimmt, sie überall auf ihr eigenes Denken zurückweist, niemals bloße Autorität sprechen läßt, überall Selbständigkeit pflegt, sind sie nach anfänglicher Scheu dankbar und bereit.⁸²

⁷⁷ The play here on the German term *Bild* is lost in English. Mitscherlich uses the notion of the youth’s “*Bildlosigkeit*” in the sense of a “lack of form,” or absence of guiding models, which is clear if we keep in mind that the verb *bilden* means “to form” and “to cultivate.”

⁷⁸ Mitscherlich, “Jugend ohne Bilder,” 40.

⁷⁹ See Tony Honiré, “Fritz Pringsheim (188-1967),” in *Jurists Uprooted: German-Speaking Emigré Lawyers in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 205-232.

⁸⁰ Fritz Pringsheim, “Über deutsche Studenten,” reprinted in *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau* 2, no. 3 (1947-1948): 108-112.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁸² Pringsheim, “Über deutsche Studenten,” 109.

As we will see, instructors in philosophy and the humanities often lauded the qualities of their first postwar students, who overcame material dearth, hunger, and homelessness to ardently pursue their education. Pringsheim also observed the unavoidable and unfortunate problem that the relationship between professors and students could no longer simply be mediated through younger assistants and *Dozenten*, for, as he points out, “this entire generation is lacking.”⁸³ He pointed to the millions of war dead and prisoners of war comprising the missing generation that might otherwise have mediated between the professors and students. Like the other commentators, Pringsheim noted how the gap between the professors and the new generation threatened to become dangerously great. Yet instead of burdening the youth with the future, like Blankenhagen, Berglar-Schröer, and others we have encountered, Pringsheim placed the onus on the professors, the only ones in a position to “build an abiding bridge from the past into the future.”⁸⁴ Of course, it is unclear if émigré commentators like Pringsheim and Karl Barth, or, for that matter, the older professors to whom they addressed the call knew what this bridge to the future should be or how it might be built. For they were dealing with a youth that to a large extent was not only exhausted from the war, but fearful and resentful of the occupation. However, Pringsheim was certain that these students by virtue of their experience were “no longer so easily seducible [verführbar]”;⁸⁵ this meant they would be harder to

⁸³ Ibid., 110.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 110.

⁸⁵ Pringsheim, “Über deutsche Studenten,” 109.

convince, but given the proper example, with patience and frank communication, their professors could instill in them a more lasting form of trust and democratic sensibility.⁸⁶

In Search of Lost Time

The majority of German students entering university after 1945 had taken part in the war in some capacity. For these students, the political discussion of collective guilt and the Nazi past missed the important point about the immediate circumstances under which they had to study. Whether they had been fanatical Nazis or not, most did not want to hear about their complicity in the crimes of a murderous regime, or that what they had suffered in the war was for naught. More urgently for them, depending on their age group, was to cope with the fact of the loss of their years of study. They began their university experience in search of lost time. Iring Fetcher (b. 1922), a student of Euard Spranger at Tübingen, recalled that the student resistance to party politics or the aims of the occupational powers had very clear grounds: “Viele Studierende waren kriegsversehrt; fast alle hatten Jahre ihres Lebens als Soldaten verbracht und kamen nun – viel zu alt – erst zum Studium. Es fiel ihnen schwer, zugeben zu müssen, daß diese Jahre im Dienst an einem verbrecherischen Regime verloren waren.”⁸⁷ Commentators in cultural journals at the time noted the same feeling of lost years of study and the inability to cope with this trauma. Indeed, not only had the war years been lost to these students,

⁸⁶ Ibid., 110-112.

⁸⁷ Iring Fetscher, *Neugier und Furcht: Versuch, mein Leben zu verstehen* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 1995), 324.

but they now were forced to deal with the realization of their inferior, incomplete, and sporadic education under the Nazi regime in the 1930s. As we have learned from the studies of Heinz Bude and Rolf Schörken, it was a trauma experienced in different ways by a broad range of age groups, those born between roughly 1910 and 1930. This causes a problem in how we conceptualize a so-called “45er generation.” The fact that it was not so much an experience but a *non-experience* of lost time makes it difficult to understand this generation in terms of Mannheim’s idea of a generation’s *Zusammenhang*. There was no real solidarity characterized by “a participation in common destinies.”⁸⁸ That they were students of vastly different ages meant not only different intensities of actual war experience, but also divergent levels of intellectual disorientation, stemming from the point at which their studies were interrupted, or their level of awareness at the time that they were being deprived of a full education.

The idea of lost years circulated after the war, but in most cases in reference to older generations. In the first volume of the important postwar journal *Die Gegenwart* appeared an article that defined the “generation problem” around the issue of stolen years—“Die gestohlenen Jahren.”⁸⁹ Yet the article did not consider the “stolen years” of the young generation but of those born just prior to the First World War, which the author dubs the “generation of 1907.” Alongside this trauma of lost years, commentators

⁸⁸ Mannheim, *Wissenssoziologie*, 542.

⁸⁹ R[obert] H[aerdter], “Die gestohlenen Jahren,” in *Die Gegenwart* 1, nos. 6-7 (March 1946):14-15. Haerdter follows the experiences of a “Generation von 1907” through the experiences of loss from 1918 to 1945.

frequently testified to the more final nature of the defeat in 1945 as a source of generational misunderstanding. At the end of the First World War, returning soldiers could maintain some idea of Germany as a victim, of a stolen victory, a betrayal, an unfair peace, and above all of German heroism; they could commemorate the sacrifices of the dead and wounded by erecting monuments to the fallen. Now these same survivors from 1918 saw a youth returning home again from a lost war but under very different circumstances. Their teachers did not fully comprehend how the search for new orientation and intellectual or even spiritual role models was much more difficult in a context of physical occupation and the disillusionment that comes after the disappearance of an ideologically charged and invasive dictatorship. Public commentators registered the youth's greater sensitivity, defensiveness, and indifference towards the public discussion of guilt and the attempts made under the occupation to proliferate the values of their former enemies. The elders' attempts to understand this youth tend to place the blame with their indoctrination by Nazi organizations, failed education, and the loss of a sense for right and wrong. However, these diagnoses tend to fall short of analyzing, except in the vaguest of terms, the specific responsibility born by the old for the youth's intellectual destitution and moral disorientation.⁹⁰ Edward Spranger succinctly described the different challenges facing students and teachers in 1945. Spranger observed,

[j]etzt aber ereignete sich genau das Umgekehrte wie 1919. Wurde damals der älteren Generation an allem, aber auch an allem, Schuld gegeben, so

⁹⁰ For one of the better discussions of this conflict see, B[enno] R[eifenberg], "Über die Liebe zum Vaterland," in *Die Gegenwart* 1, nos. 6-7 (March 1946):11-14.

brachten die jetzt Studierenden den Lehrern der Hochschulen ein Vertrauen entgegen, das von diesen nur in ganz seltenen Fällen als verdient empfunden werden konnte. Das *verpflichtete*, nicht nur zur Dankbarkeit. Natürlich wollten und mußten diese um beste Jugendjahre gebrachten Heimkehrer an schnelles Vorwärtskommen denken. Sie wollten aber auch etwas lernen.⁹¹

The most palpable feeling for the “45er generation” was, in the first instance, not directed towards the calculus of guilt that seemed to characterize the policies of the occupational powers and the reopened universities. More important was their desire to enter the university and take up their studies where they had left off, or the need to catch up, often signified with the word “*Nachholbedürfnis*.” In terms of the issue of guilt and political re-education so often applied to the postwar situation, the students are characterized less by an unwillingness to deal with the past so much as by the realization that their only connection to a real intellectual life was their teachers—the older generation. The language of de-Nazification and of identifying guilt would only obstruct and disrupt this relationship. This made all the more important the search for teachers and role-models who could reconnect them with the living tradition of German thought and shepherd them through the university.

Some older figures misunderstood these specific problems of the post-1945 youth because of their embellished and romantic recollections of 1918. In a speech before students in Göttingen in July 1946 the physicist Werner Heisenberg drew a comparison

⁹¹ Spranger, “Fünf Jugengenerationen,” 54.

between his education at the University of Munich directly following the First World War and the situation facing the students after the Second. He recalled how

die Niederlage im Ersten Weltkrieg hatte in uns ein tiefes Mißtrauen wachgerufen gegen die Ideale, mit denen dieser Krieg geführt und verloren worden war und die uns nun irgendwie hohl erschienen: wir nahmen uns deshalb das Recht selbst nachzusehen, was in dieser Welt wertvoll und wertlos sei, und nicht unserer Eltern und Lehrer danachzufragen. Neben vielen anderen Werten entdeckten wir dabei auch die Wissenschaft von neuem.⁹²

Heisenberg thus sought to encourage the students to envision an international community of scholars. He observed how the natural sciences were successfully appropriated by the ideological regime of National Socialism for the practical goals of military might and for national purposes, and how the humanities were used to create the building blocks for a nationalist world-view. Against this he felt that an international community of scientists, particularly in Europe, could counter this tendency towards the instrumentalization of science for ideological politics and its employment for narrow nationalist concerns. Yet how could the intellectual youth of 1945 develop, or even visualize such values on their own, that is, without asking anything of the parents or teachers?

Heisenberg appears to have overlooked the fact that what was possible after 1918—to redefine science anew in the face of the world-view of their fathers or teachers—was not something that the intellectual youth of 1945, raised as they were in the exceptional circumstances of the 1930s and 1940s, could achieve on their own.

⁹² Werner Heisenberg, “Wissenschaft als Mittel zur Verständigung unter den Völkern,” in *Deutsche Beiträge* 1, no. 2 (1947):165.

Heisenberg adopts common tropes of the postwar moment: European cosmopolitanism and internationalism, and a revaluing of science in the face of “nihilism.” Yet the physicist provided no explanation from whence this dynamic impetus was to come if not from the teachers who were themselves compromised and certainly in no position to form the “aristocracy” of European scholars (*Gelehrten*) he envisioned.⁹³ Interestingly, Pringsheim wrote of the problem in a different way:

Worte haben die Tendenz, durch zu häufigen und unbedachten Gebrauch leer zu werden. Derselbe Mißbrauch, der früher mit dem Worte “deutsch” getrieben wurde, beginnt nun mit dem Worte “europäisch”. Plötzlich denken wir nun alle “europäisch”, reden vom dem “erbe des Abendlandes”. Das ist aber schön und gut. Aber es klingt doch ein wenig nach Spätsommer, nach Flucht in vergangene Herrlichkeit. Die Welt ist schon lange nicht mehr von Europa bestimmt, nach Asien und Amerika verlagern sich die Gewichte. Selbst ein geeintes Europa wird nicht unabhängig, selbständig und frei sein. Das muß man wissen, wenn man den großen Gedanken “Europa” verwirklichen will.⁹⁴

In this lecture before students in Freiburg in July of 1950, Pringsheim perceptively observed that such clichéd appeals towards a European spirit and international cooperation were empty gestures in the bifurcated Cold War world. The task, for Pringsheim, was much more practical and entailed reconstruction of the German intellectual tradition.

Pringsheim expressed this goal in a way reminiscent of Edward Spranger’s concept of a *Rüstung* of ideas. Yet whereas Spranger’s notion of *Rüstung* was mainly cultural and philosophical, Pringsheim’s concern was the political education of the youth.

⁹³ Heisenberg, 167.

⁹⁴ Pringsheim, “Student und Politik,” in *Die Sammlung* 6 (1951):48-49.

For this task, again, trust and encouragement was needed on the part of the older generation. This could already be accomplished at the level of the university, not only by engendering trust between students and their instructors, but also in student self-government and the use of seminars where professors and students could work together. For Pringsheim, this conception aligned very much with the traditional humanistic notion of the German university as defined by Wilhelm von Humboldt, which had to be recovered from the clutches of the authoritarian-minded *Ordinarien*. A community of thinking and research was the leading idea of the classical university, but as Pringsheim insists, “die Studenten *sind* die Universität, so gut wie die Professoren. Aber dazu gehört daß sie von ihrem Recht gebrauch machen im vollen Gefühl ihrer Mit-Verantwortung.”⁹⁵ In the end, “politische Erziehung ist wie jeder Erziehung, Anleitung zur *Selbsterziehung*.”⁹⁶ This meant that the true spirit of the learning process, for Pringsheim, was embodied in the free growth of critical thought: “Sie lehrt nicht ein Spiel mit Worten und Begriffen. Es ist eine Freude zu beobachten, wie die Abneigung gegen laute Worte und heftiges Reden eher wächst, als abnimmt. Skepsis und Wachsamkeit sehe ich gern.”⁹⁷ Pringsheim here reconceptualized the mistrust and skepticism of the youth in a much more constructive and concrete way than others like Herman Nohl who, as we have seen, proffered a return to *einfache Sittlichkeit* and German spirit. Pringsheim lauded a healthy skepticism as a positive value when redirected in critical dialogue between

⁹⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

teacher and students.⁹⁸ Skepticism as critical thought was not the cause for concern but for hope. The development of independent, critical reasoning had been the true goal of a classic German humanistic education. Education towards self-education was Pringsheim's way of reformulating the demands for political re-education proffered by the occupying powers as the re-establishment of the classical German university, whose form was originally determined as much by students as it was by their professors.

A re-envisioned university curriculum was one way in which the older generation of German philosophers and educators hoped to deal with the problem of the younger generation and its political heritage. Some invoked a new idea of neo-humanism, which hearkened back to ideas of the German classic tradition, and appeared to be a way in which a German cosmopolitanism such as existed, in their view, during the *Goethezeit*, could be rediscovered. This appeal was by no means unique or new to the postwar period. The German mandarins had made similar appeals during the 1920s. However, whereas Goethe could be successfully nationalized after the First World War, he could not simply be democratized after the Second. Friedrich Meinecke concluded his famous commentary of 1946 on the social and political antecedents of Nazism, *Die deutsche Katastrophe* with a call for the creation of "Goethe Communities" ("Goethe-Gemeinden") in all parts of Germany as means to reconnect with classical German cultural traditions that predated

⁹⁸ We must therefore differentiate Pringshiem's praise of the youth's skepticism from that of Helmut Schelsky's later concept of the "skeptical generation." For the former signals an openness towards education and public, critical discourse, whereas for the latter, as we shall see, skepticism entails above all a concern for the concrete and a sober sense of reality, which actually separates this youth from constructive public dialogue with its elders.

the rise of German militarism.⁹⁹ However, as Eugon Kogon wrote in the *Frankfurter Hefte*, Meinecke's short history had more to offer the older, *much* older generation of the *Gründerzeit*, who could still find much to salvage in German culture and in German politics in the age of Bismarck before it had been 'blown off course' by Wilhelm II's *Weltpolitik* and then hijacked by the "masses" into the two-headed hydra of Hitlerism and Bolshevism.¹⁰⁰ Kogon's co-editor, Walter Dirks likewise complained of the haste with which the *Goethehaus* in Frankfurt was resurrected "as if nothing had happened."¹⁰¹ In August 1947, as recipient of the *Goethe-Preis* from the city of Frankfurt, Karl Jaspers expressed a similar sentiment towards the contemporary "Goethe addiction" (*Goethe-Anneigung*).¹⁰² The time of the Goethe-Cult was over, Jaspers declared: Goethe could no longer be offered up as a figure for emulation or imitation. Echoing Dirks, Jaspers poignantly observed in reference to the *Goethehaus*, "Es wird nicht mehr das alte Haus sein. Die alte Welt ist endgültig verloren, wir müssen *über einen Abgrund hinüber* die Erinnerung festzuhalten versuchen."¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe*, trans. Sydney B. Fay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 120.

¹⁰⁰ E[ugon] K[ogon], "Beginn der Geschichtsrevision," in *Franfurter Hefte* 1, no. 8 (1946):776-79.

¹⁰¹ Walter Dirks, "Mut zum Abschied," in *Frankfurter Hefte* 2, no. 8 (1947):819. Anson Rabinbach also points to this anecdote as an example of a "conservative cultural restoration"; however he reminds us that it adds to the one-sided view of the immediate postwar era as one of "restoration," whereas the late 1940s can just as well be seen as much more "intellectually vital" period in which more nuanced forms of cultural reconstruction were possible (Rabinbach, "Restoring the German Spirit," 23-24).

¹⁰² Karl Jaspers, *Unsere Zukunft und Goethe* (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1948). This provoked a series of heated exchanges between Jaspers and the Professor of Romance Languages in Bonn, Ernst Robert Curtius, who objected to the way Jaspers used the occasion to raise the question of German collective guilt. See the somewhat bemused treatment of the "Curtius-Jaspers-Streit," in *Göttinger Universitäts-Zeitung* 4, no.10 (1949):6-7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 40. Cf. "Das Haus zu den drei Leyern," in *Die Gegenwart* 2, 23-24 (Dec. 1947): 17, where Max von Brück emphasizes the importance of the *Goethehaus* as effigy and testament: "Das alte Haus wird

Nearing the two-hundredth anniversary of the poet's birth in 1949, cultural journals such as *Die Sammlung*, *Deutsche Beiträge*, and *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau* devoted issues to Goethe's legacy. Like the gestures towards a return to the "humanism" of the German classical tradition, to a simpler morality, and to a common European culture, it is difficult to imagine that the attempts like that of Hermann Uhde-Bernays to resuscitate the "undying spirit" of Goethe as a political guide or moral touchstone resonated much with the post-1945 youth.¹⁰⁴ Some critics pointed to the Goethe revival as a way for the older generation to gloss over the crimes of the Nazi past. The returned emigré Richard Alewyn argued in the *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau* that Goethe was not an alibi, or, as he put it literally and symbolically, "Zwischen uns und Weimar liegt Buchenwald." Alewyn was highly suspicious of any attempt to reinvent Goethe as a German phenomenon, to set up a 'good' Germany alongside the bad: "Es gibt nur Goethe *und* Hitler, die Humanität *und* die Bestialität. Es kann zumindestens für die heute lebende Generationen, nicht zwei Deutschlands geben. Es gibt nur eines oder keines."¹⁰⁵

Humanism meets Modernity: Studium generale

nicht mehr sein, aber ein Abbild wird sein, hier und an diesem Platze; nicht täuschend und in leerem Trotz, sondern als seine Stätte des Gedankens und zu tätigem Anschauen. Und es wird eine Hülle sein für alles, was in bedachter Bangnis geborgen werden konnte in der großen Vernichtung."

¹⁰⁴ Hermann Uhde-Bernays, "Wendung der Jugend zu Goethe," in *Deutsche Beiträge* 1, 1 (1946):3-17. See Jost Hermand's discussion of the turn towards Goethe and humanism in *Kultur im Wiederaufbau*, 69-71.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Alewyn, "Goethe als Alibi?" in *Hamburger Akademischer Rundschau* 3, no. 8 (1948-1949):686.

Alongside these persistent but ineffectual appeals to a broken German cultural tradition, there existed institutional expressions of a reconceived humanist model of learning in the German university. The most significant of these was the implementation of the ideal of *Studium generale*. These experiments in general or humanistic education existed at several of the most prestigious institutions in the Western zones such as Heidelberg, Göttingen, Tübingen and Freiburg. Part of the plan for *Studium generale* was not just the idea of general studies, but a physical re-organization of student life at the university. In addition to re-connecting with a humanistic ideal, the implementation of *Studium generale* simultaneously responded to the problems of modernity, more specifically the modernization of the university and most specifically the excess of students, paucity of teachers and issue of living space. In Heidelberg, for example, 180 students of different ages and academic position were brought together in the “Collegium Academicum,” established in Winter 1946. Even in a city relatively untouched by allied bombing, the students of the Collegium were housed in buildings and barracks formerly belonging to the local administration of the *Wehrmacht*. In spite of cramped living conditions and minimal resources, the hope was to foster a spirit of camaraderie among the “Collegiaten,” but with the practical goal of teaching them “*Selbstverwaltung*,” or student self-government. Unlike the *Korporationen* or *Burschenschaften* of old, which had been tainted by their radical conservative record in the 1920s, the new students of the “general study colleges” would be placed in an environment where they could learn participatory democracy. A report published in October 1947 on conditions at Heidelberg University

described these reforms of the Collegium Academicum as potentially more appropriate for the changing social constitution of the student body. “Der neue Typ des deutschen Studenten, wie er im Collegium erzogen wird, entspricht den veränderten sozialen Voraussetzungen in besserer und gesünderer Weise als der auch noch gelegentlich auftretende Typ der vergangenen bürgerlich gesättigten Jahrzehnte.”¹⁰⁶

Whether in Heidelberg, or the other universities in the Western Zones, reformers aimed to create a college within the university, a community where students worked and lived together. Pringsheim adopted this idea when he insisted that the students themselves *were* the university. Indeed, *Studium generale* was related to the practice of the *offene Türe* or *dies academicus*—the days in which the faculties of the university would offer a cycle of lectures (*Ringvorlesungen*) on all topics in the humanities and sciences. The innovation after the war was to adapt and expand these traditional practices to specific postwar conditions and, more generally, to the threats presented by the modernization of the German university. Advocates of the *Studium generale* feared the university would become a bureaucratic machine that produced only narrow-minded specialists. Heinrich Behnke complained in the *Frankfurter Hefte* that, “Jeder Student will heute möglichst bald ein gutes Examen machen, er teilt daher seine Zeit sorgfältig ein, wie ein Geschäftsmann.”¹⁰⁷ This image of “businesslike” postwar students was linked first to the

¹⁰⁶ Christel Schmidt-Rohr, “Bericht von der Universität Heidelberg,” *Studium Generale* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1947): 59.

¹⁰⁷ Heinrich Behnke, “Erziehung und Bildung der intellektuellen Jugend: Das studium generale,” in *Frankfurter Hefte* 5, no. 4 (April 1950): 366.

economic hardships of the time but also to the commonly expressed view of the young generation as much more sober, practical or—in the favorite term—“*sachlich*.” These characteristics promoted the fear that in an age of greater specialization the *Hochschulen*, which traditionally were meant to form a unity, could become a “fragmented conglomerate of specialized schools.”¹⁰⁸ In a familiar refrain, Behnke lamented the lack of connection between professors and students—due in part to the growth of the student body as the number of *Dozenten* in fact decreased. Two dangers appeared imminent: the transformation of the university into a soulless business and the students into narrow-minded paper shufflers:

So kommt es leicht dazu, daß die Universität, die morgens früh die jungen Menschen aufsaugt und sie zum Abend, mit erdrückender Fülle neuen Stoffes angefüllt, wieder ausspeit, auf die Studenten wie eine riesige Maschine wirkt, zudem die sehr beschränkte freie Zeit nichts mehr von dem eigenartigen Reiz des studentischen Lebens früherer Tage hat; nach beendetem Kolleg geht man nach Haus, als käme man aus dem Büro oder aus einer Werkstatt.¹⁰⁹

It was “höchst gefährlich,” Behnke warned, “die Jugend dauernd zu enttäuschen und das Verlangen der jungen Menschen, in allen ihren Kräften angesprochen werden, unbeachtet zu lassen. Wer weiß denn, wohin der unbefriedigte Idealismus unserer Jugend ein nächstesmal ausschlagen wird?”¹¹⁰ Thus the bureaucratization and specialization endemic to the ‘mass’ university was often feared as an enabling factor in the manipulation of the youth’s will in the service of authoritarian causes.

¹⁰⁸ Behnke, “Erziehung und Bildung,” 366.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 368.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Studium generale was one response to this perceived threat, but it is also important to see that it was an expression of the need for orientation of the postwar generation. Behnke's discussion of the German youth focused on the need for an academic elite for the future. In order to create this, the universities needed a "different atmosphere," one in which, Behnke insisted, not only the understanding (*Verstand*) of the students must be addressed, but also their emotional life (*Gemüt*). This holistic approach, exemplified both in the program of *Studium generale* but also the traditional ideal of humanistic education, was far superior, Behnke argued, to the Anglo-American model, which was, in the minds of most German commentators, equated with bureaucratization and ever increasing specialization. Colleges of general studies within the university would provide a basis in humanistic education and political awareness for students as preparation for entering the *Hochschulen*. By expanding *Studium generale* and bringing students into closer contact with their peers and their instructors, German reformers hoped to engender a community of scholars, at least among the elite students within the university, that would counteract the tendency towards specialization and promote the development political responsibility, self-awareness, and a resistance to political manipulation.

Studium generale would offer a political education, but one which did not compromise the "Einsamkeit und Freiheit" of the traditional humanist university devoted to research and teaching—the *Universitas scholarum et magisterum*. Rather than allowing external politics to intrude into the university classrooms, a political sensibility

would emerge from within the university community itself. The idea was to create an environment where civic responsibility and social consciousness developed alongside the reconnection with traditional intellectual and cultural learning. As Arnold Bergstraesser argued before the Subcommittee for *Hochschulfragen* of the Bundestag in 1951, *Studium generale* served two purposes:

1. dem Studenten wieder eine wirkliche Verbindung mit den geistigen Gütern der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart zu schaffen;
2. ihm die Grundlagen des Wissens zu vermitteln, die bei einem Akademiker die Voraussetzung dafür bilden, daß er sich später als Bürger am öffentlichen Leben beteiligt.¹¹¹

Echoing this new sensibility, Hermann Heimpel, in his rectorial address to the entering class at the University of Göttingen, encouraged students to have “courage towards science.”¹¹² He identified *Wissenschaft* with the idea of *Freiheit*, which was embodied in *Studium generale*. For Heimpel, this meant less of an emphasis on preparation for exams and worry about assessment. However, in a slight departure from the experiments in student self-government like the “Collegium Academicum” in Heidelberg, Heimpel’s appeal emphasized the traditional form of the German *Korporationen* as the basis for student political self-education. The corporations and student unions would supplement classroom learning with political education with the goal of creating a living connection

¹¹¹ Quoted in Ulrich Schneider, “Hochschulreform, *Studium generale* und *Collegium Academicum* Heidelberg, 1945-1952,” in *Bildung und Erziehung* 36, no. 1 (1983):59.

¹¹² Hermann Heimpel, “Rede zur Immatrikulation an der Göttinger Universität,” in *Die Sammlung* 8 (1953):341.

between the German *Kommilitonen* by which they would become citizens of the university (*Bürger der Universität*).¹¹³ The rhetoric of community, citizenship, and family was a common pedagogical claim that was extended to German secondary education as a whole. As another commentator in the pages of *Die Sammlung* put it: “Unsere Schule braucht durchaus nicht im Amerikanischen Sinne zu einem Parlament im Kleinen zu werden, sondern mehr im Deutschen Sinne zu einem grossem Familie.”¹¹⁴

The new approach to education was thought to answer the thirst of the post-1945 youth for learning while also moderating the understandable desire to make up for lost time by proceeding too quickly, and superficially, through their studies. For Eduard Spranger, *Studium generale* was the educational form most adaptable to the earnest desire for learning, which he lauded in the student generation of the mid to late 1940s. Although, as we have seen, much of Spranger’s outlook on the postwar youth was based on an idealized view of the cultural fecundity of the pre-1914 *Jugendbewegung*, his call for a reinvention of the German university along humanistic lines was an honest attempt to address the special challenges facing the youth that returned from war in 1945:

Natürlich wollten und mußten diese um beste Jugendjahre gebrachten Heimkehrer an schnelles Vorwärtskommen denken. Sie wollen aber auch etwas lernen. Und dieser Lerneifer richtete sich keineswegs nur auf das Fachwissen. . . . Sie erwarteten wohl manchmal noch von ihren Lehrern, daß auch dieser Besitz ihnen fertig gegeben werden könnte. Denn sie hatten bisher in ganz einseitiger

¹¹³ Ibid., 342-43. *Kommilitone* was the traditional German term for fellow students.

¹¹⁴ Max Buchheim, “Aufgaben und Möglichkeiten der politischen Bildung in der Schule,” in *Die Sammlung* 6 (1951):424.

Berührung mit der Welt gelebt, und wußten noch nicht alle, was es heißt, um eine eigene echte Weltanschauung zu ringen.”¹¹⁵

Providing the youth with a means “to struggle with a proper, authentic World-view”

“*echte Weltanschauung*” sounds a great deal like Spranger’s call for a “youth ideology”;

however, in the context of *Studium generale*, we see clearly how this was not simply

romantic pining for the *Jugendbewegung*, but a response to the postwar, post-Fascist

youth’s need for defense or “*Rüstung*” against future attempts at *political* ideologization.

In this respect, as Iring Fetcher wrote in 1959 in a Festschrift for his teacher (Spranger),

this could be seen “as a powerless attempt to hinder the degeneration of the classical

German university into Fachschule, but it was rather an appropriate expression for the

need for orientation of the postwar Generation.”¹¹⁶ Fetcher does express on the part of his

generation and those slightly younger than him a certain enthusiasm for experiment after

the war, an open-mindedness that was matched by a short-lived readiness for institutional

experiments on the part of the university.

We see evidence in such experiments that the quest for *Hochschulreform* along

democratic lines did not begin with the 1960s. Certainly, the mid to late 1960s appear in

hindsight as the most pronounced crisis point for West German universities and the

political clash of generations. However, the political generation of 1968 must not obscure

the efforts of young intellectuals in philosophy and humanities of the 1940s and early

¹¹⁵ Spranger, “Fünf Jugendgenerationen,” 54.

¹¹⁶ Iring Fetscher, “Die Nachkriegsgeneration und der geistige Weg der Deutschen,” in *Eduard Spranger: Bildnis eines geistigen Menschen unser Zeit*. Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1957), 578.

1950s to work on reestablishing German intellectual and cultural life. This had to happen in cooperation with their teachers and in reference to German intellectual and cultural traditions; but this relationship to tradition is not grounds for judging this work as merely restorative, politically quietist, or conformist.

Efforts to reestablish and reorient academic and intellectual life both within the universities and in the wider cultural field, will be a constant theme throughout our study of postwar West German philosophy. One example of the participation of academics in philosophy and the humanities in this cultural moment was the important journal founded in Heidelberg by Karl Jaspers and others, named *Studium Generale*. As we will see, this journal became a forum in which specialists in all of the sciences could showcase their work to non-specialists. The journal, *Studium Generale* would often feature discussions by leading philosophers of the relation of the natural sciences to the humanities, the place of philosophy among the sciences, and the ideal of a unity of science versus the real social need for specialization. Addressing the role of philosophy in relation to the other sciences and the philosopher's position in the institutional situation of university reform, was the chief concern of postwar West German philosophy and, more importantly, a defining aspect of cooperation and conflict between the generations of philosophers after 1945. Many important professors of philosophy also expressed admiration for the "seriousness and diligence" of their students after 1945. The young generation as a whole was certainly more open to their teachers' attempts to create a living connection with genuine German intellectual traditions and philosophy that went beyond the superficial

public fascination with past symbols like Goethe. Yet the intellectual intensity, whether it be in contemplation of abstract ideas, or in the pursuit of practical knowledge, also has served as the basis for the criticisms of this generation's political apathy, its silence and apparent denial of the past, and, thus, its "superfluity" as a political actor in the history of the Bundesrepublik.

A Youth Discontent with Politics

Undoubtedly, many of the accusations levied against the immediate postwar youth arise from the assumption that social groups can be reified as coherent political actors. The "45er generation," however, does not conform to the political mould of the generations that came before and after it. We have examined the onerous circumstances under which the intellectual youth of this fragmented generation attempted to reorient itself after 1945. In response to the incessant commentary of their elders about the youth's character and the critical, often one-sided judgments about their guilt for the past and the responsibility towards the future, we can detect a definite, almost cynical discontent on the part of this younger generation within its own context, that is, from an "inside view." This youth not only resented the political posturing of their elders—which was often perceived as an attempt to placate the foreign occupying powers—but also the apparent hypocrisy of the expectation that one could move from unquestioned obedience to dictatorship to an uncritical conformity with the newly restored party politics of the postwar period. For many young students, *Hochschüler*, and *Dozenten* in the university, it

seemed unfair that any critique of the new democracy and of party politics was perceived as “*unpolitisch*” and therefore suspicious or criminal. The youth were accused of reluctance and apathy just because the immediate postwar politics of the “Great Old Men” found no resonance among them. Writing in the *Frankfurter Hefte* in 1947, Alfred Andersch recorded the youth’s discontent, as an “Unbehagen in der Politik” in the space of this generational divide. Andersch records the conversation of a young *Dozent* with his students: “Die alten Politiker haben keine Ahnung, wie die heutige junge Generation tatsächlich denkt und empfindet. Vor allem wissen sie nicht, daß diese Generation jeglicher Dogmatik grundsätzlich abgeneigt ist.”¹¹⁷ Although Andersch’s reportage of the young generation “among itself” may be quite limited and embellished, it raises certain questions about the divide between the expectations of the older commentators recorded in the pages of cultural journals and the immediate concerns and discussions of the students and Dozenten. However much programs like *Studium generale* may have taken an inclusive approach towards creating a community of teachers and students, the postwar academic youth were ultimately misled by the expectation that the university could become not only a place of education but the fashioning of a new intellectual elite: one that was at the same time “political but not ideological” and “critical but not disenchanted.” The youth were presented with a world in which they would have the feeling of apparent freedom and self-determination but only insofar as they chose the

¹¹⁷ Alfred Andersch, “Das Unbehagen in der Politik: Eine Generation unter sich,” in *Frankfurter Hefte* 2, no. 9 (1947): 917.

“right” educational path and took on the appropriate comportment in the intellectual field and, along with this, the correct political allegiances.

In the most general sense, the problem was the burden presented by the myth of youth itself. This “aimless mission,” which rested on the example of the pre-First World War *Jugendbewegung* and its post-1918 politicization, the idea that the future belonged to the youth, or to use the catch-phrase, “*Mit uns zieht die Neue Zeit*,” was simply ill-suited to the youth after 1945.¹¹⁸ Emerging from a war of total defeat and foreign occupation preceded by a 12-year period of cultural suppression, this youth had no intellectual basis for the kind of rebellious pathos found before and after 1918. Moreover, this inability to assume responsibility—diagnosed as the “reluctance to identify”—was compounded by the fact that even in light of the sudden confrontation with suppressed cultural material and new forums of public debate, the space of real possibilities in terms of political expression and intellectual choices remained extremely limited for the youth.

In the wake of their “lost years,” confronted with the inexplicable, exaggerated expectations of the older generation, was the intellectual youth after 1945 not set up to fail, not merely in the eyes of their elders but also those who would succeed them?¹¹⁹ Again, we are reminded of Hans Werner Richter’s now paradigmatic article in *Der Ruf* that the only response of this young generation was to be willfully silent—if not in

¹¹⁸ Here I follow the line of argument developed in Frank Trommler, “Mission ohne Ziel: Über den Kult der Jugend im modernen Deutschland,” in Thomas Koebner et al., eds., “*Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit*”: *der Mythos Jugend* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

protest, then in recognition of the impossibility of the task set before them. This was a disinherited youth, which could not imitate the older generation's flight back to their existence before 1933 and their re-connection to long-term German cultural and intellectual traditions. As Richter put it, "Jede Anknüpfungsmöglichkeit nach hinten, jeder Versuch dort wieder zu beginnen, wo 1933 eine ältere Generation ihre kontinuierliche Entwicklungslaufbahn verließ, um vor einem irrationalen Abenteuer zu kapitulieren, wirkt angesichts dieses Bildes wie eine Paradoxie."¹²⁰

In *Der Ruf*, Richter and his co-editor, Alfred Andersch attempted to diagnose the causes for the silence of the young generation. Still, one cannot help but feel that the silence of this youth was a necessary presupposition for the agenda of a journal, which was after all a "call" (*Ruf*) to independence directed towards a purportedly disillusioned and speechless generation. Stuck in a paradoxical and burdened conceptual position by the selective silence of its elders, the youth appeared in need of slightly older cultural figures like Richter (b. 1908) and Andersch (b. 1914) to speak on their behalf.¹²¹ Yet it seems unclear if the journal, or the work of *Gruppe 47* to which Richter and Andersch belonged, opened up a space not simply for diagnosis of the youth's immobilism, but for potentially constructive and therapeutic discussion of the past that really took their voice into account.

¹²⁰ Richter, "Warum schweigt die junge Generation?" 2.

¹²¹ Jérôme Vaillant, *Der Ruf: Unabhängige Blätter der jungen Generation (1945-1949): eine Zeitschrift zwischen Illusion und Anpassung* (Munich and New York: K.G. Sauer Verlag, 1978), 104-105.

If we look closely at the journals edited by students and *Dozenten*, like the *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau* or the *Göttinger Universitäts-Zeitung*, we find that the intellectual youth were in fact *speaking*, and in many cases they expressed a clear desire for the public discussion not only of the material problems facing them, but of the intellectual antecedents of the recent political catastrophe. A young law student in Göttingen articulated a hopeful expectation for the public resonance of the newly founded university journal:

Wir studenten, die wir zum größten Teil aus dem Felde zurückgekehrt die Universität bezogen haben und, enttäuscht, vielleicht auch verbittert aus dem verlorenen Krieg und den hinter uns liegenden Jahren heraustreten, sind unsicher geworden in Vielem, was bislang unserem Leben Maß und Ziel setzte. Wir wollen darangehen zu sichten, was der schweren Probe standhielt. In fruchtbarer Zusammenarbeit mit unseren Professoren suchen wir nach den geistigen Ursachen des Zusammenbruches, eine Arbeit, die in oft erschütternder Ehrlichkeit schon begonnen hat. Dabei wird es viele durch eine verantwortungslose Zeitungspropaganda entstellte und belastete Begriffe zu säubern gelten. Ihr einseitiger guter Klang soll sie neu erfüllen. Vom Unwahren und vom Phrasenhaften müssen wir uns trennen. Nach neuen festen und dauernden Werten heißt uns die Not unseres Volkes suchen... Ein Schritt auf diesem Weg kann die Universitäts-Zeitung sein. In ihr wird Dozentenschaft und Studentenschaft vor der akademischen und darüber hinaus vor der geistigen Öffentlichkeit miteinander ins Gespräch treten.¹²²

By 1949, *Der Ruf* of Richter and Andersch had disappeared. Likewise, the *Göttinger Universitäts-Zeitung* merged with other journals into the *Deutsche Universitäts-Zeitung*. Much of the sentiment for a collaborative working through the past with elders and professors disappeared in favor of articles on more practical questions about university reform. One could interpret this as the result of the youth's own reluctance to engage and

¹²² Wolfgang Zippel in *Göttinger Universitäts-Zeitung* 1, no. 1 (1945-46).

its stubborn silence. However, could this not signal a greater failure on the part of the older teachers, intellectuals, and cultural critics from whom these young people were clearly seeking guidance? In the absence of real models for public communication—that is, of figures who *listened* before presupposing to speak on the youths’ behalf—it is not difficult to understand how this ‘*schweigende Generation*’ by an easy sleight of hand was unjustly transformed into the conformist, superfluous, ‘*skeptische Generation*’ first lauded by conservatives in the 1950s and then derided by the next political generation of the late 1960s.

From silence to “skepticism.”

Much of the later discussion of the postwar “generation” is shaped by its engagement with or opposition to Helmut Schelsky’s 1957 portrait of a “skeptical generation.”¹²³ As we have seen with other authors like Edward Spranger or even Fritz Pringsheim, judgments of the post-1945 youth were based on their understanding of the young generations that had come before. Schelsky likewise began his study with the generation of the *Jugendbewegung*—defined as a movement aimed at the youths’ emancipation from bourgeois propriety prior to the First World War. Although Schelsky attempted to distance himself from pedagogical philosophers like Spranger, who as we have seen, called for the rise of a new youth ideology, a *Jugendideologie*, Schelsky’s

¹²³ Helmut Schelsky, *Die skeptische Generation: eine Soziologie der deutschen Jugend* (Düsseldorf and Cologne: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1957).

conception of the characteristics of the skeptical generation fell very much in line with the pedagogical and sociological studies of youth in the early postwar period. Even Spranger, in the new afterword to the 1949 edition of his *Psychologie des Jugendalters*, expressed the impression “dass die studierende deutsche Jugend, die heute in meinen Gesichtskreis tritt, den Ruhm verdient, die beste und ernsteste unter allen zu sein die wenigstens mir begegnet ist.”¹²⁴ Likewise, Georg Weippert, in an important article in *Studium Generale* in December 1951,¹²⁵ which Schelsky himself would later cite, argued that the political pathos of the *Jugendbewegung* (and here he included the “*Bündische Jugend*” that Spranger spoke of) had disappeared with the destruction of the Hitler State. Still, although one could not detect a strong “common intention” or “pathos” among the youth of the *Bundesrepublik*—Weippert described them as “*unpathetisch*”¹²⁶—he did not discount the possibility that the youth of the day could “exhibit the traits of an intentional association [*Verband*].”¹²⁷ Weippert, and later Schelsky, would argue that the call towards the responsibility of the youth for society and the political youth towards *Gemeinschaft* or community were inappropriate expectations. The postwar youth, in Schelsky’s terms, exhibited not a tendency towards social engagement but “the retreat into the personal and private existence” and an “*ohne mich Haltung*” towards large

¹²⁴ Eduard Spranger, *Psychologie des Jugendalters*, new edn., with an afterword from the author (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1949), 323.

¹²⁵ Georg Weippert, “Zur Soziologie der Jugend,” in *Studium Generale* 4, no. 10 (Dec. 1951): 610-620.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 613.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 615.

organizations and the experiments of political parties.¹²⁸ In Schelsky's view, this was a necessary comportment for a youth resistant to ideology and more in tune with the reality of 1950s middle-class society and the demands of expanding professional occupations. But it is important to note here that even Schelsky's insistence on the "overriding processes of de-politicization and de-ideologization of the youth consciousness" placed a significant burden on the youth.¹²⁹ This time, the burden took the shape of an expectation to resist outdated political ideologies underlying the "experiments" of political parties like the SPD and, to a certain degree, to defend themselves against the great planning structures ("Großstrukturen") that govern human reality in the advanced industrial world. Implicit in Schelsky's portrayal of the skeptical generation as one that resisted great organizations, programs, dogmas and political parties was his own conservative notion that the "ideologies" of the day had lost touch with reality.¹³⁰ The youth were being set up as the bulwark against political radicalism and political experiments.

It was not lost on the reviewers of Schelsky's work at the time that the strengths that he accorded this generation, such as "spiritual disillusionment" or "an unusual competence in life" were an attempt to portray a society driven towards individual security, towards reserve and a "longing for a place of security in a totally material world

¹²⁸ Schelsky, *Skeptische Generation*, 91-92.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹³⁰ Helmut Schelsky, "Der Realitätsverlust der modernen Gesellschaft [1954]," reprinted in *Auf der Suche nach Wirklichkeit: gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1979), 394-409.

[*in der totalversachlichen Welt*].”¹³¹ Although it was clear at the time, as all the reviewers point out, that Schelsky restricted his study to the occupational youth (*berufstätige Jugend*) between the ages of 14 and 25,¹³² which if we take this from 1955 when Schelsky’s statistical and testimonial material was collected would include only those born after 1930, retrospectively the “skeptical generation” has been a catch-phrase for the entirety of the German youth after 1945, or what has come to be known as the “45er generation.”¹³³ Schelsky’s study was in part a response to many of the pedagogical and critical views expressed in the cultural journals in the mid-1940s to early 1950s. The difference, of course, was that what was seen as a cause for alarm in the 1940s: i.e., the youth’s apoliticism, mistrustfulness, and retreat into private life and the security of the family, all become positive traits for Schelsky’s post-ideological age, in which class struggle had been superseded by a silent and self-content middle-class majority.¹³⁴ This fell in line with the conservative picture of a self-content West German consumer society of the late 1950s presented by sociologists like Schelsky. As Jost Hermand writes,

Überhaupt herrschte in der offiziellen oder offiziösen Soziologie der späten fünfziger Jahre eine penetrante Kritiklosigkeit den bestehenden Verhältnissen gegenüber. Da man endlich in einer freien, offenen Gesellschaft lebe, hieß es hier,

¹³¹ Anton Reinartz, “Eine kritische Stellungnahme zum Buch von Helmut Schelsky: *Die skeptische Generation. Eine Soziologie der deutschen Jugend*,” in *Zeitschrift für Heilpädagogik* 9 (Nov. 1958):500.

¹³² See Schelsky, *Skeptische Generation*, 94.

¹³³ Here we are not referring mainly to Dirk Moses’s study, which is not dependent on Schelsky, but simply to the common usage of the phrase, which often is used to designate those born roughly between 1920 and the mid 1930s.

¹³⁴ For a penetrating critique of Schelsky’s depiction West Germany’s “nivellierende Mittelstandsgesellschaft” (“leveled-out middle-class society”) see Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1967), 115-120.

nütze jeder der Wirtschaft und damit dem Gansen am meisten, wenn er als guter Egoist so viel und so genußreich wie nur möglich konsumiere.¹³⁵

Schelsky wanted to show, with particular emphasis on the working youth rather than the intellectual youth, that they were uninterested in ideology, and moreover, that ideologies such as the Marxist notion of class antagonism, or even social democratic experimentation were of little interest to this altogether apolitical generation.

Furthermore, there remained a certain residue of anti-modernism in Schelsky's viewpoint, a concern for the alienating elements of technological society, which a few years before, his former teacher, Hans Freyer had designated with the term "secondary systems."¹³⁶ But whereas Freyer pessimistically viewed these forms of social organization as an inescapable dissolution of human agency and loss of meaning before institutional constraints, Schelsky discovered in the middle-class youth bound around the family and close associations points of general resistance to modern technology and social disenchantment.¹³⁷ At the same time, this youth would be the bulwark against radicalism and provide the political backbone for the Federal Republic, which, in quite a *volte-face*, Schelsky, the former *Volksgenosse* par excellence, had come to support. This

¹³⁵ Jost Hermand, *Kultur im Wiederaufbau*, 257, and on Schelsky in particular see p. 256.

¹³⁶ The idea of "secondary systems" was developed by Schelsky's teacher Hans Freyer in his influential *Theorie des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1955). Here these secondary systems of order are mechanisms of social control and of distraction (e.g., mass leisure activities) that divide up the reality of human beings, turning men into functions of the whole. For Freyer and Schelsky, secondary systems are the cause of what Hegel or Marx termed alienation (*Entfremdung*); however, being resistant to theoretical reflection and in a definite sense *Post-ideological* they are simple givens across all classes that govern the division of space and time in industrial society by virtue of which, as Freyer writes, "Der Mensch wird den Institutionen willig gemacht und ihnen angepaßt" (Ibid., 89).

¹³⁷ Schelsky, *Skeptische Generation*, 86.

all resonated well in a “restorative time” led by a government that pledged “no experiments” as the CDU slogan of 1957 went, a felicitous concurrence of which neither Schelsky nor his publisher, Peter Diederichs were unaware.¹³⁸

This was certainly a time in which the youth in general were more concerned with private life and close associations rather than identification with political parties and large organizations. Evidence from the universities points to an academic youth that was likewise turned towards intensive study and close relations with their teachers. However, one cannot discount the influence public opinion and critical scrutiny had on this youthful turn to “*Innerlichkeit*” and even its willful silence. Wholesale diagnoses like those of Schelsky and other public commentators can have a self-fulfilling character about them, particularly when they fall in line with the interests of the dominant political regime. By effectively eliding moments of possible *cross-generational* communication and identification with public intellectual life in the name of youth’s “*Konkretismus*” and “*Lebestüchtigkeit*,” conservative theorists of the “post-ideological age” silenced what could have been a basis for genuine intellectual engagement with the past in the public domain. We must keep in mind that the skeptical youth are used as a tool by Schelsky against public intellectuals or “idea- and ideology producers” as proof of their loss of

¹³⁸ See Franz-Werner Kersting, “Helmut Schelsky’s ‘Skeptische Generation’ von 1957: zur Publikations- und Wirkungsgeschichte eines Standardwerkes,” in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 50, no. 3 (July 2002):485n116. Much of the book’s success can also be attributed to its timely republication in a special edition (Düsseldorf and Köln, 1963) from which Schelsky and his editor removed obtrusive statistical tables and citations to make the book shorter and more accessible to ordinary readers. Apparently, Schelsky, the Mandarin devoted to ‘fortress Wissenschaft,’ was himself not above seeking the status of cultural intellectual.

touch with reality (*Realitätsverlust*) and “loss of function.”¹³⁹ Here the “deradicalized conservatism”¹⁴⁰ of his teacher, Hans Freyer, returns in a more aggressive form; for now the very existence of “secondary systems” becomes a weapon for the conservative sociologist against “ideology producing” intellectuals. Precisely, because these “great ordering structures” are “secondary”—that is, they function independently of ideological direction and across class and social divides—they defy the rational analysis of traditional intellectuals, who thereby lose their social function. “Secondary systems” make critical questioning of any kind obsolete. Schelsky’s wholesale attack on ideology and cultural intellectuals has the collateral effect of leaving no place for a questioning of the collusion of older social groups in the ideologies and political misdeeds of the past, and, for that matter, of the present. The dismissive tone towards “cynical” cultural criticism was even more explicitly expressed by Arnold Gehlen, another student of Freyer’s and an early instructor of Schelsky, in his programmatic essay “Ende der Persönlichkeit?” which appeared in the pages of *Merkur* in 1956. Here Gehlen concluded, “[d]ieser Kulturkritik ist ein sozialer Reflex, es handelt sich da sehr weitgehend um Abwehrhandlungen einer Schicht von Gebildeten, die in der technischen Gesellschaft in

¹³⁹ Schelsky, “Der Realitätsverlust,” 398-399; 401.

¹⁴⁰ Jerry Z. Muller, *The Other God that Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

Gefahr gerät, sozial funktionslos zu werden, oder die ihre Rolle im gesellschaftlichen Ganzen nicht mehr definieren kann.”¹⁴¹

The “loss of function” and legitimacy by public intellectuals observed by Schelsky and Gehlen effectively served to elide possibilities for genuine criticism of the responsibility of the older generations in society to account for the past. What is more, even if Schelsky at times lamented the loss of importance accorded to the humanities and social sciences in the university, his unwillingness to consider the ideas of public intellectuals and writers—Heinrich Böll and others from *Gruppe 47* for example—closed down possible therapeutic cultural avenues out of the complacency of consumer society by which young and old alike could have been provoked into discussion of the past and the predicament of silence.¹⁴² Although Schelsky provides detailed accounts of the youth’s return to the family and to close-knit associations, the sociologist does little to explain how the young generation interacts with the old. More importantly he provides no explanation of the way in which this youth is to find its intellectual orientation, whether it be from teachers or any other possible role models. It is enough that their “*ohne uns*” mentality towards political experiments can be transformed into the “*mit uns*” of the family, close personal associations, and workplaces of a tranquilized, monolithic middle-

¹⁴¹ Arnold Gehlen, “Ende der Persönlichkeit?” in *Studien zur Anthropologie und Soziologie* (Neuwied am Rhein and Berlin: Luchterhand Verlag, 1963), 330.

¹⁴² This can also be seen as defensiveness on Schelsky’s part to protect his own sense of scholarly legitimacy and the immunity of his own brand of conservative sociology from left-wing, literary intellectuals. See Frank Trommler, “German Intellectuals: Public Roles and the Rise of the Therapeutic,” in Michael Geyer ed., *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 41-43.

class society. As Helmuth Plessner noted in his “Nachwort zum Generationsproblem,” the characteristics of the youth observed by Schelsky were merely the byproduct of the absence of engagement and leadership from their elders. Plessner argued,

[d]ieses Mißtrauen gegen große Ideen und der Konkretismus in der deutschen Nachkriegsjugend, die Schelsky eine skeptische Generation nennt, sind nur scheinbar Symptome einer Skepsis. In Wirklichkeit war (und ist) sie vaterlos und deshalb in einer diffusen Abwehrhaltung, die auch reaktionäre Züge annehmen kann, und zwar in dem Maße, in welchem eine fortschrittliche Ansicht die öffentliche Meinung (das heißt der Äteren) für sich hat.¹⁴³

Despite Schelsky’s attempt to provide a sociological refinement of the generation concept as neither an elite nor a non-descript mass, the skeptical generation remains a generation in a bubble or a vacuum—a disinherited generation. It is important to recall that particularly in their role as educators of or commentators on the youth, the older figures draw on their experiences as young people. This is a particularly salient point when we recall that the older generations in 1945 are comprised of those who identified with the *Jugendbewegung* (before 1914) or the political youth (Schelsky’s own generation) after 1918. These remain the standards against which the postwar youth is judged. What sociologists like Schelsky failed to admit is that this youth will no doubt encounter drastic conflict between the expectations of the older figures and the range of possibilities open to them after 1945 and into the 1950s and 1960s.

The conflict is still one of experiences, or better the position of a generation—Mannheim’s “*Generationlagerung*”—towards experiences and events. The traumatic past

¹⁴³ Helmth Plessner, “Nachwort zum Generationsproblem,” in *Diesseits der Utopie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), 84.

experience, or, as it were, *non*-experiences of the postwar youth do not disappear in times of greater social mobility and economic prosperity like those of the 1950s in West Germany. The methods of coping with these memories and questions of guilt and responsibility open to the youth remain limited despite the impressions of Schelsky and those older than he, that this was a more earnest, hard-working youth with a “more sober sense of reality.” Such tendencies can also be symptoms not simply of an inability to mourn—which is a diagnosis that can also be viewed as burden or accusation—but more importantly of a dissonance between the old and the young in how they can deal with the memory of past events. Unlike those who reached relative maturity before the 1930s, the postwar youth had limited access to long-term traditions that extended back beyond contemporary events or “ruptures.” And they could have no access to these unless they had their older contemporaries as guides. A skeptical generation like that portrayed by Schelsky is only conceivable to the sociologist because this was a disinherited and “fatherless” youth whose recourse to strategies of restoration and tradition was impossible, at least in the short term. Intellectually, this youth possessed no background, or “tradition” in the hermeneutical sense, that could serve as a means of understanding for such narratives of renewal, rebirth or restoration which the old attempted to proffer by either drawing on “good” or untainted German cultural moments, or, *à la Schelsky*, on a belief that a post-ideological age had been reached in which such intellectual gestures became unreal and unnecessary. The latter position was particularly dangerous for philosophy. In a momentary flush of recognition for the orientation problems of

consumer society, Schelsky admitted, “[n]irgendwo wird dieser säkulare Umschwung der Aufgaben des Geistes deutlicher als darin, daß die Philosophie ihre Rolle als führende *Bildungsmacht*, die sie seit dem Beginn der Aufklärungsepoche gespielt hat, offensichtlich heute zu verlieren beginnt oder schon verloren hat.”¹⁴⁴

Another aspect in this picture, at first overlooked and unthematized, was identified by Theodor Adorno, writing in 1950 shortly after his return to Frankfurt from his Californian exile. He found in the new West Germany a strong engagement in intellectual affairs and culture. However, Adorno viewed this in the first instance as a space made possible by the momentary suspension of the cultural industry. The Germans, in general, had been thrown back upon themselves in the absence of a dominant mass culture. Interestingly, Adorno mentioned how students in philosophy and the social sciences displayed “the greatest interest in practically unusable problems.”¹⁴⁵ Even the terrible material hardship in which they live could not deter their intellectual energy:

Die jungen Menschen machen durchweg den Eindruck, sie seien frei von den Gedanken an die tägliche Misere und überließen sich selbstvergessen und glücklich der Möglichkeit, sich ohne Zwang und Reglementierung, wenn auch ohne viel Hoffnung auf äußeren Erfolg, mit dem zu befassen, was ihnen am Herzen liegt. Man kommt sich zuweilen vor, als wäre man hundertfünfzig Jahre zurückversetzt, in die Zeit der Frühromantik, als man ein so unpopuläres Buch wie die Wissenschaftslehre Fichtes allgemein zu den großen Ereignissen des Zeitalters rechnete, und als die Einzelwissenschaften sich bis ins Innerste bewegt zeigten von den Motiven der großen spekulativen System.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Schelsky, “Der Realitätsverlust,” 408.

¹⁴⁵ Theodor Adorno, “Auferstehung der Kultur in Deutschland,” in *Frankfurter Hefte* 5, no 5 (May 1950): 469.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 470.

Adorno's answer to the question about the existence of a "resurrection of culture in Germany," as his article was titled was ultimately negative, since any resurrection would be possible only under the historical conditions of a temporary remission of the culture industry. This also accounted for a certain "romanticism" of the German youth in the new humanistic atmosphere.¹⁴⁷ However, in more general terms, Adorno had touched upon a great obstacle to the intellectual youth in 1950. It was too late to resurrect the German character of the *Dichter und Denker* and make of it a cultural program. The fear of the return of the mass culture industry threatened to undermine the elite notion of German cultural uniformity inherited from tradition. Only a new intellectual orientation could confront the political realities of the postwar world. If not from a public sphere in which there would again rise an inescapable culture industry, then the impetus towards such cultural reorientation would have to come from the university, and, above all, from philosophy. Though here Adorno, at least in 1951, did not fully appreciate the extent to which the university and the classical ideal of *Bildung* would have to change to accommodate the great influx of students following the Second World War. These would be students of different social background, who would come to university not in search of elite cultural knowledge, which was second nature for Weimar cultural intellectuals like Adorno, but usable knowledge and expertise required for diverse professional opportunities of industrial society and an expanding welfare state in the 1950s and 1960s. This meant, as we shall see, that however high-minded the ideas of political reeducation

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

and classic humanism that directed the reform of West German higher education were, they revealed the insularity and even revanchist attitudes of professoriat towards a more inclusive definition of German culture, one that could encompass new social realities and, most importantly, the exponentially growing student population that filled their classrooms.

Chapter 2

The Philosopher after 1945: Political Continuities and the Burden of Legends from the Past

The political events of 1945 presented no “Stunde Null” for German philosophy. Although the idea of unbroken continuity across the 1930s and the Second World War would be equally simplistic as the idea of the Third Reich period as an absolute rupture, after 1945 there was not only an interaction of generations but also of the ideas of the previous decades, including those of the 1930s. The era of the Third Reich should not be dismissed as a kind of intellectual dead zone from which nothing persisted into the postwar era. Volker Böhnigk has referred to this view as the “separation theory” of intellectual history, whereby historians tend to view the period between 1933 and 1945 as a destitute time for German science that had corrupted the ideas of the culturally affluent 1920s and left no impact after 1945.¹⁴⁸ For Böhnigk this view is contradicted by figures like Erich Rothacker, who not only retained a prominent position in the philosophical

¹⁴⁸ Volker Bönigk, *Kulturanthropologie als Rassenlehre: Nationalsozialistische Kulturphilosophie aus der Sicht des Philosophen Erich Rothacker* (Würzburg, Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2002). Böhnigk describes the view of the “Separat-Theoretiker” thus: “Die deutsche wissenschaft ist nach 1945 nicht sprunghaft zu neuer Blüte erstanden – womöglich in paralleler Entwicklung zum Demokratisierungsprozeß in Deutschland, gar unter Anbindung an die wissenschaftlichen Tradition vor 1933 – so, als wäre die Zeit zwischen 1933 und 1945 ein wissenschaftsloses Trümmerfeld gewesen” (ibid., 92).

profession and was a leading figure promoting the humanities after 1945,¹⁴⁹ but also continued to espouse the core ideas from his work of the 1930s and early 1940s.¹⁵⁰ Much of the legend of the 1920s as *the* time of German cultural flourishing and the 1930s as cultural and scientific stagnation is based on the view of the émigrés who returned to Germany in the late 1940s and early 1950s. From the perspective of hindsight, the great caesura after 1933 was due to the loss of many of Germany's greatest philosophers and philosophical schools. As Herbert Schnädelbach argued in 1990, "Nicht Hitler, der Krieg und Auschwitz haben die Deutsche Philosophie nach 1933 inhaltlich bestimmt, sondern die Folgen der Emigration. Durch sie wurden Traditionen unterbrochen, die dann umso mächtiger im Ausland weiterwirken sollten, und so wurde die Deutsche Philosophie ziemlich provinziell."¹⁵¹ To be sure, the departure of the great figures of the Wiener Kreis, the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt as well as prominent Neokantians, phenomenologists, and *Existenzphilosophen* represented a great loss and meant a lack of alternatives to men like Heidegger, Rothacker, or Arnold Gehlen. However, if we simply discount the activities of such thinkers, dubious though they may be, which comprised

¹⁴⁹ Rothacker's professorship in Bonn was not suspended by the British Occupational Authority after 1945, though he was required to submit to the *Fragebogen* (Questionnaire concerning political activity during the Third Reich). He was a founding member of the *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz*, "geisteswissenschaftliche Klasse," which was established in 1949. Among the members supported by Rothacker were Heinz Heimsoeth, Joachim Ritter, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Hans Blumenberg. Finally, as we will see below, Rothacker played a leading role at the first congresses for philosophy in Garmisch-Parteikirchen (1947) and in Mainz (1948).

¹⁵⁰ Bönigk offers a close comparison of editions of Erich Rothacker's works before and after 1945. Although Rothacker altered, or excised some explicit references to Nazi policies, what is more interesting are the elements that he chose to leave in; the core vocabulary of the "Sieger- und Herrenschicht" of the German or "Aryan" race remained unaltered and was even expanded upon. See *ibid.*, Chapter 5.

¹⁵¹ Herbert Schnädelbach, "Deutsche Philosophie seit 1945," in Wolfgang Prinz and Peter Weingart, eds., *Die sog. Geisteswissenschaften: Innenansichten* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990), 404.

the political-scientific paradigm shift during the National Socialist period, we risk overlooking the subtle and sometimes not so subtle effects of their ideas and practices on the postwar intellectual and cultural field.

In this chapter and the next, we will weigh the impact of continuities in German intellectual history before and after 1945 against the undeniable attempts to renew and reorient the discipline through professionalization and institutional innovations. This new spirit of collaboration took many forms: the founding of philosophical societies, scientific academies, and academic journals in the late 1940s and 1950s; and later the interdisciplinary research projects of the 1960s and 1970s. These efforts implied a departure from the mode of philosophizing of the great, though isolated thinkers, like Martin Heidegger and a turn towards collaborative philosophical research projects organized around particular questions or problems rather than segregated into “schools of thought.”¹⁵² If we follow Schnädelbach, while *Existenzphilosophie* and Heidegger’s “original German philosophizing” dominated the image of West German philosophy in the public sphere, one cannot overlook the fact that alongside and against this “*Heidegger Wirkung*,” a young philosophical generation came into its own and sought reconnection with German intellectual traditions, even those that had been suppressed during the 1930s. They did this not only in collaboration with returned émigrés, but even in close collaboration those who had been able to remain in Germany during the Third Reich, many of whom were Heidegger’s former students.

¹⁵² Cf. *ibid.*, 414.

The war years undoubtedly had been a major disruption. Universities had closed, or at the very least limited teaching activities and curricula from lack of students and teachers, or because of the constant threat of bombings. Most scholarly journals in philosophy and the other sciences became scarce or ceased to be by the early 1940s. The dearth of materials at the height of the war made the publication and distribution of scholarly texts nearly impossible. After food and perhaps cigarettes, the German philosopher's greatest concern in the first years following 1945 was for paper and books. The fall of the Nazi regime did present the possibility for a greater public openness about cultural and intellectual subjects. The most striking examples for the youth were in the rediscovery and recovery of forms of modernist art like expressionism that were classified 'degenerate' by Nazi cultural propagandists. The pages of student and *Dozenten* run journals like the *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau* printed numerous articles and reviews, peppered with images of sculpture, sketches, and paintings from the art exhibits in which the intellectual youth "celebrated the rebirth of their spiritual freedom."¹⁵³

Yet a renewed orientation in philosophy as a discipline developed more slowly and only after the material dearth could be ameliorated after the years of occupation. What is more, established philosophers faced no great intellectual rupture or *tabula rasa* of learning immediately after 1945. Rather, the ideas of the 1920s and 1930s endured.

¹⁵³ See the Hamburg art historian, Carl Georg Heise's review of the "Wegbereiter" [Path Breaker] exhibit of Expressionist art in Hamburg, which was presented in co-operation with a committee of students from the University, in *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau* 1, no. 1 (1946-47): 36-37.

Most of the personalities that had accommodated or at least silently coexisted under the twelve-year Reich remained active after the war. Though ‘denazification’ began as an Allied effort to purge the academy of Nazism and general anti-democratic sentiment, for most established German academics of any scholarly ability this amounted to at most a suspension or “moratorium,” to use Bernd Weisbrod’s useful term, during a period of intellectual “redefinition” and “rehabilitation,” before they could be reinstated and properly “placed.”¹⁵⁴ Our concern here is not to undertake a full analysis of the practice and mixed outcomes of “denazification” in West German universities or society, which has been exhaustively dealt with elsewhere. However, it is safe to say that most of the professoriate that had at least accommodated the Nazi Regime continued their professional and public activity after the war; even the select few compromised figures, who initially were removed by the Occupational Authorities, in most cases, regained their positions, or at least their civil servant status and pensions by the early 1950s.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Bernd Weisbrod, “The Moratorium of the Mandarins and the Self-Denazification of German Academe: a View from Göttingen,” in *Contemporary European History* 12, no. 1 (2003): 49. Although much of Weisbrod’s empirical basis rests on cases at the University of Göttingen, his analysis supports in large part the work done by Steven Remy on the University of Heidelberg in *The Heidelberg Myth*, see esp. Chaps. 5-6.

¹⁵⁵ See Steven Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth*; on prominent philosophers and pedagogues see in Göttingen and elsewhere see Bernd Weisbrod, ed., *Akademische Vergangenheitspolitik: Beiträge zur Wissenschaftskultur der Nachkriegszeit* (Göttingen: Wallenstein Verlag, 2002); and the key general studies, Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1996); Clemens Vollnhals, ed., *Entnazifizierung: politische Säuberung und Rehabilitierung in den vier Besatzungszonen* (Munich: DTV, 1991); James Trent, *Mission on the Rhine: Reeducation and Denazification in American-Occupied Germany* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982); Lutz Niethammer, *Entnazifizierung in Bayern: Säuberung und Rehabilitierung unter amerikanischer Besatzung* (Frankfurt a/M: S. Fischer Verlag, 1972).

These observations are not intended to support unequivocally the notion that German philosophers and, particularly the young philosophy students, failed to deal with the Nazi past. As we have already seen in the first chapter, such diagnoses of repression and denial often derive more from the retrospective expectations of future generations of commentators and critics than from a realistic appreciation of the modes of coping available at the time, particularly to the postwar youth. The expectation has always been that the intellectuals and, perhaps the philosophers in particular, should have reacted more openly to the moral repercussions of National Socialist crimes. The young, however, had neither the means nor the information to take the lead in this kind of public moral reckoning. Among the ‘great old men’ there were exemplary cases like Karl Jaspers, Theodor Litt, Julius Ebbinghaus, and Eduard Spranger. However, the ‘spirit’ of renewal evoked in their public speeches did not always translate into the institutional practices that would have dealt with the practical consequences of the twelve-year period of active collaboration. The laudable efforts of these figures to examine National Socialism publicly was not the same as dealing with the unavoidable continuities in personnel and institutional practices that carried on into the postwar reconstruction of the discipline. Later commentators like Helmut Fahrenbach observed with disbelief how the philosophical-political discourse present in the public speeches of these select few philosophers found little resonance in the organs and institutions of philosophy, such as the new philosophical journals and in particular the early congresses of philosophy.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ See Helmut Fahrenbach, “Der Neuanfang ‘westdeutscher Philosophie’ 1945-1950,” in *Wissenschaft im*

Yet a serious discussion of the relationship between philosophy and National Socialism at these congresses, even under the direction of men like Julius Ebbinghaus, Theodor Litt, and Helmuth Plessner, would have run counter to the interest of those wishing to re-establish the integrity of academic philosophy. The academic space of the congress was not considered the place for such political interventions and open discussion. A concern for professional discretion ensured such a dialogue could not take place. Reference to the recent past, whether at conferences or in the scholarly journals, was always mediated through the very general language of intellectual or spiritual renewal and above all a departure from the explicit intrusion of politics into the scientific realm. However, so long as they remained wedded to the narrative of a pure, ideal *Wissenschaft* that had been supplanted or perverted by the *völkisch* ideology of Nazi biological determinism, the public philosophers left no room for the revelation that, as Martina Plümacher puts it, “scholars as scholars and philosophers as philosophers could be brought into the service of National Socialism.”¹⁵⁷

Indeed, most intellectuals understood the Nazi period as a moment in which politics entered all too intrusively into the academic sphere. Most philosophers had to some degree made concessions with the Nazi Regime, even if only by joining the *Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund* (National Socialist Teacher’s Association), whose membership was not restricted to the normal cast of “*echte Nazis*,” but included men like

geteilten Deutschland, 109-112.

¹⁵⁷ Martina Plümacher, *Philosophie nach 1945 in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996), 33.

Julius Ebbinghaus and Johannes Hessen, who were very outspoken about Nazi crimes after the war.¹⁵⁸ Surely, the silence of many among the incriminated (*belastete*) scholars was less a case of the repression of guilt than of disappointment with the downfall of Germany and the failure of their attempt to become the spiritual aristocracy of the Nazi movement. German philosophers had happily engaged in opportunistic political intrigues and defamations in the early 1930s. The distinction between intellectual life and politics is not nearly so neat and clear cut. As Hans Sluga has convincingly shown, the political conflicts of philosophers were often continuations of complex intellectual disputes of the 1920s.¹⁵⁹ In most cases the evidence is overwhelming, that *Promovierung* (i.e., the awarding of the Ph.D.), habilitations, and new university appointments were, as they had been during Weimar, determined in large part by the favor of competing *Ordinarien* professors with the federal or national representatives of “culture.”¹⁶⁰ The Nazis simply encouraged and expanded the possibilities for such opportunism by creating more associations and projects controlled at the national level by Alfred Rosenberg’s Office or by Goebbels himself. Finally, on the level of discourse, the ideas of Nazism remained vague and pliable enough in the first years that almost any academic philosopher could

¹⁵⁸ A thorough record of philosophers’ membership in the NSLB, the Nazi Party, the SA, and many other organizations and research groups can be found in George Leaman, *Heidegger im Context: Gesamtüberblick zum NS-Engagement der Universitätsphilosophen* (Hamburg: Argument-Verlag, 1993).

¹⁵⁹ Hans Sluga, *Heidegger’s Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

¹⁶⁰ See the mammoth, two-volume study of university politics and record of university promotions, habilitations, and appointments from Weimar to the Third Reich, Christian Tilitzki, *Die deutsche Universitätsphilosophie in der Weimarer Republik und im Dritten Reich*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002).

see elements of Nazi ideology to which their own work could appeal. With this in mind, Sluga argues that one cannot take the ideological claims of National Socialism at face value by drawing substantial connections with particular schools of thought. This practice fails to see that National Socialism succeeded with many intellectuals precisely because it is open to multiple philosophical views. Sluga observes,

This line of reasoning is involved when Nietzsche and Heidegger are singled out as the philosophers of National Socialism. It fails to see that Nazi ideology had many sides to it and could connect itself with many different philosophical schools. National Socialism was not a philosophical system; it was not based on a coherent set of philosophical assumptions but drew opportunistically on whatever served its purposes.¹⁶¹

Many were able to achieve as much or more with distortions of Kant, Hegel, and even Goethe than Heidegger was able to by selectively interpreting Nietzsche.¹⁶² In this sense, one cannot restrict the understanding of intellectual collaboration to a ‘few bad apples,’ or as the simple political distortion of the ideals of science. As Max Weinreich already revealed in his work of 1946, Hitler’s accomplices “were to a large extent people of long and high standing, university professors and academy members, some of them world famous, authors with familiar names and guest lecturers abroad. . . . The younger academic people might have stayed a little longer on the waiting list as ‘Privatdozenten’ except for the fact that several thousand positions were vacated through the dismissal of Jewish or liberal professors; but, technically, the young Nazi instructors more often than

¹⁶¹ Sluga, *Heidegger’s Crisis*, 229-30.

¹⁶² On the role of Kantian philosophy during the Third Reich see Volker Böhnigk, *Kant und der Nationalsozialismus: eine programmatische Bemerkungen über Nationalsozialistische Philosophie* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 2000).

not were qualified for the positions they were offered.”¹⁶³ In other words, academic rituals of consecration concerning the appointment of professors, promotion and habilitation of younger scholars, and the proliferation of their research continued as before; the only difference was perhaps a more open repudiation of values considered non-Aryan by the regime and a more flagrant disregard for scholarly integrity. The complexity of the levels of collaboration and the variety and number of those who made concessions to the regime indicates that scholars qua scholars, philosophers qua philosophers always operate in a field of power, which can be bent towards the goals of a political will; Nazism is simply one of the most extreme examples.

By the late 1930s, most philosophers had become disenchanted with the Hitler Regime, once they realized that the leaders of the Nazi movement had no intention of setting their plans according to the ideas of leading intellectuals. Certainly, many philosophers of any reputation and ability were eventually replaced with lesser men— hacks who would toe the Party line. However, the German Mandarin philosophers continued to go through the motions of outward support for the Regime, while at the same time restricting their intellectual reservations and practical differences to the realm of ‘inner emigration.’

The expectation that these same ‘inner émigrés’ would suddenly become public intellectuals after the war seems naïve in hindsight. They simply gave more license to the

¹⁶³ Max Weinreich, *Hitler's Professors: the Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes Against the Jewish People*, second edn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 7. Originally published as *Hitlers Professoren* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1946).

fatalistic ideas to which they succumbed after the spiritual promise of the Third Reich disappeared. High-profile collaborators like Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt, Arnold Gehlen, and Hans Freyer fell into deeper, though somewhat ‘deradicalized’ cultural pessimism by the late 1930s and especially after the War’s end.¹⁶⁴ For those disenchanted like Heidegger, this ‘late Nazism’ of the collaborators was simply the redefined form of reactionary modernism that now included the Nazi movement, once its “inner truth and greatness” proved unable to master the global confrontation with technology, as Heidegger had hoped in 1935.¹⁶⁵ For Heidegger, the heroic form of radical anti-modernism and the “positive” or “active nihilism” represented by the Nazi war machine had faded with its changing fortunes on the Eastern Front by 1943.¹⁶⁶ Even after the war, the great catastrophe for Heidegger was not the demise of the movement that had let him down, nor the sufferings of its victims; rather, the great disappointment, for the self-proclaimed ‘thinker,’ was the delay of “the advent of a new order of Being” that his idealized version of National Socialism was meant to bring about.¹⁶⁷ The postwar accounts of the process of modernity, whether it be the increasing dominance of natural science and positivism, positive law and parliamentary democracy, the end of metaphysics and the forgetting of Being, or the image of a German *cum* European culture

¹⁶⁴ Jerry Z. Muller, *The Other God that Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

¹⁶⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* [1935] (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1953), 152.

¹⁶⁶ Domenico Losurdo, “Heidegger and Hitler’s War,” in Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis, eds., *The Heidegger Case: On Philosophy and Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992), 141-164.

¹⁶⁷ Anson Rabinbach, “Heidegger’s ‘Letter on Humanism’ as Text and Event,” in *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 115.

caught between American and Soviet style bureaucratization and technologization—all employed the tropes of decline and crisis which were borrowed from the conservatism of the Weimar period and adapted to postwar conditions. Although this “melancholy modernism”¹⁶⁸ did not match the genuine emotional *Kulturkritik* of the 1920s and early 1930s, the summary conclusion that German intellectuals in the first two decades after 1945 “adjusted to the mass and machine age”¹⁶⁹ does little to explain what this process of adaptation meant for different generations.

That someone like Freyer moderated and “deradicalized” his ideas does nothing to suggest a process of rehabilitation. Jerry Muller has argued that because Hans Freyer remained silent about his Nazi past (and actively covered it up), his detractors after the war did not fully appreciate how much his views had changed in his postwar writings. Apparently, we are meant to give the man credit for the extent to which he had come to embrace bourgeois individualism in his diagnoses of the threat of “secondary systems” and the functionalization of man.¹⁷⁰ It seems misguided to use the silence of men like Freyer, Schmitt, or Heidegger as an explanation for why their disillusioned postwar conservatism was not fully appreciated as a break with their Nazi past. Certainly, Muller may simply intend to provide a plausible historical explanation of the irony that Freyer’s

¹⁶⁸ This phrase is used by Jan-Werner Müller to describe the muted antimodernism of Joachim Ritter and his closest ‘*Schüler*’ in *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in postwar European Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 116–132.

¹⁶⁹ Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins*. New edition (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1990), 444.

¹⁷⁰ Muller cites Freyer’s *Weltgeschichte Europas* (Wiesbaden: Dieterich Verlag, 1948) and *Theorie des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (1955) as examples of Freyer’s new liberal-conservative tone.

attempts to conceal the past actually led to greater suspicion; however, this seemingly innocuous explication is undercut by the comparison Muller makes to postwar confessions of former Communists.¹⁷¹

Muller directs our attention to the continued threat of Stalinism as the more pressing problem of the postwar era and the impetus for “repentant Marxists” like Arthur Koestler. This seems to be a veiled deflection of responsibility for the greater crimes committed with the help of ardent Nazis like Freyer. Of course, the former Nazis produced no statement to match that of Arthur Koestler et al. in Richard Crossman’s volume;¹⁷² for their responsibility ran much deeper than these former Communists. Freyer, Schmitt, Heidegger, Rothacker, Gehlen—these men supported an openly anti-Semitic regime, adjusted their ideas to fit its racism, and continued to support the Regime’s brutal policies so long as its armies were winning in the field. The changes to their ideas late in the War and after the Nazi Collapse were purely intellectual attempts to come to terms with these ‘unfortunate’ events and, finally, the fact that they had been wrong about Nazism as the answer to modern nihilism and estrangement, or as the means to the mastery of technology. A better way to understand the philosophy of these figures after 1945 is as a kind of late, disillusioned Nazism—a lament for the ‘pure’ or ‘heroic’

¹⁷¹ This is the dizzying logic used by Jerry Muller, *The Other God that Failed*, 367. “In fact,” argues Muller, “the absence of any explicit confession of personal error comparable to *The God that Failed* [by A. Koestler et al.] had quite the opposite effect. The absence of such an admission fed the suspicion that Freyer had emerged from the collapse of the Third Reich defeated but not transformed” (ibid., 368).

¹⁷² Richard H. S. Crossman, ed., *The God that Failed*, texts by Arthur Koestler et al. (New York: Harper Publishers, 1950).

Nazism that they had envisaged in the early to mid 1930s, or so long as Hitler was winning the war. The fallback position of ardent Nazis like Hans Freyer, disillusioned by the failure of Nazism to fulfill their idealized model of a new European order, was to a half-hearted acceptance of a bourgeois western European alternative to American bureaucracy and Soviet technocratic civilization. This was the simple escapism to which the old were long inured. In the consciousness of the intellectual youth, however, it created a new, more implicit barrier to active questioning. Their elders' escapism saddled them with the burden of confronting events without the benefit and knowledge of certain experiences or traditions for orientation.

Of course, the very idea of confession, rehabilitation, and even guilt were matters only fully understood in Germany by those old enough to have observed their colleagues' actions. The silence and active dissemblance of the former Nazi philosophers had more important consequence for the younger students of philosophy, who, in any event, would only come across those works from the 1930s in (sometimes altered) republications, which, in the absence of historical context would very rarely provoke a political questioning on the youth's part.¹⁷³ Still, we have to remain open to the possibility that the changes in the philosophical field—particularly in the subject matter, interdisciplinary exchanges, and practice of teaching—could have developed out of and even alongside the

¹⁷³ Of course, the most important counterexample to this is Jürgen Habermas' review of the 1953 republication of Heidegger's 1935 lectures, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, which we will discuss in detail below. However, even in this case, the negative responses to Habermas' critical review design their apologia for Heidegger's misstep by evoking the young upstart's lack of understanding for the political context of Heidegger's statement.

intellectual and institutional continuities of the older generations. Despite the persistent cultural pessimism of the aging “reactionary modernists,” the youth above all remained open to a renewed connection to the cultural traditions that predated the pathos of intellectual revolt that accompanied the destruction of First World War and fueled the National Socialist rise to power.¹⁷⁴

Philosophy, Politics, and the Young Generation

Although “overburdened” with political expectations and under-informed about the misdeeds of their teachers, the question remained for the young, aspiring philosophers in West Germany: was there any role for philosophy, even in the broad sense of intellectual guidance, to play in political and social reality? In publications like *Der Ruf*, commentators lauded the idea that in a time of “spiritual privation” (*geistige Not*), philosophy must take on the role of the “Weltanschauung von morgen,” as the prominent Catholic philosopher, Aloys Wenzl demanded in a speech before students in Munich.¹⁷⁵ “*Weltanschauung*,” or “world view” was a very controversial term in the cultural and political discourse of immediate postwar era. It conjured up images of the conflict of

¹⁷⁴ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in the Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). I regret that I cannot provide more than a gesture to Herf’s excellent and very apt characterization of how the radical conservatism of the Weimar Period combined a concern for the decline of *Kultur*, the rise of materialism, and leveling powers of mass society with a fascination with modern alienation, the figure of the ‘worker,’ the warrior, the ‘heroic’ nihilist, as in the examples of men like Heidegger, Schmitt, Jünger, or Werner Sombart. However, it is fair to say that these same figure after 1945 maintained an ambivalent view of technologization, ‘massification,’ and specialization; the only difference was that Nazism was now include as another manifestation of these problems rather than a solution.

¹⁷⁵ A. von Bernstorff, “Philosophie, Weltanschauung von morgen,” in *Der Ruf* 1, no. 10 (Jan. 1947):8.

multiple *Weltanschauungen* among competing philosophical schools and academic disciplines from the Fin de siècle to the early 1930s. The word was also often used interchangeably with political ideology, as when one spoke of the Nazi or Communist *Weltanschauung*. Yet Wenzl's catch phrase was not a call for philosophy to become another political ideology; rather, like many older philosophers he hoped for quite the opposite: that philosophy could guide human beings away from the image of a world divided by competing political world views by a return to 'true' German culture. He was not alone in this desire.

In a lecture given in 1946, the eminent Bonn philosopher and pedagogue, Theodor Litt associated the teaching of world views or "*Weltanschauungslehre*" with the pseudo-philosophies proffered by figures like Ludwig Klages and Oswald Spengler after the First World War. In the enmity of competing world views, Litt observed, the true "Sendung der Philosophie" had been lost. *Lebensphilosophie* fascinated the popular imagination of the 1920s, while the sciences in the university, tending towards greater specialization, produced only disenchanted 'experts' (*Fachmänner*). For German Mandarin thinkers, philosophy's rightful place was as the coordinating and unifying force of science and learning among the disciplines.¹⁷⁶ For aged thinkers like Litt, this narrative was as true in 1945 after the twelve-years of collaboration of German science with the Nazi dictatorship as it was in 1918. The task now, was not only for philosophy to reassert its place in science and pedagogy, but to guide the practical reasoning of human beings. Litt argued,

¹⁷⁶ Ringer, *German Mandarins*, 106.

“Der Mensch ist eben das Wesen, das nicht nur in weltanschaulicher Bindung steht, sondern auch um diese Bindung *wissen* kann.”¹⁷⁷ Against the uncertainty of “unconditioned” (*bedingungslos*) life, Litt held up the ability of human beings to stand both “in and above their horizon,” which included the grim political realities of the hour. Philosophy alone, as the protector of truth, possessed this ability to determine and to restrain competing *Weltanschauungen*.¹⁷⁸ In the wake of a political catastrophe that Litt elsewhere plainly explained as the subjugation and misdirection of a people by years of ideological suggestion,¹⁷⁹ he risked the final observation “that today the politicians must go along with the philosophers” not in the sense of Plato’s ‘philosopher kings,’ but because the essence of philosophy was unity. Because, Litt concluded,

Noch nie hat der Wille zur Einheit so viele, so starke Widerstände gegen sich gehabt wie in unseren Tagen. Dem Willen zur *Einheit* den ideellen Beistand zuzuführen, den ihm nur der lautere Wille zur *Wahrheit* zu leisten – das ist, so glaube ich, die Sendung, die die Philosophie in dieser Welt der Zerrissenheit zu erfüllen hat.¹⁸⁰

Johannes Hessen, a strongly Catholic philosopher in Köln, gave philosophy the “partly critical, and partly *positive*” task (*Aufgabe*) of helping to “overcome the old and build the new.”¹⁸¹ In the National Socialist *Weltanschauung* fashioned by Party hacks like Alfred Rosenberg, the German ‘Spirit’ (*Geist*), once envied by its neighbors as one determined

¹⁷⁷ Theodor Litt, *Von der Sendung der Philosophie: ein Vortrag* (Wiesbaden: Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1946), 39.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁷⁹ Theodor Litt, *Geschichte und Verantwortung* (Wiesbaden: Dieterich Verlag, 1947).

¹⁸⁰ Litt, *Sendung*, 50-51.

¹⁸¹ “Die Philosophie soll *das Alte überwinden* und *das Neue aufbauen* helfen.” Johannes Hessen, “Von der Aufgabe der Philosophie in unserer Zeit,” in *Von der Aufgabe der Philosophie und dem Wesen des Philosophen: zwei Vorlesungen*. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1947), 7.

by “poets and thinkers,” became a “Funktion der Rasse” and of power. Biological vitalism came to deny the metaphysical and moral basis of humanity. *Kultur* and *Wahrheit* were likewise connected to the ideology of race and thus relativized and pragmatically instrumentalized for political goals. *Wissenschaft* served the purposes of the racial community alone. “Thus,” Hessen argued, “biological *relativism* joins itself with biological *pragmatism* [So verbindet sich der biologistische *Relativismus* mit einem biologistischen *Pragmatismus*].”¹⁸² Within the framework of this union of relativism and pragmatism, for an entire culture, the ‘true’ became only that which was ‘useful’ relative to the goals of the racial community or “*Volksgemeinschaft*.” For Hessen, philosophers now had the difficult task of critically engaging this misguided world view, but in a constructive way such that particularly the young had something upon which to build. Reconceived with a *positive* intent,

Die Philosophie soll nicht nur den Irrtum zerstören, sie soll zugleich die Wahrheit aufbauen. Wichtiger noch als die kritische ist die *positive* Funktion der Philosophie. Wie stark das Interesse gerade der jungen Generation von heute für diese Funktion der Philosophie ist, wie viel sie von ihr erwartet, haben mir in vergangenen Winter meine philosophischen Seminarübungen gezeigt, deren Teilnehmerzahl eine außergewöhnlich große war. Mehr als ein Studierender hat mir erklärt: Wir sind entwurzelte Menschen und studieren Philosophie, um wieder geistigen Boden unter die Füße zu bekommen, um eine Lösung jener tiefsten und letzten Fragen zu gewinnen, die uns allen auf die Seele brennen.¹⁸³

Many established philosophy instructors also testify to the desire on the part of their students for intellectual guidance and stability. However, the fulfillment of such a need

¹⁸² Ibid., 10.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 18.

was not nearly as clear cut as the lofty phrases of older professors seemed to suggest. On the one hand, students in the humanities and philosophy would inevitably confront the strictures of an intellectual field in the process of greater professionalization and differentiation. The universities and particularly the newly established, semi-public professional journals and associations did not offer forums for the realization of what Litt, Hessen, or even Spranger put forth as the positive functions of philosophy.

On the other hand, there were many thinkers, slightly younger than Litt or Hessen, who were critical of the notion that philosophy could serve as the protector of ‘unified science’ and ‘objective truth.’ If anything, the experience of the recent past showed that a plurality of competing *Weltanschauungen* arose from a shared belief that each somehow possessed the final answers to the problems of concrete existence. In a speech before the teaching faculty of University of Leipzig in September 1945, the newly appointed Rector, Hans-Georg Gadamer reminded his audience now under Soviet occupation that

Eine voraussetzungslose Lehre von den Weltanschauungen kann es nicht geben; das ist eine der großen Leistungen der deutschen Philosophie der letzten 25 Jahren, die Fragwürdigkeit des Begriffs der Tatsache aufgewiesen und damit auch das Ideal einer voraussetzungslosen wissenschaftlichen Weltanschauungslehre zerstört zu haben. Sie hat die asketische Selbstbeschränkung der Wissenschaft auf ‘wertfreie Objektivität’ und ihre Unabhängigkeit von der Philosophie als eine Selbsttäuschung erwiesen.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Die Bedeutung der Philosophie für die neue Erziehung,” in *Über die Ursprünglichkeit der Philosophie: zwei Vorträge* (Berlin: Chronos-Verlag, 1948), 6. The speech was given not only at the end of 1945 in Leipzig but in Berlin in the Summer of 1946. It is important to note, that the slim book containing the two lectures could only be published under license of the French Military Authority in Berlin. By 1948, Gadamer had already left Eastern Germany for a position in Frankfurt due to political differences with the SED and the Soviet authority. See the somewhat biased account given in Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 232-263. One can laud Gadamer for continuing to uphold the freedom of

Gadamer recalled how the almost universal “misuse of the prestige of science and genuine research [Wahrheitsforschung]” served not only to support the biologism of National Socialist doctrine, but allowed ‘reputable’ scholars to exercise reason instrumentally to serve their own political purposes and professional intrigues. In this way, Gadamer came as close as any philosopher of the time to explaining the way in which the ideal of modern science was itself implicated in its political mobilization.

Although Gadamer invoked the critique of truth and reason made by Nietzsche and the German historicist tradition, he insisted that “die Diskreditierung der Vernunft im Zuge unserer jüngsten Erfahrungen ist eine der gewaltigsten Gefahren, die unserem menschlichen Leben noch immer droht.”¹⁸⁵ Yet far from viewing the perspectivism or historicity of truth and knowledge as the main threat to reason, Gadamer argued that it was dogmatism dressed in “romantic phrases” and the general lack of respect for the positions of others that led to reason’s (and philosophy’s) degradation. Echoing the opinions of some of the early commentators in the western Zones, Gadamer spoke of the need for educating students with the goal of teaching “self-education” and also what Gadamer called “*Belehrung*.” *Belehrung* meant, for Gadamer, not indoctrination, but an erudition mindful of one’s own subjective presuppositions as well as respectful of the opinions of others. It meant a departure from the half-hearted democratic politics of the 1920s, which had led to the “struggle of world views” each maintaining the pretense of

scholarship in the face of new political intrusions; however, it is hard to reconcile this with his support as Rector for the reinstatement of men like Hans Freyer to full teaching duties.

¹⁸⁵ Gadamer, “Die Bedeutung der Philosophie,” 10-11.

truth. Philosophical learning could also inform a new political existence. “Denn was wir philosophierend vom Wesen der Wahrheit erkennen, lehrt uns das gleiche, was wir, Bürger unseres Staates, als das Wesen der echten Demokratie immer müssen realisieren lernen: Belehrt zu werden,” declared Gadamer, “auch gegen unsere eigene, subjektiv gewisse Überzeugung ist der Weg der Ermittlung der eigentlichen geschichtlichen Wahrheit.”¹⁸⁶

Gadamer too had an image of “the primordially of science,” to which he devoted a Rectoral address before students of Leipzig in 1947.¹⁸⁷ Self-doubt, humility, and an objectivity through “absent-mindedness,” by which Gadamer meant complete devotion to scholarly subject matter and an aloofness towards or ignorance of politics, were the classical forms of science for the Greeks and for the classical humanists in the era of Humboldt and Goethe. This detached, non-dogmatic intellectual *habitus* was a far cry from his teacher’s definition of the essence of science. In the latter’s infamous Freiburg Rectoral address fourteen years earlier the task of scholar and student alike was *work* within the bonds of “service to the *Volksgemeinschaft*.”¹⁸⁸ The Heidegger of 1933 would have perhaps criticized his pupil’s later characterization of science as the mistaken “theoretical attitude” often attributed to the Greeks’ commitment to pure

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸⁷ Gadamer, “Über die Ursprünglichkeit der Wissenschaft,” in *Leipziger Universitätsreden* 14 (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1947); appears in English translation as “On the Primordially of Science”: Rectoral Address, in Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, eds., *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 15-21.

¹⁸⁸ Martin Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University,” in Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1993), 35.

contemplation.¹⁸⁹ However, though he did not speak of science as risk [*Wagnis*] or decision, Gadamer hardly believed science to be mere diversion for pleasure. Rather, he maintained that the university and, with it, the unifying force of philosophy had been transformed and endangered by the contemporary equation of science with technological advancement and the production of specialized knowledge (*Fachwissen*). This may sound similar to Heidegger's "questioning standing firm in the midst of the totality of being [Seinenden]" as the defense against the splintering of the fields of knowledge into specialized disciplines.¹⁹⁰ Yet Gadamer saw the ideal of true *Wissenschaft* as having been most clearly perverted during the Third Reich:

The increasing dependency of research on an expensive apparatus and the repercussions of its results on industrial production have created forms of unconscious dependency for science which are opposed to its original essence—up to the extreme of its orientation toward military-scientific and military economic applications, as were outrageously forced upon German science and so humanity for Hitler's insane war.¹⁹¹

Gadamer admonished the scientists, who had meekly accommodated the Regime, for their lack of humility and eagerness to use politics as a means to promote their own opinions. Philosophers had not asserted their independence from politics and from the spurious notion of the blood-bond to the German *Volk*. This was a failure of science and philosophy itself that would be repeated if the more humble form of science he prescribed

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Heidegger, in *ibid.*, 31. Gadamer recalls in a late interview receiving a copy of Heidegger's Rectoral address in 1933. After reading his teacher's newly adopted salutation: "Mit deutschem Gruß," Gadamer confesses to having thought his teacher had "gone crazy." See the 1986 interview, "The German University and German Politics. The Case of Heidegger," translated in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, 10.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

¹⁹¹ Gadamer, "On the Primordality of Science," 17-18.

could not be reinstated and proliferated above all in the relationship between teachers and students.

*Existentialism as Political Liability in postwar Germany*¹⁹²

Much of the early debate in Germany after 1945 focused on a separation of philosophy and politics. If philosophy had any active, public role or function it was as a counterweight to the instrumentalization of science and the university for political goals. Again, this was based on an older mandarin conception of the university as *universitas*—a unity of scholars and researchers that was vouchsafed by the philosophers. This view set the German thinkers often labeled as “existentialists,” such as Jaspers and even Gadamer, apart from the popular philosophy coming from France. Certainly, Sartre’s call for *engagement*, or “*Einsatz*,” as it was rendered into German, resonated among many left wing commentators outside of professional philosophy. *Der Ruf* used the readiness of the young generation in France to engage in political, existential debates as a model for the German youth, who again seemed reluctant and unready to judge political realities for themselves. The French youth took part in the lively discussions, above all in the literature of the day, while young people in Germany, as the programmatic statements of *Der Ruf* always suggested, needed first to overcome the ideology of crisis and existential love of danger that prevailed in the philosophies of the 1920s and 1930s and, to an extent,

¹⁹² It would be anachronistic at this point to speak of a “West Germany,” as the *Bundesrepublik* came into being only with the proclamation of the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) on May 23, 1949. However, the influence of existentialism was certainly a phenomenon of Western Europe.

prepared them for the sacrifices of the war. “Anders als in Deutschland,” wrote Carl August Weber, “wo die junge Generation erst in wenigen Exponenten scharf umrissene eigene Meinungen zur Gegenwart ausdrückt, ist darum in Frankreich eine lebhaftere Diskussion im Gange, in der sich die verschiedenen Standpunkte klar voneinander abheben.”¹⁹³

German commentators tended to place Heidegger’s thought alongside the “fashionable philosophy” (*Modephilosophie*) coming from Sartre and Camus in Paris. For some critics of popular existentialism coming from France, this language of engagement and will sounded too much like a return to Heidegger’s undirected “Resoluteness” (*Entschlossenheit*), which, in Heidegger’s case, appeared to have been given concrete expression in the political texts of the 1930s.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, the appearance of Heideggerian terminology in the feuilleton pages of major newspapers and popular cultural journals somewhat undermined the legitimacy of his thought for academic philosophers. At the same time, some intellectual commentators outside the academic field criticized the way in which the doyens of German university philosophy dismissed existentialism as a popular fashion. In a piece for *Die Neue Zeitung* in August 1947, shortly after the US occupational authority pulled the license for his journal *Der*

¹⁹³ Carl August Weber, “Die literarischen Strömungen in Frankreich und die junge Generation,” in *Der Ruf* 1, no. 5 (Oct. 1946):13.

¹⁹⁴ Of course, Heidegger explicitly differentiates his philosophy from the humanistic existentialism of Sartre and his followers. However, as we will see below, Heidegger’s departure from any notion of the subject into the question of Being was often lost on many older German philosophers who still identified Part II of *Sein und Zeit* as the quintessential statement of Heidegger’s philosophy. In this sense, Anson Rabinbach’s strict differentiation between the postwar German and French reception of the *Letter on Humanism* (“Heidegger’s ‘Letter on Humanism,’” 118) must be slightly modified in the next chapter.

Ruf, Alfred Andersch challenged the tendency of German academic philosophers to dismiss the politicized version of existentialism coming from France. He pointed out that what figures like Julius Ebbinghaus objected to as existentialism's nihilism and denial of objective values overlooked the historical context in which French existential humanism arose, namely out of the resistance to Fascism.¹⁹⁵ In a very provocative rhetorical turn, Andersch juxtaposes the French existentialists' idea of political engagement and the questioning of values with the German subservience in the recent past to supposedly 'higher' values proffered by the Nazi State. Andersch writes,

Wie gut wäre es gewesen, wenn die Deutschen in den letzten zwölf Jahren der Suggestion einer Philosophie entronnen wären, die gerade in ihre Entartung ihr Wesen enthüllte. Es gibt keinen objektiven Wert – also auch nicht den des Nazionalsozialismus. Die Philosophie des Idealismus, welche die Freiheit als Bindung an die Verantwortung begreifen wollte, trug sich mit ihre Perversion selbst zu Grabe. Das monomanische Kreisen des deutschen Freiheitsdenkens um den Begriff der Verantwortung (wem gegenüber?) – wird es vom Existentialismus nicht endlich entscheiden unterbrochen.¹⁹⁶

Here Andersch challenged the Hegelian turned Kantian, Ebbinghaus to justify the partial responsibility of the system of German Idealism for the perversion of German morality during the Third Reich. Finally, Andersch pointed to the way in which the question of *Existenz* was one for the younger generation for whom the loss of objective values was their reality, a reality which they faced without the benefit of their elders' ability to find

¹⁹⁵ Julius Ebbinghaus, "Streifzug durch die Existenzphilosophie," *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau* 3, no.1, (1948/49): 27-34.

¹⁹⁶ Alfred Andersch, "Die Existenz und die Objektiven Werte: Eine Entgegnung," *Die Neue Zeitung*, 15 August 1947.

refuge in the high-minded ideals of the past. Existentialism confronted the youth with the burden of a freedom in the wake of being asked to kill in the name of higher values. The returned prisoner of war Andersch asked bluntly: “wollen wir morgen wieder Menschen töten weil wir angeblich in Besitz der hohen Werte und ethnischen Ziele sind?” For the young who had taken part in the war, Andersch reminded his readers, “[d]as ist eine existentielle Frage, für die uns, Angehörigen einer Generation, die unmittelbar aus dem unbedingtesten Gehorsam in den unbedingtesten Zweifel und – wir leugnen es nicht – in den hemmungslosesten Zynismus gesprungen ist, die Philosophie Jaspers, Heideggers und Sartres eine Lösung anzubieten scheint.”¹⁹⁷ Yet, the enigmatic character of the first postwar writings hardly seemed to provide a solution to the problems of the intellectual youth; rather, Heidegger’s language seemed to confirm for many that the great philosopher had little to offer in the way of guidance in destitute times. Nonetheless, in 1948, the prominent German theologian Helmut Thielicke, then professor of philosophy at Tübingen, wrote a report entitled “Religion in Germany” for the American Academy of Political and Social Science. Along with describing National Socialism as a false substitute for religion, Thielicke also reported on the “present tendencies of nihilists.” He stressed to his American audience the problem intellectual nihilism posed for a youth in search of meaning. Thielicke observed how

the leading German existentialist, Martin Heidegger, though strongly tainted by his political past and deprived of his academic post, is still the representative prophet of “Nothingness” for large intellectual circles

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

Youth, in particular, seems to recognize its own feeling of existence in this philosophy. This youth – more innocent than guilty – that stands on the ruins, that seems to be burdened by a terrifying past, with the rubble of the large cities constantly before its eyes, feeling duped by the adult generation, yet remains astoundingly aloof from politics and seemingly still the captive of terror. In all its hopelessness, this youth at least feels in this philosophy the impulse to an adventurous and daring life and the message of a freedom that wants to shed all bonds – those that bind it to the past as well as those that bind it to God – and “other out-of-date authorities”.¹⁹⁸

“The Sphinx is not Dead”: Heidegger’s Riddle for the German Intellectual Youth

Max von Brück expressed a wider cultural concern with Heidegger’s influence among the youth in an article for *Die Gegenwart* from December 1948, entitled “Die Sphinx ist nicht tot.”¹⁹⁹ Von Brück opened with the image of Oedipus solving the riddle of the Sphinx at the beginning of his tragic path. This is juxtaposed with the position of the German youth in the present, who found themselves likewise thrown back on human finitude and insecurity because of the privation of their past intellectual development. Von Brück depicts a “crisis of intellectual foundations [*Grundlagen*]” on a personal level. He related a conversation with a student, “‘Wir haben keinen Grund’, sagte mir neulich ein Student. ‘Sieben Jahre Mittelschule, kaum das Elementare gelernt, dann der Krieg, dann die Gefangenschaft, 1946 würde ich entlassen.’ – Was soll man darauf antworten? Die gestohlenen Jahre gibt denen keine zurück. Nur nichts vertuschen und

¹⁹⁸ Helmut Thielike, “Religion in Germany,” in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 260 (Nov. 1948): 146.

¹⁹⁹ Max von Brück, “Die Sphinx ist Nicht Tot,” *Die Gegenwart*, 3, no. 24 (15 December 1948): 17-19.

beschönigen!”²⁰⁰ Certainly, von Brück conceded that some of their knowledge will someday prove useful in their occupations and in the routine of their daily life. However, this should not obscure the reality that “Die Menschheit, voran die Jugend, steht vor einem Nichts, wenn erst die Kulissen, die aufgepappten erkerchen des Glücks, durchschaut und vortgeblasen sind.” For von Brück, Martin Heidegger was the most radical thinker of the time, who with his “Letter on Humanism” broke a long silence to offer not answers but new questions or riddles to his contemporaries. Heidegger is here differentiated from the picture which Sartre and his French followers developed from the earlier idea of “*Geworfenheit*,” or the “thrown character” of human, finite existence. But the answer was not as easy as Sartre’s inference that the human being is a project that is condemned to be free and thus responsible for what he makes of himself. Heidegger’s picture was one of *Heimatslosigkeit*, homelessness and exteriority. Von Brück observed “das Auszeichnende im Denken Hiedeggers scheint mir darin zu liegen, daß es unserer Weltsituation die im Alltag dumpft und tausendstimmig an uns anbranden, in einer neuen Fragestellung dem Bewußtsein sichtbar werden läßt. Sichtbar freilich nur am äußersten Rande, den auch im Satz des Parmenides [“Es ist nämlich Sein”] steckt die Sphinx.”²⁰¹ Von Brück pointed to the ambiguity in Heidegger’s oracular language and the latter’s return to the simplicity of early Greek thought. It may well seem to Heidegger that human being possessed the same path towards the “*Lichtung des Seins*” (“clearing of Being”)

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 17.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 18.

and in this sense remained “der Hirt des Seins” in the manner of the Ancients. However, von Brück confessed, “für uns bleibt der Satz von der ‘Lichtung’ der dunkelste, da es in ihm nicht um eine gelehrte Erkenntnis geht, viel mehr um eine Lebenswahrheit, die wieder aufgefunden werden muß.”²⁰² Whether his turn from philosophy to “thinking” would result in this return to the truth of Being, remained a mere possibility and, by virtue of the departure from the metaphysics of subjectivity, never a certainty.²⁰³ The passive imagery of the philosopher, or the human being in relation to the truth of Being—as “shepherd” or “neighbor” in the midst of Being²⁰⁴—could easily leave the students of philosophy with a feeling of powerlessness before the realities of their threatened existence and traumatic past. Von Brück ends with the hope that the image of the clearing, *die Lichtung*, could be realized in something more tangible: “Wenn es möglich wäre, daß der Mensch dieser Weltstunde dorthin zurück- und vorfände, doch nicht als zu einer theoretischen, viel mehr einer erlebten Gewissheit, dann schlosse sich der Abgrund, der zwischen den einsamsten Gedanken einer Elite und dem Tun und Leiden der Massen kluft.”²⁰⁵

However, despite the possibility for a new beginning, out of the state of indeterminacy and exteriority of modern existence, there remained the obstruction of Heidegger’s language. Heidegger purposely adopted a very pictorial (*bildhafte*) language

²⁰² Ibid., 19.

²⁰³ Cf. Heidegger, “Brief über den Humanismus,” 72, where Heidegger states his focus on “dieses andere, die Subjektivität verlassende Denken.”

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 75, 90.

²⁰⁵ von Brück, “Die Sphinx,” 19

to prevent or discourage translation into the conceptual (*begriffliche*) terminology of the metaphysical tradition. Otto Friedrich Bollnow pointed to the continued infatuation with Hölderlin as a primary source for Heidegger's apparent destruction of the boundary between poetry and philosophy. Heidegger had begun to see the task of the "thinker" as one with that of the poet; that is, the task for both was the dwelling in language. But this was a task that presented an obstacle for the interpreter and, more importantly, a danger for the student of philosophy. "Wenn es bei Schüler dann zur erlernbaren Manier wird," Bollnow warned, "entsteht die Gefahr jenes 'vornehmen Tons in der Philosophie', gegen den sich schon Kant gewehrt hatte und die sich heute wiederum bei den verschiedensten Strömungen abzeichnet."²⁰⁶

In an essay from 1958, Walter Kaufmann suggested that West German philosophy in the 1950s continued to be dominated by Heidegger, though only because German thinkers still believed that something profound lay behind the new, idiosyncratic turn towards poetic language and the settling upon the question of Being. Kaufmann used the image of "Heidegger's castle"—a stronghold made impregnable by the ramparts of Heidegger's impenetrable vocabulary. Heidegger's later works raised questions but no answers.²⁰⁷ His "thinking" undermined the potential for philosophy to engage in the scientific search for truth. Heidegger's thought was a distraction; for it erroneously

²⁰⁶ Otto Friedrich Bollnow, "Heideggers neue Kehre," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 2, no. 2 (1949-1950): 127.

²⁰⁷ Walter Kaufmann, "Heidegger's Castle [1958]," in *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 344.

maintained the illusion that there was a deeper, older truth that could not be arrived at through logical procedure. But the departure from the standards of scientific thought was simply a sophistic tactic that made Heidegger's position impervious to rational criticism. At the same time, Kaufmann pointed to the mystique and the public "fascination" with Heidegger's printed lectures which was "due in no small measure to the way in which he manages to keep alive the hope that in just a few more pages, or surely before the course is over, we may see something that even now reduced any other enterprise to insignificance."²⁰⁸ Kaufmann cited Karl Löwith, who in 1953 published a very convincing critique of his teacher entitled "Heidegger: Denker in dürftige Zeit" in which the Master's oldest student argued that in the later works Heidegger often substituted etymologies for arguments, playing with words in order to create connections.²⁰⁹ As Löwith wrote, "Heidegger's language is, as he himself says along with Hölderlin, 'the most innocent of all affairs,' a glass bead game with words, and at the same time 'the most dangerous of all goods.' Its danger is that it is insidious and that it encumbers more than it liberates."²¹⁰ Löwith related this back to earlier claims which he had made about the nature of Heidegger's appeal to students in the 1920s and early 1930s, those of Löwith's own generation: that the notion of resoluteness developed in *Being and Time*

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 345.

²⁰⁹ Karl Löwith, *Heidegger: Denker in dürftiger Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1953). The second German edition (1960) appears in English translation as "Heidegger: Thinker in a Destitute Time," in *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, ed. Richard Wolin, trans. Gary Steiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 31-134.

²¹⁰ Löwith, *Heidegger: Thinker in a Destitute Time*, 41.

was without content and could be a resoluteness towards anything, whether the resoluteness of Dasein, or transposed on the resoluteness of a political agent choosing Nazism. In his 1953 work on Heidegger, Löwith reiterated, “that to which one resolves oneself remains intentionally undefined in *Being and Time* since this is first determined in the very resolution, which is a projecting upon factual possibilities.”²¹¹ Löwith had put it more explicitly in his important article from 1942 written in exile in which he compared Heidegger and Franz Rosenzweig. Löwith declared,

the anticipatory resoluteness lacks a definite aim! Upon what existence actually resolves, remains an open question and undecided; for only when a decision is in the making, is the necessary vagueness of its ‘for what’ replaced by a definite aim. To make up one’s mind depends on the actual possibilities of the historical situations. Hence, Heidegger refuses to be positive or even authoritative as to existential liabilities.... The resolve, thus does not come to any conclusion; it is a constant attitude, formal like the categorical imperative and through its formality open to any material determination, provided that it is radical.²¹²

Aimless and non-specific, Heidegger’s resoluteness took on the character of an “occasional decisionism” that Löwith juxtaposed with that of Carl Schmitt.²¹³ In the 1953 work, though, Löwith added another important observation of the potential danger of Heidegger’s ideas in the seductiveness of his style of argumentation, that of the

²¹¹ Ibid., 42. Löwith had made this claim already in the early 1940s. See Löwith “M. Heidegger and F. Rosenzweig or Temporality and Eternity,” *Philosophical and Phenomenological Research*, 3, no. 1 (Sept. 1942): 66-67.

²¹² Löwith, “M. Heidegger and F. Rosenzweig,” 66.

²¹³ Karl Löwith, “The Occasional Decisionism of Carl Schmitt,” in *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 139-69; for comparison of Schmitt’s decisionism to Heidegger’s “resoluteness” see esp. 159-166; originally published in exile under the pseudonym “Hugo Fiala” as “Politischer Dezisionismus,” in *Internationale Zeitschrift für Theorie des Rechts* (1935): 101ff. See also, Alfons Söllner, “Kronjurist des Dritten Reiches: das Bild Carl Schmitts in den Schriften der Emigranten,” *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 1 (1992): 197-98.

“displaced preacher.”²¹⁴ Whereas the earlier Heidegger had animated the generation of the political youth of the 1920s through talk of resoluteness, authentic and inauthentic, existential and common, now the later Heidegger’s turn to poetic language could fascinate as much as his earlier philosophy, but ostensibly without the same radical existential or political decisionism.

Nonetheless, Löwith reaffirmed his conviction that Heidegger’s political decision in 1933 was a logical outcome of the latter’s philosophical radicalism.²¹⁵ Löwith’s insinuation of a continuity in the shirking of responsibilities in Heidegger’s thought, first by removing the normative yardstick from any existential or political resolutions, then through the escape into seemingly innocuous language games, was not that far from the strongly political criticisms raised by Georg Lukács in his 1947 review of Heidegger’s *Brief über den Humanismus*.²¹⁶ Lukács interpreted the language of the “Letter” as escapist and an attempt to obscure the real consequences of Heidegger’s political actions

²¹⁴ Löwith had already isolated the seductiveness of Heidegger’s lecturing in the then unpublished report submitted to an essay contest offered by Harvard University in 1940. Here Löwith wrote, “The fascination that Heidegger has exerted over us as a result of his Resolve devoid of content and his ruthless critique has endured. It is now twenty years since I first went to Freiburg, but even today he manages to captivate the listener by the enigmatic nature of his intensive lecturing, and the influence of his teaching can still be felt everywhere” Löwith, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933: A Report*, trans. Elizabeth King (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 44; on Heidegger as “displaced preacher” see *ibid.*, 30.

²¹⁵ “Heidegger’s decisionism in favor of Hitler goes far beyond agreement with the party’s ideology and program. He was and remained a ‘National Socialist,’ on the margins and in a state of individuation, . . . He was influential solely in virtue of the *radicalism* with which he placed the freedom of Dasein that is German and always one’s own upon the manifestness of the *Nothing*” (Löwith, “Occasional Decisionism,” 166). Compare this with the almost identical restatement in Karl Löwith, “Les implications politiques de la philosophie de l’existence chez Heidegger,” *Les Temps Modernes* 11 (Nov. 1946): 357-58; and Löwith, *My Life in Germany*, 42-43.

²¹⁶ Georg Lukács, “Heidegger Redivivus [Review of M. Heidegger, *Platons Lehre der Wahrheit, mit einem Brief über den “Humanismus”* (Bern, 1947),]” *Sinn und Form* 1, no. 3 (1947): 37-62.

of the 1930s. For Lukács, Heidegger's turn towards the irrational, either in Nietzsche or in, for Lukács, a false interpretation of Hölderlin's poetry was a way now of augmenting Heidegger's "pre-fascist philosophy" with a relativization of the crimes of the Nazi regime by a retreat from all values and metaphysics by claiming to have discerned the "misguided development" of philosophy.²¹⁷ It was Heidegger's way of escaping judgment for the deeds of the past by focusing on the deeds of thinking which was "more primary" (*anfänglicher*) than all values and all types of beings (*Seienden*). Lukács ends his review with a powerful statement of the continuity of Heidegger's enigmatic, quietist postwar work with the thinker's earlier political misdeeds. The Hungarian Communist concluded, "Heidegger hat mit seiner präfaschistischen Vergangenheit nicht gebrochen, ja nicht einmal sein persönliches Eintreten für den Faschismus philosophisch desavouiert. Ja, das hier entworfene Inkognito des Seins dem Seinde gegenüber kann leicht ein Deckmantel für eine spätere Enthüllung von was immer sein."²¹⁸

Knowledge of Heidegger's political collaboration with National Socialism not only disseminated from émigrés in the West and figures like Lukács in the East. In *Die Neue Zeitung*, published in Munich by the US Occupational Authority and edited by Erich Kästner, there appeared a short piece in 1947 from a lecture given by Kurt Hiller in Hamburg entitled "Über die Denkwebel." Hiller could not have laid out the case against Heidegger more explicitly,

²¹⁷ Ibid., 53f.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 62.

Der narrisch überschätzte Heidegger zeichnet sich dadurch aus, daß er statt des Gehirns einen metaphysischen Blumenkohl im Schädel herumträgt. Das äußert sich in eine Sprache, daß nur dem Ausländer Deutsch klingt während sie für den Deutschen von Urteil einen nie versiegenden Born des Spasses bedeutet. Wir hatten den Spaß schon *anno* Weimar. Die Sache äußert sich aber nicht nur im Stil. Sie äußert sich auch in Ismus: im zwar schnörkligen, dennoch stumpfsinnigen Inhalt jenes "Existentialismus" ... Zwar frivolisiert Herr Heidegger das Bestehende, aber erst recht frivolisiert er die es brennende Vernunft, in dem er, besessen vom Tode, nichts ernst zu nehmen vorgibt, es sei den das Nichts, aus welchem er seine bizarren intellektuellen Ornamente spinnt.²¹⁹

Hiller cites the way in which theologians, intellectuals, and cultural critics like Max Brod tried to seriously engage Heidegger in discussion.²²⁰ However, for Hiller this was a pointless endeavor with someone who had confused intellectualism and barbarism. The returned émigré literary critic with record of Heidegger's fresh in the mind:

Ich halte daß schon deshalb für unnötig, weil mir der Aufruf bekannt ist, den er am 3. November 1933 als Rektor von Freiburg an seine Studenten richtete. Auf eine Kaskade von Phrasen tanzt da der Kork der These:

"Nicht Lehrsätze und 'Ideen' seien die Regeln eueres Seins. Der Führer selbst und allein ist die heutige und künftige deutsche Wirklichkeit und ihr Gesetz."²²¹

Aus diesem Sätzen spricht Existentialismus: das Wort "Ideen" ist in hämische Gänsefüßchen gesetzt. Ideen in Gänsefüßchen: der Geschmack der Epoche!²²²

²¹⁹ Kurt Hiller, "Über die Denkwebel," *Die Neue Zeitung*, Friday, August 15, 1947.

²²⁰ Hiller was most likely referring to Max Brod, "Kierkegaard – Heidegger – Kafka," in *Prisma* 1 (1947): 17-20. Brod's essay was hardly an endorsement of Heidegger's philosophy; however, this dispute between two émigré cultural critics shows how potentially explosive the early cultural debates could become, particularly when the name of a former Nazi could be placed alongside that of Franz Kafka, whose republished work after 1945 symbolized the recovery and rehabilitation of a cultural heritage the Nazi Regime had tried to extirpate.

²²¹ See the English translation of Heidegger's speech of November 3, 1933 to German students prior to the Nazi plebiscite of November 12, 1933 in Richard Wolin ed., *The Heidegger Controversy*, 47.

²²² Kurt Hiller, "Über die Denkwebel."

After 1945, the majority of university philosophers, as we have seen, understood the Nazi period as the perversion of philosophy's genuine function as the organizing discipline of the sciences. This view went as far as to assign philosophy the role of defender of German intellectual life and the university against political intrusion. Hans Sluga has analyzed the large-scale miscalculation on the part of German philosophers—the attempt to read politics through philosophy, exemplified by Heidegger—as evidence that philosophers would do best to resist political engagement. Although Sluga presents a very original interpretation of the intellectual field in the Nazi Period, one cannot wholly aver the general conclusions about its legacy for post-1945 German intellectual life. Sluga describes both German philosophers and German society as a whole after 1945 as devoted to the collective task of forgetting the recent past. It seems paradoxical that Sluga decries the collective silence of German intellectuals and at the same time advocates the separation of philosophy and politics, of truth and power.²²³ For even if German intellectuals after 1945 were willing to impose the self-limitation from political action in the way Sluga suggests, the avoidance of political engagement in the Federal Republic of Germany could appear as no less than escapism or denial. As we have seen in the first chapter, for many living in the wake of the 'German catastrophe' the active engagement of intellectuals and of a new intellectual youth in the process of 'democratization' and 'Westernization' of German cultural life and academic institutions appeared a moral and political necessity.

²²³ Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis*, 243ff.

Constructive political engagement within the university need not take the form of overbearing “spiritual mission” of students and teachers bound to the German *Volk* that Heidegger had outlined in 1933. Though Heidegger never recanted his early enthusiasm for the spirit of National Socialism, responses of intellectuals in West Germany after 1945 were quite diverse. It is simplistic to view the decades immediately following 1945 as a period of avoidance, denial, and restoration. To be sure, silence did pervade German culture and intellectual life in the 1940s and 1950s, but for the young in particular this was a conscious silence that could itself serve as particular kind of intellectual protest and disagreement with the lofty speech of the older generation. For some, silence corresponded to a greater cultural belief that the immediate past was impossible to represent and unthinkable to interpret by any existing literary or philosophical means. Theodor Adorno’s well-known observation about the status of ‘traditional’ cultural criticism was a nagging reminder that the return of old cultural attitudes did not dispel the nightmares of the recent past: was philosophy as well as poetry impossible after Auschwitz?²²⁴

Yet Adorno now famous words still echoed the sentiment of an older generation and, more specifically, for those who had experienced forced emigration and who were personally touched by the Holocaust. This was not a model for the younger German intellectuals. The incessant implication of guilt was not easily accepted, particularly when

²²⁴ “To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that also gets at the insight that explains why it has become impossible to write poetry today” (Theodor Adorno, “Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft,” in *Prismen* [Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1955], 31).

their German elders were all too eager to bypass the question of guilt by focusing on the need for political reeducation. Thus, it is not useful to view the history of postwar philosophy, any more than that of the wider postwar generation in the light of an expected direct engagement with Nazism. It is equally reductive to view silence one-sidedly as evasion when this expectation is not met.

Again, the silence of the young was not that of the older, compromised figures, nor was it always captured by the émigrés like Adorno, or the returned prisoners of war like Richter and Andersch, who had their own understandable manner of coping through a “*nachgeholter Widerstand*.” As we have seen, the reductive view of silence coincides with the expectations for a political generation that had determined the traditional sense of the concept used by Karl Mannheim and those writing in the 1920s, who then as older teachers and commentators imposed sometimes burdensome expectations on the postwar youth after 1945. There was no political generation of 1945 that could compare with the strong sense of shared identity, or match the very self-consciously stylized avant-garde political and cultural movements of the *Jugendbewegung* before and after the First World war, or the so-called “generation of 1968” that would follow. The youth of the 1940s and 1950s had shared experiences in the Second World War, though these could be very different depending on the capacity in which they served in the war effort because of age, or location. If they displayed any “shared destiny” or *Generationszusammenhang*, then it could only be based on the *non*-experiences of “lost years” of study and on a lack of character formation. Their lack of form, or “*Bildlosigkeit*” (Mitscherlich) was driven

home again and again in the pages of cultural journals and in the speeches of their elders, who judged this youth for its reluctance to identify with the projects of political reeducation and for its unwillingness to assume responsibility for the past, and more importantly, for the future of the nascent West German state and its cultural life.

In a 1996 lecture delivered in memory of the recently deceased philosopher, Hans Blumenberg, Dieter Henrich recalled how members of his generation, now “on the way out” [“Im Abgang”], were not always in a position to comprehend, or be convinced by the call to *Einsatz* either in the speeches of prominent public philosophers in Germany such as Karl Jaspers and Theodor Litt, or by the existentialists in France. His age group lacked the means to start again with only slightly reconceptualized ideas that predated 1933, which were presented in the public sphere with little background contextualization. Henrich confesses,

Die Erfahrung einer Jugend unter den Schatten von Indoktrination, Kriegsgeschehen und Überlebenmüssen ergaben wohl eine Gestimmtheit, die, wenn sie denn in eine philosophische Denkart und deren öffentlichen Vortrag eingebracht werden sollten, nach einer Verständigungsweise aus neuem Einsatz verlangte. Zu ihm fehlten aber die Ressourcen und Kraft verständlicherweise zunächst einmal gänzlich.²²⁵

Henrich’s recollections also respond to the notion that existentialism was a possible avenue towards self-understanding for the whole of a ‘young generation’ in the late 1940s. Alfred Andersch, born in 1914, may not have been accurately expressing the sentiments of younger intellectuals born in the mid to late 1920s, when he claimed that

²²⁵ Dieter Henrich, “Eine Generation im Abgang,” in *Die Philosophie im Prozeß der Kultur* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2006), 58-59.

the youth could find workable answers in the philosophy of existentialism and its passionate critique of ‘objective values.’ Henrich points out, “Zwar wirkte aus Frankreich der Existentialismus herüber, der aber erkennbar modisch getönt war. Wer sich also auf ihn nicht verlassen mochte und auch Altbewährtes nicht nur fortsetzen wollte, mußte einen indirekteren Zugang zum selbständigen Denken suchen.”²²⁶ As we will see in the following chapters, there were many such “indirect avenues to independent thought” for the philosophical youth. However, the most successful among them found their way by means of a questioning of the German tradition and, later, a reconnection with intellectual movements that had been suppressed or forced from Germany and Europe by the Nazi Regime. Critical engagement, not with contemporary politics in the first instance, but with the problems of the German and Western philosophical tradition was the first, difficult path that they had to traverse to gain entry to the profession. This might have appeared to many in the public realm as yet another example of the postwar intellectual youth’s political apathy; or it could have been an abdication of responsibility on the part of their instructors to engender a discussion of contemporary political events. Yet recourse to tradition also can take the form of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of one’s own cultural inheritance. In this way, the most gifted young thinkers coped with the trauma of the recent political and moral collapse by focusing their critical questioning first on the long-term intellectual antecedents of their current predicament. Philosophical instruction and research into the history of philosophy became the safe enclave for

²²⁶ Ibid., 59.

critical questioning in the midst of political and professional uncertainty. Teacher and student alike had to overcome the residua of the older ways of philosophizing, whether embodied in the former schools of philosophy, or the singular ‘great thinkers’ and living legends from the recent past.

This youth’s earnestness and desire for learning and cultural orientation did not go unnoticed by the most perceptive among their instructors. The need to catch up (*Nachholbedürfnis*) on their interrupted study meant that the priority for the philosophical youth was to locate teachers who were willing to spend the time and effort to impart the fundamental ideas of the Western philosophic tradition as well as the practice of critical thinking. This generation of young, eager students could be classified as a part of the “45er Generation”—again, those born roughly between the end of the First World War and before the Nazi *Machtergreifung* of 1933.²²⁷ However, this first generation of students after the war ran up against the tropes of political ‘rupture’ and intellectual parenthesis of Nazism that framed the narratives of older cultural commentators and professors and was a basis for the expectations the latter placed on the youth. The “generation” of 1945 lacked the living connection to the German intellectual past and was concerned in the first instance with a desire to make up for lost time. As Willy Hochkeppel (b. 1927) writes,

Ein ganz natürliches, heftiges Nachholbedürfnis und der Wunsch, ein neues Lebensgefühl zu artikulieren sowie sich angesichts einer nahezu globalen

²²⁷ A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*. See especially Chapter 3 “The Forty-Fivers: a Generation between Fascism and Democracy”, 55ff.

Auflösung weltanschaulich zu orientieren, dazu die Verklärung einer so jungen, aber auch so fernerückten Vergangenheit – die ‘goldenen’ oder ‘roaring twenties’ – machten die auffällige Hinwendung zum philosophischen Denken, vor allem in Europa plausible.²²⁸

Hochkeppel was expressing in this hindsight appraisal a feeling of “euphoria” among many Western philosophers in the 1940s and 1950s for a return to pure thought and an escape into a meta-historical *philosophia perennis*. Of course, any return to tradition was mediated by the older generation and thus refracted through and weighed against the legendary cultural and intellectual productivity of the 1920s. The German philosophical youth were not immune to these “*Fluchtlinien*,”—“lines of flight”—or escape into a romanticized past from the present realities of political accountability and economic privation. Hochkeppel repeated the common refrain of the critics in the first years after the war that the intellectual youth, along with many of their elders, availed themselves of any opportunity to avoid political questions of the day as well as their own responsibility for the criminal deeds of the recent past. Even the talk of ‘responsibility’ and ‘engagement’ found in the popular philosophies coming from the French existentialists and parroted by some West German cultural critics were mere phrases, short outbursts of emotion that punctuated an otherwise silent period of retreat into pure thought and speculation in the hopes of remaining untouched by the political judgments of the day. Hochkeppel cynically observed:

Politisch wollte die Mehrzahl abstinent bleiben, niemand wollte sich wieder die ‘Finger verbrennen’: In der Welt der Ideen und des reinen Gedankens bestand

²²⁸ Willy Hochkeppel, *Mythos Philosophie* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 1976), 24.

keine Gefahr, mit der Realität zu kollidieren, auch wenn die Mode-Philosophie jener Tage viel von Verantwortung und Entscheidung redete; es war alles nicht so ernst gemeint, man spielte Freiheit und grämte sich nicht sonderlich, daß man zu ihr verurteilt sein sollte.²²⁹

Of course, Hochkeppel was writing as an outsider to the philosophical profession in the 1970s. Although it would seem that he paints a picture very close to that of conservatives like Schelsky and Gehlen in the mid to late 1950s, Hochkeppel had different reasons for reflecting on the way in which philosophers and intellectuals had steadily lost touch with reality and, as a result, had forsaken their claim to scientific status and their greater social function. As we shall see below, external commentators like Hochkeppel would come to negatively judge academic philosophers for the professionalization and institutionalization of the discipline that took place in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In this way, the greater ‘irreality’ of philosophical questioning and the practice of philosophy within the West German universities existed in homology with the putative political skepticism of consumer, middle-class society extolled by Schelsky. However, this picture of the philosophical profession and, the young academics that came to take up the leading roles within it, was as much an oversimplification as it was to label the attitude of the German youth in general as “skeptical” or “de-politicized.” As in the latter case, it is important to see that political interests, most importantly, a determination to come to terms with the experiences of the twelve-year dictatorship developed only after the more primary needs of intellectual formation and professional orientation had been

²²⁹ Hochkeppel, *Mythos Philosophie*, 24.

met. Political engagement was never overt in the first decades after the war. The more pressing concern was, first, the critical reinterpretation of the German and greater Western philosophical tradition and, second, what could be achieved institutionally to realize a new model of professional collaboration for the discipline of philosophy. The apparent “euphoria” of the intellectual youth for a newly opened cultural and philosophical tradition must not be equated with the equally dubious portrayal of opportunism or conformity in the sense of a soporific functional, “*sachlich*,” or business-like comportment of the restorative 1950s.

The Legend of the 1920s.

As we have seen above, myths of past cultural originality and political activism often functioned to overshadow the less spectacular but no less important process of learning and discovery which characterized the postwar intellectual youth’s path to self-sufficient thought. Many intellectuals whose academic careers predated the 1930s retained a strong belief in the ‘legend’ of the cultural and intellectual inspiration of the 1920s that then provided the standard against which post-1945 philosophy and culture could be judged unoriginal or exhausted.²³⁰ It was even apparent to foreign visitors like Walter Kaufmann that the situation of philosophy and culture in Germany after the defeat

²³⁰ Here I refer to an address by Helmut Plessner in 1962 republished as “Die Legende von den zwanziger Jahren,” in H. Plessner, *Diesseits der Utopie* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp, 1974), 87-119. I would argue that until recently much of the historiography on German postwar culture and intellectual life retained something of this ‘legend.’

in 1945 was the exact reverse of the cultural flourishing that followed the defeat of 1918. “Now it is the economic and political recovery of West Germany that nobody would have considered possible when the war ended; but there are no cultural achievements of comparable significance. . . . West Germany is doing brisk business on all fronts,” Kaufmann observes, “but culturally she is living on her capital.”²³¹

During the 1950s, thinkers of older generations—those born in the 1880s, 1890s, and around 1900—of the most disparate schools, temperaments, and former political affiliations were joined in the diagnosis and resistance both to the putative threat of positivism and the decline in number of positions for *Ordinarien* and *Dozenten* relative to the exponential rise in student enrollments at the major universities in West Germany. One finds a decidedly Mandarin conservatism, in Fritz Ringer’s use of the term, latent in the concerns about the prospects for the continued relevance of philosophy inside and outside the university. Even leading philosophical figures among the German “existentialists,” a label that could really designate a very disparate grouping of thinkers, many of them effectively on the margins of academia, all lamented the loss of a unified philosophical ideal of learning that guided the university and coordinated the now dispersed *Einzelwissenschaften*. By the late 1950s, these already strange bedfellows were joined in the defense against “positivism,” albeit from the platform of a debate inside

²³¹ Walter Kaufmann, “German Thought after World War II,” reprinted in *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 371. This article first appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, Winter 1957. Cf. James V. McGlynn, “A Note on Philosophy in German Universities Today,” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 19, no.2 (Dec. 1958): 248-252.

sociology, by the old Frankfurt School leader, Theodor Adorno. Herbert Schnädelbach (b. 1936) was a student in Frankfurt beginning in the mid 1950s. He recalled a shared concern in the philosophy profession and the Geisteswissenschaften as a whole for the loss of philosophy's "Totalitätsanspruch" and degradation as just another *Einzelwissenschaft*. Schnädelbach pointed out,

Man muß sich klarmachen, daß in den zwanziger Jahren, in denen auch die "Kritische Theorie" entstanden ist, Philosophie noch so etwas wie eine personengebundene Deutungsdisziplin war, die jeweils individuell vertreten wurde durch einen Lehrstuhlinhaber. Bei solcher Positionen war ja nichts Geringes beansprucht als eine Gesamtdeutung der Totalität der menschlichen Kultur oder des menschlichen Denkens. Inzwischen ist auch die Philosophie verwissenschaftlicht worden – vereinzeltwissenschaftlicht –, wozu sie selbst beigetragen hat.²³²

Although Adorno and the *Kulturkritiker* often referred to the cultural and philosophical radicalism as well as the scholarly productivity of the 1920s as positive models for postwar German intellectual life, the continuing confrontation with the ubiquitous threat of "positivism," or, what many some younger philosophers later described as the "scientification" or "Verwissenschaftlichung" of philosophy, was the common cause for concern among philosophy at the leading universities in West Germany, including the Frankfurt School of the 1950s.²³³

²³² Herbert Schnädelbach, "Philosophieren lernen: Interview mit Josef Früchtel," in Josef Früchtel and Maria Calloni, eds., *Geist gegen den Zeitgeist: Erinnern an Adorno* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991), 65.

²³³ In addition to Schnädelbach's quote above, one must acknowledge the work of the Gadamer student and accomplished Tübingen philosopher, Walter Schulz, *Philosophie in der veränderten Welt* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1972), esp. 11-245.

By the 1960s, many cultural critics turned their attention to the failure of the younger generation of students—those whose intellectual development began only after the culture of the 1920s had been silenced by a new political order—to introduce a new thinking that could replace or at least challenge the old philosophical radicalism of the 1920s and even the classical tradition of German idealism. The negative comparisons of the young philosophers of the day to the radical philosophers of the 1920s were relatively widespread, not surprisingly in the more popular cultural magazines and journals.

A short article appeared in the March 1966 issue of *Der Monat* in which a well-known intellectual commentator gave the following diagnosis of the state of German philosophy in the decades following 1945: “There was and is no young philosophical generation. . . The old has not been displaced by youthful thinking; [they] still spoke and speak with the old words, with the vocabulary that the sixty, seventy, eighty-year-olds of today had inherited.”²³⁴ The author was the free-lance writer, literary critic, and “aged student of philosophy,”²³⁵ Ludwig Marcuse, who had only just returned to his birth city of Berlin at the beginning of the 1960s after having been forced to emigrate in 1933. His “descriptive appraisal” of German philosophy in the 1960s as a tentative or “Provisional Philosophy” derived from the author’s memory of the cultural productivity and philosophical radicalism of the years between 1918 and 1933—the years of his own

²³⁴ “Es gab und gibt in Deutschland keine junge philosophische Generation. . . . Die Alten wurden nicht von jungen Denken abgelöst; sprachen und sprechen noch mit den alten Wörtern: mit dem Vokabular, das schon die heute Sechzigjährigen, Siebzigjährigen, Achtzigjährigen ererbt hatten.” Ludwig Marcuse, “Provisorische Philosophie,” *Der Monat* 18, no. 210 (March 1966), 31.

²³⁵ See Ludwig Marcuse, *Aus den Papieren eines bejahrten Philosophie-Studenten* (Munich: List, 1964).

intellectual maturation—and also from his time abroad, where, like so many exiled Jewish intellectuals he was exposed to Anglo-American philosophical ideas that were in part the product of an exported Viennese analytic tradition to which in his youth Marcuse was very close.²³⁶

I dwell on Marcuse's biography only to foreground the experiences and memory that influenced his point of view and that of the more literary critics of philosophy, particularly the émigrés. His nostalgia for the cultural novelty of the 1920s was accompanied by the belief that the radical renewal for philosophy that occurred after 1918 was impossible after 1945. Marcuse observed, "Philosophy did not begin *ad ovo* after 1945; there was no philosophy of the rubble [Trümmer-Philosophie] (which was there after 1918, when there was no rubble)."²³⁷ Although Marcuse's provocative observation about the persistence of German philosophical traditions and the at best makeshift character of an intellectual community of younger philosophers certainly resonated with the wider cultural public—the readership of "an international journal for politics and intellectual life" (the secondary title of *Der Monat*)—these were only the opinions of an outsider to the field of academic philosophy, even if they were very much

²³⁶ It is also worth mentioning that his pre-1933 works included most notably intellectual biographies of Heinrich Heine (1931) and Ludwig Börne (1929), which gained a tragic poignancy after the German-Jewish author's own forced emigration. Heine's 1834 work, *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, written in French exile, seems to have been an archetype for Marcuse's own reflections on the decline and provincialism of German philosophy since the 1920s. Thus it is important to see a kind of love-hate relationship with the cultural production of the 1920s in Marcuse's criticism. His ideal would have been for the younger thinkers of the 1950s and 1960s to give up the *philosophia perennis* and to build upon the analytic tradition as it had been incorporated into the Anglo-American tradition while in exile.

²³⁷ Marcuse, "Provisorische Philosophie," 31.

in line with the views of a more academically-based, but no less publicly visible philosopher like Theodor Adorno. Adorno argued in the pages of *Merkur* that any contemporary artistic or philosophical production, especially when it gestured to the rebellion against tradition of the 1920s, gave the feeling of “second hand” radicalism and could only serve as “ideological distraction” from “the powerlessness of political subjects.”²³⁸ Thus, not only was the composition of poetry after Auschwitz “obscene,” it also no longer served as the “negative knowledge of the actual world,” by dynamically exposing the contradictions in the apparent “harmony,” whether it be of the subjectivity of the spectator, or the passive consumer of the culture market.²³⁹

Shortly after Adorno’s piece appeared, Hans Paeschke, editor of *Merkur*, ran a short article from Helmuth Plessner in which the latter expressed an uncommon opposition to the mythologization of the 1920s by the political generation of the First World War. In the 1950s Plessner had renewed his critique of the German political tradition, or, the “belated” development of the nation state, which led the stable bourgeois view of the relationship between society and the state astray.²⁴⁰ This peculiar national

²³⁸ Theodor Adorno, “Those Twenties,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 47. This essay first appeared as “Jene zwanziger Jahre,” in *Merkur* 16 (1962): 46-51.

²³⁹ Theodor Adorno, “Reconciliation under Duress [on Georgi Lukács ca. 1961],” trans. Rodney Livingston in *Aesthetics and Politics: Key Texts from Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, et al.* trans. ed. Ronald Taylor, afterward by Fredric Jameson (London and New York: Verso Publishers, 1980), 160-61.

²⁴⁰ Helmuth Plessner, *Die Verspätete Nation: über die politische Verführbarkeit bürgerlichen Geistes* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1959). We will have more to say in chapter five about the profound influence Plessner’s timely republication had on younger West German philosophers, historians, and social scientists. “The Belated Nation” was based on Plessner’s 1935 pamphlet published in exile, *Das Schicksal deutschen Geistes im Ausgang seiner bürgerlichen Epoche* (Zurich and Leipzig: M. Niehans, 1935).

development also manifested itself in the postwar view of German philosophy and culture:

Das Fascinosum der zwanziger Jahre, verdichtet in der Legende von ihrer einzigartigen Produktivität, ihre unvergleichlichen Fülle an Talent und Wagemut, erklärt sich zu einem Teil aus der perspektivischen Verklärung, in der eine versunkene, jäh abgebrochene Zeit den Alten und den Jungen gerade heute erscheinen muß.²⁴¹

Plessner argued that from the perspective of those in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the 1920s were bracketed off first by the political catastrophe and its consequences, but also, and perhaps more importantly for one's judgment of its originality, from the "long process of consolidation" that took place in German culture before 1914. Moreover, Plessner warned that the young philosophers of the postwar suffer from a very distorted and misleading sense of the greatness of these epigonal times. Those older philosophers educated between the defeat of 1918 and the political revolution of 1933 could recall a time of tension, but of a productive tension that had to seem all the more meaningful because it was precisely directed at the youth and against the stuffiness of tradition. Plessner writes, "Separated from the questionable epoch by the dead zone of the Third Reich, for those over sixty, they [the 1920s] stand for the splendor of their own youth, and for the young under forty, as a period of brilliance, which they know only by way of stories."²⁴²

²⁴¹ Helmuth Plessner, "Die Legende von den zwanziger Jahren," in *Diesseits der Utopie: ausgewählte Beiträge zur Kulturosoziologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), 101. This essay also appeared in *Merkur* 16 (1962) shortly after Adorno's "Jene zwanziger Jahre."

²⁴² Ibid., 87.

Just as the generation of the *Jugendbewegung*, idealized by commentators like Eduard Spranger and many others, served as the standard by which the postwar intellectual youth could be judged less original and conformist, the stories of the “epic time” of 1920s philosophy, found in the reminiscences of figures as different as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Theodor Adorno, would burden younger philosophers well into their own mature careers. The self-consciousness of their own unoriginality continued to inform their self-criticisms. As late as 1976, Willy Hochkeppel, judged his own generation’s adherence to tradition quite severely. Echoing Ludwig Marcuse and Walter Kaufmann, Hochkeppel charges, “We speak the language and think the thoughts of our grandfathers and fathers, those men, whose cultural, ethical, social, and political ‘world picture’ [Weltbild] supposedly lies so far from us, and which we have put behind us.”²⁴³

In the 1960s despite the public talk of its collapse, philosophy in Germany saw an explosion of publications, congresses, exhibitions, and workshops. However, in the view of those outsiders, like Hochkeppel, this was at the expense of its receding from the public world. The provincialism and abstraction that had characterized German philosophy since the First World War was institutionalized in postwar *Universitätsphilosophie*. Hochkeppel invoked Karl Popper and his followers such as Hans Albert as counterexamples. The displaced Vienna School thinkers and their German students had always argued that philosophy must have its roots outside itself. With the

²⁴³ “Wir sprechen die Sprache und denken die Gedanken unserer Großväter und Väter, jene Männer, deren kulturelles, ethisches, soziales und politisches ‘Weltbild’ uns doch angeblich so fern liegt, das wir hinter uns gebracht haben.” Hochkeppel, *Mythos Philosophie*, 23.

professionalization of the 1960s these roots apparently had receded into the closed domain of the specialized disciplines. Philosophy was reduced to being one subject among others with its own closed system of practices and its own specialized jargon. Though this meant a brisk business for the academic philosophers, it caused a loss of interest on the part of a “cultivated bourgeoisie” for the ideas and opinions of philosophers: “Die Philosophie hat sich, so darf man durchaus sagen, der Öffentlichkeit entfremdet.”²⁴⁴ More importantly, for Hochkeppel, writing after 1968, as professional philosophers abdicated their social function, they allowed “vulgarized philosophies” to move unmediated into the public mind in the form of catchwords and phrases, particularly attractive to the new, impatiently activist youth of the 1960s. Hochkeppel writes, “Es ist nicht verwunderlich, daß die jüngste Generation ihrem Verdruß über den Zunftgeist, die Esoterik, das bloße Theoretisieren und die gänzliche Uneffektivität der total zersplitterten Kommunikationsgemeinschaft ‘bürgerlicher’ Philosophen lautstark und manchmal handfest Luft machen. Diese Jüngsten wollten philosophische Gedanken unvermittelt in Taten umsetzen.”²⁴⁵

Thus, in a final bitter irony, the complacency and professional achievements of the first postwar generation of philosophy—the youth of 1945—are blamed for the misguided radicalism of the ‘68er movement. As a result of the ‘45er’s supposed indifference to the wider social function of philosophy and their ‘businesslike’

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 32.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 33

(*betriebsam*) *habitus* of professionalism and collaborative research, the subsequent politicized youth movement of the 1960s was left vulnerable to the pseudo-philosophies of vulgar Marxism and the left-wing ideologies of the day.

Still, the hindsight pronouncements of cultural critics before a wider public in the quality, literary journals like *Merkur* and *Der Monat* in the 1960s do not explain the models for the practice of philosophy that were offered to the philosophers, who came to professional maturity and entered academic positions in the mid to late 1950s. Again, politics for this ‘generation’ was overshadowed by a search for orientation and the mitigation of their lost or wasted years under Nazism and during the War through collaboration with their teachers and active participation in the reconstruction and redefinition of the discipline.

The practice and production of philosophy within the specialized field of academic philosophy can only ever partially heed the pronouncements of outsiders before a wider public (and also pronouncements and revelations of its own members through non-scholarly mediums). However, that does not mean that the actual “business as usual” of the profession remained unaffected by broader social changes. With the overflow of students seeking professional degrees, academic chairs and directorships had to be taken up—and indeed, despite the crisis of the *Ordinarienuniversität*, the official policy of *Hochschulreform* by the late 1950s was to expand the number of instructors, above all the *Assistenten*, in the humanities to accommodate the exponentially growing number of young people seeking higher education. Academic societies like the *Heidelberger*

Akademie der Wissenschaften or the *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz* continued to grow and to take in new members, congresses are sponsored, research groups meet and exchange ideas. These paled in public attraction to the radical activities of the 1920s, but they were the means of pursuing philosophy in the 1950s and particularly, in the 1960s. The majority of philosophers interested in teaching and in making a career in the profession had neither the time nor the public notoriety to make grandiose pronouncements about the “crisis” or the ‘end of philosophy.’

For most, Adorno’s question of 1962, “Wozu noch Philosophie?”²⁴⁶ was provocative and marginally interesting; but this public “spectator” position could appear superficial and diversionary for many younger philosophers, who were engaged in the practice of academic philosophy and its various institutional articulations. Those who questioned the *raison d’être* of the profession, or its social relevance as “negative thinking,” like Adorno or Herbert Marcuse were viewed as outsiders to the academic field. Habermas recalls how “during the course of the late 1950s, Adorno became well-known to the public above all through his journalistic publications. Inside the discipline [of philosophy] the Frankfurt philosophy has remained an enclave for a long time.”²⁴⁷ As

²⁴⁶ First delivered as a radio lecture “Wozu Philosophie heute?” on Hessischer Rundfunk, January 2, 1962; then published as “Wozu noch Philosophie?” in *Merkur* 16 (1962:1001-1011).

²⁴⁷ Jürgen Habermas, “Eine Generation von Adorno getrennt: Interview mit Josef Früchtl,” in Früchtl and Calloni, *Geist gegen den Zeitgeist*, 47; on Adorno’s public interventions, see Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingston (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 366-74.

Marcuse’s case is more ambiguous and difficult to track. His wartime work on Hegel, *Reason and Revolution* was well respected and often cited by the circles around Joachim Ritter and Gadamer. Odo Marquard recalled presenting Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955) before Ritter’s “Collegium Philosophicum” at Münster in 1956; Marquard and others invoked this anecdote as evidence of

a recent biographer of Adorno observes, in the early 1950s, the returned émigrés did not experience the “triumphant reception” that was assumed in later accounts, after figures like Adorno became well-respected scholars as well as public intellectuals.²⁴⁸ Equally problematic was the relation of the Frankfurt School émigrés with their young, German assistants.

Habermas confesses that he never fit in at the Institute after being appointed Adorno’s assistant in the Autumn of 1956. This tension was caused not only by political differences of opinion—which related more to Max Horkheimer’s anti-Marxism and support for the restorative politics of the Adenauer government—but also by generational differences. The older members at the Frankfurt School were bound by the experiences of intellectual exchange during the 1920s, when the *Institute für Sozialforschung*’s idea of critical theory was first actualized; just as significantly, they were connected by the shared experience of emigration, exile and cautious return. A young assistant, like Habermas, could only admire the intellectual intimacy of the émigrés from afar.²⁴⁹

Ritter’s openness to unconventional, quasi-Marxist thinkers. See, Marquard, “Farwell to Matters of Principle,” in *Farwell to Matters of Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 8 and Jürgen Siefert, “Joachim Ritters ‘Collegium Philosophicum’: ein Forum offenen Denkens,” in Richard Faber and Christine Holste, eds., *Kreise – Gruppen – Bünde: zur Soziologie moderner Intellektuellenassoziationen* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), 192. If Marcuse’s work of the 1950s were more esteemed by the academic profession in Germany, there would not be this suggestion of something on the margins becoming momentarily *salonwürdig* within the coterie around a professionally respected professor such as Ritter.

²⁴⁸ Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius*, trans. Rodney Livingston (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), 176.

²⁴⁹ Habermas, “Eine Generation von Adorno getrennt,” 50.

The more pressing question for those who entered the profession in the 1950s and who were just achieving institutional recognition and their livelihood by the early 1960s was perhaps “Wozu noch Philosophen?” and, more than this, who or what is the model for the philosophical intellectual? These questions bear in upon the same problematic legacy of the past and the displacement of alternative forms of philosophy through forced emigration or suppression.²⁵⁰ The only role models for the younger philosophers were the same philosophers, whose intellectual coming of age occurred in the 1920s, who were now the senior *Ordinarien* in control of the philosophical faculties, the learned societies, and scholarly journals. These older figures, most of whom had accommodated, or supported the Nazi Regime, would guide their most promising young apprentices into the profession after 1945 and would, to a certain extent, offer them critical methods for dealing with the more unsettling legacies of the German intellectual past. In this way, it was precisely the “fathers” and even some “grandfathers,” who offered the philosophical youth of the 1940s and 1950s the tools to overcome the inherited language of the 1920s and 1930s by means of a new professional means of scholarly collaboration.

²⁵⁰ Here one has to add to the exiled Frankfurt School, the Wiener Kreis and other philosophers of science like Karl Popper and Hans Reichenbach as well as those in analytic philosophy, or Neo Kantians such as Ernst Cassirer.

Chapter 3

The “Freedom of Emptiness” for Teachers and Students amidst the Strictures of a New Professionalism

While the German ‘*Existenzphilosophen*’ like Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger remained the most prominent and apparently prolific thinkers in the public sphere, many professional philosophers in the universities would diverge from the work of these ‘living legends’ both in their ideas and language as well as in their professional practice. Most importantly for our narrative, the actual teachers of philosophy in the West German universities and *Hochschulen* would direct their students beyond the ‘popular’ philosophies, or “*Modephilosophien*” of the existentialist authors by means of a critical return to the texts of the German intellectual tradition. The first priority, for teachers and students alike, was the need for orientation in a postwar intellectual atmosphere that could at once overwhelm the student with rediscovered learning from the past and appear groundless and uncertain because of the specter of ‘nihilism,’ which resounded as the fate of (western) Europe in the pages of the cultural journals.²⁵¹ Driven by their own thirst for learning, the philosophical youth responded to the guidance of their teachers and, more

²⁵¹ See an interesting exchange from the feuilleton pages of *Die Neue Zeitung* in Munich over the “legend of nihilism” Hans Kudzus, “Die Legende vom Nihilismus,” *Die Neue Zeitung*, no. 61 (March 13, 1950) and Kurt Seeberger, “Ist der Nihilismus doch keine Legende?” *Die Neue Zeitung*, no. 90 (April 15, 1950): 9.

generally, to the *habitus* of a discipline seeking to reassert its relevance in a world of greater academic specialization, professionalization, and ‘scientification.’

A bitter conflict arose over the role and language of professional philosophy. The popular existentialists in France and the reluctant ‘*Existenzphilosophen*’ like Heidegger or Jaspers quickly became liabilities for academic philosophers, who, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, were struggling to adapt their once dominant, unifying faculty to the institutional realities of an expanding university system and an academic field where the specialized, ‘positive’ sciences asserted their independence and material power more than ever. Aspiring young philosophers could only achieve intellectual and professional self-sufficiency by mediating the space of this conflict between German philosophy’s public, popular image and its professional-institutional articulation. Although in the space of the collapse of dictatorship and of its cultural restrictions, the postwar philosophical youth now seemed, to use Sartre’s popular injunction, “condemned to be free”; their path into philosophical study was sometimes constrained by the models presented to them by the older generation of philosophers. At the same time, the best among their teachers could offer direction both by returning their brightest students to the history of Western thought and ushering them into the philosopher’s new, professional comportment, often by using the questions raised by the contemporary German tradition and their enigmatic, nonconformist representatives as cautionary foils.

In contrast to the wider public sphere and its mutual suspicion and conflict over the political past, when we turn our focus to the relationship between students and

teachers of philosophy, the feeling we find is one of cooperation and mutual curiosity in an uncertain context. As Dieter Henrich recalled in 1970, “in place of the coercion to think and feel only the compulsory [Vorgeschiedenes], at first only the freedom of emptiness [Freiheit der Leere] could step forth after the suspension of all continuity. In this space only the most intimate bonds could exist.”²⁵² This “Freiheit der Leere” in intellectual terms made necessary the cooperative attempts to overcome material restrictions such as the lack of classrooms, the absence of textbooks, and all the amenities of a fully functioning university. Official reforms along the lines of *Studium generale* were only the most conspicuous part of this process of cooperation. Teachers could ameliorate the conditions of material dearth and overcrowding by holding special seminars and lectures, or by producing new introductory texts in the history of philosophy, often at the expense of their own specialized research. This was true of philosophers like Ludwig Landgrebe in Kiel, Joachim Ritter in Münster, and Hans-Georg Gadamer in Frankfurt and then Heidelberg, who, instead of following the ingrained practice of the Mandarin *Ordinarien*, devoted increasing time to introductory seminars and small reading groups.²⁵³ On the part of the students, there was an unmatched curiosity and thirst for ideas, which only provoked more willingness on the part of their

²⁵² Dieter Henrich, “Die deutsche Philosophie nach zwei Weltkriegen,” in *Konzepte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986), 45.

²⁵³ Gadamer’s lectures and seminars in Frankfurt and Heidelberg, particularly in the period from 1948 to 1951, reflect this need to reconnect students to “the beginnings of Western Philosophy.” For Gadamer, this meant literally *beginning at the beginning* with the pre-Socratics, courses devoted to foundational texts from Plato and also to major turning points in Western philosophy, like Descartes *Meditations* or Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. For a useful list of Gadamer’s announced course offerings in these years see Appendix 2 in Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, esp. 372-73.

teachers to provide them with the necessary material means and intellectual content to prepare them for philosophical study. Questions of the recent political past and of the guilt born by themselves or their teachers were of lesser importance in the academic field.

Despite the public pronouncements of aging figures like Julius Ebbinghaus, Johannes Hessen, Theodor Litt, and most prominently, Karl Jaspers, academic philosophy in the university, the actual teaching and research of philosophy professors paid little heed to the demands for moral reckoning with the past.²⁵⁴ Jaspers' apparent dissatisfaction with the inability of the Germans to confront the question of guilt led him to leave Heidelberg for Basel in 1948. But even Jaspers admitted to Hannah Arendt that, despite political apathy, "The one positive factor is that there are young people, minority though they are, who are eager to learn, indomitable, grateful, hungry for the life of the mind." He advised Arendt to relay to her colleagues in the United States that "Anyone who has a passion for teaching can have some wonderful experiences" at a German university.²⁵⁵ Ludwig Landgrebe also painted a highly positive picture of teaching after the war in the devastated cities of Hamburg and Kiel:

Für den Universitätslehrer war diese Zeit [direkt nach dem Krieg] besonders erfreulich. Die erste Generation der Studenten nach dem Kriege waren größtenteils Kriegsteilnehmer, die, aus der Gefangenschaft zurückgekehrt, das Bewußtsein um die Notwendigkeit eines ganz neuen Anfangs hatten. Mangelhafte

²⁵⁴ On these "exemplary attempts at political self-reflection" see Helmut Fahrenbach, "Nationalsozialismus und der Neuanfang 'wesdeutscher Philosophie' 1945-1950," in Walter H. Pehle and Peter Sillem, eds., *Wissenschaft im geteilten Deutschland: Restauration oder Neubeginn?* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992), 99-109.

²⁵⁵ Letter from Karl Jaspers to Hannah Arendt, Heidelberg, April 19, 1947, in *Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers Correspondence, 1926-1969*, ed. by Lotte Koler and Hans Saner, trans. by Robert and Rita Kimber (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1992), 82.

Kleidung und Ernährung und die ungeheizten Hörsäle konnten sie nicht davon abhalten, mit unermüdlicher Aufmerksamkeit den ganzen Tag in der Universität durchzuhalten.”²⁵⁶

For the committed teachers like Landgrebe, most of their time in the decade and a half after the war was devoted to lectures, seminars, and the production of texts designed to reintroduce philosophical ideas of the recent and more distant Western philosophical tradition. To this end, Landgrebe published his lectures on Husserl’s phenomenology as well as on the great turning points of Western metaphysics²⁵⁷ and even an essay on Hegel and Marx for the *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau* in the late 1940s.²⁵⁸ His most influential work of the 1950s was *Philosophie der Gegenwart*,²⁵⁹ a synoptic work organized around the major philosophical problems in contemporary philosophy, which, for Landgrebe, derived from the interaction of Husserl’s phenomenology and Heidegger’s philosophy with the German tradition.²⁶⁰ Landgrebe was determined to show that contemporary philosophy could no longer be taught as a survey of “movements” or “schools.” This outmoded view of German philosophy often gave the deceptive impression that “philosophy is essentially a struggle of different views of life (*Weltanschauungen*) and systems of thought, among whom everyone may freely choose.” This “willful arbitrariness (*Unverbindlichkeit*)” made philosophy appear as a “useless

²⁵⁶ Ludwig Landgrebe, “Selbstdarstellung,” in Ludwig Jakob Pongratz ed., *Philosophie in Selbstdarstellungen*, 3 vols. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1975), 2:149.

²⁵⁷ L. Landgrebe, *Phänomenologie und Metaphysik* (Hamburg: M.von Schröder, 1949).

²⁵⁸ Landgrebe, “Hegel und Marx,” in *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau* (1948).

²⁵⁹ Ludwig Landgrebe, *Philosophy der Gegenwart* (Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1952). In English: *Major Problems in Contemporary European Philosophy: from Dilthey to Heidegger*, trans. Kurt F. Reinhardt (New York: Frederick Ungar Pub. Co., 1966).

²⁶⁰ Landgrebe, “Selbstdarstellung,” 153.

intellectual game”; and had the “result that philosophy, instead of dealing with specific problems, has become preoccupied with reflections on its own nature, with attempts at justifying itself and its tasks and function in society.”²⁶¹ For Landgrebe, the task of the teacher of philosophy was to get beyond the orientation around schools or movements in order to raise “vital problems” towards which the student must be encouraged to take a stand (*Stellungnahme*).²⁶² The most important task of the teacher was not to proffer worldviews or to focus their young apprentices on abstruse questions of philosophy’s claim to social or political relevance. Rather, the necessity was first to instruct aspiring philosophers, as well as those who took up philosophy as a means to a professional degree, in the task of critical thinking by focusing on the interpretation of classic texts and the questions of philosophy, which persisted in contemporary thought.

Hans-Georg Gadamer was similarly committed to reconnecting students to the living traditions and questions of Western philosophy. To this end he produced introductory texts for students and his *Hochschüler* during the late 1940s and early 1950s. In the time between the war’s end and his return west from Leipzig in 1947 to the publication of *Truth and Method* in 1960, Gadamer dedicated his time to publishing “didactic” pieces as introductions to new students of philosophy. His close collaboration with Klostermann Verlag, which began before 1945,²⁶³ allowed him to undertake a series

²⁶¹ Landgrebe, *Major Problems in Contemporary Philosophy*, 2.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁶³ After the publication of the now controversial text, *Volk und Geschichte im Denken Herders* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1942) Gadamer proposed editing a series of texts, which would

of volumes designed as introductory texts, and written by many of his closest academic contacts—the friends from his Marburg days like Walter Bröcker and Gerhard Krüger.²⁶⁴ This was reinforced by his founding of the journal *Philosophische Rundschau* in 1953.²⁶⁵

Philosophizing in Common?: Early Attempts to Mediate Professionalization in German Philosophy

Through the *Philosophische Rundschau*, Gadamer and Helmut Kuhn sought to renew philosophy through critical discussion and, in the process, brought younger voices to the fore. Similar but more conventional initiatives were undertaken after 1945 by the newly established *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* (*ZphF*) and the organization that grew out of it by 1950, the *Allgemeine Gesellschaft für Philosophie in Deutschland* (AGPD). The AGPD was meant to reconstitute the philosophical discipline and an academic community of researchers, initially within the entirety of occupied Germany, but then only within the western zones. Beginning in 1947, the founders of the AGPD attempted with varying success to choose themes and organizational forms for the congresses that would establish philosophy's relevance beyond the limits of the academic

serve as introductions to key texts of the Western philosophical tradition and also basic questions of philosophy, which was admittedly directed towards question of the end of metaphysics raised by Heidegger.

²⁶⁴ Gerhard Krüger, *Die Geschichte im Denken der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann Verlag, 1947); idem, *Grundfragen der Philosophie: Geschichte – Wahrheit – Wissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1958). Both of these were based on lectures given by Krüger in the late 1940 and early 1950s.

²⁶⁵ See Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 267.

philosophical discipline. There were many debates between 1947 and 1950 about the form which the philosophy congresses should take. The early congresses in Garmisch-Partenkirchen (1947) and in Mainz (1948) were relatively conventional, limited discussions among specialists, and certainly constrained by the difficulty of traveling between the four zones of occupied Germany. Dissatisfaction among the leading organizers for the traditional series of disconnected lectures led to the most structurally novel experiment in the first congress officially held by the AGPD. The congress and the published proceedings were called “*Symphilosophiein*,” which was meant to evoke the sense of “philosophizing in common” that recalled the classic period of German idealism.²⁶⁶ In his opening address, Helmuth Plessner, the President of the Congress and of the AGPD, signaled the realities of this departure from the ostentatious forms of the past. He recalled how “in the Wilhelmine period, when we were still rich, people were apparently less concerned that each one had their say according to the principle of unrestricted liberality.”²⁶⁷ Gone were the “parades” of the (Imperial) past when the financial support and public esteem for academic ceremony had not yet been shattered by the devastation of dictatorship and war. Plessner lamented that the present poverty of the philosophy profession in West Germany meant that one had to sharply weigh the costs

²⁶⁶ *Symphilosophiein*. Bericht über den Dritten Deutschen Kongreß für Philosophie Bremen 1950, ed. by Helmuth Plessner (Munich: Verlag Leo Lehnen GmbH., 1952). The Congress was held in the rooms of the Bremen Courthouse from October 1-5, 1950. The term originated with the Jena Romantics at the end of the eighteenth century above all in the circle around Novalis the brothers Schlegel.

²⁶⁷ Helmuth Plessner, “Eröffnungsansprache des Präsidenten,” *Symphilosophien*, 9.

against the primary needs of the academic conference and the demands of its changing constituency:

Man verlangt, jedenfalls die Jüngeren verlangen es, daß die Kongresse ihrer ursprünglichen Bestimmung sachlicher Auseinandersetzung wieder dienen, was ja nur möglich ist, wenn sie eine neue Form bekommen. Ein solche neue Form, die des Gesprächs am runden Tisch, des Symposions . . . [ist] seit Jahren schon mit Erfolg ausprobiert worden und beginnt auch in unserem vortragsfreudigen Vaterlande – wie sagte schon Heine? Die deutschen sind ein Volk, in dem der eine Teil dem anderen Teil Vorträge halt –, wenn ich recht sehe, gebräuchlich zu werden.²⁶⁸

Thus, Plessner, not without some irony, put forth the symposium as a form suited to the primarily cultural land of “*Dichter und Denker*” and for German philosophers, who were belatedly coming to realize that their profession could no longer unproblematically assume its novelty vis-à-vis the other disciplines and before the public realm. However, the concern for Plessner and the organizers was not so much the relevance of the themes of the symposia to wider social or political concerns. More significant was the problem of how the philosophers understood their discipline. Was philosophy merely a “subject among others” (*Fach unter Fächer*), whose representatives come forward to present the positive results of their research? Or was philosophy’s scientific scope wider than that of the research form of the positive sciences in that it raised problems that challenged the understanding and meaning of scientific practice as such? This was a much more practical formulation of Adorno’s question “Wozu noch Philosophie?” The choice of *Symposien*, for Plessner and the other planners, was based on the conviction that

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

philosophy possessed this general function, but that its distinctiveness from the other sciences in terms of scope and function need not mean its isolation from the so-called *Einzelwissenschaften*, or a rejection of the forms of scholarly organization and collaboration that had developed in the latter. Therefore, in Plessner's view,

Die Frage bleibt offen, und vielleicht bildet die Offenheit eben dieser Frage des Philosophierens nach sich selbst keinen ungelösten Rest, auch kein Scheinproblem, sondern ihr spezifisches, ihr schöpferisches Element, das freilich die Gefahr der Asozialität, des Eigenbrötlertums und der Originalitätssucht für den Philosophen beschwört.²⁶⁹

Hans Leisegang put it differently in his closing address to the Bremen congress. The new form of the congress signaled a turn away from the idea that philosophers should offer a personal or group-oriented *Weltanschauung*, a worldview. As he put it rather succinctly, “auf unseren Philosophenkongressen wird keine Weltanschauung, sondern Philosophie getrieben.”²⁷⁰ The clear inclination towards philosophical practice and professionalization was guided by the determination that these congresses of the AGPD would be not only a collection of “philosophers” of one school or another, but a gathering of researchers and teachers, who each carried a responsibility to the philosophical community. The antique form of the symposium imparted an image of an intimate conversation between philosophers, but conducted in view of the public, which could gather around and potentially speak instead of passively receiving the conference reports. It was also a way for an older generation of German philosophers to come to terms with

²⁶⁹ Plessner, “Eröffnungsansprache,” *Symphilosophien*, 13.

²⁷⁰ Leisegang, “Schlussansprache,” *Symphilosophiein*, 355.

the modernization of philosophy as a discipline. The Mandarin ideals, but not necessarily Mandarin “attitudes” of older philosophers were curbed to fit the discipline within the new university system and to adapt its practices more closely to those of the natural and newly independent social sciences. This meant above all adopting models of professional communication and public exchange.

The young philosopher of religion, Jacob Taubes, then still in the United States, lauded these efforts to shift the tendency of German philosophy towards the dialogic form. In a review of the proceedings, Taubes observed, “The form of the symposium or of a round table conference is not a genuine German method of philosophizing, and it took some courage to experiment with a dialogical philosophy instead of continuing with the usual way of oracular monologues.”²⁷¹ Albeit from a distance, Taubes believed the Bremen experiment successful in dealing a blow to the dictatorship of the German philosophical Mandarinate. Yet within the West German press, the reviews of the Bremen Congress were mixed. Most applauded the effort to adopt the style of the symposium in order to prevent scholars from simply lecturing, or speaking past each other. However, many younger commentators complained that the conference failed to engender a heightened, more dynamic discussion and exchange. There was a certain “Unfähigkeit zum wirklichen Gespräch,” as the 23-year-old Hans Heinz Holz observed in

²⁷¹ Jacob Taubes, Review of *Symphilosophien*, ed. Helmuth Plessner, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 14, no. 2 (Dec. 1953): 284. Taubes was not in attendance at the actual congress in 1950.

the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.²⁷² Other critics cited the failure of philosophers at the congress to take up the important problems of the time, such as the responsibility of philosophers and academia for the recent past. Nor was it lost on the attendees that among the participants and even the chairs of some of the panels were former, ardent National Socialists, such as Hans Freyer, Erich Rothacker, Carl August Emge, and Arnold Gehlen. This was not surprising since the same politically burdened individuals had figured prominently at the congresses in 1947 and 1948 as well as in the pages of the new *ZphF*. It may only be astounding in retrospect that the *Symphilosophiein* Congress had not altered the continuity in the cast of characters, despite being presided over by the returned émigré, Helmuth Plessner.

More significant to many participants in the first postwar conferences was the lack of discussion about the most prominent philosophical movement at the time: existentialism. In an review published shortly after the Mainz Congress in 1948, Otto Friedrich Bollnow complained that the newest philosophical tendencies that may have found resonance above all with the youth and wider public were as a rule marginalized in the topics of the conference panels. Bollnow argued that the discussion was still determined by the “consolidated world picture of the older generation,” those who were over sixty and who viewed existentialism as a mere expression of the crisis of the times. The dominance of this view was due in part to the lack of young philosophers, who might have offered a “counter-balance” to the older figures. Bollnow lamented, “Von der

²⁷² FAZ, 17.3.1953.

älteren Generation haben verhältnismäßig viele die Wirren der Zeit überdauert, es fehlt schon die mittlere, und die Verluste der jungen Philosophengeneration durch Emigration, Krieg und andere Einflüsse werden für lange Zeit nicht wieder zu ersetzen sein.”²⁷³ This apparent lack of interest for the concerns of the young generation undermined the picture of a profession attempting to attune itself to broader intellectual problems both inside and outside the university. Despite official pronouncements to the contrary, that an academic congress of philosophers was likely to spark enough interest to have some sort of exchange between specialists and “the public” appears at best unlikely and at worst naïve. The more practical problem facing leading academic philosophers was the structure not only of the congresses, but of the inclusivity of organizations that would determine the practice of the profession itself.

After the Congress of 1947 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen the leading academic philosophers formed a “*Kuratorium*,” whose tasks included planning of future conferences and also the formulation of the organizational principles of the AGPD. Organizers of the Mainz Congress (1948) led by Fritz Joachim von Rintelen (Mainz), Aloys Wenzl (Munich), Theodor Litt (Bonn), and Helmuth Plessner (Groningen, later Göttingen) formed “*Das engere Kuratorium*,” which would be responsible for planning the next conference to meet in two years time. A small coterie comprised of the same notables of the Mainz Congress also met in Deidesheim on 8 and 9 August 1948

²⁷³ Otto Friedrich Bollnow. “Der Mensch – die Welt – Gott: Rückblick auf den Mainzer Philosophenkongreß” in *Die Neue Zeitung* 1 (14.18.1948)

following the Congress proper. The so-called “Deidesheimer Gespräche” were meant to address the question of “Das Verhältnis der Philosophie zu den Ereignissen unserer Zeit.” Theodor Litt opened the discussion with the intention of addressing the status and task of philosophy under the present circumstances in Germany as well as with consideration of the recent past and an uncertain future. Above all, Litt emphasized the need for a renewed, albeit provisional “*Bildungsideal*” as a guide for the work of philosophers and teachers of philosophy inside and outside of the university.²⁷⁴ Von Rintelen then pointed to the impossibility of forming a definite picture of human life in Germany at present, particularly with respect to the German youth:

Wir leben dem Zeitbewußtsein nach in einer Art Dämmerzustand. Ich deute ihn so: Das seelische Spannungsvermögen ist überspannt worden. Jugendliche, die aus dem Krieg zurückkamen, scheinen wie stehengeblieben. Sie sind nicht innerlich wesentlich vorangekommen, sondern es ist, wie wenn ihre Entwicklung den Atem angehalten hätte. Und so ist es in ganz Deutschland.²⁷⁵

At the same time, in his opening address as president of the Mainz congress, Von Rintelen strongly spoke out against *Existenzphilosophie* and the call back to “actual human existence,” and a resoluteness that demanded both engagement and unconditional freedom as an answer to the present misery. For figures like Litt and von Rintelen there was no going back to the vitalist intellectual movements and *Lebensphilosophie* of the first two decades of the twentieth century. As von Rintelen declared, “[h]inter uns liegt auch

²⁷⁴ Theodor Litt, recorded in “Die Deidesheimer Gespräche,” summarized by Hermann Wein, in Georgi Schischkoff, ed., *Philosophische Vorträge und Diskussion*. Bericht über den Philosophen-Kongreß, Mainz 1948. Sonderheft 1 der *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* (Wurzbach, 1949), 197-98.

²⁷⁵ Fritz-Joachim von Rintelen recorded in *ibid.*, 198.

eine Zeit der Lebensphilosophie in all ihren Höhen und ihren minderen Abarten. Sie hat in weitem Maße Schiffbruch erlitten.”²⁷⁶ Against the resurrection of this “vitalistic dynamic,” von Rintelen places at the center of the congress a renewed “freedom of spirit” which would grow out of a community of scholars. This renewal of *Geist* and *Intellekt* against *Leben* and *Existenz* did not entail a purely formal intellectual project. Like Litt’s tentative *Bildungsideal*, von Rintelen saw renewing the philosophical spirit as primarily question of education and of counteracting the image of specialized training that continued to dominate the schools and universities in West Germany. Pure intellectualism and pure vitalism were to be avoided in favor of the education towards true humanism, “wahren Humanitas,” which von Rintelen in the common gesture of the time identified with the age and values of the *Goethezeit*.²⁷⁷ The overall tenor of the Mainz congress was a move away from what Litt labelled the “philosophical defeatism” and “depressive mood” of existentialism and the reinvestment of meaning in philosophical activity.²⁷⁸ Despite the talk of humanistic ideals of inclusivity and universalist ideals of *Bildung*, practically the turn away from *Existenz* to the freedom of intellect secured philosophy as the domain of the few, of professional philosophers.

By 1950 the organization of the AGPD and the planning of the conferences was controlled by the “*Engerer Kreis*,” which was made up of academic teachers of philosophy and philosophical authors with membership in the AGPD. This was opposed

²⁷⁶ Von Rintelen, “Zur gegenwertigen Stunde der Philosopohie,” in *ibid.*, 13.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15

²⁷⁸ Theodor Litt, “Die Weltbedeutung des Menschen,” in *ibid.*, 23.

initially by some like Erich Rothacker, who viewed the initiative as an institutionalization and even bureaucratization of philosophy.²⁷⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, on the other hand, objected to the idea that the membership of the AGPD, which included those outside the discipline, would be able to decide on the formal rules for the philosophical field.²⁸⁰

Gadamer was eager to see the regulation of the profession remain in the hands of professional philosophers. At a meeting of the AGPD in Marburg in October 1951, a significant change was made to the composition and conceptualization of the *Engerer Kreis* by limiting its membership only to those “Lehrer der Philosophie an deutschen Hochschulen mit Promotionsrecht,” that is to philosophy professors—the *Ordinarien*, who had the right to confer the Ph.D. Thus, the broad composition of the AGPD, which by design was intended to include all those interested in philosophy (*philosophische Interessierte*), would not be allowed membership, or even representation in the *Engerer Kreis*. This “Fachverband” would instead be composed of a select elite of university professors of philosophy. As Alex Demirovic has observed,

Mit der Gründung des engeren Kreis hatte sich die Universitätsphilosophie nicht nur eine zentrale berufs- und wissenschaftspolitische Institution geschaffen, sondern rückwirkend auch die Philosophie als universitäre Wissenschaftsdisziplin festgeschrieben. Philosophie hatte nun die fest umrissene Form eines akademischen Wissens, das durch Lizenzen in seiner Autorität geschützt und

²⁷⁹ Letter from Erich Rothacker to Hans-Georg Gadamer, Bonn, May 8, 1951. Rothacker-Nachlass, Teil I, Universität- und Landesbibliothek, Bonn.

²⁸⁰ Letter from Hans-Georg Gadamer to Erich Rothacker, Heidelberg, May 3, 1951. Rothacker-Nachlass, Teil I, Universität- und Landesbibliothek, Bonn. Cited with permission of Andrea Gadamer.

gegen Irrlehren nichtprofessionelle Philosophien und Zeitströmungen verteidigt werden konnte.²⁸¹

Hence philosophy and the philosopher's activities became identified in large part with institutional duties and the network of professional associations that established the formal requirements for the initiation of younger members into the discipline. This formalized the political field of the discipline. It restricted access to the means of scholarly reproduction in the university and in the secondary schools—such as rules for promotion to doctor or *Habilitation* as well as the *Staatsexamen* for teaching certificates—to an elite of *Ordinarien*, civil servants, appointed by the Federal States (*Bundesländer*).

An important element of this professionalization of philosophy after the war was the establishment of a journal of professional philosophy. The statement introducing the journal, the *ZphF*, distinguished itself from the kind of partisan journals based around a restricted philosophical school that had dominated the profession in the past. The *ZphF* was to be “ein Organ ... das alle Auffassungsweisen, Arten, Problemgebieten und Strömungen des Philosophischen Denkens bzw. der philosophischen Forschung unparteiisch zur Verfügung steht und also einfach ein Veröffentlichungsblatt für Forschungsbeiträge der streng philosophisch Denkenden schlechthin darstellt.”²⁸² The editor emphasizes that the journal “geht nicht von einem philosophischen Kreis aus, sondern

²⁸¹ Alex Demirovic, “Sympilosophien – oder die organisierte Philosophie: die Allgemeine Gesellschaft für Philosophie in Deutschland und ihre Veranstaltungen 1947-1951,” in *Widerspruch* 18 (1990): 36-37.

²⁸² Georgi Schischkoff, “Zum Beginn,” in *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung* 1, no.1 (1946):1.

lediglich von einem Herausgeber und einem Verleger, die das philosophische Leben dadurch erreichen wollen, daß sie die Möglichkeit bieten die neuesten Ergebnisse der Forschung in Zeitschriften aussetzen anzuzeigen oder eingehend zu behandeln.”²⁸³

Yet, the *ZphF*, or at least its editor Georgi Schischkoff, was largely responsible for the first two meetings of what was then simply called the *Philosophenkongress*, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen in 1947 and then in Mainz in 1948 and selected papers and reports on the congresses were published in the *ZphF*. Only with the Bremen congress in 1950 was a report and essay collection from the congress published separately.²⁸⁴ Although the journal’s name pointed towards a new form of collective philosophical research, its content remained rather traditional. But it did serve as the main organ for the philosophical profession. In contrast to Gadamer’s *Philosophische Rundschau*, founded seven years later, the *ZphF* lacked in the early years a critical engagement with contemporary literature and pressing questions of contemporary philosophy. It focused more on recasting the German philosophical community as a scientific profession and, as one of the sections of the journal was called, a “philosophical life” in Germany. However, it was clear that the “philosophical life” was now narrowly focused on the rhythms of academic philosophy; this section of the journal consisted of nothing more than listing the dates of birth and the deaths of leading philosophers, appointments to university chairs in philosophy, and the announcements of philosophical congresses. The

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Helmuth Plessner, ed., *Symphilosophien*.

“philosophical life” tied in very closely with the ideal of a shared philosophical community and the professional ethos of the AGPD. Reflecting on the journal ten years on in 1956, Schischkoff identified the ideal of *Forschung* with an increase in tolerance among professional philosophers for opposing viewpoints. In this context Schischkoff lauded the abatement of *Existenzphilosophie* with its desire for conflict and its insistence on concrete individuality and an “incomparable, scarcely communicable, inwardness.”²⁸⁵ Following a common refrain of the profession in the mid-to-late 1950s, *Existenzphilosophie* was viewed as a product of the disorientation of the wider cultural field in the first years after the war. The lack of basis in rational and even positivistic sharpness meant that *Existenzphilosophie* never had the chance to become a leading philosophy (*Hauptphilosophie*). Schischkoff observed,

Es hat viel mehr den Anschein, als wäre man etwa abwartende und geduldige geworden; in diese zunehmenden Toleranz in der philosophischen Forschung der Gegenwart scheint die Existenzphilosophie vielfach als eine Art, als eine “Vor-Philosophie” angesehen zu werden, von deren Sprachnot in der subjektiven Innerlichkeit die langsame Formung neue Konzeptionen, die etwa “nachträglich” zu allgemeingültigen Urteilen führen könnten, zu erwarten wären.²⁸⁶

Here Schischkoff typifies the exemplary paradox of the proclamations of philosophical openness and cooperation presumed in his identification of *Forschung* with tolerance. For the equation of philosophy with research and, thus, with the institutions which regulated and promoted it acted as a powerful means of exclusion of those ill-defined philosophical

²⁸⁵ Georgi Schischkoff, “Zehn Jahre Philosophische Forschung und Toleranz,” *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung* 10, no. 4 (1956): 574.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 575.

movements like existentialism that did not fit the image many had of professional philosophy.

The *Philosophische Rundschau* appeared in 1953, seven years after *ZphF* and was by design less wedded to the traditional view of philosophical research. The *Rundschau* presented a contrasting view of the professionalization of the discipline, which aimed in Helmut Kuhn's words to "revitalize the standards [Wiederaufrichtung der Maßstäbe] through the application of a philosophical style of review." Gadamer and his co-editor Helmut Kuhn succeeded in turning the journal into a forum for the critical discussion of the most pressing questions of contemporary philosophy. The preferred form of the contributions was the extended review article. In a letter to Gadamer from November 1952 Kuhn singled out the review articles as the "most important part" of each issue: here the *Rundschau* would "concentrate on the philos[ophical] ἔλεγχος [*Elenkhos*]", the Socratic method of refutation and cross-examination, in order to foster the critical exchange of ideas.²⁸⁷ Many of these critical discussions of contemporary literature were penned not only by men of Gadamer's generation, but by the most promising young philosophers in West Germany. In the *Philosophische Rundschau*, aspiring philosophical talents like Hans Blumenberg, Wolfgang Stegmüller, Dieter Henrich, Wolfgang Ieland, Iring Fetscher, Hans-Robert Jauf, Hermann Lübbe, Otto Pöggeler, Karl-Otto Apel, and

²⁸⁷ Helmut Kuhn to H-G Gadamer, November 21, 1952 in Gadmaer Nachlass, DLA Marbach. "hier wird sich die Wiederaufrichtung der Maßstäbe durch Anwendung eines philos. Rezensionstils zu redigieren haben."

Jürgen Habermas would take on questions of the philosophical tradition in reviews of the newest works of leading scholars of philosophy.

Walther Bröcker, who served on the board of editors for the *ZphF*, wrote to Hans-Georg Gadamer in October of 1952 that Gadamer's plan for a "critical organ of philosophy" (i.e., the *Philosophische Rundschau*) was exactly what had been lacking in the field for so long.²⁸⁸ Two years later, in another letter to Gadamer, Bröcker criticized the editor Georgi Schischkoff for the decline in the quality of contributions to the *ZphF*:

Ich meine wir brachen neben der [Philosophische] Rundschau eine brauchbare Zeitschrift, die nun nur aufsetze, aber keine Rezensionen bringt, und die nichts so viel Mist veröffentlicht. Schischkoff muss abgesetzt werden. Ich meine Landgrebe könnte den Herausgeber machen, und er würde das auch tun, wenn man ihm darum bäte. In Kiel gibt es auch brauchbare Leute unter den Jüngeren, die ihm helfen könnten. ... Ich meine man sollte eine einzige gute Zeitschrift anstreben, die die Lücke ausfüllt, welche die Rundschau lässt.²⁸⁹

It is difficult to determine if Gadamer shared his old friend's antipathy towards the *ZphF* and its editor, though he and his students never published there. Gadamer undeniably distanced himself from the AGPD in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He expressed his concern, as we have seen, only in regard to the issue of the *Engerer Kreis*. Nonetheless, Gadamer was the single most important institutional influence in postwar German philosophy after 1950; and although he remained distant from the AGPD at first, he would come to exert great influence over this organization by 1960, when his colleague Kuhn became president of the AGPD, followed by Gadamer himself in 1966. As we have

²⁸⁸ Bröcker on Gadamer, 18.10.1952 in Gadamer Nachlass, DLA Marbach.

²⁸⁹ Walther Bröcker an Gadamer, Kiel 21.2.1954, Gadamer Nachlass, DLA Marbach.

seen, in the years immediately following the end of the war the AGPD and the *ZphF*, despite some attempts at institutional and intellectual renovation, only superficially contributed to the re-founding of German philosophy in a new democratic key.

Bröcker had identified Kiel as a possible site for the founding of a new philosophical journal. It was not only the presence of Ludwig Landgrebe and himself, but of “younger talents”; most likely Bröcker had in mind Hans Blumenberg, the most promising of Landgrebe’s students. However, Kiel was arguably on the periphery, and as a key port and industrial city, the university had suffered heavy damage from bombing during the war. The universities that produced the best and brightest philosophers after the war had nothing special about them, except perhaps in certain cases like Heidelberg and Göttingen, which, relatively untouched by the bombings, possessed facilities superior to most other philosophical centers. Graduate students (*Hochschüler*) after the war cleaved to individual professors because of their personalities and teaching abilities, not because they were identified with a particular school or approach. In the case of Heidelberg, the presence of key figures like Hans-Georg Gadamer, Karl Löwith, or the historian Werner Conze made a very desirable place for study before any lingering association with a particular philosophical tradition, or school. Other important philosophers and teachers were Joachim Ritter in Münster, Erich Rothacker and Oskar Becker in Bonn, Otto Friedrich Bollnow and Gerhard Krüger in Tübingen, Max Müller and Eugen Fink in Freiburg, Helmut Kuhn, Ernesto Grassi, and Romano Guardini in Munich and, one might add, Theodor Adorno in Frankfurt. What could distinguish these

universities were region and in some cases, religion. For instance, Freiburg and Munich remained the center for many Catholic philosophers and also the most important Catholic journal of philosophy, *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* of the *Görres Gesellschaft*, edited by Aloys Wenzl, Fritz Leist, and Hermann Krings.

The university defined by a “*Schulphilosophie*” became a thing of the past—exemplified for many of the teachers we have just listed by the various Neo-Kantian schools, which dominated places like Marburg, Heidelberg, and Freiburg, when they were students in the 1920s. Yet while not traditional Mandarins in this sense, the new teachers were academic philosophers of great pedigree. With few exceptions, all of the names above had taken their doctorates and/or Habilitated under Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl. By the early 1950s the philosophical field was dominated by those brought up in the traditions of “*Existenzphilosophie*,” Heidegger’s Ontological Hermeneutics, Husserl’s phenomenology, and/or the historical school revitalized through Wilhelm Dilthey and his students. In this way, the teachers of the teachers, particularly Heidegger, could also greatly influence the philosophical discussion of the late 1940s and early 1950s despite their absence from the professional scene.

The Shadow of the Living Legends

The ideas of aging *Existenzphilosophen*, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, and Nicolai Hartmann²⁹⁰ continued to dominate philosophical discussion well into the middle of the 1950s. Although figures like Heidegger receded into the background in academic, university philosophy, most of the younger philosophical generation would come into contact with and need to traverse Heidegger's path of thinking. Heidegger remained the most well-known and sought after philosopher in postwar West Germany. The fact that he was no longer an institutional and professional presence in academic philosophy only increased his mystique. The 'outsider' status continued to bestow the myth of greatness and profundity on this thinker. Heidegger's ideas and institutional presence had dominated the 1930s in part from lack of competition: most of his famous detractors were forced to emigrate. The most important result of this dominance was that he had "promoted" (conferred the doctoral degree) and habilitated the most students, who later would hold a majority of the most prestigious university chairs in West Germany.²⁹¹ The Heidegger epigone, Max Müller (professor at Freiburg) spoke on the occasion of Martin Heidegger's ascension to the status of *Ehrenbürger* of his home town of Meßkirch in 1959. Müller evoked Heidegger as the "*Meister*," not of a school but of an intellectual movement. He spoke directly to the Master of his legacy:

²⁹⁰ N. Hartmann died in 1950, but his influence continued through his son, Max Hartmann, who was an important contributor to the journal *Philosophia Naturalis*. The elder Hartmann had also produced students, who came to have a very wide influence beyond existentialism, especially in the philosophy of science.

²⁹¹ As many have noted. See in particular Schnädelbach, "Deutsche Philosophie Seit 1945," 406.

es gibt keine Schuldoktrin und kein Schulsystem, welche von Ihnen [Heidegger] ihren Ausgang genommen hätten. Als “Meister” waren Sie ein “Weiser”: ein so Weisender ist mehr als ein Gelehrter. Der Weise hat Grunderfahrungen gemacht und sich für sie jederzeit offengehalten, während die anderen vor ihnen zurückschrecken oder sie sich wieder verschütten lassen. Er lebt in der Offenheit zu den Grunderfahrungen und hält sie aus. Das ist unlehrbares Leben. Dieses ist nicht lernbar, aber sein Vollzug wirkt und erweckt. Und so ist ohne Schule im akademischen Sinn trotzdem auch Ihre Wirksamkeit im Raume der Universität fast unübersehbar.²⁹²

Müller proceeded in his *laudatio* to list Heidegger’s students from north to south in Germany, from Bröcker in Kiel on the Baltic to Gadamer in Heidelberg and also Gadamer’s students—Heidegger’s “*Enkelschüler*,” as Müller refers to them—Karl-Heinz Volkmann-Schluck in Köln and Walter Schulz in Tübingen, and finally Heidegger’s assistants remaining in Freiburg, Eugen Fink and himself. Interestingly, Müller failed to mention Heidegger’s oldest student, Karl Löwith, who taught in Heidelberg after returning from exile in 1952. Nor when turning to the Master’s international influence does Müller remember any of Heidegger’s émigré students such as Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, or Herbert Marcuse. Here we do not identify the dominance of Heidegger’s students in the university in order to construct a narrative of guilt by association. They were hardly “Heidegger’s children” caught in a tragic drama in which they ineluctably reproduced the ‘sins of the father.’²⁹³ Each of them recognized the legitimacy of

²⁹² “Ansprache Max Müllers in Meßkirch anlässlich der Verleihung der Ehrenbürgerurkunde an Martin Heidegger am 27. September 1959,” in Martin Heidegger, *Briefe an Max Müller und andere Dokumente*, ed. by Holger Zaborowski and Anton Bösl (Freiburg and Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 2003), 94-95.

²⁹³ This is the simplistic narrative constructed by Richard Wolin about Heidegger’s prominent Jewish students in *Heidegger’s Children* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002). It seems impossible for

Heidegger's thought—at least his early thought. Each of them would pass the thoughts of the master on to their own students, but not without alteration. For the former Heideggerians, those trained in the *Existenz* tradition and the phenomenological approach, the purpose had always been to work through the dead end that Heidegger seemed to reach after the so-called '*Kehre*' into fundamental ontology.

Most did accept the end of the old metaphysics that Heidegger had affirmed in his works of the mid and late 1930s all of which were republished in the timely collection, *Holzwege* in 1950.²⁹⁴ Vittorio Klostermann followed up with the republication of *Kant und der Problem der Metaphysik* in 1951 and then the introductory lectures from 1935 entitled *Einführung in die Metaphysik* appeared in 1953 from Max Niemeyer.²⁹⁵ In this sense, by the 1950s it was clear that Heidegger's star had not fallen or even dimmed in the philosophical profession. However, few working philosophers merely followed him down what he now depicted as occluded 'wood paths,' few were content with the image of the slow, solitary thinker, whose toils in language were more inconspicuous than those of the farmer making "furrows in the field."²⁹⁶ Many of the most important academic philosophers of the fifties and early sixties, including Heidegger's former students,

Wolin to formulate Heidegger's influence in terms other than the trope of tragic continuity, which elides the possibility that these gifted students (or anyone else) could draw on Heidegger's work with a new level of awareness generated out of the experiences of forced emigration, war, and postwar political developments in the polarized Cold War world.

²⁹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt a/M: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1950).

²⁹⁵ Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (Frankfurt a/M: Klostermann Verlag, 1951); indem, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1953).

²⁹⁶ "Das Denken legt mit seinem Sagen unscheinbare Furchen in die Sprache, die der Landmann langsam Schrittes durch das Feld zieht." Heidegger, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit. Mit einem Brief über den Humanismus* (Bern: Verlag A. Franke, 1947), 119.

attempted to overcome or at least mediate Heidegger's "*Destruktion*" of the philosophical tradition through a critical re-examination of that tradition.

The postwar publications of Heidegger's lectures of the 1930s and early 1940s created the sense of a continued presence of Heidegger in German philosophy. However, the republication of unaltered editions of old lectures alongside the newer, more oblique writings also introduced the complexity of anachronism into their reception, which had a particular effect on younger readers. As Ignaz Knips has observed, "Durch diese editorische Geste wird das zweideutige Verhältnis der späteren Arbeiten zu 'Sein und Zeit' zwischen Bruch und Kontinuität unterstrichen, vor allem aber wird es seiner eindeutigen Chronologie von Werkabschnitten entzogen."²⁹⁷ Academic philosophers received these texts in light of the new postwar works such as the "Letter on Humanism" to Jean Beaufret in 1946 that appeared in *Platons Lehre der Wahrheit* a year later. The archaic idiom of the later works with their focus on *Sein*, *Ek-sistenz*, *Lichtung des Seins* found its way into academic publications on existentialism in the late 1940s and early 1950s.²⁹⁸ However, for most professional philosophers the easy adaptation of 'existentialist' jargon by the feuilletonists only supplied Heidegger's detractors with further proof of the superficiality of his later thinking. For younger philosophers and aspiring students this context indicated that Heidegger's was not a philosophy on which

²⁹⁷ Ignaz Knips, "Die 'Kehre' und die Kontinuität: Heideggers Arbeiten nach 1945 und ihre Rezeption," in *Widerspruch* 18, *Restauration der Philosophie nach 1945* (1990): 81-88.

²⁹⁸ See above all Max Müller, *Existenzphilosophie im geistigen Leben der Gegenwart* (Heidelberg: F. H. Kerle, 1949).

one could build. Not only did it close itself off by way of its esoteric language, but Heidegger was compromised and contaminated by his wider cultural notoriety. Heidegger had become fashionable.²⁹⁹ Only celebrities like Heidegger could talk and write this way. As we will see in the next chapter, there was an almost universal fear among professional philosophers both within and outside West Germany that Heidegger's eccentric manner of philosophizing would corrupt the very language of their students and lead them astray (*verführen*) from serious critical thinking. The easiest way for the younger academic philosopher to lose respect and possibly end his career would have been to try to imitate the language of 'the thinker' in his huttled sanctuary. One need not completely repudiate Heidegger's postwar writings to realize that they were no model for the aspiring generation pursuing their PhDs and Habilitations.

A distinct but parallel influence was exerted by the other great *Existenzphilosoph*, Karl Jaspers. Of equal or greater public notoriety after the war than his former friend, Heidegger, Jaspers represents another case of a powerful background force in postwar German academic philosophy. Unlike Heidegger, Jaspers' professional and moral reputation remained unblemished by collaboration. Jaspers could no longer teach after 1935 and was forced to emigrate in 1937, only to return to Heidelberg with some hesitation in 1946. In contrast to Heidegger, who could teach and, more importantly, produce students well into the 1940s, Jaspers' time of exile meant a disruption of his professional influence during the war, and this limited what he could achieve in academic

²⁹⁹ Hochkeppel, *Mythos Philosophie*, 24-25.

philosophy after his return in 1946. His most memorable interventions in these years were outside the profession. In his 1946 lecture, “The Question of German Guilt” (*Die deutsche Schuldfrage*), Jaspers sought to locate German guilt within precise intellectual and political traditions in Germany in order to provide a moral and philosophical basis for Germany’s cultural reconstruction.³⁰⁰ This meant initially, in Jaspers view, the suppression of the thought of Martin Heidegger, which the former characterized as “in its essence unfree, dictatorial, and incapable of communication.”³⁰¹ Jaspers articulated the now familiar conviction that Heidegger’s philosophy led directly to his political decision to support the Hitler Regime in 1933; however, we can also interpret Jaspers’ actions as an explicit intervention into a political process of institutional reorganization of German universities and German intellectual life in general. Jaspers’ interventions were based on the ideal that the political transformation of Germany required an intellectual and moral basis in free public discussion as well as in the free communication between researchers and scholars in the universities.³⁰² Prior to his departure from Heidelberg for Basel in 1948, Jaspers exerted a profound institutional influence during the reopening of the universities in Western Germany. This meant intervening in Heidegger’s case to block the latter from teaching, although according to Steven Remy, Jaspers actively obstructed

³⁰⁰ Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage: ein Beitrag zur deutschen Frage*, 2nd edn. (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1946).

³⁰¹ Karl Jaspers, “Letter to the Freiburg University Denazification Commission, December 22, 1945” in R. Wolin ed., *Heidegger Controversy*, 149.

³⁰² Anson Rabinbach, “The German as Pariah: Karl Jaspers’ *The Question of German Guilt*,” in *In the Shadow of Catastrophe*, 140.

efforts to remove other compromised figures in Heidelberg and thereby helped engender “the thickening of an atmosphere hostile to any reckoning with the professoriate’s support for National Socialism.”³⁰³ Remy’s indictment seems a little harsh in light of the thinker’s public pronouncements on the question of German guilt. What is more, this fails to see the difference between public questions of collective guilt and the guilt of individuals, a distinction that Jaspers clearly maintained in *Die Schuldfrage*. Indeed, Jaspers intervened personally—though only upon request—in Heidegger’s case; for at that point in 1945, Jaspers did not face the institutional realities and constraints that he later met with in Heidelberg—not the least being his belief in the need for the reconstruction of a scholarly community.

The rebuilding of the university community required communication between scholars. Too thoroughgoing a denazification process would result in a university community paralyzed due to political infighting. Jaspers had experienced the worst kind of political opportunism and the denunciation of colleagues in the 1930s. The last thing he wanted was a similar atmosphere created by acts of retribution in the context of denazification. Central to Jaspers’ philosophy and his idea of the university was communication and cooperative research; his was the ideal *universitas scholarum et magisterium* which could only preserve its “solitude and freedom” by restricting the influence of the political sphere. It did not exclude the cultivation of the critical skills to negotiate the practical, political realm along the lines of *studium generale*. This required

³⁰³ Remy, *Heidelberg Myth*, 169-170.

mutual exchange between scholars but also between teachers and students. Unfortunately, under the pressures of reforming the intellectual community in West Germany, one often had to settle for the semblance of ‘rehabilitation’ and general amnesty, if only to maintain the students’ trust. Thus, even in the case of Heidegger, after the initial letter to the Freiburg Denazification Committee, Jaspers refrained from public condemnations in the name of scholarly decorum.

Although Jaspers’ commitment to a political ethic of communication provided a prominent counter-example to Heidegger’s solitude and silence, the former never denied the importance of the latter’s philosophy.³⁰⁴ By the end of the 1950s, Jaspers even supported Heidegger’s distance from professional philosophy as the better example of genuine philosophizing. By comparison, what was being carried on by professors within the West Germany universities Jaspers deemed uninspiring on the whole because of its narrowness, unmediated specialization, and alienation from the public interest.

Although Jaspers held the most prestigious chair in philosophy at Heidelberg and exerted public political influence through new journals like *Die Wandlung*, which he helped found along with Dolf Sternberger, Werner Krauss, and Alfred Weber, his work and his personal reputation were not always taken seriously by academic philosophers in Germany. The specialized works containing Jaspers’ own version of *Eixistenzphilosophie* were always accompanied by the appearance of voluminous works on the history of philosophy like *Die grossen Philosophen* as well as many print and radio introductions to

³⁰⁴ Rabinbach, “The German as Pariah,” 164.

philosophy.³⁰⁵ This along with his refusal to take part in philosophical conferences with his peers in Western Germany ensured that Jaspers would be considered by some as more of a *Populärphilosoph* than a serious academic philosopher. When he left Heidelberg for Basel in 1948-49, his institutional and professional power was nearly nil. Unlike Heidegger, Jaspers had produced very few students. This was due in part to his forced exile from Germany after 1937, but also to the style of his thinking. As Otto Friedrich Bollnow observed,

Daß von Jaspers verhältnismäßig wenig direkte Schüler ausgegangen sind, liegt in der ganzen Art seines Denkens begründet, daß der Ausbildung einer Schulmäßig ausmünzbaren Terminologie bewußt entgegen tritt. Sein Einfluß liegt, literarisch und fassbar, bei denen, die, von den Einzelwissenschaften herkommend, in seinen Vorlesungen den Appell eines ursprünglichen philosophierens erfuhren.³⁰⁶

Jaspers left no school of thought behind, whereas Heidegger's influence continued to shape German philosophy through the network of his students. Even the few students of Jaspers who remained in Heidelberg could not be promoted or habilitated in his absence. The former Heidegger protégé, the then unknown, Hans-Georg Gadamer replaced him, and set to forming a circle of colleagues and gifted students around him along the humanist model that was more in-line with the goals of professionalization.

³⁰⁵ The earliest one of these was a very popular series of twelve radio lectures delivered in 1950, first published as Karl Jaspers, *Einführung in die Philosophie: zwölf Radiovorträge* (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1950); published in English translation as *Way to Wisdom: an Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1951). I will cite from the Second English Edition of 2003.

³⁰⁶ Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Deutsche Existenzphilosophie*, Bern, A. Francke AG Verlag, 1953, 11-12.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, ‘living legends’ like Heidegger and Karl Jaspers had lost their institutional, academic influence, but not their notoriety and broader culture capital. Even so, they were not exactly models for the younger thinkers, who had not yet made a name for themselves. (And one could not make a name for oneself in the same manner that Heidegger did in 1927 with *Sein und Zeit*, or as Jaspers did in 1919 with his *Philosophie der Weltanschauungen* and 1932 with the 3-volume opus magnum, *Philosophie*). More importantly, Jaspers and, to a lesser extent, Heidegger publicly expressed their disillusionment with contemporary university philosophy and shunned the attempts of West German philosophers to create a more professionalized discipline along the lines of the the seemingly more ‘rugged’ sciences like sociology and political science. Jaspers continued to maintain the humanistic ideal of the university and also a view of philosophy’s role as a unifying discipline, which ensured the possibility of communication between researchers, teachers, and students in the human and the natural sciences.³⁰⁷ By contrast, Heidegger completely superseded the idea of philosophy’s relation to the sciences in favor of his notion of “thinking.”

The most public pronouncement of Heidegger’s view of “thinking” came in a 1952 radio address for Bayerisches Rundfunk—the lecture “Was heißt denken?” which was then published in *Merkur* in 1953.³⁰⁸ It was also the title of a lecture course which the newly reinstated or rehabilitated Heidegger delivered in Freiburg between 1951 and

³⁰⁷ See Karl Jaspers, *Die Idee der Universität*, Berlin, Springer Verlag, 1946.

³⁰⁸ Martin Heidegger, “Was heißt Denken?” in *Merkur* 6, no. 7 (July 1952): 601-611.

1952.³⁰⁹ In the early address, “Was heißt Denken?” Heidegger distinguishes the “interest,” or “*Inter-esse*”—the indifferent “being among and between things” that characterizes the haphazardness of modern life—from what he means by “thinking.” Heidegger fears the interest shown for philosophy at the universities to have the same ephemeral quality. By philosophical “interest” Heidegger meant in the first instance the preoccupation with the history of philosophy, or the common practice of introducing texts by the great thinkers with the hope of teaching the student the practice of critical thinking. But, Heidegger contended,

these are useful and worthy tasks, and only the best talents are good enough for them, especially when they present to us models of great thinking. But even if we have devoted many years to the intensive study of the treatises and writings of great thinkers, that fact is still no guarantee that we ourselves are thinking, or even are ready to learn thinking. On the contrary – preoccupation with philosophy more than anything else may give us the stubborn illusion that we are thinking just because we are incessantly ‘philosophizing.’³¹⁰

In part this can be interpreted as a gesture of Heidegger’s departure from the history of metaphysics. After all, in the wake of “the end of philosophy,” he predicted the rise of superficial attempts to dabble in its history in such a way as to mimic the practice of the technical disciplines. At the same time, he was attempting to articulate what was lost in

³⁰⁹ M. Heidegger, *Was heißt Denken?* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1954); in English as *What is Called Thinking?* trans. by J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968).

³¹⁰ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 5. In the address published in *Merkur* we read, “Daß man ein Interesse für die Philosophie zeigt, bezeugt keineswegs schon einen Bereitschaft zum Denken. Selbst die Tatsache, daß wir uns Jahre hindurch mit den Abhandlungen und Schriften der großen Denker eindringlich abgeben, leistet noch nicht die Gewähr, daß wir denken oder auch nur bereit sind, das Denken zu lernen. Die Beschäftigung mit der Philosophie kann uns sogar am hartnäckigsten den Anschein vorgaukeln, daß wir denken, weil wir ‘philosophieren.’” (“Was heißt Denken?” in *Merkur* 6, no.7 [July 1952]: 602-603).

the separation of the sciences from philosophy as they moved more towards research and their technological character from the 19th into the 20th century.

However, Heidegger remained ambiguous about the so-called “End of philosophy and the Task of Thinking” as he titled an important text from 1964.³¹¹ Here we learn of the “dissolution of philosophy in the technologized sciences,” which privileged an “operational and model-based character of representational-calculative thinking.”³¹² In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger had already diagnosed the dangerous form of “*Ge-stell*” or “Enframing” of modern technology as an “ordering” that “drives out every other form of revealing.”³¹³ In the same way that this sort of “revealing” of objects as “standing reserve” could block man’s access to a more originary revealing, the mode of technologized thinking in the empirical sciences, in their instrumentalized focus on beings (*Seiende*), could deny the question of Being and the new task of thinking. However, the sciences could never dispense with their origin in philosophical questioning. In this way, Heidegger does not see “thinking” in opposition either to philosophy or to the sciences. Scientific discussion as practiced in the contemporary research university could obscure the task of thinking, but if one viewed the role of

³¹¹ Heidegger, “Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens (1964),” in *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1969). I cite from the revised English translation in David Farrell Krell, ed., *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, second, expanded edition (New York: HarperCollins, Publishers, 1993), 431-449.

³¹² “The End of Philosophy,” in *Basic Writings*, 435.

³¹³ “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 27. “Die Frage nach der Technik” was part of series of lecture delivered in 1949 and first published in M. Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfulingen: Günther Neske, 1954).

thinking as that of an opponent to science, it would only further the misunderstanding. In his lecture course from the early 1950s, Heidegger told his students,

when we speak of the sciences as we pursue our way, we shall be speaking not against but for them, for clarity concerning their essential being. This alone implies our conviction that the sciences are in themselves positively essential. However, their essence is frankly of a different sort than what our universities today still fondly imagine it to be. In any case, we still seem afraid of facing the exciting fact that today's sciences belong in the realm of the essence of modern technology, and nowhere else.³¹⁴

Here Heidegger strikes at the essence of the traditional university devoted to research and to teaching. He was giving expression, perhaps, to what academics in philosophy and the humanities lamented as the rise of positivism and specialization within their disciplines. Yet Heidegger in usual fashion attempts to remain above the professional fray by focusing attention not on the threat of specialization or modern science, but on its misinterpretation; on the notion that “true thinking” still held out the possibility for an understanding of the relationship between philosophy and the sciences and therefore the supersession of the modern scientific world picture.

We see, as in Heidegger's “Letter on Humanism,” a return to simple, ‘provincial,’ and possibly comforting images. He directs us to the cabinet-maker (*Schreiner*) and his apprentice, and even the poet: the first must have a “relatedness to wood” and, the second, to language, to writing and saying. In both these cases, the “learning” was not the mere technical mastery of tools and methods as could be related simply by the teacher's example. Likewise with thinking, the teacher was in an uncertain position insofar as

³¹⁴ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 14.

merely understanding the necessary information or, in the case of the teaching of philosophy, providing access to the texts of the great thinkers did not ensure that the students were learning. For Heidegger, “the proper teacher lets nothing else be learned than—learning. His conduct, therefore, often produces the impression that we really learn nothing from him, if by ‘learning’ we now automatically understand the procurement of useful information.”³¹⁵ With this “letting learn” Heidegger may have been, in his mind, expressing a fundamental paradox of pedagogy. However, to most teachers and students of philosophy it could appear either trite or as a shirking of the thinker’s responsibility. Heidegger had already taken leave of responsibility in relation to the historical political events of his past. Now, in his criticism of university philosophy, he again bore no responsibility for what his students might learn, or fail to learn from his oracular monologues.

This was not so much different from the ‘radical’ and anti-academic self-stylization that Heidegger had employed in the 1920s and into the 1930s. Heidegger again played the role of the intellectual ‘rebel,’ whose thinking could move outside the academy into an idealized bucolic existence of the simple farmer (*Landmann*). Of course, Heidegger could only make this retreat to more originary existence and adopt an arcane form of expression precisely because of the “cultural capital” that he had accumulated as a respected teacher and scholar in the decades before the Second World War.³¹⁶ Yet the

³¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

³¹⁶ Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, 46-47.

images of the *Schreiner* or *Landmann* were no models for the aspiring philosophical youth of the early 1950s. Gone was the revolutionary pathos that had served as the background ‘mystique’ for the Master’s defiant provincialism during the Nazi takeover;³¹⁷ gone was the nebulous, undirected ‘resoluteness’ that had found content in the belief in the spiritual mission of the German Volk. In a time when so much of the focus of pedagogy in West Germany was concerned with teaching so as to cultivate students’ resistance to ideology and being led astray, to develop their capacities for independent critical thought, Heidegger calls thinking precisely the absence of such guidance.

With regard to the appropriate attitude and professional calling of the philosopher, Jaspers was the more direct and outspoken. Even with his distance from the academy, Jaspers perceived the reality that fewer students in West Germany followed the normal path into the philosophy profession (e.g., from Ph.D. to Dozent to Habilitation to Professor). However, Jaspers contended that the decrease in interest for professional philosophy was only relevant from within what he termed the “Universitätsphilosophie,” or the “philosophischer Betrieb.” In radio and television addresses and public lectures he made it clear that philosophy was not the possession of the scholars of the academy;

³¹⁷ Heidegger, “Warum bleiben wir in der Provinz?” originally a radio lecture, printed in *Der Alemanne*, 2 March 1934.

rather, it belonged to *everyman*.³¹⁸ As Jaspers provocatively put it in an interview from 1963: “Philosophie und Philosophieprofessor sind nicht ja identisch.”³¹⁹

For Jaspers, the academic philosopher by the 1960s was not the independent philosopher of whom he had publicly spoken in 1950, when his institutional presence in West Germany was still somewhat powerful. Just as he had described the university as “a community of scholars and students engaged in the task of seeking truth,” he called upon philosophers to achieve the independence—from dogma, politics, and narrow specialization—that was necessary for this “battle for truth and humanity.”³²⁰ In a sense, the philosophical life was the means of transcending the “self-forgetfulness” that had been exacerbated by the “machine age.” Although here we can see a relationship to the anti-modernism contained in Jaspers’ earlier works, most specifically *Die Geistige Situation der Zeit* (1932), and perhaps an affinity to Heidegger’s notion of the “forgetfulness of Being,” Jaspers maintains that the philosopher achieves transcendence through unconditional communication among scholars, students, and even the interested public; it could never be achieved through solipsistic concern for Being.³²¹ Here Jaspers might very well have had Heidegger in mind, when he wrote of how “those who cultivate

³¹⁸ This is shown very unequivocally in his short introduction, Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy is for Everyman: a Short Course in Philosophical Thinking*, trans. by R. F. C. Hull and Grete Wels (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967).

³¹⁹ Jaspers, “Philosophie und Welt: ein Gespräch mit François Bondy über den Einfluß der Philosophie,” aired on schweizerischen Fernsehen, February 1963, in Jaspers, *Provokationen – Gespräche und Interviews*, ed. by Hans Saner (Munich: R. Piper Verlag, 1969), 33.

³²⁰ Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom*, 118.

³²¹ Though here one must concede, that Being, for Heidegger, would not preclude communication in the sciences; for it is the very possibility for scientific research into the world of beings (*Seinde*).

this independence of irresponsibility shun self-awareness. The pleasure of vision becomes assimilated to passion for being. Being seems to reveal itself in this mythical thinking, which is a kind of speculative poetry.”³²²

Jaspers already suggested how the claim to exclusive truth had been the practice of totalitarianism and was opposed to all philosophical independence. He now attributed the same sort of practice to the “solitary vision” that disregarded communication. This he called a “dictatorial language of wisdom and prophecy” which could also manifest itself in intellectual opportunism. Again with his former friend in mind, Jaspers warns of this illusory independence of the solitary thinker, who “actually says nothing but seems to be promising something extraordinary. He exerts an attraction by vague hints and whisperings which give men a sense of the mysterious.” Most importantly, Jaspers concluded, “no authentic discussion with him is possible, but only a talking back and forth about a wide variety of “interesting things. Conversation with him can be no more than an aimless pouring forth of false emotion.”³²³ The philosophical life and pursuit of truth had to avoid the seduction of this kind of inauthentic self-assertion. He commanded the philosopher to engage in “constant communication, risk it without reserve, renounce the defiant self-assertion which forces itself upon you in ever new disguises, live in the

³²² Ibid., 113.

³²³ Ibid., 114.

hope that in your very renunciation you will in some incalculable way be given back to yourself.”³²⁴

In practice, as we have noted, Jaspers saw the realization of philosophical independence in the collaboration of researchers and scholars within the university. Philosophers had to retain a living connection with the sciences in order to prevent the dissolution of the traditional disciplines, abandoning the many areas of the specialized knowledge to the domination experts (*Fachmänner*). Not unlike Heidegger, Jaspers also attacked those academic philosophers, who confined themselves to the history of philosophy as if this self-referentiality would secure philosophical study as one subject amongst others. For Jaspers, the role of philosophy was fundamentally larger in scope than that of the *Einzelwissenschaften* in that it served these sciences as a guide. Though this meant transcendence of the boundaries and the subject matter of the disciplines, Jaspers insisted that the philosopher “must participate in the actual work of the scientists.”³²⁵ Jaspers was expressing an old concern in a new context. Already in 1929, Fritz Heinemann had argued that the current crisis in science derived from the reluctance of the philosophers of different schools to orient themselves towards the practices and problems of the individual sciences. Any “new foundation” for philosophy, Heinemann claimed, had to repair this broken relationship with science that had resulted not only in philosophy’s loss of function. The fragmentation of a humanistic “cosmos of sciences”

³²⁴ Ibid., 124.

³²⁵ Ibid., 158.

into the chaos of the modern *Einzelwissenschaften* meant that the scientists too had lost a sense for the real significance of their work and with it, a lack of consensus on what were the central questions of their disciplines. Heinemann succinctly summed up the pressing dilemma that would continue to burden German philosophers into the 1950s, “Philosophy without science is empty, science without philosophy is blind.”³²⁶

Jaspers helped found another journal in Heidelberg entitled *Studium Generale* in 1947, which had as its goal “das teilnehmende Interesse an der Gesamtheit des Wissens wachzuhalten und als Organ solchen Interesses diese Teilnahme zu ermöglichen.”³²⁷ The point of the journal was not to erase the borders between the sciences, but rather to clarify them by virtue of collective discussion. The content of the journal embodied Jaspers’ ideal of fostering communication between researchers in different disciplines, not in opposition to specialization—which he saw as inevitable—but in order to encourage general philosophical consideration of how specialized research and training could be made most effective and fulfilling.

Jaspers had no illusions that the fragmentation of specialization was irreversible and that neither philosophy nor theology could make them whole again as they once had. In 1950, Jaspers believed that teachers were the best philosophers; for the practice of good teachers was to relate the totality of specific science to the whole of what was known for their students. They could teach respect for great thinkers, but not their

³²⁶ Fritz Heinemann, *Neue Wege der Philosophie: Geist – Leben – Existenz. Eine Einführung in die Philosophie der Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Qulle und Meyer, 1929), 11.

³²⁷ “Zum Geleit” *Studium Generale* 1, no.1 (October 1947), 1.

idolization. Thinking, in Jaspers' sense, was achieved by exchanges between researchers, teachers, and students, where the last were pushed more by the experience of not knowing, finding limits and then working to overcome them. Much like his successor in Heidelberg, Gadamer, Jaspers believed that the former philosophical systems and the dogmatic *Weltanschauungen* of *Schulphilosophien* were self-deceptions in that they gave the illusion that what only served for a time as a "signpost" guiding scientific thinking was absolute.³²⁸ Instead, philosophy constantly developed and was "always alive in the sciences and so inseparable from them"; however, philosophy's role was beyond that of the sciences, for "the concrete work of the scientist is guided by his conscious or unconscious philosophy, and this philosophy cannot be the object of scientific method."³²⁹ Thus, Jaspers retained the notion that the sciences must be guided by philosophy, which was always more than a simple *Hilfsdisziplin*; however, such a view would prove untenable with the changing demands placed on professional philosophers in the universities. With the exponential increase in the student enrollments through the late 1950s and early 1960s, what was left of the ideal of the classical German university—the unity of research and teaching—had to be abandoned to the instrumental needs of the mass of students pursuing professions.

By the 1960s Jaspers observed how the pursuit of philosophy no longer displayed demonstrable benefits to the public in the way that the social and natural sciences could.

³²⁸ Jaspers, "Philosophy and Science," in *Way to Wisdom*, 161.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

In a world inhabited by disciplines that each could point to a specific region of knowledge, or set of skills as their own, philosophy possessed no strong claim to a specific area of competence. Traditionally, philosophers had claimed to transcend the goals of the specialized sciences; they now had the choice of either being content to find their ‘expertise’ solely in critical reflection on the method of the human and natural sciences, or risk having no role at all. The view of the academic philosophers that appears widespread to Jaspers in the mid 1960s, which he holds to be fundamentally false is “the idea, first, that philosophy is the territory of the sciences in which experts work and advance specialized knowledge that can be used like the knowledge of the sciences. And, second, [the view] that philosophy is the science that is the business of philosophy professors for which they are the experts.”³³⁰

The job of the philosophy professor was not the reproduction of a kind of specialized study of historical problematics that only addressed the internal debates and concerns of other academic philosophers. For Jaspers, it was no great wonder that the philosophers of the academy had alienated the public so completely. Evidence could also be found in the lack of interest in philosophical congresses and in the fact that most of the publications of philosophical research required subsidies to even see print. If everyman

³³⁰ “die Vorstellung: Erstens, Philosophie sei ein Gebiet der Wissenschaften, an dem Sachkundige arbeiten und Erkenntnisse fördern, die man brauchen kann, wie Erkenntnisse von Wissenschaften. Und zweitens, die Philosophie sei die Wissenschaft, die von den Philosophieprofessoren betrieben werde, die dafür die Sachkundigen sind.” Jaspers, “Wie kommen Sie zu Ihrem Urteil, Herr Professor?” Interview with Armin Eichholz about the book “Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik?” in *Münchener Merkur*, 16-17 June 1966, 17-19, republished in *Provokationen*, 186.

needed to philosophize, then the proper work of the philosophy professor was to “convey the ideas of the great thinkers” of the past. On the other hand, if the professional philosophers attempted “supposedly to conduct their own philosophy, or in groups a philosophical school [Schulphilosophie], then in most cases today it is a hobby.” But then he added, surprisingly, “One can count some exceptions like Heidegger.”³³¹

Jaspers called attention to the deficits of academic philosophy, and above all its inability to capture the imagination of a wider reading public.³³² Jaspers may have also subscribed to the ‘legend’ of the 1920s, or the period of the cultural *Jugendbewegung* before the First World War; many of his generation presumed that a period so fecund in cultural and philosophical production was as interesting to a “reading public” as it was to intellectuals and scholars. At the same time, that one would attempt to develop one’s own philosophy or “school” he found to be nothing more than a hobby. Still, it is mystifying that Jaspers now esteemed Heidegger’s thinking as more significant and original form of philosophizing when compared to the practices of specialists in the academic ‘*philosophischer Betrieb*.’ From Jaspers’ perspective, academics who mainly took part in philosophical congresses and published in specialized journals and academic publications were engaged in mere monologues or a kind intellectual diversion for academics.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² This was not the case for Jaspers, or his contemporary Martin Heidegger. A short article appeared in *Der Spiegel*, where it was reported that Jaspers’ 1966 work, *Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik?* had sold over 35,000 copies and was due to surpass the 40,000 mark reached only by Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*. The article also reported that while there existed no “Jaspers-Schule” that his former Freiburg colleague, Heidegger “Whose followers [Anhänger] or students occupied around ten percent of the circa 100 *Ordinarius* positions in philosophy in the Hochschulen of the Federal Republic.” See “Philosophie Jaspers: Wißbar wohin,” in *Der Spiegel* 20, no. 29 (July, 11 1966), 76.

However, one can imagine that, from the perspective of the academic professors Jaspers' is deriding, he and especially his "exceptional case," Heidegger were the ones who were engaged in monologues.

This was precisely the point made by Karl Löwith in an interesting employment of the idealized 1920s, not against the youth but against his teacher. Löwith described the period after the First World War in which both Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* and Franz Rosenzweig's existential consideration of eternity (*Ewigkeit*) in *Stern der Erlösung* appeared, as "for the time being, the last epoch of German philosophy in which it was productive and had a definite vision [Gesicht] that was not merely the opinions of the solitary thinkers engaged in monologues" ["der vorerst letzten Epoche der deutschen Philosophie, in welcher sie produktiv war und ein bestimmtes Gesicht hatte, das nicht nur der Kopf von monologisierenden Einzelgängen war"].³³³ Like Jaspers, Löwith was perhaps idealizing the years of his academic apprenticeship in the 1920s and early 1930s; however, Löwith would not concede the postwar Heidegger as an example of genuine philosophizing. Clearly, the "Einzelgänger" in this addition to the revised version of his 1942 essay was Heidegger, who Löwith introduced in his 1959 contribution on the thinker's seventieth birthday as "The native of Messkirch . . . who prefers 'wood paths' [Holzwege] and 'country paths' [Feldwege] to heavily traveled thoroughfares."³³⁴ But the

³³³ Karl Löwith, "M. Heidegger und F. Rosenzweig: ein Nachtrag zu *Sein und Zeit*," in *Gesammelte Abhandlungen: zur Kritik geschichtlichen Existenz* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960), 68.

³³⁴ Karl Löwith, "On the Critical Appraisal of Heidegger's Influence," in Richard Wolin ed. *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, trans. Gary Steiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 128.

times at Marburg in the 1920s with this Privatdozent under Husserl, comparable it seemed for Löwith to the 1830s and 1840s—the great moment and radical break that he had identified in *From Hegel to Nietzsche*—seemed less momentous when one observed in the 1950s how

Heidegger's willful monologue conducts itself in a space without discussion, a space on whose edge there stand those who are fascinated, those who parrot Heidegger, and those who are reluctant, though on the other hand there are those who negotiate Heidegger's achievements like hard currency. . . . How can we expect others to follow a thinker as his traveling companions, when it is part of that thinker's essential character to reject all community and cooperation and to proceed in isolation along paths that end precipitously in what cannot be traversed?³³⁵

Although Löwith's view of Heidegger was not shared by many of the thinker's former students, most notably Gadamer, Löwith's friend and colleague in Heidelberg after 1952, he did express the common view within the academy, which privileged the collaboration and exchange of philosophical ideas within the universities, academic societies, and professional journals. In certain ways, Löwith unlike, his teachers, Jaspers and Heidegger, supported the model of professionalization in academic philosophy that had emerged in the 1950s. This was epitomized in the figure of Gadamer, who was, as we shall see, the most important academic philosopher in West Germany during the 1950s and 1960s, particularly when one views his influence over the greatest minds of the younger generation. Gadamer occupied the chair in philosophy at Heidelberg, which at

This short piece was added to the second, expanded edition of *Heidegger: Denker in dürftiger Zeit* [orig. 1953] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960).

³³⁵ Ibid., 130.

that time was also the most prestigious. He was a leading member of the *Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften* and the *Allgemeine Gesellschaft für Philosophie*.

In the learned societies and new publications, Gadamer and others of his generation put forward perhaps the most common and influential image of the philosopher and of the postwar academic intellectual. As Gadamer would later write, in the learned academies one found “the only kind of meeting worthwhile for an intellectual in contemporary intellectual life: There is a little administrative work, but only after a scholarly presentation with intensive discussion.”³³⁶ The philosophy of the universities, of the learned societies, of academic journals, and formal research groups continued to grow in influence and membership. They were the only pathways into the philosophical profession for the young generation, even if their new professionalism seemed to have “alienated the wider public sphere,” as Hochkeppel or even Jaspers concluded. Indeed, it was less Jaspers, or for that matter Heidegger, but their students, or their students’ students who began the task of renewing philosophy by discovering ways out of the solipsistic practice of the great thinkers, above all through professional collaboration.

³³⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, trans. Robert R. Sullivan (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1985), 149-150.

Chapter 4

The Task of Philosophy Inside the University and in Scientific Culture

In 1951 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organized an inquiry into the teaching of philosophy. Georges Canguilhem, Inspector General of Secondary Education in France arranged the investigation. UNESCO produced a published volume in which Canguilhem both introduced the materials and responded to the questions with regard to teaching philosophy in France.³³⁷ An international group of both Western and non-Western philosophers was asked to respond to a series of questions concerning the nature of philosophical instruction in their respective countries. The questions focused on all aspects of philosophy and its relation to society from the procedures of examination and degree requirements to the relationship of philosophy to politics, religion and culture and especially its influence on students' political and intellectual formation. The Freiburg philosopher, Eugen Fink, was the respondent for West Germany. Fink was invited to participate not only for his interest in the philosophy of pedagogy but possibly because Freiburg lay in the former French occupation zone. His answers reflect his own philosophical background in Husserl's

³³⁷ Unesco, ed., *The Teaching of Philosophy*, intro by Georges Canguilhem (Paris: UNESCO, 1953).

phenomenology and his closeness to Heidegger's philosophy.³³⁸ However, beyond these intellectual preferences, Fink's responses also reflect a concern to uphold the German values of humanist education, the freedom of teaching and research from central planning, and the belief in the unity of philosophy and its independence from other disciplines. His responses do reveal a general attitude of professional philosophers in West Germany of the 1950s and the concerns of the early Cold War era.

Fink characterized German philosophy as interested in speculative, metaphysical questions at the expense of social or political concerns. In the land of "*Dichter und Denker*," he claimed, there had been no viable philosophy of society and politics since Hegel.³³⁹ Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Marxist tradition did not enter into Fink's equation. Since Hegel, German philosophy had had no impact on the political field. "Unless," Fink wrote, "one wishes to designate by the name 'philosophy' the nineteenth-century beliefs which long ago became mere trite articles of faith for the masses, philosophical ideas exert no marked influence on political doctrines and

³³⁸ Eugen Fink (1905-1975) earned his doctorate under Edmund Husserl in Freiburg and remained Husserl's private assistant even after 1933, when the latter was banned from publishing and working in Germany because of his Jewish ancestry. After Husserl's death in 1938, Fink along with Ludwig Landgrebe helped secure Husserl's unpublished papers in Leuven, Belgium under the custodianship of the Franciscan H. L. Van Breda (See Landgrebe's account in Pongratz, ed., *Philosophie in Selbstdarstellungen*, 2:147-49). Fink seems to have reconciled with Martin Heidegger after the war, even though it was publically well known that Heidegger would have nothing to do with his former teacher after the "Law for the Reconstruction of the German Professional Civil Service" banned Husserl, already in retirement, from teaching in Freiburg. Heidegger also removed the famous dedication to his teacher from the fifth edition of *Sein und Zeit* published in 1941. On the record of Heidegger's fallout with Husserl see Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*, trans. Allan Blunden (London and New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 172-86.

³³⁹ Eugen Fink, "The Teaching of Philosophy in Germany," in *ibid.*, 78-79.

controversies.”³⁴⁰ Likewise, Fink confessed that the attitudes of the student body as well as the design of curricula in the philosophical faculties exhibited a general apathy with regard to social and political questions. Fink thus confirmed the common claim of the 1950s that the German youth were on the whole skeptical, or suspicious of political and ideological agendas and even reluctant to claim religious affiliation. Fink writes:

In my opinion, it is quite impossible to give any indication of the students’ ideological interests, especially as regards philosophy rather than the politics of the hour, for such interests do not so much refer to their content as reflect an attitude. There is a tendency to be careful, suspicious, critical, to refuse to be taken in, there is little interest in current social beliefs, but rather a tendency to wait and see whether new ideas and social programmes turn up; it is ‘the thing’ to be neither a Christian nor an atheist, neither a Marxist nor a liberal. The ideological beliefs which had their origin in the philosophical thought of the nineteenth century are considered antiquated and out-dated. There is a tendency to ‘wait and see’, which may prove to be either a sign of weakness or of strength. In any case, young German students fail to show any clear-cut ideological interests.³⁴¹

The ‘wait and see’ attitude attributed to the youth by Fink is remarkably similar to Helmut Schelsky’s depiction of the depoliticizing and de-ideologizing elements in the social realities of the “skeptical generation” in the 1950s. In Schelsky’s account, this ‘wait and see’ response to political projects was accompanied by the “without us mindset” (*die Ohne-uns-Haltung*)—the refusal of organizational and community life for fear of the programs and dogmas that go along with associational commitments.³⁴² To be sure, Fink lamented the fact that “the relationship of contemporary German philosophy to

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 86.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 84.

³⁴² Schelsky, *Die Skeptische Generation*, 80.

political and social ideas and to urgent questions of social reorganization is both weak and under developed.”³⁴³ Yet Fink, like so many of his generation, was unwilling to endorse the need for any fundamental structural reform of the Humboldtian, humanistic university.

“[F]ree teaching as the outcome of free research” was the shared mantra of the philosophy profession. Practically, this outlook represented German professors’ determination to retain their high degree of autonomy and independence in choosing what they will teach and in designing their syllabuses. Unlike France, Fink argued, German academia and universities did not present a clear hierarchy; nor did West Germany have an intellectual center that matched Paris. By comparison, German universities were decentralized and their composition and policies were shaped by the federal structure, i.e., the different *Länder* of which they were a part.³⁴⁴ Nascent university reform along the lines of *Studium generale*—with instruction in the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*) at its core—appeared promising given the “growing demand for a general education with a philosophical basis, and . . . a recognition of the danger of one-sided specialization.”³⁴⁵ For Fink, the vocation of the German professor was to bring his students into contact with “living thought” from the classic texts of philosophy rather

³⁴³ Fink, “Philosophy in West Germany,” 84.

³⁴⁴ Though Fink also made the unlikely claim that “Despite this administrative decentralization, however, research is equally free everywhere, and is unhampered by an spirit of regionalism” (ibid).

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 73.

than providing “routine instruction” for instrumental purposes.³⁴⁶ Defending the freedom of the professor to lecture on what he wished, often times on his own research, was the fundamental means of maintaining the autonomy and exclusivity of the *universitas scholarum*. This went hand in hand with maintaining what Fink described as “the concept that philosophy in the real meaning of the word cannot be divided into disciplines, but is a uniform system of questioning and thinking which covers every aspect of ‘being’, and whose quest extends beyond a regionally subdivided ‘being’ to existence itself, to the whole world.”³⁴⁷

In addition to maintaining the old Mandarin notion of “indivisibility” and “unity” that set philosophy and the philosopher apart from the specialized ‘experts,’ Fink was at pains to respond to the questions put by the UNESCO commission about the political and social dimension of philosophical inquiry and instruction. Fink admitted that “Germany still has far to go before its thought penetrates the crucial problems of the modern world (human rights, democracy, community of nations and world peace). . . . it would be both more important and to the point if the energy spent on lofty speculation were for once to be more logically devoted to the educational problems of life in a world community.”³⁴⁸ There was a lack of interest on the part of professors, students, and the greater public for

³⁴⁶ The former was also made more difficult and more critical by the material scarcity after the war. Fink describes the dearth of textbooks and the general lack of reprints of classic philosophical texts in new critical editions. This limited what professors could teach and assign and what level of competence they could expect from state examination candidates (ibid., 80).

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 78.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 79.

the problems of society, the State, the international community, or democracy. In the philosophical-cultural field, Fink observed, an analogous absence of “an adequate and broadly based cultural contact with contemporary foreign philosophies.”³⁴⁹

Despite this persistence of German ‘provincialism,’ Fink argued that in fact the lack of uniform educational guidelines set by the Federal government, combined with the autonomy of the professors, secured the freedom of *West* German philosophy from a dominant intellectual tradition, or the reigning ideological doctrines of the state. For the German philosopher, Fink claimed, “[t]here is only the whole tradition of the history of Western thought which forms the background to original philosophizing.”³⁵⁰ What is more, Fink declared, “there is no real popular philosophy bearing a purely German stamp, but genuine philosophy is widely popularized, as shown, for instance, by the fashion for existentialism.”³⁵¹ German professors were not influenced by popular philosophemes, nor were they bound to the use of “official syllabuses”; they existed in splendid ‘isolation’ (*Einsamkeit*) from both political intervention and public intrusion. As a result, university philosophy in West Germany was resistant to bias towards any dominant tradition and dogma as well as impervious to contemporary ‘*Mode-Philosophien*’ like existentialism and, naturally, the pseudo-philosophies of Marxism. Clearly, the German professor’s ‘unpolitical’ nature was not above contriving a philosophical tradition that squared nicely with the prevailing anti-Marxist ideology of the West.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 85.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 83.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 86.

No doubt sensitive to the expectations of his international audience, Fink painted a reassuring philosophical and cultural scene that was fundamentally open to and prepared for the introduction of Western democratic impulses, and to the possibility of improved relations with the newly established North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Even the apparent lack of concern for political and social reorganization, Fink concluded, could be overcome without a general reform of the university system. He concluded that

.the fundamental structural form in which philosophy is at present taught in Germany (free teaching as the outcome of free research) does not require to be reformed, but its subject matter does seem to need modifying. Its profoundly speculative nature should be retained, but there must be a definite swing over to the crucial problems of modern life (technology, the machinery of State, the masses, the comity of nations, the setting up of a world-wide social order, etc.). The most imperative need here is to strike a balance between Anglo-Saxon social philosophy, with its growing interest in political matters, French ideas and German metaphysics.³⁵²

As unlikely and tendentious as Fink's UNESCO report may seem in hindsight, the Freiburg philosopher and pedagogue expressed the hopes and concerns of his profession about its present and future status in the university. Many of his assumptions register the widespread belief in the apoliticism of the postwar youth and, more generally, the neutralization of the effects of ideology on German culture. Although Fink contended that the teaching of philosophy at the university did not require substantial reform, he nonetheless had to admit the great extent to which West German philosophy failed to respond to social and political problems. It was clear to Fink that after Hegel, German

³⁵² Ibid., 87.

philosophy had lost its claim to competence in dealing with the concrete social and political problems of modernity.

Throughout this chapter, we will assess the meaning and consequences of these core beliefs and concerns for the development of professional philosophy in West Germany in the 1950s and early 1960s. Of particular importance, was this desire to maintain the autonomy of philosophy and the closely-related *Geisteswissenschaften* under the pressure of the dominant model of science and research offered by the natural sciences, and also by the social sciences, particularly sociology and political science, which were ‘emancipated’ institutionally from philosophy by the mid 1950s.³⁵³ The professors and teachers of philosophy responded to the threat of diminished status for themselves and their discipline by reasserting the classic ideas of philosophy and the university in the continuous debates about university restructuring and “*Hochschulreform*.” The leading professors explained this decline intellectually by focusing their debate on the twin threats posed by “positivism” and popular existentialist philosophies. The latter were seen as the expression of postwar anxieties and the alienation of life in industrial, consumerist society, though in the initial years after the war both French existentialism and Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* were often represented as

³⁵³ Most universities in West Germany approved the degree (*Diplom*) in sociology by the mid 1950s—for example, 1955 in Frankfurt and 1956 at the Freie Universität Berlin. The great institutes for political science were opened to *Hochschulkandidaten* in the early 1950s—notable examples included the Otto Suhr Institut at the FU and the Institut für wissenschaftliche Politik under Wolfgang Abendroth in Marburg, established in 1949 and 1950 respectively.

part of a critical response to positivism.³⁵⁴ At the same, professional philosophers viewed existentialism as a potentially damaging and misleading cultural fashion unsuited to the tasks of professional renewal and detrimental to the prestige of the discipline.

Defining the Boundaries of the Field: Separating ‘Genuine Philosophizing’ from Cultural ‘Fashion’

The process of professionalization within academic philosophy took place alongside the dissemination, or “popularization” of philosophical ideas and language beyond the walls of the university. Existentialism, broadly defined, pervaded cultural discussions of philosophy, politics, literature, and virtually every artistic medium treated in the quality press and even in some professional journals. In a widely cited article for the *Frankfurter Hefte* in 1948, the philosopher and former student of Heidegger, Wilhelm Weischedel (1905-1975) noted how the omnipresence of the term ‘existentialism’ in cultural journals and the feuilleton pages of newspapers frustrated attempts to pinpoint the meaning and essence of *Existenzphilosophie*. Weischedel complained,

[w]enn man heute eine Zeitung oder eine Zeitschrift aufschlägt, kann man beinahe sicher sein, auf das Wort “Existentialismus” zu stoßen. “Existentialistische” Romane, “existentialistische” Dramen, “existentialistische” Filme werden angezeigt; Maler und Bildhauer werden “Existentialisten” genannt; “existentialistische” Lebenshaltung, ja sogar “existentialistische” Politik wird besprochen. Eine Fülle von Aufsätzen versucht, den “Existentialismus” zu deuten: als tiefe Weisheit oder als oberflächliches Gerede, als trübsinnige Weltanschauung oder als Haltung des stolzen Trotzes, als Rettung aus der Krisis

³⁵⁴ See for example, Hermann Riefstahl, “Review of Jean-Paul Sartre, *L’Être et le Néant: Essai d’Ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris, 1943),” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 2, no. 4 (1948): 610-19.

oder als abgründigen Nihilismus. Was aber dieser “Existentialismus” vor aller Deutung von sich selber her ist, davon ist nur wenig die Rede.³⁵⁵

Because of its ubiquity German philosophers considered existentialism to be a sign of the times, or, more often, the result of the impatience of the younger generation. Above all, existentialism could be viewed as the disillusionment of a growing ‘mass’ of university students with the uncertainty of professional philosophy and the uncoordinated knowledge offered by the “special sciences.”³⁵⁶ Concerns about the confusion caused by existentialist thought managed to penetrate academic philosophy, at the early philosophy congresses at Garmisch-Partenkirchen (1947), Mainz (1948), and Bremen (1950), even if the most conspicuous “Existenz-philosophers” were absent and remained largely aloof from these internal debates. Many academic philosophers attempted to discredit the prominent German ‘existentialists’ like Jaspers and Heidegger by associating them with what they viewed as the superficial pseudo-philosophies produced by the fashionable literati of Paris. Nevertheless, some of the most prolific commentators in the German language sought to isolate different forms of western existentialist thought along national lines, while still emphasizing their common historical emergence “as after-effects of national catastrophes.”³⁵⁷ In the West German case, however, there seemed to be more

³⁵⁵ Wilhelm Weischedel, “Wesen und Grenzen der Existenzphilosophie,” *Frankfurter Hefte* 3 (1948): 726.

³⁵⁶ F. H. Heinemann, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament*, 6.

³⁵⁷ Fritz Heinemann, “Was ist lebendig und was ist tot in der Existenzphilosophie,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 5, no. 1 (1950): 5; Otto Friedrich Bollnow, “Deutsche Existenzphilosophie und französischer Existentialismus,” in *Die Sammlung* 2, no. 2-3 (1948): 231-43. Bollnow in particular highlights the intensified political meaning of existentialism in France because of the association with representatives of the resistance movement; however, he too views each of the national variants of western

cause for mistrust among philosophers because of the need to reestablish their beleaguered discipline under the pressures of occupation and the politics of denazification, and, most importantly, the perceived threat of the disintegration and degradation of their profession into individualized disciplines, the *Einzelwissenschaften*, which philosophy was traditionally meant to guide.

At least initially, academics in philosophy and the *Geisteswissenschaften* also tended to portray the putative nihilistic implications and irrationalism attributed to the publicized work of leading ‘Existenzphilosophen’ as impediments to democratic reeducation and damaging to a shared sense of intellectual responsibility. At the same time, however, the West German reception of the work of French existentialists almost without exception downplayed, or neglected completely, the notion of “*engagement*” and the background of political activism in the case of figures like Sartre, Camus, or Maurice Merleau-Ponty.³⁵⁸ One could argue that existentialism most often served as a useful foil in the face of which philosophers and *Geisteswissenschaftler* could articulate the reasons for the decline of culture and the diminution of their own status within it. Professional philosophers often represented the persistence of existentialism, broadly construed, as a poignant example of how European culture continued on the wrong path that had been

existentialism as common attempts to come to terms with the “crisis situation” of postwar Europe rather than mere fashion (ibid., 243).

³⁵⁸ An exception to this is the work of Otto Friedrich Bollnow, who emphasized how French existentialism was shaped by the background of political resistance to fascism, and that these historical circumstances made its comparison with German *Existenzphilosophie* very misleading. See Bollnow, “Deutsche Existenzphilosophie und französischer Existentialismus,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 2, nos. 2-3 (1948): 233 and Bollnow, “Existentialismus und Ethik,” *Die Sammlung* 4 (1949): 321-35.

paved by the irrationalism and personal irresponsibility of philosophers and intellectuals during the interwar period. However, there were a handful of university philosophers, who believed that postwar existentialism was the crisis point of these previous three decades of irrationalism and, potentially, a first step towards recovering a new philosophical ethics that could counter intellectual passivity and unassumingly regain its guiding influence on the special sciences.³⁵⁹

Existentialism between France and Germany

For West German philosophers, the confrontation with *Existenzphilosophie* became the impetus for critical reflection on the German philosophical tradition. Public literary intellectuals were the principal representatives of the existentialist movement in France. The French debates about existentialism, even when they included university professors, took place in cultural and political journals, in widely-circulated literary works and in theatre. The result was the apogee of the French literary intellectuals' influence in the field of power.³⁶⁰ However, in Germany, the debates about *Existenz* oftentimes became entangled with the pressing questions about the historicity of the philosopher along with the philosopher's status in the university hierarchy, and, in effect, the scientific basis for the entire German philosophical tradition since Hegel. The political content of

³⁵⁹ Cf. Bollnow, "Existentialism und Ethik," 335.

³⁶⁰ Régis Débray, *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: the Intellectuals of Modern France* (London: New Left Books, 1984), 67-68; Sartre combined the charisma of the writer with the institutional power of the publisher at the height of "The Publishing Cycle (1920-1960)" see *ibid.*, 67-79.

existentialism embodied in the French intellectuals' call for intellectual responsibility to a universal community was lost in the German professors' concern for their own future. The relevance of French existentialism for the German academic was at best limited to the private, inner commitments of the philosopher as an individual, an embodiment of the "*Innerlichkeit*" that seemed to characterize all of postwar German culture. Existentialism, viewed as a "school of inwardness" was counterproductive and potentially ruinous if one tried to put it forth as a model for research in philosophy or the sciences in general.³⁶¹

Yet the leading *Existenzphilosophen* in Germany continued to exert a great deal of influence on the debates within the profession, which was only compounded by these figures' extra-academic cultural notoriety. In this way, existentialism proved to be both a provocation to and a liability for the postwar German philosophical profession. For better or worse, German academic philosophers had to begin with the dominant figure, whose work and influence was closest to them: Martin Heidegger. Dieter Henrich, Gadamer's assistant in Heidelberg noted that up until the "middle of the 1950s Heidegger dominated philosophical discussion in Germany."³⁶² However, the master gave them little to work with. All observed that Heidegger had produced no great statement of his philosophical position since *Sein und Zeit* of 1927, the first part to a planned greater work that never came to be. Since the early 1930s, Heidegger had only published short essays and lectures on Kant and Hölderlin; and his postwar publications seemed to raise more

³⁶¹ Edwin Latzel, "Bemerkungen zum Umgang mit Existenzphilosophie: Existenzphilosophie als Katharsis und Katharsis der Existenzphilosophie," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 6, no. 3 (1952): 409-410.

³⁶² Henrich, "Die deutsche Philosophie nach zwei Weltkriegen," 49.

questions about the path of Heidegger's thinking. Initially, and perhaps necessarily, German commentators after the Second World War focused not on Heidegger's own development, but on that of his French appropriation. The second-hand existentialism of the French was determined by the complex intellectual appropriations of German thought during the 1930s.

Heidegger's French influence derived from interpretations of the unfinished masterpiece *Sein und Zeit*. The French interpretations were normally limited to Division II and, even then, to the first and second chapters that focused on those existential "modalities of being" that disclosed Dasein's "ownness" and singularity. Thus, the French already started from a point in Heidegger's existential analytic where it was most easily adaptable to anthropological and subjectivist readings of Dasein's being as "care" (*Sorge*) and "resoluteness" (*Entschlossenheit*), and "my-ownness" (*Jemeinigkeit*). The French debate was further radicalized by the strong presence of the Marxist Hegelianism of Alexander Kojève in the Parisian intellectual scene. Heideggerian concepts of "anxiety," "thrownness," and "being towards death" were often taken as a kind of secularized version of Kierkegaard's individualist existentialism and as a modification of Hegel's example of the struggle for recognition between master and slave. These two components comprised what Ethan Kleinberg has distinguished as the first reading of Heidegger, which came to dominate French existentialism and French phenomenology in the inter-war period.³⁶³

³⁶³ Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927-1961* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 13-17.

The influence of Kojève was clear. As Kleinberg writes, “Kojève’s anthropocentric reading used Heidegger’s philosophy to read Hegel in the light of subjectivist tendencies. ... This led to a fundamentally anthropocentric understanding of Heidegger’s work in the years to come.”³⁶⁴ Likewise the popularity of Jean-Paul Sartre’s literary works after their postwar republication, particularly *La Nausée*, and the plays, *Les Mouches* and *Huis clos* ensured that the French debate, at least outside of the academy, remained the domain of literary intellectuals, whose main concern was appropriating those elements most suited to intellectual activism. Heidegger’s idea of *Geworfenheit*, or the “thrown character” of Dasein, was represented as the human existential predicament in which a subject can choose to act, or remain in the tranquilized complacency of *das Man*, the conformist, or “undifferentiated” “they-self.” The Marxist politics of figures like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Sartre also led to a very voluntaristic interpretation of resoluteness and of authenticity as “engagement” towards the goals of the socialist movement.³⁶⁵ Beginning from “Existenz,” which many like Sartre took as a kind of materialist credo, French existentialists introduced a purely formal ethics of commitment based on an

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 68.

³⁶⁵ It is important to note that Merleau-Ponty’s reception of Heidegger and Husserl’s phenomenology departed significantly from that of Camus or Sartre’s humanistic readings. Merleau-Ponty’s abiding interest is in the way the subject can no longer be thought of in purely logocentric terms as a thinking being, nor as a physical object. The critique of the Cartesian subject and new behavioral approaches to psychology are the main interest in Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, and this also what distinguishes Merleau-Ponty’s existential Marxism from Sartre’s abstract notion of the freedom based on the idea of a completely undetermined subjective will in *Being and Nothingness*. On Merleau-Ponty’s critique of the Sartrean subject and the former’s non-dogmatic reaffirmation of the role of history and collective social projects as the meaning-giving background for subjective decisions see Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 151-153.

unconditionally free will, which, some German commentators were quick to point out, in Sartre's case, invoked the binding claim to universality of Kant's categorical imperative despite the existentialist's denial of any metaphysical guarantees that one acted morally, authentically, or "in good faith."³⁶⁶

Although there was nothing like a "*Generation Existential*" in Germany comparable to that of the French case, German commentators ultimately had to contend with the ideas of popular existentialism because they believed it to be an expression of the real anxieties of western European societies in the wake of the Second World War. Of course, none of the German representatives of *Existenzphilosophie* like Heidegger, Jaspers, or Nicolai Hartmann embraced the term 'existentialism' and even actively militated against it. Heidegger's successful publication in 1946 while still confined in French-occupied territory of the booklet containing his Plato essay and the '*Humanismusbrief*' to Jean Beaufret generated a vehement public debate over "Heidegger's new turn" to *Ek-sistenz*.³⁶⁷ German thinkers of the same age as their French counterparts—those Kleinberg calls the "generation of 1933" born around 1900—had for the most part followed the development of Heidegger's thought through the 1930s. For them, the "Letter on Humanism" was not the abrupt *volte face* as it was for the French. Indeed, for Max Müller, who had been Heidegger's student and assistant during the

³⁶⁶ O. F. Bollnow, "Existentialism und Ethik," 325-27. The clearest expression of Sartre's notion of free will that comes close to replicating the structure of Kant's deontological ethics appeared in Jean-Paul Sartre's lecture "Existentialism is a Humanism," a lecture first published in 1946.

³⁶⁷ Otto Friedrich Bollnow, "Heideggers neue Kehre," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 2, no. 2 (1949-1950): 113-128.

1930s, the terms *Existenz-philosophie* or existentialism never suited his teacher's philosophy. Müller made draw this distinction clearly in an important synopsis of 1949, where he wrote, "für Heidegger gibt es nur *ein* Thema des Philosophierens: Nicht den Menschen und die Existenz, sondern einzig und allein das Sein. Aber die Existenz und in ihr der Mensch ist Mittel und Ort und Grund der Möglichkeit und Ansatz für die Seins Erhellung. Alle Aussagen über die Existenz und den Menschen in 'Sein und Zeit' waren daher von Anfang an niemals im Sinne eine philosophischen Anthropologie gemeint."³⁶⁸ It was no surprise then, for Müller, or any other of Heidegger's students when the Master took leave of both the traditional concept of *essentia* as well as the Sartrean notion of 'existence.' The focus on the history of Being and the turn to language as the "house of Being" in the *Humanismusbrief* was a refinement and extension of Heidegger's earlier claims in *Sein und Zeit* about the "concealment" of Being in Dasein's everyday understanding of beings.³⁶⁹ Now, with "Being, and only Being" as the very possibility for truth, as "unconcealment," there could be no question that Heidegger's thinking completely denied the recourse to a willing, knowing, or thinking subject. This made the later Heidegger's thought completely incompatible with any merely anthropological or humanistic perspective such as that which guided the French reception in these years.

³⁶⁸ Max Müller, *Existenzphilosophie*, 13.

³⁶⁹ Heidegger's ontological analysis eschewed both transcendental and materialist understandings of existence. As Heidegger wrote, "Dasein's *kind of Being* thus *demand*s that any ontological Interpretation which sets itself the goal of exhibiting the phenomena in their primordially, *should capture the Being of this entity, in spite of this entity's own tendency to cover things up*. Existential analysis, therefore, constantly has the character of *doing violence* [*Gewaltsamkeit*], whether to the claims of the everyday interpretation, or to its complacency and its tranquilized obviousness" Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1962), 359.

It was clear to the early German reviewers of Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" that this new turn signaled nothing less than "die radikale Absage an jede Art von 'Existentialismus', den Abbruch aller Brücken zu einer über zweitausendjährigen Tradition und den kühnen Versuch einer Rückkehr zur urwüchsigen Kraft eines archaischen Denkens im reinen Elemente des Seins."³⁷⁰ Certainly, the picture of the later Heidegger as a radical break with tradition and retreat into a seemingly humble and archaic language can be interpreted as a kind flight from responsibility and an attempt to obscure the historical events of his dubious political past.³⁷¹ However, by reducing Heidegger's later writings to an expression of the escapism of a politically compromised individual, one risks passing over the meaning of the later texts for Heidegger's West German readers.³⁷²

Heidegger's postwar philosophy by virtue of its turn to the question of Being certainly precluded the ethics of *engagement* championed by Sartre's early adherents in France. But for most of his German interpreters, Heidegger's later writings also revealed the extent to which the "thinker" remained gripped by the problem of historicity. Heidegger's new linguistic turn was perceived by critical readers such as Bollnow and Heidegger's student, Gerhard Krüger as a significant departure from the crisis thinking of

³⁷⁰ Heinz-L. Mazat, "Review of Martin Heidegger, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit. Mit einem Brief über den 'Humanismus'* (Bern, 1947)," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 2, no. 4 (1948): 648.

³⁷¹ Georg Lukács, "Heidegger Redivivus," *Sinn und Form* 1, no. 3 (1949): 37-62; Anson Rabinbach adopts a similar position, albeit with much more subtlety and historical contextualization than Lukács in "Heidegger's 'Letter on Humanism' as Text and Event," in *In the Shadow of Catastrophe*, 114-17.

³⁷² The content of the "Letter on Humanism" and its timing as "event" certainly support such a reading. But to view the text as opportunistic apologetics and conscious deception does not exhaust its significance for the postwar West German audience.

the 1920s and early 1930s.³⁷³ Anson Rabinbach has reminded us of how the *Humanismusbrief*, within the context of the 1940s, was a personal attempt on Heidegger's part to explain the German catastrophe, the failure of National Socialism and to relativize and obscure his involvement in historical events. Disappointed by defeat and contemptuous of the occupation, Heidegger's language was "a gesture of defiance in the cloak of humility."³⁷⁴ However, Heidegger's recourse to poetic and simpler language in the late 1940s resonated within a wider cultural tendency towards inwardness and the search for a new language in philosophy. For many readers of the later Heidegger, the step away from "*die Seiende*," "beings," into a thinking epitomized by the poet or the *Dichter*, the move into language of *heilen* and *Heiligen*, healing and the holy, and finally a return to a simpler relationship to the world along the path of language, which was "*das Haus des Seins*" could serve as a kind of consolation in a culture coping with political upheaval and physical destruction. As Jost Hermand has observed, in West German during the 1950s, many differentiated Jaspers and Heidegger from the nihilism and exteriority present in the work of the French existentialists and the German thinkers of the 1920s and early 1930s:

Statt sich von Vokabeln wie Kälte, Geworfenheit, Nichtigkeit oder Todesverfallenheit blenden zu lassen, entschloß sich diese Gruppe zu einer "Kehre" vom Heroisch-Solipsistischen zum Konservativ-Geborgenen und rückte eher das Sinnstiftende in den Vordergrund. Bei den meisten lief das auf den Versuch hinaus, die durch die zunehmende Technisierung und

³⁷³ Gerhard Krüger, "Martin Heidegger und der Humanismus," *Theologische Rundschau* 18 (1950): 148-178.

³⁷⁴ Rabinbach, "Heidegger's 'Letter on Humanism' as Text and Event," 115.

Vermassung in irgendein Nichts gestellte menschliche Existenz auf dem bereits von Heidegger und Jaspers vorgezeichneten Weg über die Kunst, den Mythos, die Natur oder die Religion wieder in den Trostraum des Umgreifenden, Bergenden, Heilenden zurückzuholen.³⁷⁵

To be sure, many contemporaries found nothing compensatory in this turn inward. On the contrary, many interpreted post-1945 existentialism as a return to dangers of the irrationalism of the 1920s. The influential Munich philosopher, Alois Dempf (1891-1982) warned that the *Existenzphilosophie* of the interwar years was part of a turn towards “private ethics” and “private intelligence [Intelligenz]” that arose from the renewed influence of Kierkegaard and the popularity of *Lebensphilosophie* in the 1920s. The intelligentsia’s focus on personal resoluteness and the search for unconditioned ‘living experience’ led to a refusal to engage or believe in the public use of reason.³⁷⁶ For the Catholic thinker, this was the end result of the modern loss of faith in God and the “immortal spirit” and, more practically, the betrayal of the humanistic model of intellectual life. The Renaissance appreciation of the independent “*vita contemplativa*” gave way to the instrumentalization of ‘secularized’ university philosophy by the state.³⁷⁷ Dempf provided a clear articulation of what the nebulously overused concepts of “Säkularisierung” and “Verweltlichung” actually signified: “der Sündenfall der neuzeitliche Philosophie in die existenzielle Staatsphilosophie.”³⁷⁸ Philosophers

³⁷⁵ Jost Hermand, *Kultur im Wiederaufbau*, 75

³⁷⁶ Alois Dempf, “Die fehlende Intelligenz,” *Frankfurter Hefte* 5, no. 3 (Mar. 1950): 251.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 247-48.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 246.

embraced a disconnected existential pathos centered on individual, undirected commitment, which left the “mechanistic method” and instrumental aims of “scientism” or “positivism” to triumph unopposed. “Inner emigration” and the outright complicity of intellectuals with Nazism legitimized the ostensible “successes” of the “organizational rationalization” of the state, the economy, and the university, and finally the diminution, or complete appropriation of cultural and intellectual life by the “total state.” For Dempf and many others, after fifty years of intellectual betrayal and subservience to the state, there could be no illusions of an easy return to the humanistic ideals of the classical, Humboldtian “*universitas magistrorum et studentium* [sic]”:

Die Wissenden sind als Produzenten von Macht verstaatlicht worden, und da es ein eigenes Standesbewußtsein der Intelligenz nicht gibt . . . denkt sie viel zu wenig an ihre auch wirtschaftliche freie Existenz. . . . Die Dichter leben von der Vernügnungs- und Unterhaltungsindustrie, die Wissenschaft lebt vom Interesse des Staates an der Ausbildung der Beamten und der Techniker . . . noch immer aber muß sie um ihre Forschungsmittel betteln, und sie erhält sie nur im Blick auf die Vermehrung des Machtpotentials.³⁷⁹

The selective reception of French existentialism likewise confirmed for Marxist thinkers that postwar West German philosophy was merely an ideological expression of the material circumstances of the 1940s and 1950s. Hans Heinz Holz (b. 1927) recalled how the German reception of the French existentialists was limited to the “petit bourgeois reactionary elements: the individualism, immoralism and voluntarism of Sartre from the period of *Being and Nothingness*.” Holz also depicts German *Existenzphilosophie* as something of a ‘*Staatsphilosophie*,’ whose anthropological, privatized tenor “connected

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 252.

the bourgeois atmosphere of collapse in the early postwar period with the robust unsolidarity and egoism of the black market phase and the first reconstruction period of capitalism.”³⁸⁰ Although Holz would point to Bollnow as one of the main protagonists in this regression of West German philosophy back into its function as “bourgeois Weltanschauung,” for Bollnow, existentialism represented a cultural expression of concrete human uncertainties, albeit not in the dialectical Marxist sense, that ultimately would need to be overcome. Bollnow argued,

Es kommt darauf an, die Existenzphilosophie, zum mindesten in ihren bisherigen Formen, zu überwinden, auch in diesem Sinn, sie zu transzendieren. ... Sie [*Existenzphilosophie*] ist die letzte große Krisis, durch die die Philosophie hindurchmuß und ohne die ihr eine letzte Unbedingtheit nicht möglich ist. Sie ist das Tor, durch das der Weg zu einer letzten unbedingten und vor den wirklichen Aufgaben des Lebens verantwortlichen Philosophie hindurchgeht.³⁸¹

Bollnow took the ideas and especially the nuances of the different versions of European existentialism very seriously. For him, the ideas of French existentialism and German *Existenzphilosophie* were not simply fashionable sophistry; rather, they contained the promise of a new beginning.

“New Security” and Existentialism in the Culture of the 1950s

Although the various forms of existentialism and ‘Existenzphilosophie’ remained dominant across a wide cultural context in the late 1940s and 1950s, by the mid 1950s

³⁸⁰ Hans Heinz Holz, “Philosophie als bürgerliche Weltanschauung: Umerziehung und Restauration – westdeutsche Philosophie im ersten Jahrzehnt,” in *Dialektik* 11 (1986): 48.

³⁸¹ Bollnow, “Deutsche Existenzphilosophie und französische Existentialismus,” 241.

academic philosophers began to call for a shift of focus. Otto Friedrich Bollnow described the necessary move away from existential Angst towards a “New Security.” For Bollnow, existential philosophy had resulted in a pressing dilemma. One could neither ignore existentialism because “it gives expression to the *crisis of our present*”; nor could one remain trapped within existential philosophy; for it provided only the expression of the present crisis, not its “sublation” (*Aufhebung*). The problem or task facing philosophy was the “overcoming of existentialism” (*Überwindung des Existentialismus*).³⁸² Fritz Heinemann also argued that Karl Jaspers failed in the attempt to connect subjective “existence” to a universal or transcendent logic. In his review of the German philosophical scene in 1949, Heinemann suggested that “Jaspers’ central problem remains the problem of our time, namely, whether within the welfare-state and in the age of mass-production the independent person working out his own destiny is able to survive.” Heinemann concludes succinctly, “although ‘*philosophies of existence*’ may be a mistake, ‘existence’ may point to a pressing problem.”³⁸³ In an important article that appeared in the *ZphF* in 1950, Heinemann took stock of “What was Living and What was Dead in *Existenzphilosophie*.”³⁸⁴ Heinemann felt that existentialism in both its French and German varieties represented “one of the essential forms of western European

³⁸² Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Die Neue Geborgenheit: das Problem einer Überwindung des Existentialismus* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1955), 12-13.

³⁸³ Fritz Heinemann, “Philosophy in Germany,” *Philosophy* 24, no. 90 (July 1949): 261.

³⁸⁴ Fritz Heinemann, “Was ist lebendig und was ist tot in der Existenzphilosophie,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 5, no. 1 (1950): 3-24. The article’s title may have been a conscious allusion to Benedetto Croce’s *Ciò che è vivo e ciò che è morto della filosofia di Hegel* (Bari, 1907). As we will see below, many drew rough parallels between the (failed) attempts of existentialists like Heidegger to place Sein “before all *Seinenden*” as “*Nichts*” and Hegel’s notion of “absolute spirit” as the negation of the real.

philosophy in the age of the European collapse.”³⁸⁵ French existentialism had changed from an expression of intellectual resistance to an international fashion. Heinemann, who was driven from Germany in 1933 to France, the Netherlands, and finally to Oxford, placed the highest ethical demand on the existentialists, while still distancing himself from Sartre’s view of freedom as total engagement and singular responsibility; For Heinemann Sartre’s ethics of commitment during the war and liberation was “an honest and relevant description of this situation, but nevertheless only the reflex of the totalitarian attitude of the German conqueror in the mind of a man of the French resistance.”³⁸⁶ Sartre’s German counterparts—the philosophies of Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger—had proven themselves able to express only the emptiness and nihilism of the contemporary state; they ultimately presented no new ethics or logic on which to base a philosophical orientation. “In our situation,” Heinemann observed, “a touchstone for the success or failure of a philosophy is the overcoming or failure to overcome nihilism.”³⁸⁷ Yet this could no longer be done through a systematic philosophy, like that of Hegel. *Existenz* defied philosophical systems, logic, and ontology. However, existentialism remained a “living” concern for philosophy insofar as “it grew out of the traumatic convulsion of the existence of millions of European human beings.”³⁸⁸ For Heinemann the problems raised by the existentialists called upon

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 5.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 22.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 15.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 20.

philosophers and thinkers to pose different questions that were ultimately humanistic and required “not Existenzphilosophies but rather existentiell philosophers.”³⁸⁹

Bollnow’s overcoming of existentialism began with a clear disentanglement of the various strands of *Existenzphilosophie* that had developed in Germany and a further differentiation of the German focus on *Existenz* from the French notion of existence that Sartre and Camus developed along humanistic lines. Heidegger’s later philosophy, his “*neue Kehre*,” as Bollnow called it, presented a different problem for German philosophers than it had for Sartre and the existentialists in France, or, for that matter, those who still focused on Heidegger’s pre-War writings. Humanism in West Germany was for the most part an apolitical humanism based on a return to tradition and, as we have seen in the first chapter, a renewed contact with German idealism and the cosmopolitanism of the *Goethezeit*. It did not contain the Sartrean notion of *engagement*, certainly not in academic philosophy, but neither in the more widely diffused ideas of existentialism in the cultural pages of the literary journals and newspapers.

Most admitted that existentialism and the tendencies towards nihilism or anti-humanism evoked real concerns, fears and the predicament of postwar Europe. But for most of the serious academic philosophers of the 1950s, this was a problem to confront and to overcome. Most importantly, for Bollnow, there could not be any recourse to the old ethos of the *Jugendbewegung*. In his programmatic essay “Einfache Sittlichkeit”

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 24.

published in the first volume of *Die Sammlung*,³⁹⁰ Bollnow, after already pointing to the need to recover practical morals (*Sitten*) such as duty (*Pflicht*) and sympathy (*Mitleid*), turned in the conclusion to *Anständigkeit*, which can be translated as trustworthiness, decency or honesty, but Bollnow notes that he is trying also to capture the English idea of “fairness” and moderation. In this sense the *Anständigkeit* was the overarching characteristic of true *Sittlichkeit* and also the key to a new security or shelteredness (*Geborgenheit*). As opposed to fanatics and doctrinaire ideologues, who found their duty in the chauvinism of the struggle for power, *Anständigkeit* expressed the value of a solidarity between “everything human.” Bollnow wrote, “[i]n der Anständigkeit des Verhaltens liegt eine gewisse Duldsamkeit: sie ist zurückhaltend gegenüber den unbedingten Vorderungen eines bestimmten ethischen Systems. Mit einem Wort: der Begriff der Anständigkeit verkündet in gewissen einfachen Verhältnissen den Vorrang der einfachen Sittlichkeit gegenüber den Vorderungen des hohen Ethos.”³⁹¹ Bollnow was very clear to distinguish *Anständigkeit* from the idea of ‘authenticity’ and the search for the spiritual depth and the immediacy of experience as things of the past. The latter were the high ideals of the *Sturm und Drang* and the *Jugendbewegung* or, artistically, the expressionism before and after the First World War.³⁹² Bollnow identified with *Anständigkeit* what we have already encountered as the characteristics of the postwar

³⁹⁰ Otto Friedrich Bollnow, “Einfache Sittlichkeit,” in *Die Sammlung* 1, nos. 3, 4, 6 (1946): 153-161; 217-229; 334-338.

³⁹¹ Bollnow, “Einfache Sittlichkeit,” Part 3: 334-35.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 336.

German youth: a concreteness, a sober attitude, a lack of pathos, precisely the strengths needed to hold up against a situation of crises and loss of belief. Much in the same way he would later talk about an overcoming of existentialism, in this early essay Bollnow points to the overcoming of the crisis situation of values in desperate times. He concluded, “In solchen Zeiten, wo alle Wertungen schwankend geworden sind und der Mensch nicht mehr weiß, was recht und unrecht ist, bleibt die sauberer und schlichter Anständigkeit ein letzte, verlässliche Maßstab für sein Verhalten, und er weiß in der bestimmten Situation, was ihre Vorderung von ihm verlangt, auch wenn er es nicht in allgemeinen Formulierungen angeben kann.”³⁹³ Bollnow’s position was an influential critique and alternative vision to what was perceived as the danger of the extreme situation to which the different forms of existentialism and *Existenzphilosophie* consigned modern man. Whereas the existentialists emphasized *Angst* and the confrontation with nothingness or, in Heidegger’s case, the abandonment of man in favor of the primordial question of Being, Bollnow’s non-dogmatic turn to simple values such as patience, reserve, thankfulness, the home, and being at home in the world resonated with a general concern in the mid-1950s for comfort and security. “Shelter” and “housing” (*Behausung*) could be a powerful image in a time of the rebuilding and restoration of West German society.³⁹⁴

³⁹³ Ibid., 338.

³⁹⁴ Playing on Bollnow’s spacial concept of ‘housing,’ a contemporary reviewer in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* satirically jibed that it was “zweifelhaft, daß ein Haus die von Bollnow supponierten Funktionen erfüllen kann, wenn in ihm ein Fernsehgerät steht, wenn ein permanentes Rundfunkprogramm

However the quest for security seemed to confirm the clichéd picture of the 1950s as a restorative time, an era of crass materialism, opportunism, and cultural conformity. As Holz later argued Bollnow's "new security" and the virtues of "einfache Sittlichkeit" expressed and promoted the quietism and "resigned passivity" of a society that shunned rational social planning, repressed the past, and embraced a widespread pseudo-religious current of trust in the status quo:

In ihr wurde wurde der weltanschauliche Anschluß an die Konsolidierung der restaurativen Staatlichkeit der BRD gewonnen, das Krisenbewußtsein der ersten Nachkriegsjahre überdeckt. Die Konvergenz mit den politischen Parolen der Adenauer-Zeit ('Keine Experimente', 'Sicherheit', 'nationale Wiedergeburt und Größe') in der Erneuerung eines bürgerlichen Lebensgefühles der "machtgeschützten Innerlichkeit" ist mühelos festzustellen.³⁹⁵

Still, for Bollnow and for many of the leading philosophers of his generation, a signal that a general turn towards moderation and simplicity could bind philosophy and the humanities to greater cultural and social needs and thus give these disciplines a renewed relevance. The general need for a new shelteredness was a turn away from the dogmatism and fanaticism of the scientific and philosophical *Weltanschauungen* of the past. Bollnow wrote,

Es geht heute durch die Menschen ein ungeduldiges Drängen nach eine definitiven Festlegung in allen Fragen der letzten Überzeugungen. ...Man will auch hier Entscheidung um jeden Preis. Demgegenüber ist es aber der Geist echter Wissenschaftlichkeit, die Probleme in ihre ganzen

das Gespräch der Bewohner verstummen läßt" F. Schonauer, Rezension in FAZ (Aug. 27, 1955), cited in Harmut Längin, "Das Problem einer Überwindung des Existentialismus: Otto Friedrich Bollnows 'Neue Geborgenheit'," in *Widerspruch* 18, Restauration der Philosophie nach 1945 (1990): 93n6.

³⁹⁵ Holz, "Philosophie als bürgerliche Weltanschauung," 66-67; cf. Längin, 92-93.

Kompliziertheit zu erkennen und sich des Urteils solange zu enthalten, bis sie die nötigen Grundlagen für eine begründete Entscheidung gewonnen hat. ... Diese zurückhaltende Art der Wissenschaft ist in den vergangenen Jahren oft als Zeichen der Schwäche angegriffen worden. Und trotzdem liegt grade [sic] in diesem langen Atem und in dieser großen Geduld diejenige Überlegenheit die wissenschaftlichen Haltung, die wir heute erst langsam wiedergewinnen müssen.³⁹⁶

Bollnow here has fused the two concerns with which the philosophical profession was burdened in the immediate postwar period. Bollnow invoked this new modesty as the only practicable position for the philosopher towards the demands for decisive engagement with wider social concerns. More than an expression of the general “retaurative” character of this period, Bollnow’s somewhat bland philosophy of “Geborgenheit” also registered the professional concerns of philosophers to distinguish their humanistic mode of understanding and research from the methodological rigidity of the natural sciences. The “new security” applied to science and the university was a means to counteract the notion that Heidegger’s challenge to all previous metaphysics and Jaspers’ departure from academia could only be surpassed through equally radical “overcoming” of tradition. The seclusion and reserve of the professional philosopher or *Geisteswissenschaftler* would offer the example of a kind of understanding that, while relevant to human practical concerns, did not succumb to the popular demand of providing new *Weltanschauungen*.³⁹⁷ Through a confrontation with but also an understanding of philosophical and intellectual traditions, along with a new

³⁹⁶ Bollnow, *Neue Geborgenheit*, 46.

³⁹⁷ Cf. Gadamer, “On the Primordality of Science,” 20-21.

professionalism that emphasized moderation, humility, and collaboration, philosophy would offer a path which could bring young philosophical minds to self-confidence.

Renouncing the Radical Twenties and the Promise of a “Philosophy of Reconstruction”

In his closing remarks to the Congress of the AGPD at Stuttgart in 1954, Eduard Spranger registered a turn towards a renewed methodological and scientific basis for contemporary philosophy in response to a growing “Substanzverlust,” or “loss of substance.” Spranger admitted that “if one wanted to find a general trend in contemporary philosophy—or only a strongly presiding main trajectory of interest—the they would find themselves disappointed.”³⁹⁸ Nevertheless, in the absence of a dominating school, or system of philosophy, the printed essays from the Stuttgart Congress in large part represented a departure from questions of the crisis of humanism, or the challenge to the practical orientation of human subjectivity given expression in the various “Existenzialismen.” These were the residuum of the “Kulturkrise” of the interwar period and a continued challenge to the traditional beliefs and certainties of German idealist philosophy, among them the unity of the subject, of philosophy, and the ability of either to produce “allgemeingiltige Urteile.”³⁹⁹ Spranger differentiated these “Philosophies of

³⁹⁸ Eduard Spranger, “Schlußwort zum Philosophen-Kongreß [Stuttgart 1954],” in *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 9 (1955): 410.

³⁹⁹ Spranger admits a “Sehnsucht” for Kant’s famous question “Wie sind allgemeingiltige Urteile möglich,” though with the caveat that he leaves out the “*a priori*” (ibid., 410). He thus announces his two-fold contention that philosophy can still find a basis in universally accepted method and provide meaning and orientation for practical human affairs in general.

Catastrophe” of the first half of the twentieth century with the forms of “Restoration Philosophy” that were available to the contemporary, postwar profession. Rather than a pure “*Restaurationsphilosophie*,” which he identifies with the introduction of theodicy into philosophy after 1815, Spranger advocated what he termed a “philosophy of reconstruction”—“*eine Wiederaufbauphilosophie*”:

Bei ihr handelt es sich nicht um bloße Wiederherstellung des Alten, sondern um einen Neubau über den Trümmern. . . . Eine solche philosophie würde sich vielleicht nicht mehr, wie bei Hegel, zu einem geschlossenen System verdichten können. Aber alle wesentlichen Faktoren müßten doch wenigstens vorkommen, als schwere Spannungen diagnostisch festgestellt werden.⁴⁰⁰

Spranger also expressed his concern for the philosophical youth. Addressing himself to the younger academics at the conference, Spranger insisted that philosophers need not only be determined by the modern existential predicament but that philosophy also possessed a potentially “formative reciprocal effect on cultural life.”⁴⁰¹ Here Spranger’s earlier emphasis on the *Jugendbewegung* as a role-model for the cultural and intellectual “armament” (*Rüstung*) of a vulnerable, but assiduous postwar intellectual youth had shifted to the profession.⁴⁰² Now, the needs of intellectual ‘reconstruction’ mandated a belief, especially on the part of the philosophical youth, in the wider cultural relevance of professional philosophy. Freed from the pretense of combining philosophy and science

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 415.

⁴⁰¹ In closing, Spranger, honorary president of the Congress, expressed the promise embodied in the work of the younger philosophers for his aging generation: “Es war für uns Alte deshalb tröstlich, bei dieser Zusammenkunft so viele junge Philosophen sehen zu dürfen, auf deren Werk wir hoffen und für deren Weg wir alles Förderliche wünschen” (ibid., 416).

⁴⁰² Spranger, “Gibt es heute in Westdeutschland eine Jugendideologie?” in *Kulturfragen der Gegenwart*, 85.

into a closed philosophical system like that of Hegel, young philosophers could negotiate present cultural concerns about professional relevance by recourse to a living tradition without at the same time being burdened with the task of fulfilling the ‘systematic’ goals of that tradition, or, it seems, without trying to emulate the cultural avant-gardism of the *Jugendbewegung*. As Iring Fetscher noted, while a figure like Spranger certainly represented the classical German ideals of *Bildung* and *Geist* for the younger generation, he embodied a tradition “not in antiquarian conservation, but rather in a living realization [in lebendiger Vergegenwärtigung],” which made reconciliation with the German intellectual past possible.⁴⁰³ Yet Fetscher’s glowing praise for his teacher notwithstanding, it is unlikely that Spranger’s written work would convey this living, dynamic relation to the past, even the recent political past, that was present in his seminars at Tübingen.

However well-meaning Spranger’s efforts were to actualize traditional intellectual ideals in contemporary philosophical practice, it is important to recognize that a ‘*Wiederaufbauphilosophie*,’ could easily be interpreted as part of the reconstruction of the ‘unpolitical’ bourgeois cultural models that predated the “crisis years” of the first half of the twentieth century. We have tried to show that the sensibilities of the intellectual youth—of the so-called “skeptical generation”—did not in fact signal only the silent acceptance of or indifference to the politics of the occupational powers and later of the newly formed Bundesrepublik. This is the ‘restoration hypothesis’ used as short-hand to

⁴⁰³ Fetscher, “Die Nachkriegsgeneration und der geistige Weg der Deutschen,” 583.

represent the culture and politics of the Adenauer era. However, the notion of a politically indifferent youth befitting the “leveled-out” (*nivellierende*) middle-class consumer culture of the 1950s is based more on the expectations of future political generations as well as on the ideological goals of certain conservative thinkers at the time.⁴⁰⁴ While prominent, aged professors of the late 1940s spoke of instilling democratic values in the young through student self-government and *studium generale*, the antiquated humanistic-corporatist vision of the university and its values of seclusion (*Einsamkeit*) and freedom from political intrusion can only be viewed as an abdication of responsibility for the prevailing ideologies of the past and present. It was the self-denying politics of the ‘unpolitical’ university elite, who, as professional civil servants, were mainly concerned with preserving their own privileges. What is more, by recalling the political intrigues and compromises of the Hitler only in the most general of terms, academics provided a kind of abstract, moral justification for their political indifference. The lesson embedded in the scholastic habitus was the pusillanimous imperative that philosophers refrain from asking social and political questions. That their very indifference to politics could have been the decisive *political* choice of professional security over independent public resistance may have been the real betrayal of their vocation during the 1930s and 1940s

⁴⁰⁴ Here Helmut Schelsky, Arnold Gehlen, and Hans Freyer come to mind, though naturally each of these thinkers would never admit to having an ideological agenda, living as they often claimed in the age of the “end of ideology.”

never entered into the discussion. Falling in line with the ideology of restoration⁴⁰⁵—the supposed “exhaustion of ideologies”—was, in any event, the obvious choice for a group that had a vested interest in maintaining the existing social hierarchy.

Philosophy: Good for Nothing?

Theodor Adorno expressed similar concerns and questioned the philosopher’s function under the twin pressures of intellectual currency in mass culture and instrumental relevance for the expanding bureaucratic state of the 1950s. Adorno’s views brought him very close to those expressed by Alois Dempf and the Christian socialists of the *Frankfurter Hefte*, with whom Adorno had closely debated in the 1950s.⁴⁰⁶

Wozu noch Philosophie?—the question framed by Theodor Adorno in a lecture and radio address from 1962 came at a time when many claimed that academic philosophy had lost its practical significance. Rather than a simple rhetorical strategy to restore and reassert philosophy’s relevance and the philosopher’s livelihood, “Why Philosophy Still?” was unique as a critique and affirmation of philosophy’s limited function. It was a response precisely to the longing for a philosophy that could provide

⁴⁰⁵ Here we use “ideology” in Marx’s sense of a false appraisal of social conditions that derives its seductive power precisely from a convenient intellectual dissonance with reality.

⁴⁰⁶ Interestingly, in a debate held at the University of Münster with the editors of the *Frankfurter Hefte*, Eugen Kogon and Walter Dirks, Adorno located primary guilt for the instrumentalization of reason not with revealed religion, but with philosophy, suggesting, “daß die Philosophie heute womöglich eine noch größere Schuld daran trägt als positive Religion. Und ich bin allerdings der Ansicht, daß der Name von Herrn Heidegger an dieser Stelle sehr nachdrücklich genannt werden sollte als seines der Hauptschuldigen.” Theodor Adorno and Eugen Kogon, “Offenbarung oder Autonome Vernunft,” *Frankfurter Hefte* 13, no. 7 (July 1958): 497.

ideological orientation, or practical, instrumental relevance. Adorno characteristically reached back to the period that had ended with Hegel in which, he believed, thinking still had enjoyed the independence of not having to produce positive ‘results.’ This spirit of the dialectic lived on as the immanent critique of philosophy and was, for Adorno, the only feasible alternative to the disastrous twin paths that philosophical ontology had taken since Hegel: positivism and Heideggerian ‘archaism.’

In this argument, however, Adorno seems to have already grasped the irony in the “ideology” of the two prevailing philosophies that challenged metaphysics. The “positivist” ontology posed its challenge by holding the logic of a contingent social configuration as a universal standard for any truth claims; whereas those taken in by Heidegger’s “mythology of Being” simply claimed that there was a “thinking” more fundamental than the tradition of modern philosophy, which they equated with the history of metaphysics. Unlike the positivists, whose critical reduction of philosophy to a specialized science of epistemology offered the promise of greater clarity, the new history of the “forgetting of Being” offered by the Heideggerians was a retreat into obscurity—a *lament* for the end of *philosophia perennis* perhaps, but one which also conferred upon the one who espoused it profundity by creating the expectation that this “thinking” would disclose what is more original. For Adorno and others much closer to the *Existenz* movement in German philosophy, this signaled a move from the great questions of metaphysics and from the critical engagement with the history of philosophy into obscurity. Positivism, or ‘scientism’ and Heidegger’s brand of existentialism had

brought the question of philosophy's continued relevance to the fore. Here we might recall the observations of Schelsky and of Gehlen that philosophy had lost touch with reality both broadly in professional society as well as in the universities of the 1950s, where instrumental knowledge and the bureaucratic certifications necessary for professional life were at a premium for a generation of sober, practically directed youth. In this context Adorno's modest claims for philosophy could seem slightly obtuse. He declared,

Only a thinking that has no mental sanctuary, no illusion of an inner realm, and that acknowledges its lack of function and power can perhaps catch a glimpse of an order of the possible and the nonexistent, where human beings and things each would be in their rightful place. Because philosophy is good for nothing, it is not yet obsolete; philosophy should not even invoke this point, lest it blindly repeat its wrong: self-justification by self-positing.⁴⁰⁷

Adorno elided the possibility that philosophy (or philosophers) could account for its own function and purpose. However, he attempted this without endorsing a detached academic philosophy, or the "*Innerlichkeit*" and retreat into pure contemplation for which so many later commentators criticized the philosophers of the immediate postwar years.⁴⁰⁸ As early as the first book of *Minima Moralia* written in 1944, Adorno lamented the lack of a

⁴⁰⁷ Theodor Adorno, "Why Philosophy Still?" in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 15. "Nur Denken, das ohne Mentalreservat, ohne Illusion des inneren Königtums seine Funktionslosigkeit und Ohnmacht sich eingesteht, erhascht vielleicht einen Blick in eine Ordnung des Möglichen, Nichtseienden, wo die Menschen und Dinge an ihrem rechten Ort wären. Weil Philosophie zu nichts gut ist, ist sie noch nicht verjährt; selbst darauf dürfte sie nicht sich berufen, wenn sie nicht ihre Schuld, die Selbstsetzung, verblendet wiederholen will." Adorno, "Wozu noch Philosophie?" in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10-2. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II. Eingriffe – Stichworte – Anhang (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 471.

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. Theodor Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit: zur deutschen Ideologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1964).

third way between the thought “inside and out”—between the “piety, indolence and calculation” (*Pietät, Schlamperei und Berechnung*) that determines the academic field of “salaried profundity” (*beamteten Tiefsinn*) and extra-academic thinking that was given over to the economic pressure of the market. Whereas the latter obliged the independent writer “at each moment to have something choice, ultra-select to offer, and to counter the monopoly of office with that of rarity,” the path of academic thinking led to ever increasing organization and a narrowing of thought.⁴⁰⁹ In Heidegger’s case, it was clear to Adorno that the drive towards radicalizing the thinking of established schools of philosophy from within the academy—albeit as a self-styled eccentric outsider—only led to the opportunistic embrace of a specious political ideology. On the other hand, ostensibly independent thought suffered from the demand for cultural currency; lacking the “critical element” of true thinking, the outsider to the academic field was compelled to produce the *au courant*. Adorno expressed the paradox,

In an intellectual hierarchy which constantly makes everyone answerable, unanswerability alone can call the hierarchy directly by name. The circulation sphere, whose stigmata are borne by intellectual outsiders, opens a last refuge to the mind that it barter away, at the very moment when refuge no longer exists. He who offers for sale something unique that no-one wants to buy, represents, even against his will, freedom from exchange.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁹ Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. by E. F. N. Jephcott (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 66; §41.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 68. “In einer geistigen Hierarchie, die unablässig alle zur Verantwortung zieht, ist Unverantwortlichkeit allein fähig, die Hierarchie unmittelbar selber beim Namen zu rufen. Die Zirkulationssphäre, deren Male die intellektuellen Außenseiter tragen, eröffnet dem Geist, den sie verschachert, die letzten Refugien in dem Augenblick, in dem es sie eigentlich schon gar nicht mehr gibt. Wer ein Unikum anbietet, das niemand mehr kaufen will, vertritt, selbst gegen seinen Willen, die Freiheit vom Tausch” (*Gesamelte Schriften*, vol. 4:74).

Although Adorno's notion of "*Unverantwortlichkeit*," or "unanswerability" and the freedom from the demand to produce results certainly resonated among many of the more mainstream academic philosophers in the mid to late 1950s, they understood this not in Adorno's sense of a freedom to critique political or cultural hierarchies from a critical distance; rather, their interest lay in preserving their elite status in the university and, to some extent, in broader cultural life. This was the implicit motive behind the common refrain during the late 1940s and early 1950s for a renewed cultural humanism and for the return to the *Bildungsideale* of the early nineteenth century under which philosophy still enjoyed preeminence among the sciences. For many professional philosophers, these gestures towards "untarnished" traditions became more subtle by the mid 1950s. The initial flush of nostalgia that accompanied the intellectual discourse of restoration in the late 1940s and 1950s, as exemplified by the "*Goethe-Anneigung*" that had accompanied the Jubilee celebrations around 1947, gave way to calls for a critical reevaluation of the German intellectual tradition and the present demands of a discipline in need of new professional credentials.⁴¹¹

The Call for 'Intellectual Leadership' and a 'Scientific Attitude'

Fritz Heinemann raised the issue of the philosopher's loss of function in a lecture, provocatively titled "Philosophie und Geistige Führerschaft," which was given at the second congress held under the auspices of the AGPD to which he was invited as an

⁴¹¹ Jaspers, *Unsere Zukunft und Goethe*.

international guest in 1954.⁴¹² The Oxford professor complained that contemporary philosophers had given up the constructive task of the collaborative search for value and meaning. Instead, both the Existenzphilosophers and the positivists denied the possibility of this task in their common critique of metaphysics:

Es ist ein Charakteristikum unserer Zeit, daß viele Philosophen gegen die Philosophie sprechen, sei es gegen die Metaphysik, gegen die Philosophie als ein eigenständiges Wissensgebiet, gegen die Möglichkeit von philosophischen Sätzen, die sich nicht auf wissenschaftliche Aussagen reduzieren ließen, oder gegen die Logik, gegen die Werte und gegen die Ethik. Dabei betrachten sie dieses Gerede als ein höchst originelles und verdienstvolles Unterfragen, das an die Stelle des Philosophierens treten sollte. Teils werden sie in diesen Angriffen zu poetisierenden Romantikern, teils zu bloßen Technikern der Sprache oder der Logik, denen das Philosophieren zu einem Spiel mit bestimmten Spielregeln wird. Sie glauben an nichts mehr und halten diesen ihren Unglauben für einen entscheidenden Fortschritt. Ohne Glauben aber kann man kein geistiger Führer sein. Geistig führen heißt Glauben und Vertrauen einflößen.⁴¹³

In opposition to this, Heinemann argued, “Die Philosophen sollten keine Sinnzerstörer, sondern Sinngeber sein; dann die spezifische Aufgabe des Philosophen ist die Sinndeutung des Ganzen unserer Erfahrung im Gegensatz zu den Einzelwissenschaftler, die sich wohlweislich auf die Analyse und Durchforschung von Einzelbereichen beschränken.”⁴¹⁴ The idea of an intellectual leader, “*geistige Führer*,” for Heinemann, was certainly not a call for the scientist or philosopher to become the political prophet,

⁴¹² Fritz Heinemann, “Philosophie und geistige Führerschaft,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 9, no. 2 (1955): 390-401.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 391.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 397.

against which Max Weber had warned in 1918.⁴¹⁵ Rather, the task of the philosopher as intellectual leader was thinking in order to encourage self-thinking: “Der Philosoph soll zum denken, d.h. zum selbst denken erziehen.”⁴¹⁶ The current problem with the teaching of philosophy in Germany was not, as Heidegger claimed, that it did not yet think; rather, that the philosophers were “no longer *thinking*” in a constructive sense—i.e., with a belief in philosophy’s ability to guide knowledge and belief through wisdom.⁴¹⁷

Against Heidegger’s nebulous, passive formulations of thinking, and the purely materialist thinking of the positivists, philosophers had to regain a belief in the inner worth of man. In response to the narrow view of positivism, Heinemann directed the philosopher to the “primacy of the values of persons before those of material ends [den Primat der Personenwerte vor den Sachwerten].”⁴¹⁸ He harkened back to the Kantian notion of the “kingdom of ends,” or “*Das Reich der Zwecke*.” The universal imperative that every human being be treated as ends in themselves also prescribed the duty of philosophy teacher to the student. “Der Philosoph,” argued Heinemann, “soll kein Hirte des Seins sein; das Sein ist fähig, sich selbst zu hüten. Er soll kein Seher sein, aber er soll sehen lehren. Er soll das geistige Auge und das innere Ohr seiner Schüler öffnen.”⁴¹⁹ This belief led Heinemann to identify “spiritual leadership” in philosophy with the

⁴¹⁵ Max Weber, “Wissenschaft als Beruf,” originally published in Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922), 524-55.

⁴¹⁶ Heinemann, “Philosophie und geistige Führerschaft,” 395.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 400.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 393.

traditional precepts of humanistic education. Thus teachers of philosophy were to guide their students according to a moral imperative in which the end of education (*Bildung*) could not be reduced to any partial, or merely instrumental transmission of knowledge. Particularly in “times of crisis,” the teacher had the “task to give the work and life of his students direction.”⁴²⁰ The potential of teachers and students to think in common was lost in both Heidegger’s passively construed notion of teaching as “letting learn” and in the purely instrumental instruction of experts in the positive sciences. In a powerful charge directed both at existentialists like Heidegger as well as the positivists, Heinemann stated, “Wer nicht mehr an Philosophie glaubt, sollte aufhören, Philosophie zu lehren.”⁴²¹

In the course of the Stuttgart congress, other thinkers came forward in defense of the practical, scientific relevance of philosophy against the charge of irrationalism provoked by the *Existenzphilosophie* of the day. The Jena philosopher, Paul Linke, presented an important programmatic paper on the “Unentbehrlichkeit der wissenschaftlichen Haltung in der Philosophie,” [the indispensability of the scientific attitude in philosophy] in which he pointed to Heidegger’s much-imitated imprecise and poetic use of language as a cause of philosophy’s loss of credibility as a science.⁴²² “Schreibe kontrollierbar!” was the dictum with which Linke introduced his concluding remarks. It was imperative not only for the general scientific demeanor of philosophy but

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 392.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 401.

⁴²² Paul F. Linke, “Die Unentbehrlichkeit der wissenschaftlichen Haltung in der Philosophie,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 9, no. 2 (1955): 209-218.

also a necessity for communication between philosophers and non-philosophers in other fields. He continued,

Schreibe so, daß du von jedem sachkundigem Leser nicht bloß kontrolliert werden kannst, sondern auch kontrolliert werden *willst* und daß man dir dies anmerkt. Schreibe so, daß man dir anmerkt, daß du deinem Gegner nicht als Feind ansiehst sondern als Mitarbeiter, dessen du bedarfst, um kontrolliert zu werden. Nur so ist *Wissenschaft*, nur so auch wissenschaftliche *Philosophie* möglich.⁴²³

The obscurity of their language and the unscientific character of their ideas, exemplified by the case of Heidegger, were the main liabilities existentialist thinking presented for professional philosophers. Linke echoed Spranger and Heinemann's comments about Heidegger and the existentialists' influence on the youth at a time when reconstruction and reorientation needed sound leadership and scholarly clarity. The fear underlying the Stuttgart Congress was that the "fascinating effect" of Heidegger's language would tempt the youth away from the 'correct' scholarly path, or, as Linke put it, that "[d]er Anfänger steht hilflos vor den Ausführungen des Irrationalisten."⁴²⁴ This was, one could argue, a powerful moralizing element in philosopher's struggle to secure recognition of the continued relevance of their profession as a necessary component in the curriculum of modern higher education. The belief that at stake was the competency and reliability of the philosophical youth as the future representatives of their discipline intensified the established philosophers' engagement in the debates about *Hochschulreform* of the mid to late 1950s. However, as we shall see, many of the old Mandarin breed were reluctant

⁴²³ Ibid., 217.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

to sully themselves in the politics and administrative affairs of the new ‘mass’ universities.

The Philosophers’ Struggle to Retain Autonomy within the University

The ideals of the mid to late 1940s about the centrality of philosophical and humanistic education to democratic reconstruction persisted through the 1950s. At the same time, these concerns for reform ran up against a profession in search of scientific status and thereby, the preservation of its autonomy over against the *Einzelwissenschaften*. A reverse polarity existed between the “salaried profundity” of the academy and the standards of “currency” or relevance in the cultural and political field. Within the university, gestures toward the broader cultural importance of philosophy for democratic re-education and practical orientation beyond the university were overshadowed by the concerns of the professors of philosophy within the academy for their own elite status. The most significant register of this tension was the growing concern of philosophers for the stake of their discipline in the continuous debates about *Hochschulreform* during the 1950s; however, even in this public debate, the professors tended to downplay the political and social implications of the university reforms and no longer wished to see universities become the sites of political reeducation. As Georg Picht observed,

Die Universitäten, einst Mittelpunkt der politischen Erneuerung, zogen sich mehr und mehr in den Raum der ‘reinen’ Forschung und Lehre zurück, der ihnen von der Kulturverwaltung zugewiesen wurde; die Wahrheit, der sie dienten, verlor die

Kraft, sie zur Verantwortung für das geistige Schicksal von Volk und Staat aufzurufen. Der Gebildete wird zum “Unpolitischen”, und entsprechend entartete die Politik in einem Bildungszerfall, der noch heute andauert und keine Grenzen zu kennen scheint.⁴²⁵

Certainly, after the political compromises of the 1930s, many university philosophers were reluctant to look towards the political realm for advancement. More than this, however, the persistent problems of *Hochschulreform* were a political minefield in the university which the *Ordinarien* nonetheless had to traverse if they wished to preserve their autonomy and dominance. The Mandarin professors were faced with the questions of student self-government and the increased role of graduate students, younger *Dozenten*, and assistants in determining curriculum and teaching because of the exponential growth in the number of matriculating students by the mid 1950s. The ideas of student involvement in university politics had moved beyond the localized experiments with *studium generale* to the level of state (*Land*) and national policy. Professors now had to either swallow their pride and take on a more active role in the bureaucratic tasks of university administration, or risk isolation and a loss of control over curriculum, examination policy, and the division of labor. But breaking out of the realm of ‘pure’ research as Picht advocated ran counter to the Mandarin habitus.

To be sure, leading philosophers attempted to reassert their professional standing by emphasizing the scientific character of their discipline and, paradoxically, by modeling new forms of collective research—journals, conferences, and professional

⁴²⁵ Georg Picht, “Universität und Schule,” in *Frankfurter Hefte* 7, no. 1 (Jan. 1952): 18.

associations—after the example of what they sometimes considered the ‘lesser sciences.’⁴²⁶ Learned societies like the AGPD attempted to regulate teaching and examination policies by means of the “engere Kreis.” However, these efforts to retain control over the standards of the discipline often fell short of effecting actual policy, often because the pace of changes in the university and rising student enrollments outran the philosophers’ ability and willingness to accommodate them.

A poignant example of the difficulties facing both philosophers and those in the *Geisteswissenschaften* more generally in the course of *Hochschulreform* was the debate about the threat posed by the increase in the number of assistants at the West German *Hochschulen*. As part of a study headed by Helmuth Plessner at the University of Göttingen in the mid 1950s, Dietrich Goldschmidt reported that “[d]as Aufkommen der Assistenten ist nur der personelle Ausdruck für die wachsende Differenzierung und Aufwendigkeit moderner Forschung und Lehre, die – ganz im Gegensatz zur Universität nach den Ideen Humboldts und seines Kreises – einer situierten Helferschicht nicht entraten können.”⁴²⁷ There was also a palpable sense of fear for the radicalizing potential of this new surplus of educated men and women with little hope of advancement within an overextended university structure.

⁴²⁶ German philosophers will often evoke the narrowness and diminutive stature of specialized sciences by labeling them with terms such as “Einzelwissenschaften” and “Fachwissenschaften.” There are no suitable English equivalents. The first is meant to signify their isolated or “singular” applicability and, the second, their focus on specialized knowledge needed to train ‘experts’ (*Fachmänner/Gutachter*).

⁴²⁷ Dietrich Goldschmidt, “Die gegenwärtige Problematik (1956),” in Helmuth Plessner, ed., *Nachwuchsfragen im Spiegel einer Erhebung, 1953-1956, Untersuchungen zur Lage der deutschen Hochschullehrer*, vol. I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 41.

The rise in assistants that could not move forward to habilitation and professorships also symbolized the decline of the ideals of the humanistic *Ordinarienuniversität*, which united teacher and researcher in one person, the *Ordinarius*, the full professor. By the mid-1950s, the *Hochschulen* were forced to produce more assistants in response to the rise in student enrollments. At the same, the number of *Ordinarien* positions remained relatively steady such that there was left a ‘mass’ of unhabilitated assistants with little chance of moving into professorships. While assistants oftentimes were taking on the tasks of instructors, the professors’ time was increasingly taken up by administrative duties, which left less time for research and teaching. As Dietrich Goldschmidt argued, “[d]er Ordinarius mag selbst noch Lehrer und Forscher sein, mehr und mehr muß er nunmehr auch verwaltender und planender Direktor oder ‘Manager’ seines ‘Betriebes’ sein.”⁴²⁸

Also, the ‘*Privatdozent*,’ who traditionally devoted their ‘*Wanderjahre*’ to free research supported by occasional teaching activities—viz., by the *Hörgeld* given out for public lectures, was a thing of the past; the designation still existed but in name alone. In greater number were the *wissenschaftliche Assistenten* who were the byproduct of the new division of labor and delegation of teaching duties in the modern, mass university. The *Assistenten* came to represent the increasing degree of specialization and the purpose-oriented (*zweckmäßig*) outlook of the contemporary students. The institutional attitude embodied in the assistants appeared even more threatening as their numbers

⁴²⁸ Goldschmidt, 42.

increased in gross disproportion to the number of *Ordinarien*, who were supposed to be their mentors. Embittered as their chances for a secure academic career thinned, the assistants were employed in the universities' administrative substructure. Along with these frustrations came generational conflict. Although there had always been some degree of tension between the professors and their impatient, aging assistants, Goldschmidt observed, “[d]aß heute in dieser Mischung die Kritik überwiegt, ist nicht nur ein Ausdruck einer allgemein geringer geworden Autoritätsgläubigkeit, sondern das Ergebnis der Prägung durch einschneidende geschichtliche Erfahrung, welche die Generationen ungleich schärfer voneinander trennen, als das bis 1914 der Fall war.” The losses of the war and the resulting delay in their studies as well as the material dearth of the postwar years had taken their toll on those 30-40-year old assistants of the mid 1950s, a youth that one encountered “not in rebellion, but in conformity [Anpassung] and at most – and indeed considerably among those over forty years old – in resignation.”⁴²⁹

Philosophy and the *Geisteswissenschaften* were affected most acutely by this dynamic. Doctoral candidates and Ph.D. assistants were not being ‘trained’ for a profession external to the discipline; for philosophy did not offer the serviceable expertise of the *Einzelwissenschaften*. While the rest of the “skeptical generation” could move through from *Staatsexamen*, or *Diplom* to “free professions” (*Freiberufe*) or the secure prestige of civil service, the scholarly assistants and “Dr. Dozenten” in philosophy found themselves without the competency, in terms of specialized training, for a job outside a

⁴²⁹ Goldschmidt, 46.

shrinking discipline. Odo Marquard (b.1928) provides a vivid recollection of how as a young philosophy student at Freiburg and Münster during the late 1940s and early 1950s, he took on the ‘skepticism’ of the younger generation, but certainly was not given the chance to prove an “unusual competency for life” and “surety of success” that Schelsky later lauded.⁴³⁰ “For as a rule,” Marquard admits dramatically, “the choice of philosophy as a field of study meant, then as it does now, not the beginning of a successful career, but the beginning of a personal tragedy.”⁴³¹ In his report on the status of the *Geisteswissenschaften* in Plessner’s volume, Christian Graf von Krockow summarized the modern dilemma facing philosophers, observing how

Alle anderen Diziplinen können jedenfalls festumrisse Bereiche nachweisen, denen sie forschungsmäßig zugewandt sind; für Philosophie jedoch läßt sich ein solcher Bezirk nicht verbindlich angeben, ja es läßt sich heute nicht einmal allgemeinverbindlich sagen, in welchem Sinn Philosophie überhaupt ‘Wissenschaft’ ist oder sein soll bzw. in welchen Verhältnis sie zu den Einzelwissenschaften steht.⁴³²

The reluctance with which philosophers adjusted the practices of their discipline to the needs of the other, specialized sciences had practical consequences, which were not always taken into account because of the persistence of the ideal of the unity of teaching

⁴³⁰ Schelsky, *Die Skeptische Generation*, 488.

⁴³¹ Odo Marquard, “Farwell to Matters of Principal,” in *Farewell to Matters of Principal: Philosophical Essays*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 5. Of course, Marquard’s trajectory ended in a successful career by the mid 1960s, and this was not uncommon for philosophers of his age. Marquard promoted in Freiburg under Max Müller in 1954 and served as Joachim Ritter’s *wissenschaftlicher Assistant* until his habilitation in 1963, after which he took up a professorship in Gießen in 1965. However, almost ten years as an assistant was clearly an indication of the great difficulty for philosophy Ph.D.s in the 1950s to achieve habilitation and appointment as professor.

⁴³² Christian Graf von Krockow, “Geisteswissenschaften (Erforschungsbericht),” in Plessner, ed., *Nachwuchsfragen*, 173.

and research, embodied in the model of the *Ordinarius*. The first consequence was the languishing of the assistants and *Dozenten*. Moreover, the inability to place one's students into university chairs, or, in some cases, even to have them habilitate was an indication of the institutional isolation suffered by many professors of philosophy as well as a constant reminder of the loss of prestige and esteem for their discipline among university administrators. Ironically, it was the philosophers' jealous separation of their research from the practices of the *Einzelwissenschaften* as well as their understandable dislike for administrative tasks that contributed to the decline of their institutional influence.

Jürgen Habermas, then assistant to Adorno in Frankfurt, observed how the antiquated belief of philosophers and *Geisteswissenschaftler* in a "*universitas litterarum*" in which the sciences were united under philosophy was belied by the necessities of modern industrial society for "functional competence." There was an "archaic moment" in continued influence of the ideal of the independence of research and teaching on the structure of the university. "Freiheit ist etwas Altmodisches," Habermas declared, "und wenn sich akademische Freiheit im liberalen Wortlauf auf ihre verbürgten Rechte beruft und sich sperrt gegen die Verwaltung dessen, was im Kern nicht verwaltet werden kann, dann bieten sich als wirksame institutionelle Instrumente kaum andere als die unzeitgemäßen Reste korporative Privilegien"⁴³³ From this point of view, the tension caused by the increase in assistants to meet the strain on the body of university teachers

⁴³³ Jürgen Habermas, "Das chronische Leiden der Hochschulreform," *Merkur* 109, no.3 (March 1957): 270.

was a result of a traditional structure that could not be adjusted to the exponential rise in student enrollment. Nor were the initial reforms based on “*studium generale*” enough to prevent the needs of modern industrial society for functionally necessary (*funktionsnotwendig*) disciplines—the natural and new social sciences—from rendering humanistic education centered on the *Geisteswissenschaften* and philosophy obsolete. Habermas observed how “[j]ener Kern der philosophische Fakultät, der zu Humboldts Zeit noch der Kern der ganzen Universität war, ist heute an die Peripherie gerückt.”⁴³⁴ A forstalling of university reform based on *studium generale* was, for Habermas, the result of a reluctance on the part of the specialized sciences to reflect on their own principles. More significant, however, was the failure and unwillingness of philosophers and *Geisteswissenschaftler* to critically address the question of their relationship to a society in which social mobility and diversification necessarily meant the training of a ‘mass’ of new specialists.⁴³⁵

The *Geisteswissenschaften* and philosophy in particular no longer seemed to possess the competence to serve the specialized disciplines as critical self-reflection. According to Habermas, this was an outcome of the stubborn refusal of many in philosophy and the human sciences to support university reforms that would have genuinely addressed the need for self-criticism among all the sciences rather than an uncritical reassertion of the traditional *universitas litterarum* and a misguided division of

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 275.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 282.

general education from specialized training. Lost too were the ideals that initially had guided the “reformist elan” in the late 1940s, which had placed equal importance on the development of socially conscious education and participatory, semi-democratic student self-government. Instead, the philosophers and humanists retreated into the domain of inwardness and solitude, and they upheld the antiquated view of *Bildung* as cultivation of an ideal bourgeois “*Persönlichkeit*.”⁴³⁶ At the same time, the specialized sciences rigidly adhered to method and instrumental goals as false guarantors of ‘value-free’ research and training. Thus, Habermas argued, “Die Versachlichung des vermittelten Wissens und die Verfälschung der darauf sich stützenden Ausbildung hat zur Folge, daß die Einheit von Forschung und lehre nur noch fiktiv aufrechterhalten werden kann.”⁴³⁷ Yet the ‘freedom’ to determine the direction of their disciplines independent from philosophy that the *Einzelwissenschaften* had enjoyed since the mid nineteenth century—viz. after the positivist model of the *Naturwissenschaften* became dominant following the fragmentation of Hegel’s system—did not release them from the necessity of communicating across disciplines. Furthermore, the relation of the multitude of independent disciplines could and should no longer be modeled on the dominance of one domain of reflection, a philosophy that had depended on the exclusivity and ‘seclusion’ of the humanist university, populated by an elite of the bourgeois class. Rather, Habermas concluded:

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 277.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 276.

Das Privileg der ‘*Grundlagenforschung*’ hat nun eine jede Wissenschaft für sich selbst, und, über sich selbst hinaus, für den Bereich der benachbarten Wissenschaften auszuüben. Und wo es die Philosophie behält, wie im Falle der philologisch-historischen und der sozialwissenschaftlichen Disziplinen, da handhabt sie es nicht mehr wie früher in einsamer Autonomie, sondern im dialogischen Kontakt mit diesen Wissenschaften selbst.⁴³⁸

The new scientific comportment of philosophers did not fully preclude the antiquated view that the philosopher belonged to a “spiritual aristocracy” that stood above not only the specialists of the empirical sciences but also the day-to-day administrative duties of the modern, mass university. A continued “idealization of pure and impractical learning” combined with the conservative implications of the classical ideal of *Bildung* remained as a hangover from the period of Mandarin preeminence expertly examined by Fritz Ringer.⁴³⁹ The legacy of political collaboration with the Hitler dictatorship had indeed undermined the apolitical or “idealistic” approach to political and social questions that was a hallmark of mandarin academics at the apogee of their influence. However, the often unthematized “attitudes” of a spiritual “aristocracy of cultivation” persisted behind the new “scientific” veneer of professional philosophy after 1945.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 284.

⁴³⁹ Ringer, *Decline of the German Mandarins*, 123.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 120-121. Ringer finds the unifying element in mandarin ideology on the “pretheoretic level,” in the defensive language of idealistic politics that came to oppose “pragmatic compromises” with the realities of mass democracy. For our postwar narrative, it is extremely important to highlight the way group competition and the maintenance of exclusivity became the often unthematized concern of a professional elite in the context of the exponential growth of the university student body and the increasing prominence of the specialized disciplines.

Though philosophers often complained of the bureaucratization and the multiplication of administrative duties within the postwar universities, they continued to take practical, institutional steps to ensure the exclusivity of their discipline and the independence of its function vis-à-vis the other sciences. The “scientification” (*Verwissenschaftlichung*) of philosophy on the model of the empirical, natural and social sciences was a necessary concession, but it stopped well short of a willing subordination to and dependence on the methodological and epistemological needs of these *Einzelwissenschaften*. German philosophers and *Geisteswissenschaftler* more generally, would maintain the conviction that philosophical and humanistic scholarship was independent and above the specialized “training” of experts in instrumentally applicable knowledge. These two contradictory tendencies, towards professional seclusion in institutions on the one hand, and the continued resistance to diminution of status as a “*Fach unter Fächer*” in the service of the mass of professional students on the other, reduced to a minimum the relevance of the philosopher to a wider non-academic world. Yet this reality only served to confirm the widely held belief among philosophers that the “*vita contemplativa*,” even in an age dominated by the world view of the natural sciences, required exclusivity and a degree of alienation from the public realm. Gerhard Krüger expressed this necessity aptly:

Die Popularisierung der Wissenschaft wird zwar zu einem ständig empfundenen Bedürfnis, dem man immer wieder abzuhelpen sucht; aber sie ist ja gerade deshalb ein ständiges Bedürfnis, weil die modern Wissenschaft an sich selbst wesentlich

unpopulär ist. Wer die wissenschaftliche Wahrheit kennen lernen will, muß mit dem populären Denken des Alltags prinzipiell brechen.⁴⁴¹

Two Cultures? The Contest between Positive Science and the Humanities according to the Philosophers and Cultural Theorists

“Outsiders tend to see uniformity in other groups and fine distinctions in their own.” Stephan Collini made this seemingly obvious observation in his astute commentary on C. P. Snow’s Rede Lecture of 1959, “The Two Cultures.”⁴⁴² Collini drew attention to the tendency, touched on by Snow, of scientists and ‘literary intellectuals’ to make summary judgements about the myopia inherent in each other’s views on the modernization of society, technology, the nature of scientific inquiry, and their implications for human beings in general. However, even Snow, himself on the side of the natural scientists, averred the unbridgeable division between ‘the sciences’ and the ‘literary intellectuals’ in the humanities at a time when English scientists and intellectuals, and, more generally, intellectuals in all advanced industrial societies were coping with the vicissitudes of cultural and institutional change, particularly with regard to specialization and organization in the universities. Snow’s mostly anecdotal analysis seemed to fall on the side of the empirical scientists’ work. He naturally abhorred the narrow specialization and lack of cultural knowledge and intellectual skills—reading, writing, communication—embodied in the crassest form of experts and technocrats.

⁴⁴¹ Gerhard Krüger, *Grundfragen der Philosophie*, 183.

⁴⁴² Stephan Collini, “Introduction,” in C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), lv.

However, he seemed more concerned with the “Luddism” of the literati and the general disregard within the humanities for the ethical commitments of scientists, and how the industrious efforts of the latter were the only path to ameliorating the tension between rich and poor, First and Third World through industrial progress. Put in his terms, it was more important that the literary intellectuals gave up their antipathy towards the industrial revolution and learn what scientists do than for the scientists to read more Shakespeare, or Dickens.⁴⁴³

Snow’s ideas resonated with certain thinkers in West Germany, who had come to accept as fate the technologization and instrumentalization of modern science. In an important essay that appeared in *Merkur* in 1961, Hans Freyer invoked Snow’s notion of the necessity of the “scientific revolution” in the advanced stage of contemporary industrialization, which placed *Wissenschaft* and its institutions like the university at the disposal of the “great planning systems,” again, the “secondary systems” over whose anonymous strategies the individual human being had no control.⁴⁴⁴ Freyer used Snow’s viewpoint as a foil in his fatalistic diagnosis of the instrumentalization of the sciences and the decline and anachronism of the humanistic ideals of *Bildung* and the university; his statements, much like those of his pupils, Gehlen and Schelsky, had the effect of neutralizing the efficacy of any form of progressive social critique as naïve and utopian.

⁴⁴³ See, C. P. Snow, “The Two Cultures,” particularly, 22ff.; on the German reaction to Snow’s bias see, Hochkeppel, *Mythos Philosophie*, 59-60.

⁴⁴⁴ Hans Freyer, “Die Wissenschaften des 20. Jahrhunderts und die Idee des Humanismus,” *Merkur* 15, no. 2 (Feb. 1961): 102-105.

The antiquated view of humanists, the philosophers above all, about the “unity of the sciences” and philosophy as “die Krönung der Wissenschaft” was belied by the realities of specialization and the irreversible extent to which science (Wissenschaft) had become the exclusive domain of the specialists, the researchers, and technocrats.⁴⁴⁵ We see the affinity here between Gehlen’s notion of the “crystallization of the *Persönlichkeit*” and Schelsky’s claim about the “Realitätsverlust” of the cultural intellectuals. Freyer contended, “[w]ir können uns schließlich die Wissenschaft, die wir aus humanistischen Gründen gern haben möchten, nicht malen. Die geistige Welt des klassischen Humanismus, die ich als Gegenbild zeichnete, ist ein Wunschbild, aber derzeit eines Modus des Irrealis.”⁴⁴⁶

One detects a clear lament in the fatal diagnoses of these figures for the fall of the *Gelehrten-Kultur* and even the *Bildungsideale* of the humanistic university. However, none of these conservative ‘cultural sociologists’—it is difficult to designate Freyer, Gehlen, and Schelsky under a general discipline—can offer any constructive, positive moment in the dialectic between ‘objective’ social processes and the rational power of a community of intellectuals. Freyer and company denied the dialectical power of the negative that was being offered at the same time by Adorno, and especially Herbert Marcuse as a normative, critical moment in the philosopher, or intellectual’s confrontation with seeming objective cultural and social processes and hierarchy. For

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 113-14.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 114.

Marcuse in particular, the situation of modern man was still contingently based on a form of domination, whose logic *imposed* the reign of experts and caused the narrowing of personal desires to a point of “one-dimensionality.” Those needs that required liberation were ignored to such an extent that all which remained was “the consciousness of servitude.”⁴⁴⁷ But for Freyer, such an insight would amount to nothing more than “mere secondary overviews [Überblicke]” that neglected the extent to which individuals could no longer see past their own position in the crowd. Ideed, Schelsky, Gehlen, and Freyer all appropriate David Riesman’s notion of the “other-directed man” from *The Lonely Crowd*, published in German translation as *Die einsame Masse*, with an introduction by Schelsky in 1958.⁴⁴⁸ Schelsky had used the image of “other-directedness” as a model for understanding the conformist, goal-oriented view of the ‘skeptical generation,’ those competent but closed-off young people, who lacked more than a purely functional interest in the learning process of the university. Instead, the generality of “other-directed” persons acquired much of their knowledge of life, values, sexuality, science etc. “second hand” from external peer groups, or from the media. For Freyer, “general consumer culture” produced an “interestedness in science” that was received passively

⁴⁴⁷ See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* [1964] (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 2nd edn. 1991), 6-7; For Marcuse’s reaction to Snow’s “Two Cultures” see, H. Marcuse, “Bemerkungen zu einer Neubestimmung der Kultur,” in *Kultur und Gesellschaft*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), 2:168.

⁴⁴⁸ David Riesman, Reuel Denney, and Nathan Glazer, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950); in German translation as Riesman et al., *Die einsame Masse: eine Untersuchung der Wandlungen des amerikanischen Charakters*, with an introduction by Helmut Schelsky (Berlin and Neuweid: Luchterhand, 1956), and the more widely-circulated paperback edition in the series, Rowohlt’s Deutsche Enzyklopädie vol. 72-73 (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958).

like all consumer values and forms of “secondary” fulfillment, which had the effect of preventing any genuine critical hold for the individual vis-à-vis the instrumentalized application of science by the bureaucratic, welfare state.⁴⁴⁹ We find an even stronger formulation of the “Lonely Crowd hypothesis” developed in Gehlen’s notion of “cultural crystallization”: “Heute aber ist es, wie Riesman in seinem Buch ‘Die einsame Masse’ sehr richtig sagt, unmöglich geworden, ein Programm aufzustellen, das die Beziehungen zwischen dem wirtschaftlichem und dem politischen Leben entscheidend verändern könnte. Ein solches Programm fände in der gewaltigen, eingespielten Maschine, in der auch die Betriebsverluste eingeplant sind, gar keine Fugen zum Eingreifen.”⁴⁵⁰

The views of cultural sociologists like Freyer or Schelsky and the “critical theorists” like Adorno and Marcuse exerted a broad influence and certainly provoked discussions of the loss of function for the humanities and philosophy in its old supposedly ‘unified’ form. However, philosophers tended to view the “two culture” question from above. Positivism embodied in the specialized sciences and the various kinds of irrational, existentialist cultural fashions were often criticized as two sides of the same coin. The belief in an unproblematic, presuppositionless relation of the scientist to the object world and the focus of existentialists on unconditioned existence both produced a kind of false compensation for the uncertainty in the self-understanding of modern man,

⁴⁴⁹ Freyer, “Wissenschaften des 20. Jahrhunderts,” 115; cf. Heidegger’s differentiation between mere “interest in philosophy” and “readiness for thinking,” in “Was heißt Denken?” in *Merkur* 6, no.7 (July 1952): 602-603.

⁴⁵⁰ Gehlen, “Über kulturelle Kristallisation [1961],” in *Studien zur Anthropologie und Soziologie*, 324.

both had anthropological bases in this fundamental insecurity.⁴⁵¹ As Wolfgang de Boer argued, “Es ist ein und dasselbe ungeheure Ereignis der Selbstverfinsterung, welches sich sowohl in der positivistischen Flucht zum gegenständlich Vorzeigbaren wie in der existenzphilosophischen ‘Angst’ bekundet. In beiden enthüllt sich die eine Wahrheit der Verborgenheit des Seins für den Menschen, der sich von dieser Verborgenheit seiner Zeitlichkeit her versteht.”⁴⁵²

Within philosophy itself, however, the tension in the two cultures of thinking endured. For the false opposition between existentialism and positivism presented by their apparent antipathy was a product of the German tradition; both represented the compensatory paths that philosophy and the sciences pursued after the downfall of systematic philosophy with the demise of Hegel. Not only this distant process, but also the recent past caused the dislocation of the very elements of international philosophy—analytic philosophy developed from Wittgenstein, the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle, and Karl Popper’s critical rationalism as main examples—that by the 1960s made their way back into West German philosophical study. There were explosive moments like the *Positivismusstreit* of the late 1950s and early 1960s; however, it is important to remember that this was very much a debate within German sociology.⁴⁵³ It began after all at the congress of the *Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie* that was held in Tübingen in

⁴⁵¹ Wolfgang de Boer, “Positivismus und Existenzphilosophie,” *Merkur* 6, no.1 (1952): 12-35.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁵³ See Theodor Adorno et al., *The Positivist dispute in German sociology*, trans. by Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976).

October 1961, where the theme was the “Logic of Social Sciences.” Also, the foremost representative of ‘German’ dialectical theory was Theodor Adorno, whose thought and practices as we have seen hardly represented those of academic philosophers in West Germany. Popper and Adorno continued the debate with missives published in René König’s *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie*. In this exchange, one could say, Collini’s observation about the tendency of entrenched groups to treat the nuances of outsider’s opinions reductively was given a most obvious confirmation. Ultimately, the ‘dispute’ saw the main participants speaking past each other. In the end it became clear that Popper hardly supported a sort of simplistic view of the presuppositionless gaze of the natural scientist and an absolute claim to objective knowledge. Likewise, Adorno’s critical theory did not deny the possibility of rational consensus, despite his caveats about the limitations of positivism in social research.

Still, despite the caricature of scientific method as based on the belief in “value free” research, both positions in the Postivism Debate seemed to demanded a change in “attitude” towards research that brought both the critical rationalists around Popper and the social research model associated with Frankfurt into conflict with the views of traditional humanist scholarship, whose representatives in mainstream philosophy had come to emphasize the basis for truth in the *Geisteswissenschaften* in conceptual clarity and creative reflection on tradition in language and the historicity of the knower as opposed to developing a method for the human sciences, as, for example, Dilthey had

attempted.⁴⁵⁴ The new attitude of the newly institutionalized social sciences quickly emerged as the more progressive and living form of critical thought, whereas the *Geisteswissenschaften* and philosophy saw their ideals of *Bildung* and *universitas* give way to that of scientific procedure of the great social research institutes of the sociologists and political scientists. The response of philosophers followed at once the path of partial emulation of scientific organization and the return to a tradition of German reflective philosophy that supposedly died with Hegel. Some commentators perceived this new ‘scientificity’ and push for interdisciplinary exchanges as superficial gestures. Willy Hochkeppel argued about the impossibility of resolving the split between the two cultures of thinking within the sciences on philosophical grounds. For Hochkeppel, “[d]as Auseinanderbrechen ‘der’ Philosophie in mindestens zwei fundamentale, gänzlich beziehungslos einander gegenüberstehende Philosopheme oder Denkkulturen spottet auch all der augenblicklich so betulichen Versuche, durch sogenannte interdisziplinäre Gespräche oder Arbeitsgruppen der Philosophie wieder Zusammenhalt oder gar erneute Reputation zu verschaffen.”⁴⁵⁵ We will consider this tension in philosophy, which might be seen by some as halfhearted at best and at worst, the continuation of a particular German provincialism. But as we will see, these two paths were radically transformed by the younger figures of German philosophy just at the moment when it seemed that the

⁴⁵⁴ This we will find above all in our discussion of Gadamer’s hermeneutics below.

⁴⁵⁵ Hochkeppel, *Mythos Philosophie*, 69.

crystallization of the “two cultures” had left philosophy without a purpose and means to mediate between apparently irreconcilable approaches to human understanding.

Chapter 5

Redefining Tradition beyond 'Provincialism' and the Limits of Institutional Change

Diagnosing German Provincialism

In postwar West Germany, the debate about existentialism and Heidegger in particular, was also complicated by the question of the political implications of *Existenzphilosophie* and its nihilistic pathos. Heidegger's Nazism figured prominently in the appraisals of his detractors for an English-speaking audience from the end of the war into the late 1950s. At the same time, it is worth recalling that much of the debate surrounding Heidegger's political involvement had to be "rediscovered" by a younger generation in the mid 1980s through the publications of foreign commentators such as Victor Farias.⁴⁵⁶ The wider implications of Heidegger's case for the living memory of German commentators, and often German-Jewish émigrés was absent from the Heidegger Controversy of the 1980s. The late debate failed to appreciate the complexities of the cultural and professional context in which philosophers of the "45er generation" first discovered the details of the political misdeeds of prominent intellectual figures in the face of a general atmosphere of discretion that prevailed in postwar academic philosophy.

⁴⁵⁶ Victor Farias, *Heidegger et le Nazisme* (Paris: Éditions Verdier, 1986).

In his “field trip to German universities” undertaken in 1953, the philosopher Walter Cerf, a German Jew who had emigrated from Germany in 1933, finished his studies at Princeton before the war, and finally taught at Brooklyn College pointed to the problem of German professors neglecting the needs of their students by clinging to an antiquated educational tradition. Cerf was a critic of what he felt was an inadequate liberal, individualistic notion of free speech and cultural power. He advocated for a more complex understanding of the unequal power relationship between teacher and student in American higher education particularly during wartime and more equal distribution of what he termed “cultural power” in the student-instructor relationship.⁴⁵⁷ On this basis, Cerf criticized the attempts to reform the German universities under the program of *studium generale*. For him, despite the invocation of such a “respectable name,” Cerf argued, “on the whole, however, the German university is still a professor’s university.”⁴⁵⁸ He cited the passivity that continued to prevail on both sides of the lectern. On the one hand, students could not ask questions nor express any criticism of the professors. On the other hand, German philosophy professors simply read aloud from a prepared text that was nothing more than a manuscript containing their recent research. Even in seminars Cerf criticized the way in which students’ *Referaten* did not truly engage critically with the texts and thinkers considered; rather, the *Referent* was content

⁴⁵⁷ Walter Cerf, “Freedom of Instruction in War Time,” in *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (Winter, 1942): 576-87.

⁴⁵⁸ Walter Cerf, “A Field Trip to German Universities,” in *Journal of Higher Education* 26, no. 3 (Mar. 1955): 135.

to simply give bland accounts of their historical antecedents.⁴⁵⁹ Finally the subject matter of lectures and seminars in the German universities showed a “stubborn narrow-mindedness” and an “arrogant kind of provincialism,” which for Cerf was exemplified by the exclusive focus on contemporary French and German existentialism and complete neglect of recent Anglo-American philosophy.⁴⁶⁰ Seminars as well as lectures were devoted to thinkers rather than to a field or set of problems, which could span national traditions.⁴⁶¹ For Cerf, German philosophers displayed “intolerance towards views different from their own”: departments had become strongly conformist and wedded to the different ‘schools’ of existentialism.⁴⁶²

Cerf’s appraisal contrasted starkly with the intentions of editors like Georgi Schischkoff, who around the same time as Cerf’s field trip was extolling a decade of intellectual “tolerance” embodied in the *ZphF* which he felt had served as an open forum for work that crossed schools of thought and promoted exchange between divergent points of view. The idea was to replace the intolerance of competing world views with the openness of a new scholarly ethos based on the ideal of ‘*Forschung*.’⁴⁶³ Even if the content of the *ZphF* was certainly inclined towards Continental philosophy, it could hardly be considered existentialist in its outlook. In fact, Fritz Heinemann in his survey of

⁴⁵⁹ Walter Kaufmann complained of the same passivity of the German style of “referieren” in his report on postwar West German philosophical instruction; see, Kaufmann, “German Thought Today,” *The Kenyon Review* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1957): 17-21.

⁴⁶⁰ Cerf, “Field Trip,” 139.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁶³ Georgi Schischkoff, “Zehn Jahre Philosophische Forschung und Toleranz”, 574ff.

German philosophy for the journal *Philosophy* lauded the *ZphF*'s commitment to a "high standard of objectivity" as early as 1949.⁴⁶⁴ Habermas, however, in his important statement of 1971, "Wozu noch Philosophie?" which directly referred back to Adorno's 1962 radio address, stated that the ideal of "Forschung" embodied in West Germany's leading philosophy journal had only recently—that is, over the course of the 1960s, and not before—signified the "transformation of spirit" that brought German philosophy to the stage at which Anglo-Saxon as well as Russian philosophy had been for years.⁴⁶⁵ Habermas observed an "astonishing continuity" of the questions and schools of thought that still dominated the practice of philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s with those that had begun in the 1920s. Here we find an echo of the sentiments of figures like Hochkeppel, Kaufmann, and even those who contested the "legend of the 1920s" like Helmuth Plessner. Habermas took aim at the leading cultural critics of the late 1950s and 1960s, those whom he had "profiled" in very public forums since the early 1950s. The successor to Adorno and Horkheimer at the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt, now argued, in the wake of the events of 1968, that German philosophers and intellectuals in the two decades after the war had failed to address the relationship between the leading ideas and "great thinkers" of the German tradition and the crimes of National Socialism. Habermas argued that "in postwar Germany the leading philosophical teachings have contained

⁴⁶⁴ F. H. Heinemann, "Philosophy in Germany," *Philosophy* 24, no. 90 (July 1949): 264.

⁴⁶⁵ Habermas, "Does Philosophy Still have a Purpose?" in *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1983), 2. Below I will also reference the expanded German edition of 1984 because the English edition is an incomplete version of the original collection of essays published as *Philosophisch-politische Profile* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971).

(often at the price of analytical purity) an explosive potential for a critique of the present age, ranging from authoritarian institutionalism, through the cultural criticism stylized in terms of the history of Being and the cultural pessimism on the Left, to a radical utopian critique of society.”⁴⁶⁶ In this way, German philosophy—here Habermas includes figures from East Germany like Ernst Bloch—had remained trapped in its provincial noncontemporaneity with the pace of social and political changes. Here he did not just name the usual suspects; rather, Habermas argued, “[t]hat holds true for the irrationalist impulses of Heidegger and Gehlen as for the dialectical critiques of Bloch and Adorno.”⁴⁶⁷

The trajectory of Habermas’ discussion of the successes and shortcomings of German attempts at cooperative philosophical research seems to pass over, or, at least, to assume knowledge of the day-to-day workings of professional philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s, which we find strongly criticized in the reports of external commentators. Two weeks after his report for the *Journal of Higher Education*, Cerf followed up with an article in the *Journal of Philosophy* in which he claimed that German philosophy, especially the teaching of philosophy, in the university was pervaded by what he called “existentialist mannerism.”⁴⁶⁸ Cerf conceded the importance of the early Heidegger, “I believe Heidegger to have been the most original philosopher of the continent in the

⁴⁶⁶ Habermas, “Does Philosophy Still Have a Purpose?” 5-6.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁶⁸ Walter Cerf, “Existential Mannerism and Education,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 52, no. 6 (Mar. 17, 1955): 141-152.

period that extends roughly from the end of the First World War to the beginning of the second. His weakness is his lack of analytic clarity.” However, on his visits to several universities in West Germany, Cerf encountered several of what he considered to be blind acolytes of the Master who practiced existential mannerism in their lectures: “The existential mannerists, without having any of his redeeming features, and simply repeating in a watered-down and often misleading way his personal insights, have completely succumbed to emotivism.”⁴⁶⁹ For Cerf, the presence of existential mannerism in the major universities he visited—Freiburg, Heidelberg, Tübingen, Marburg, Münster, Kiel, Freie Universität Berlin, Göttingen—frustrated genuine philosophical and moral education and as a consequence even lowered students’ moral resistance to potential resurgent political ideologies: “Existentialism is precisely the kind of philosophy which will lead to a lack of intellectual and moral resistance to political Romanticism.”⁴⁷⁰ In Cerf’s observations, we find an early version of the thesis of Germany’s intellectual *Sonderweg*: for over a century, German universities had given up the idea of moral education in favor of the transmission of knowledge and research results. German existentialists in particular were the end product of an intellectual *Kultur* that had never fully embraced the Enlightenment age of optimism, progress, and intellectual freedom.⁴⁷¹ In contrast to the Enlightenment project of moral education, “Existentialism has no

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 144.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 141.

⁴⁷¹ See Cerf, “Existential Mannerism,” 147. Interestingly, Cerf notes that the only German professor that he heard say anything positive about the Enlightenment was Otto Friedrich Bollnow in Tübingen.

educational philosophy except the appeal to this empty and whimsical authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*).”⁴⁷² In language very similar to that of Heinemann’s notion of “geistige Führerschaft,” Cerf pointed to the general failure of philosophical pedagogy in Germany:

In brief, the last thing an existentialist professor considers to be his duty toward his students is to awaken in them a logical conscience. Just the opposite. He accustoms them to big words and profound sentences whose meaning is mainly emotive and whose appeal is to *Erlebnis* and *Vernunft*, and not to reason. . . . Questionable etymologies replace arguments and evocation replaces evidence. What can one reasonably expect of the great mass of students whose only exposure to philosophy has been to this emotive mannerism?

Cerf explicitly linked the German students’ exposure to emotive, mystical language to their vulnerability to the rhetoric of political extremism. What is more, in the reference to a new ‘mass of students,’ Cerf again asserted his own educational philosophy based on the idea that freedom of education required not simply the protection of individual liberty, but public and institutional measures to ensure that students are taught the values of democratic society, not leaving it to the unmentored student to decide on their individual values for themselves, as if as young people they were really in a position to exercise this cultural judgment.⁴⁷³ Cerf was arguing that the German students were similarly offered only emotive mannerism in monologic lectures without any development of their own critical capacities. He observed,

⁴⁷² Cerf, “Existential Mannerism,” 148.

⁴⁷³ Cf. Cerf, “Freedom of Instruction in War Time,” 584-86.

They [German students] will be victims of similar parlance in the field of politics. They will have no intellectual resistance of any strength and sincerity to political romanticism and charlatanry. In the very courses which should have awakened their logical conscience, they have learned to mistrust reason and facts. They will again trust political and social nonsense if it is dressed pretentiously and emotively.⁴⁷⁴

Cerf offered many examples of lectures that he attended to prove how existential mannerism had infected German philosophers and particularly the students of Heidegger, though aside from Wilhelm Weischedel in Berlin (after 1953), who Cerf quoted as an example of “arrogant German provincialism,” Cerf cited no other German philosophers by name.⁴⁷⁵ However, Weischedel was according to his own later account concerned with the burdens facing his students in the immediate aftermath of the war. Indeed, what brought him to the Freie Universität from Tübingen in 1953 was “the fact that this university [FU] was considered the hotbed for new academic forms.”⁴⁷⁶ Berlin represented the “realization” of the democratic aspect of reforms based on *studium generale* towards which Weischedel and his colleagues had attempted, but with less luck at the older, traditional universities like Tübingen, Freiburg, and Heidelberg. Weischedel further claimed that he had great sympathy for the initial phase of the student movement in the mid 1960s. Weischedel wrote,

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁷⁵ Cerf, “Field Trip to German Universities,” 139.

⁴⁷⁶ Wilhelm Weischedel, Beitrag in Pongratz, ed., *Philosophie in Selbstdarstellungen*, 2:330. Weischedel had broken with Heidegger in 1933 after the latter gave his support to the National Socialists and idly watched as his Jewish students were turned out from the universities and Germany. Weischedel (1905-1975), a non-Jew remained in Germany, but was banned from publishing due to his political views. He served in the library at Tübingen while working on his Habilitationsschrift, which could not be accepted unless he joined the NSDAP. Weischedel also made contact with the French Resistance with whom he served shortly before the war’s end. The symbol of arrogant German provincialism he was not.

In der ersten Phase ging es darum, den Studenten maßgebenden Einfluß auf die bisher fast ausschließlich von den Ordinarien bestimmte Universität zu verschaffen. Hier habe ich mit ganzer Kraft, in mancherlei Reden, Diskussionen und Artikeln für die Sache der Studenten und Assistenten eingesetzt; auch mir erschien die bisherige Gestalt der Hochschule dem demokratischen Geiste nicht zu entsprechen.⁴⁷⁷

Cerf attended lectures in Heidelberg, where he likewise seemed to find only Heidegger acolytes. However, it is hard to believe that Gadamer or Löwith could be characterized as “Existentialists [who] believe they philosophize when they translate everyday language into Heidegger’s terms.”⁴⁷⁸ Kaufmann directed a similar attack at Karl Löwith.

Kaufmann suggested that even Löwith’s book pulished after the latter’s return from forced exile, *Heidegger: Denker in dürftiger Zeit* in 1953, in which the former pupil revealed the political implication of his teacher’s philosophy, still “contributed to the [Heidegger] mystique.” The Princeton professor, whose own book on Nietzsche had met with a slightly lackluster review in the *Philosophische Rundschau* from Löwith a few years before,⁴⁷⁹ was shocked in 1956 to hear the Heidelberg professor give a lecture to a room of 200 students entitled, “Introduction to Modern Philosophy: From Nietzsche to Heidegger.”⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 2:332; see also, Wilhelm Weischedel, “Wie frei muss eine Universität sein? Die Lehren aus den Vorgängen an der Freien Universität Berlin,” in *Die Zeit* Nr. 20 (May 13, 1966): 17f.

⁴⁷⁸ Cerf, “Existential Mannerism,” 143-44. Cerf only alludes to a “famous existentialist” in Heidelberg. However, that the lecture in question dealt with Ancient Greek philosophy, Cerf may very well have been describing Gadamer.

⁴⁷⁹ Löwith, “Review of W. A. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, 1950),” in *Philosophische Rundschau* 2 (1954-55): 235-36. Among other things, Löwith objected to the way in which Kaufmann insisted on reducing the meaning of Nietzsche’s life and work to the psychological level.

⁴⁸⁰ Kaufmann, “German Thought Today,” 28.

Cerf's damning presentation provoked a response from Ludwig Landgrebe, then a prominent professor in Köln. Landgrebe was bemused by the suggestion that existentialism, particularly the philosophy of Heidegger dominated the German philosophical scene. Cerf had criticized the tendency to discuss classical philosophical texts in seminars and lectures as well as the apparent need of all discussions of "new ideas" to be couched in historical terms. But Landgrebe insisted that the focus on primary texts was a necessity that arose from the need of German students for a reconnection with their own cultural past. Landgrebe contended that "instead of an overall uniformity dominated by existentialism" there was "a multitude of efforts towards opening a new path in a seemingly impenetrable chaos, mainly by going back to past traditions."⁴⁸¹ In the West German universities, students were required to demonstrate a capacity for critical thinking and this was done through the interpretation of a classic of Western philosophy. It was not, as Cerf supposed, an attempt on the part of the professors to stifle the independent thought of the students. The more pressing problem, for Landgrebe, was not the presence of emotion or romanticism on the part of the German youth, but rather the drive towards specialization on the part of the students who were coming to view their studies as merely a means towards the end of a possible profession, generally their teaching certificate, or *Staatsexamen*. What is more, evoking perhaps a dominant view of the German youth, Landgrebe wrote "German students today have been so disillusioned

⁴⁸¹ Ludwig Landgrebe, "The Study of Philosophy in Germany: A Reply to Walter Cerf," *Journal of Philosophy* 54, no. 5 (Feb. 28, 1957): 128.

by abusive emotion and high-sounding words that they are deeply skeptical of philosophy.”⁴⁸² This practical state of mind on the part of the German youth was ample reason to believe that students were not expecting guidance to come from philosophy. Nor were they searching for an ideology that could be described as ‘intoxicating.’ Landgrebe reasserts the distinct character of the German university, which had always had as its foundation the unity of research and teaching. The idea of lectures devolving into “a conversation between teacher and students” would jeopardize this unity, “for this unity depends on the teacher being able to present in his lecture a wide range of material over a continuous period of time.”⁴⁸³ While Landgrebe admits that the lectures may only reach a minority who will find them meaningful, the present circumstances of the German university, the overflow of students attending lectures simply as a means to an end—that is, a profession—meant that one had to be satisfied with teaching abstract thinking through the interpretation of texts. Finally, against Cerf’s charge that the topics of seminars were mainly historical in character, Landgrebe reminded his Anglo-American audience, “that the German people has lost its historical memory, so to speak, and needs to be reminded of the standards of thought established by the classic works and, indeed, to be reminded of its own tradition, so largely forgotten.”⁴⁸⁴ Landgrebe ends by pointing out that the Germans’ task of thinking through their intellectual past could not be transplanted by an “alien tradition”—that of Anglo-Saxon philosophy. “The way

⁴⁸² Ibid., 129.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 130.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

to recover absolute principles,” Landgrebe concluded, “can only be found by overcoming and conquering one’s own traditions.”⁴⁸⁵ However, the recovery of “absolute principles” seems an improper goal to set for philosophical instruction if philosophy was no longer meant to proffer *Weltanschauungen* and organize itself into combatant schools of thought.⁴⁸⁶

In a report given in Berlin in October of 1955 before the meeting of the *Engere Kreis* of the AGPD, later published in the *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung*, Landgrebe offered a presentation of the possibilities for philosophical instruction in secondary school (“*an der höheren Schule*”). Landgrebe distinguished philosophy from the *Einzelwissenschaften* made up of corporate bodies (*Stände*) of experts. He also distinguished contemporary philosophy from the systematic philosophy of the past by making the common claim that there was no longer any dominant school of philosophy. Landgrebe contended, “es gibt daher auch keine herrschende Schulphilosophie der Art, wie sie etwa im Mittelalter oder in der neueren Zeit bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts eine allgemein anerkannte Grundlage des Lernens war.”⁴⁸⁷ As a consequence, Landgrebe made several important observations about the teaching of philosophy in the present situation. First, in the absence of a dominant philosophical school and the uneven expertise of the teachers of philosophy, it was impossible to put

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. Landgrebe, *Major Problems*, 2-3.

⁴⁸⁷ Landgrebe, “Zur Gestaltung des Philosophieunterrichts an der höheren Schule,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 10, no. 4 (1956): 568.

forth a set, uniform teaching plan. Rather, it would be more possible for an institution like the AGPD to circulate suggestions and model teaching plans as examples. Second, as a consequence of this, Landgrebe argued, philosophical instruction “may not be dogmatically built upon a definite philosophical system.”⁴⁸⁸ Secondly, Landgrebe also warned that teaching could not take on the character of a *Weltanschauungslehre*. Although he also opposed the idea of creating a kind of “instruction based on lived experience” (*Erlebnisunterricht*) which could lead to “idle talk” and “dilettatism,” Landgrebe did argue that the initial questions raised in a model philosophy class should be ethical ones.⁴⁸⁹ But ethical questions in the classroom did not mean “Normen aufstellen oder Restbestände von ‘einfache Sittlichkeit’ registrieren als das, was noch gilt.”⁴⁹⁰ Landgrebe seemed to support the idea that philosophical instruction could be organized around a consideration of general ethical questions, which directly related to the existential position of the human being whether as cultivated, responsible intellectual, or mere expert and functionary. In this way, Landgrebe argued, instructors focused directly on countering not simply dogmatism in traditional philosophy, but also the threat posed by the greater organization and technologization of human life. Therefore, he directs attention away from what he thinks of as simple, abstract intellectual consideration of problems. Rather, Landgrebe wrote, such a discussion “muß verbunden werden mit einer Besinnung auf die Mächte, die im heutigen Gesellschaftsleben die

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 568-9.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 569.

Freiheit des Menschen, seine Selbstverantwortung, seine Möglichkeiten, sein Leben zu führen, bedrohen, auf die Gefahren, die dieser Möglichkeit vom Apparat, von der Organisation, von den Mächten der öffentlichen Meinung drohen.”⁴⁹¹ Landgrebe suggested that one could best engage such discussion in the classroom by choosing philosophical texts that would give the students examples of how to deal with these questions philosophically. Again, Landgrebe warned that the students must be insulated against the influence of public opinion and the interference of popular catch-phrases (“*Schlagworten*”). The successful instructor had to demonstrate that current existential problems “selbst ihre Geschichte haben, in der sich die Begriffe und Methoden zu ihrer Beantwortung gebildet haben, die heute vielfach als in ‘gesunkenes Kulturgut’ unser Denken leiten und ihm seine Perspektiven vorschreiben.”⁴⁹²

Here, Landgrebe made an important hermeneutical observation, which was common to other thinkers of his generation like Otto Friedrich Bollnow and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Namely, that when one dealt with perennial questions and texts, one did so always with the background of a “philosophical tradition” (“*philosophische Überlieferung*”), and that this hermeneutical mode of understanding was particularly well-suited to the *Geisteswissenschaften* and, therefore, a model for instruction in philosophy. The problems of dogmatically positivistic science and the intrusion of romantic, ideological *Weltanschauungen* were the result of individuals losing this

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 570.

“historical horizon of tradition.” The point was to clarify the horizon of tradition for the student, in order to give them the critical means to defend against these intrusive elements.⁴⁹³

Interestingly, at the end of his report, Landgrebe advised against drawing from texts of contemporary philosophy for the purposes of instruction. Contemporary questions had a long history and tradition. A narrow focus on present-day texts could prevent

die Wiederherstellung der Kontinuität in unserem Bewußtsein, die Weckung der Einsicht, daß die Weise unseres Gemeinschaftslebens und die Denkschemata, die zu seiner Bewältigung ausgebildet wurden, ihre zweitausendjährige Geschichte haben, die nicht etwas hinter uns Liegendes und Abgetanes ist, sondern eine in unserem Selbstverständnis verborgen weiterwirkende Kraft, ist eine der wesentlichen Aufgaben, die der heutigen Bildung gestellt ist. Zu ihrer Lösung beizutragen wird an Hand eines Textes aus der Gegenwart weitaus schwieriger sein als im Rückgang auf die sogenannten Klassiker der Philosophie.⁴⁹⁴

Landgrebe’s views on the practice of teaching philosophy were based upon his idea of the nature of understanding in the human sciences to which Landgrebe had devoted a lecture while still a professor in Kiel in 1951.⁴⁹⁵ The problem of understanding in the human sciences and in particular the contemporary understanding of texts and philosophical questions in view of their descent (*Herkunft*) from a long tradition, served as the guiding problematic for the most significant younger philosophers. Although tradition played a central role in philosophical hermeneutics and the teaching practices of Landgrebe and

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 571-2.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 572.

⁴⁹⁵ Ludwig Landgrebe, “Vom Geisteswissenschaftlichen Verstehen,” *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung*, 6, no. 1 (1951): 3-16.

Gadamer or in Joachim Ritter's notion of the compensatory function of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, the works of their best students demonstrated the need to reassess many of the assumptions that underlay their teachers' methods of identifying and relating to these traditions. One important way in which they did this was to introduce the supposed "alien traditions" of Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy and American pragmatism and to reintroduce the displaced ideas of German-speaking émigrés such as the Vienna School and some of the important neo-Kantians like Ernst Cassirer.

Despite Landgrebe's ardent protest, the provincial, insular picture presented by émigré observers such as Walter Cerf, Walter Kaufmann, and Fritz Heinemann was certainly not an inaccurate picture of at least the teaching of philosophy in the university, and even the public statements of the prominent academic philosophers. Landgrebe, in his widely-cited 1957 work, *Philosophie der Gegenwart* did in fact organize his synopsis of contemporary philosophy around perennial problems, rather than schools of thought; however, this was still a narrative that ran over the phenomenological and historicist traditions, from Dilthey and Husserl on to Heidegger. Heidegger's philosophy still marked the limits of the contemporary philosophical discussion. As he declared in his rebuff to Cerf, contemporary West German philosophy was only understandable as the culmination and crisis of what Landgrebe defined as *the* German tradition, which excluded the discussion of "exemplary thinkers" in non-German regions—again, the representatives of analytic and other 'positivistic' philosophies. In particular, he distanced continental philosophy both from the Anglo-American dominance of a philosophy of the

objective and the exact sciences and, ironically, the logical positivism and critical rationalism, which had been forcibly ‘exported’ from Vienna in the 1930s.⁴⁹⁶

Although Heidegger’s students like Hans-Georg Gadamer and Walter Bröcker were engaging in subtle critiques of their teachers thought, and other philosophers like Helmut Kuhn and Otto Friedrich Bollnow were calling for an overcoming of existentialism, particularly of Heidegger’s strain, it is easy to see how foreign observers would interpret this as a dominance of Heidegger and Jaspers in an almost uninterrupted continuity of German philosophical thought from the 1920s and 1930s.

A strong belief in the originality of German culture and intellectual life remained a powerful, albeit jeopardized, cultural force that found its way into the discussions around the design of philosophical instruction and the abiding ‘spirit’ of the German university. This is, in a way, analogous to the unfavorable comparisons that were made between the culturally avant-garde *Jugendbewegung* with the seemingly practical and “sober” post-1945 youth. Paradoxically, the supposed vulnerability of the young students of philosophy and the humanities in the 1940s and 1950s only caused greater concern that the influence of potentially nihilistic ideas of figures like Heidegger continued and even increased in potency.

We have already seen how Otto Friedrich Bollnow interpreted the language of Heidegger’s “*neue Kehre*” as potentially problematic if it led to imitation on the part of students. In 1950, he had already called for Heidegger to come up with a clearer

⁴⁹⁶ Landgrebe, *Major problems in Contemporary European Philosophy*, 5-7

statement, to come out of his long-term silence and reserve and finally to continue the development of a more substantial and systematic philosophical foundation.⁴⁹⁷ More and more, for academic philosophers, even the students of Heidegger, and especially their students, it became important to distance themselves from what was called the “*Heidegger Wirkung*”—the “Heidegger effect.” Dieter Henrich later recalled that in the context of the new prosperity of the economic miracle,

die Philosophie stand weiterhin unter dem Anspruch, die Lebensfragen der Zeit aufzunehmen und ihrezeit eine universale Perspektive des Verstehens anzubieten. Heidegger hatte ihn genügt, freilich in eine Weise, die sich nun nicht mehr akzeptieren ließ. Er hatte dabei die Grundlage der Tradition hintergefragt und mit subtilen Gründen bestritten, daß systematisches philosophieren in Zukunft noch möglich ist. So entstand die eigentümliche Aufgabe, sich Heidegger zu entziehen, ohne den Versuch eines philosophischen Entwurfs von vornherein preiszugeben, und sich zugleich seine Destruktion der Tradition – seine bedeutendsten Leistung – in der Kritik gewachsen zu zeigen.⁴⁹⁸

This period represented what Henrich identified as the third phase of postwar German philosophy in which the younger figures like himself in cooperation with their teachers, in his case, Gadamer, sought to take up a more historically-oriented and meaningful relationship to philosophical traditions and to the ideas of the great thinkers, the system-builders of the past, of German Idealism, and the German historicist tradition. The *Philosophische Rundschau* became a forum for these attempts. Also the *Allgemeine Gesellschaft für Philosophie* by 1960 had come under the control of Gadamer’s friend and co-editor of the *Rundschau*, the Munich professor Helmut Kuhn, which meant that

⁴⁹⁷ Bollnow, “Heidegger’s Neue Kehre,” 128.

⁴⁹⁸ Dieter Henrich, “Deutsche Philosophie nach zwei Weltkriegen,” 51

the conferences began to showcase the work of their students: the talented contributors to their journal such as Hans Blumenberg, Hermann Lübbe, Hans-Robert Jauß, Dieter Henrich, and Jürgen Habermas in whose career Gadamer had taken particular interest since Habermas left Frankfurt in 1958.

Thinking after Heidegger, against Heidegger

Even before the 1960s there had been substantial critiques both of Heidegger's later philosophy and even of his Nazi past. We dealt briefly with the reception of Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" and the critiques it spawned in the late 1940s and early 1950s. But in order to understand the true effects on the younger generation of philosophers, it is instructive if we look at the political critiques, which came not only from émigrés and older philosophers who knew first hand of Heidegger's Nazi past, but from younger figures like Jürgen Habermas.

In a now famous intervention, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of 25 July 1953, Habermas reviewed the republication of Heidegger's *Einleitung in der Metaphysik* by Max Niemeyer Verlag of Tübingen.⁴⁹⁹ The 24-year-old Habermas objected to the exact reprinting of Heidegger's lectures from 1935 without any contextual explanation or clarification of a sentence in which Heidegger extolled the "inner truth and greatness of

⁴⁹⁹ Jürgen Habermas, "Mit Heidegger gegen Heidegger Denken. Zur Veröffentlichung von Vorlesungen aus dem Jahre 1935," in *FAZ* Nr. 170, 29 July 1953. I will cite from the unaltered version republished in Habermas, *Philosophisch-Politische Profile*, 3rd, expanded edn. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984), 65-72.

the [National Socialist] movement.”⁵⁰⁰ Habermas could draw only one conclusion: “Da diese Sätze 1953 ohne Anmerkung erstmals veröffentlicht wurden, darf unterstellt werden, daß sie unverändert Heideggers heutige Auffassung wiedergeben.”⁵⁰¹ Although caught somewhat by surprise by the controversy that ensued, Habermas justified the political review of Heidegger’s work at the outset by observing that “the philosopher Martin Heidegger concerns us here not as philosopher, but rather in his political proclamation [Ausstrahlung], in his effect [Wirkung] not on the internal discussion of scholars, but on the formation of the political will of students who are able to be fired-up and easily excited.”⁵⁰² Heidegger had opened the door to this political critique by reproducing an overtly political statement. While older observers would accuse Habermas of failing to understand the meaning of Heidegger’s words in the context of the mid 1930s—a tactic used by ‘inner émigrés’ for some time—it is undeniable that the young, recently promoted *Dr. Dozent* could imagine very clearly the effect these words would have on a lecture hall full of impressionable young students.

Yet the *parole* of the repression of the past won out, and within a few weeks Habermas and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* came under attack. The conservative cultural critic, Christian Lewalter responded to Habermas’ article in *Die Zeit* on 13

⁵⁰⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in der Metaphysik*, 152. Although the published version only referred to “the movement,” Otto Pöggeler was able to uncover that the words that Heidegger actually spoke were “the inner truth and greatness of National Socialism” in his lecture, during the summer semester of 1935 at Freiburg (see Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*, 293-94.)

⁵⁰¹ Habermas, “Mit Heidegger gegen Heidegger Denken,” in *Philosophisch-Politische Profile*, 66.

⁵⁰² “Der Philosoph Heidegger beschäftigt uns hier nicht als Philosoph, sondern in seiner politischen Ausstrahlung, in seiner Wirkung auf entzündbarer und begeisterungsfähiger Studenten” *ibid.*, 65.

August 1953.⁵⁰³ Along with providing an apologia for Heidegger's statements—that they could only be understood with “the ears of 1935”—Lewalter attempted to discredit Habermas and the *FAZ* by exposing a dependency on the neo-Marxist vocabulary of Theodor Adorno in Frankfurt, who sought nothing less than to publically defame all “supposed ‘fascists’ from Richard Wagner to Ernst Jünger.”⁵⁰⁴ Lewalter's accusations provoked Karl Korn, the cultural editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, who had assigned Habermas the review, to produce an answer the following day in an article entitled “Warum schweigt Heidegger?”⁵⁰⁵ Along with objecting to Lewalter's attempt to link the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* with Theodor Adorno and the politics of the Frankfurt School, from which Korn himself kept his distance, he also pointed out the fact that Habermas was a doctoral student of philosophy in Bonn under Erich Rothacker. “Es mütet grotesk an,” wrote Korn, “daß der Kulturpolitiker der ‘Zeit’ [Lewalter] dem vierundzwanzigjährigen Studenten Habermas Verfolgungsucht vorwirft und den Versucht macht, H[abermas] ohne sachlichen Anlaß ins ‘neo-marxistische ghetto zu stoßen.’”⁵⁰⁶ Of greater concern for Korn was the apparent implication of Lewalter's dismissive claim that a capable representative of the younger generation had no right to demand that Heidegger clarify the meaning of his republished statement in the public press. Lewalter's sentiment militated against and refused to recognize the legitimacy of

⁵⁰³ Christian Lewalter, “Wie liest man 1953 die Sätze von 1935?” in *Die Zeit* Nr. 33, 13 Aug. 1953.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Karl Korn, “Warum schweigt Heidegger? Antwort auf den Versuch einer Polemik,” in *FAZ* 14 Aug. 1953.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

Habermas' reactions to the presence of National Socialism in an ostensibly scholarly text. Lewalter never seemed to consider the shock of a younger person like Habermas at reading this blatant statement of support for the National Socialist's political regime in a set of lectures which had been given to students as an introduction to philosophy.

The debate registered the dissonance of generations. Of course, Korn understood ahead of time the potentially provocative element in Habermas' politically-directed review; sensing this significance, he gave the young author nearly an entire page of the *FAZ*'s prominent Saturday section, "Bilder und Zeiten."⁵⁰⁷ To be sure, Korn was outraged at the implication that the great Heidegger was somehow immune to criticism, particularly from such a junior academic. However, equally disturbing, in Korn's view, was the resentment of Lewalter and some of Korn's colleagues that he had offered Habermas the public forum to air his generation's grievances.⁵⁰⁸ This was a direct challenge to the intellectual authority of the press to question the political actions of important intellectuals and academics.

It seemed that the young Habermas had broken a code of silence about which he was unaware. Habermas recalls that, shortly after the publication of his review essay, his *Doktorvater* in Bonn, Erich Rothacker, invited him to his house, something that Rothacker had never done before. There Rothacker engaged the young Habermas in a very nebulous and, as Habermas recalls, awkward conversation about his academic plans

⁵⁰⁷ Marcus M. Payk, *Der Geist der Demokratie: intellektuelle Orientierungsversuche im Feuilleton der frühen Bundesrepublik: Karl Korn und Peter de Mendelssohn* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2008), 209.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 210-11.

and obliquely referred to the Heidegger essay. Habermas understood this meeting only in retrospect; for at the time, he knew very little about his teacher's own dubious past. It was more than likely an attempt on Rothacker's part to ascertain whether the young Habermas intended to write an exposé-like essay on him.⁵⁰⁹ Habermas' recollections are supported by a letter sent by Erich Rothacker to prominent publisher, Dolf Sternberger at the beginning of November 1953 in which the former refers to the conversation with his young student about Heidegger's work:

Ich habe Habermas, nachdem ich seinen Aufsatz gefragt [sic]. Weshalb er eigentlich bei dieser Gelegenheit nicht auch auf den Passus im Humanismusbrief hingedeutet habe, wo Heidegger über den Kommunismus etwas ziemlich Ähnliches sagt wie über den Nazismus in den Vorlesungen. Es bleibt dabei, dass er sich den Ereignissen ausgeliefert hat mit seiner Entselbstung.⁵¹⁰

Here Rothacker used the common tactic of relativizing guilt before questions of his own culpability. Sternberger knew quite well that Rothacker was in many respects more compromised than Heidegger by his Nazi past. Rothacker had sought in 1933 to take up the leadership of the department of *Volksbildung* in Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry in connection with the study, "Aktion Wider den Undeutschen Geist."⁵¹¹ Figures like Rothacker were the true "Edel-Nationalsozialisten," or "aristocracy of National Socialism." In the same letter to Dolf Sternberg shortly after the Habermas review,

⁵⁰⁹ Interview with Habermas, Starnberg near Munich, May 2007.

⁵¹⁰ Erich Rothacker to Dolf Starnberg, November 10, 1953, p.2. Rothacker-Nachlass Teil I, Archiv der Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn.

⁵¹¹ George Leaman, *Heidegger im Context*, 73; see also Volker Böhnigk, *Kulturanthropologi als Rassenlehre*.

Rothacker tried to distance himself from Heidegger's case by pointing to the latter's provincial origins as the basis for his politics:

Die Sache hängt mit Heidegger zusammen. Einerseits ist er ein Bauer, und das hat zur Folge, dass er ganz reizvoll an einigen ewigen Werten der sozialen Urschicht hängt. Andererseits ist er dem, was ich die bürgerliche Substanz unserer Weltgeschichte nenne, doch völlig entfremdet und insofern, wie alle Bohémiens einschliesslich der Ski-Bohémiens, wurzellos. . . . Ich selbst bin einem sehr skeptisch gegen Revolutionen und halte praktisch mehr von Renaissance und Reformationen. Heidegger aber macht alles von 'Grund auf' (Grrund mit rollendem 'r'). Und in diesem Falle sind es recht häufig private Dämonen, die an die Stelle des angeblich überindividuellen 'Seins' [start second page] treten. Das steht nur in einem scheinbaren Widerspruch mit seinem Kampf gegen das Subjekt. . . .⁵¹²

This suggests something very significant about the presence of the Nazi past for postwar intellectuals and academics. Naturally, dialogue about the actions of fellow colleagues occurred mainly in private. What is more, even in the private domain, rhetorical strategies were used to deflect blame from oneself onto one's more prominent colleagues; and those, like Sternberger—an outsider to the philosophy profession and certainly outspoken in his publications for *Die Wandlung* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*—had the sense of propriety not to question Rothacker's hypocrisy. This also gets back to the common comparison made by historians between the reticence and suppression of the Nazi past during the 'restorative' 1950s and the relatively frank discussion in the years immediately following 1945. In the 1940s, Germany was occupied. The journals in which the most critical statements about the Nazi past were made had been licensed and in some

⁵¹² Erich Rothacker to Dolf Sternberger, November 10, 1953., pp. 1-2. Rothacker-Nachlass, Bonn.

cases directed by the Allied Occupational Authorities. The editors and contributors to *Die Wandlung*, *Die Neue Zeitung*, or *Der Monat* were relatively secure if they wanted to publish articles or documents that incriminated particular individuals. Furthermore, this was the period of the Nuremberg Trials and denazification proceedings. The last thing the accused would want is for their past to become a legal or political case. In the early 1950s, when Karl Korn published Habermas' review of Heidegger's 1935 lectures, philosophers and academics in general had reestablished what we can only call with Bourdieu the "field of academic power." By 1953 the philosophers' guild mentality, or "Zunftwesen" was firmly back in place. The former Nazis within the profession like Rothacker were highly placed and protected in the academic community. Heidegger could be challenged because he was an outsider. His self-stylization as the *Einzelgänger*, or solitary thinker now worked against him. It meant that he was fair game for such a political attack, though even in his case the publication of Habermas' article caused a scandal; however, as we have seen, the main objection of those—other than Lewalter or Müller, who came to the Master's rescue out of loyalty—concerned the right of a 'popular' newspaper, *FAZ* to publish such a piece in the Saturday feuilleton, where one expected to see only the frivolous commentary of journalists, not the David and Goliath scenario of a mere *Doktor designatus* taking on an Emeritus professor.⁵¹³ Again, the controversy subsided because Heidegger's case was well-known, and his 'colleagues' in the academic profession already considered him a liability because of his stubborn refusal

⁵¹³ Habermas' dissertation had been excepted, but he was not officially a Ph.D. in the summer of 1953.

to behave like a professional. Of course, the professional philosophers also resented Heidegger's popularity and fame, which was based on his link to the superficial, but dangerous literary ideas coming from France.

It would have been an altogether different affair if someone had tried to take on a figure such as Rothacker. First, no one spoke openly of his Nazi past, and though his works of the 1930s were republished after the war still containing the racialized idiom of that period, it was unlikely to cause the same reaction as the blatant endorsement of the National Socialist movement found in Heidegger's *Einführung in der Metaphysik*. Second, Rothacker was a disliked, but still active member of the philosophical community as leading member of the AGPD, a founding member of the *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz*, editor of the *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, on the editorial board of *Studium Generale*, and many other journals; an attack upon him would have been seen as an attack on the philosophical profession. Finally, one must admit that Rothacker, despite his institutional power, was virtually unknown to the wider public. Put simply, no editor of a widely-circulated newspaper like the *FAZ* would see any gain in publishing an exposé of his political past, particularly if the only evidence was based on hearsay at that point.

How then can one justifiably argue that the intellectual youth of the 1950s was in a position to effectively question the past actions of their elders? One could have evidence to suspect these past misdeeds only if the older teachers and culture figures

spoke of them specifically and openly.⁵¹⁴ It was altogether a different matter to be surrounded by a culture that talked incessantly about collective guilt, as was the case briefly in the few years directly following the war; but this had only fortified the youth's silence if in their private dealings, while these same cultural commentators sought to relativize their guilt and deflect blame onto others. In other words, only an event as blatant and public as the most famous philosopher in Germany republishing lectures that explicitly endorsed National Socialism could offer the chance for a young intellectual to take a firm public stance.

Of course, there were statements made by philosophers of the teachers' generation, younger than Heidegger but older than Habermas. In an important article that appeared in *Merkur*, Helmut Kuhn reacted to Heidegger's *Einführung in der Metaphysik*, pointing to a crisis which he described as "Philosophie in Sprachnot."⁵¹⁵ Where one finds in *Sein und Zeit* and the *Einführung in der Metaphysik* the presence of a conceptual structure, in Heidegger's later work Kuhn found merely the "spröden Auslassungen der Nachkriegszeit, die einer baumeisterlichen literarischen Zusammenfassung zu widerstreben scheinen."⁵¹⁶ Here Kuhn expressed worries very similar to those articulated

⁵¹⁴ Even more sympathetic figures like Gadamer only addressed this issue much later. It was typical that Gadamer only discussed the Nazism of former colleagues much later, indeed decades after their deaths (and reluctantly even then), as was the case with figures like Erich Rothacker, Joachim Ritter, and Oskar Becker with whom Gadamer worked closely. See Gadamer's interview with Dörte von Westernhagen from 1989, "The Real Nazis had No Interest in Us at All..." in *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 118-19.

⁵¹⁵ Helmut Kuhn, "Philosophie in Sprachnot: zu Martin Heideggers 'Einführung in die Metaphysik,'" in *Merkur* 68, no. 10 (Oct. 1953): 935-49.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 935.

by Otto Friedrich Bollnow in regard to Heidegger's *Humanismusbrief*. Kuhn likewise feared Heidegger's new language had become "an enticement for buffoonery and imitators."⁵¹⁷ We discover that the "*Sprachnot*"—the poverty of language—was epitomized by Heidegger's "dichtendes Denken," a style in which etymological allusion substituted for philosophical argument. By the mid 1930s, obscure wordplay with Hölderlin and the early Greeks had already started to overtake the Kierkegaardian "pathos in death" of the thinker's earlier works. In this way, argued Kuhn, "Heidegger hat sich auf einen Punkt gestellt, von dem her Sprechen kaum noch möglich ist."⁵¹⁸ Kuhn already expressed his consternation as a reviewer of Heidegger's *Holzwege* in 1952. The Munich philosopher was at pains to separate himself from "[d]as Schauspiel von Leuten, die in den abgelegten Kostümen ihres philosophischen Meisters umherwandeln," Kuhn observed how "Man kann nicht, ohne sich lächerlich zu machen, Heideggers Bildausdrücke übernehmen, und sei es auch nur zu Besprechungszwecken." Rather, serious philosophical analysis required "Ein Herübersetzen zu dem fremdartig Gedachten und dessen Rückholung in die Sprache der Philosophie."⁵¹⁹

However, the *Introduction to Metaphysics* was not merely further documentary evidence of Heidegger's descent into stylistic obscurity. The republication of the lectures from 1935, in Kuhn's view, served as an occasion to critique Heidegger's attempt to undermine and discredit the history of Western philosophy as a "history of the Fall" from

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 936.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Helmut Kuhn, "Heideggers 'Holzwege,'" in *Archiv für Philosophie* 4, no. 3 (July 1952): 255.

some sort of originary knowledge of Being among the pre-Socratic Greeks. Moreover, Kuhn insisted that Heidegger's decision to include and reproduce the political remarks made in the 1935 lectures placed the fundamental ontologist within present-day historical and political concerns. Kuhn observed how already in 1935, Heidegger saw a central world conflict between Russia and the United States unleashed by the narrow focus on technology and organization. In the middle of this conflict stood Germany, the only power that offered an alternative able to prevent these two forms of decay that represented "dieselbe trostlose Raserei der entfesselten Technik und der bodenlosen Organisation des Normalmenschen."⁵²⁰ Finally, Kuhn comes to Heidegger's statement about the "truth and greatness" of National Socialism. Kuhn wrote,

hier schliesst sich innerlich das Bekenntnis zum Nationalsozialismus an, niedergeschrieben und gesprochen im Jahre 1935, durch Druck veröffentlicht 1953, vermutlich als Beleg dafür daß Heidegger nicht durch die Geschichte "wankt," sondern in ihr steht und stehen bleibt. Die Bescheinigung der "inneren Wahrheit und Größe der Bewegung" (d. i. das Nationalsozialismus) wird auf Seite 152 damit begründet, daß hier "die Begegnung der planetarisch bestimmten Technik und des neuzeitlichen Menschen" stattgefunden habe. Was immer daß heissen möge – der an den Maßstäben von 1935 gemessene müthige Panegyrikus auf den Geist als das "tragende und herrschende" zeigt daß Heidegger zu den Edel-Nationalsozialisten gerechnet werden will.⁵²¹

Although Kuhn partly expressed the view that Heidegger's panegyric about National Socialism needed to be read in its context, he certainly did not welcome it as did others like Max Müller, who lauded the reproduction of the lectures of 1935 as an act of courage

⁵²⁰ Heidegger, *Einführung*, 28; quoted in Kuhn, "Philosophie in Sprachnot," 948.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 948.

and intellectual honesty.⁵²² Instead, the presentation of such statements, without explanation, fit together with the equivocal nature of Heidegger's postwar work. For Kuhn, reading Heidegger's lines in praise of National Socialism triggered the frightful recognition that such a phrase was once ordinary and could become so again if it was allowed to be explained away: "Das Loblied auf den Geist klingt bereits hohl, aber das erneuerte Lob des Nationalsozialismus, so gespenstisch auch seine Erscheinung wirkt, hat heute wieder reale Bedeutung."⁵²³ In this way, wrote Kuhn, "Heidegger's thinking would remain a warning sign" for the future.⁵²⁴

As with the issue of generations, the important point in analyzing the debates of the 1950s about Heidegger is not to view them through the lens of the much more vociferous and informed conflicts which occurred subsequently, particularly in the 1980s. It would be wrong to see the intervention by the 24 year-old Habermas in 1953 as a conscious attempt to engage as a public intellectual dealing with the Nazi Past. If anything this event shows how little Habermas and other members of his generation knew about the misdeeds of German intellectuals, but also their naïveté in thinking that they could take part in free public debate about the past without incurring the disapproval of other figures—not simply of cultural critics such as Christian Lewalter on the periphery of the philosophical field, but also an important figure like Rothacker who in

⁵²² Max Müller, "Besprechung von Martin Heideggers Einführung in die Metaphysik," reprinted in *Martin Heidegger: Briefe an Max Müller und andere Dokumente*, 82-92; originally appeared in *Universitas* 9 (1954): 301-304; 409-413; see esp. 91.

⁵²³ Kuhn, "Philosophie in Sprachnot," 948.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 949.

his conversation with Habermas and his discussions with other colleagues, exerted a more subtle form of pressure.

Overcoming Insecurity with Tradition: from Heidegger to Hegel and Back Again

An important starting point for younger philosophers and their teachers was the critical return to nineteenth-century traditions—to the problems of historicism and the historicity of the philosopher and the *Geisteswissenschaftler*. For the teachers, like Gadamer, Landgrebe, Ritter, or Bollnow this meant taking up anew the crisis of philosophy after Hegel, often by way of the philosophy of older figures like Edmund Husserl and Wilhelm Dilthey. This signaled not a return to *Lebensphilosophie*, the philosophical *Weltanschauungenlehre*, and the Neo-Kantian schools that dominated the pre-World War One era, or even the path that the young Heidegger had traversed. Rather, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, the confrontation with tradition occurred above all through philosophical arguments about the character of truth and method in the *Geisteswissenschaften*. The claims of the ‘human sciences’ to objectivity and conceptual clarity vis-à-vis the natural sciences were the most important challenges facing philosophers wary of their apparent loss of relevance.⁵²⁵ It is important to note in this

⁵²⁵ Throughout this chapter we will continually refer to Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1960); references will be to the second English edition, *Truth and Method*, 2nd, rev. edn., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co. [Continuum], 1989); see also Otto Friedrich Bollnow, “Die Objektivität der Geisteswissenschaften und die Frage nach dem Wesen der Wahrheit,” in *Mass und Vermessenheit des Menschn: philosophische Aufsätze. Neu Folge* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 131-159; and Landgrebe, “Zum geisteswissenschaftlichen Verstehen.”

context that a resurgent humanism, though it could take on the compensatory and sometimes quaint language of “*einfache Sittlichkeit*” and Bollnow’s “*neue Geborgenheit*,” was part of a general return to the richness of the German philosophical and philological-hermeneutical tradition that sought to understand and to teach the classical texts in the history of philosophy with a more critical awareness of limits of objectivity and scientific method. Alongside the concerns raised by Heidegger’s language and hermeticism for professional academic productivity or pedagogy and the wider threat that Heidegger’s mode of thinking and his anti-humanism presented to the security (*Geborgenheit*) of the youth and of philosophy, there was also a strong move to reassert a philosophically-grounded basis for research and teaching in the *Geisteswissenschaften*.

Neutralizing Heidegger’s Effect through Tradition

There was never the same investment in Heidegger’s philosophy as a basis for political activism as there was in the case of Sartre. The German reviewers of his work were more concerned to place Heidegger within, or to define his work against a particular tradition and, thereby, to render it more intelligible and potentially surpassable. Often this meant revealing how Heidegger’s new concern with the history of Being was simply a rhetorical gesture to bring philosophy as metaphysics to an end. Gerhard Krüger went so far as to claim that his teacher’s attempts to overcome metaphysics had nonetheless succumbed to a new kind of humanist metaphysics. Krüger argued, “Gerade indem er die Metaphysik des Seienden überwinden und eine sich anbahnende Wende der

Weltgeschichte denken will, humanisiert er, wie sich zeigte, das übermenschlich und übergöttlich gemeinte Sein und trägt die unüberwundene moderne Not der Geschichtlichkeit des Menschen mit alle daran haftenden Relativierung der wandelbar gewordenen Wahrheit in jenes Sein selbst hinein.”⁵²⁶ For Krüger, Heidegger’s attempt to quarantine man and beings in their historicity by means of the elevated notion of *Sein* was nothing new. German Idealists, above all Hegel, had already been drawn to the task of resolving the modern experience of historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*). Many would equate the negation of the factual in Hegel’s concept of Absolute Spirit with Heidegger’s phrase *Lichtung des Seins* (clearing of Being).⁵²⁷ Krüger contended that “Heidegger stands like every current thinker before the fact that history has passed over Hegel’s eschatological pronouncement of the perfection of history in absolute philosophy.”⁵²⁸ Here it may seem that Krüger tried to assimilate Heidegger to the familiar narrative in which no German philosopher ever succeeds in surpassing Hegel. However, Krüger’s point was more subtle. Heidegger’s philosophy of “Ek-sistenz” becomes an unworkable variation on Hegel’s identification of history with the development of Absolute *Geist*.

Heidegger may have removed any notion of rational progress from the history of philosophy, but Heidegger nonetheless treated the history of metaphysics as so many attempts to raise the question of Being. The supposed “overcoming of metaphysics” proclaimed by Heidegger in “The Age of the World Picture,” a lecture given in 1938 and

⁵²⁶ Krüger, “Martin Heidegger und der Humanismus,” *Theologische Rundschau* 18 (1950): 173.

⁵²⁷ Cf. Helmut Kuhn, “Heideggers ‘Holzwege’,” in *Archiv für Philosophie* 4, no.3 (July 1952): 267-68.

⁵²⁸ Krüger, “Martin Heidegger und der Humanismus,” 176.

republished in *Holzwege* (1950), was merely the simplification of Hegel's notion of the historical actualization of spirit to a potential "advent" of Being. Now, "Being" took the place of absolute spirit as that which distinguished human being-in-the-world. However, whereas for Hegel there was a rational plan underlying the movement of *Geist* that found concrete actualization in universalizing processes such as human *Bildung* and the formation of a more inclusive state, in Heidegger's case, Being eluded the efforts to pinpoint instances of meaning in its historical development. The actuality of the idea, which, for Hegel, derived from the rationality or "reasonableness" of its determinations (*Bestimmungen*), found no correlate in Heidegger's thinking through language as the path to Being. Thus, Heidegger's "thinking" did nothing to ameliorate the aporias of human facticity, or "*Geschichtlichkeit*" (historicity). In his yearly review of German philosophy for the journal *Philosophy*, Fritz Heinemann expressed the "anticlimax" of the *Holzwege* collection and dismissed Heidegger's late thought as "a sort of inverted Hegelianism transformed into an ontological mysticism. The Absolute which appears in different historical forms is now 'nothing,' whereas each of its appearances claims to represent true reality."⁵²⁹ Helmut Kuhn expressed the same argument in his review of *Holzwege* for the *Archiv für Philosophie*. In reference to Heidegger's important essay on "The Word of Nietzsche 'God is Dead'," Kuhn observed, "Wie bei Hegel die Weltgeschichte das Zu-sich-kommen des Geistes ist, so ist sie bei Heidegger die Selbstoffenbarung des Nichts."

⁵²⁹ F. H. Heinemann, "German Philosophy," in *Philosophy* 25, no. 95 (Oct. 1950): 342. Of course, Heidegger would never make the claim that the truth of Being was "represented true reality," in the way that Hegel imputed greater reality and reason to the idea than appearance.

Theologisch ausgedrückt ist die Weltgeschichte bei Hegel die in Christus vorweggenommene Re-inkarnation Gottes. Bei Heidegger, ebenfalls theologisch ausgedrückt, ist sie das fortschreitende ‘Töten Gottes’.⁵³⁰ Kuhn observed, a secularized “Nachleben” of Hegel’s Absolute Geist in Heidegger’s apparent reintroduction of mysticism: “In kühner Verkehrung wird an die Stelle des absoluten Geistes das Nichts gesetzt. Wie aber die Hegelische Philosophie selbst, so hat auch deren Umformung durch Heidegger ihre Wurzeln in der deutschen Mystik.”⁵³¹

Hegel’s systematic philosophy sought to encompass all fields of *Wissenschaft* while maintaining the identity of *Geist* and history, and the connection between transcendence and finitude, being as the rationality of the idea and its concrete actualization, as for example, in the relation between universalizing potential of the state and law and the other modalities of the person as ethical member of the family and self-interested bourgeois in the heteronomy of civil society. Before Hegel’s great system, Heidegger’s ‘thinking’ was quite a let-down.

Heidegger’s late philosophy set out the task of “thinking” through the history of Being as the history of metaphysics, which was in any case a history of the forgetfulness/forgetting of Being (“*Seinsvergessenheit*”), which would seem to condemn human Dasein to the “fate” (*das Geschick*) of nihilism, rather than a *Geschichtlichkeit* that nonetheless has reason in its moment of unfolding. As Gadamer argued, “Heidegger

⁵³⁰ H. Kuhn, “Heideggers ‘Holzwege’,” 267.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 268. Kuhn compares Heidegger’s late ‘mystical’ thought to that of Meister Eckart. Cf. John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986).

quite intentionally avoids the expressions, history (Geschichte) and historicity (Geschichtlichkeit) . . . Instead, he speaks of ‘fate’ (Geschick) and ‘our being fated’ (Geschicklichkeit) as if to underscore the fact that here is not a matter of possibilities of human existence which we ourselves seize upon . . . Rather it is a matter of what is allotted to man and by which he is so very much determined that all self-determination and self-consciousness remains subordinate.”⁵³² With the turn to Being “before all beings (*Seinde*),” Heidegger’s thought had simply sidestepped the issue of *Geschichtlichkeit* altogether and certainly precluded any possible role for philosophy as a guiding factor in the future development of human knowledge and practical dealings. For Heidegger, philosophy did not comprehend the rational in the real as in Hegel; rather, “the forgetfulness of Being” ensured that an unreflective historicism prevailed in which, as Heidegger claimed, “Die Historie ist die ständige Zerstörung der Zukunft und des geschichtlichen Bezuges zur Ankunft des Geschickes” and where “Die technische Organisation der Weltöffenheit durch den Rundfunk und die bereits nachhinkende Presse ist die eigentliche Herrschaftsform des Historismus.”⁵³³ Such a statement ran counter not only to Hegel’s view of the progress of reason in history, but also to the reflective potential of philosophy introduced through German idealism, which was so vital for the contemporary philosophical hermeneutics practiced by Gadamer as well as the critical, communicative rationality later developed by Habermas. At the same time, philosophy

⁵³² Gadamer, “Hegel and Heidegger,” 109.

⁵³³ Martin Heidegger, “Der Spruch des Anaximander,” in *Holzwege*, 301.

seemed to reach a point of crisis in which it had lost any claim to competence in ‘worldly’ affairs because of the radical “derealization” of its practice, which the struggle with Heidegger’s thought and the dominance of ‘positivism’ threw into sharp relief.

The Relation to Tradition as a Hermeneutical Problem

In many of the statements and recollections made by younger philosophers, one can observe the problem of the displacement of their relation to the German philosophical and cultural tradition. This is perhaps a more ‘abstract’ relation on the level of discourse than the political and institutional relations we have explored; however, no consideration of the thought and professional activities of the younger figures we encounter like Habermas, Dieter Henrich, Hermann Lübbe, and Hans Blumenberg can proceed without first accounting for this rift in experience.

Gadamer stated the problem for us quite clearly when he observed how “[t]he hermeneutical problem only emerges clearly when there is no powerful tradition present to absorb one’s own attitude into itself and when one is aware of confronting an alien tradition to which he has never belonged or one he no longer unquestionably accepts.”⁵³⁴ We could then specify the hermeneutic problem for the West German intellectual youth after the war by means of the three moments in the relation to tradition suggested in Gadamer’s definition: absence, confrontation, and questioning/skepticism. First, the

⁵³⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Problem of Self-Understanding (1962),” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1976), 46.

absence of a “powerful tradition” that would “absorb one’s own attitude,” for younger students of philosophy, would be the broken, or at least ‘displaced’ tradition of German philosophy that few would deny was most represented by German idealism consummated in Hegel’s systemic philosophy. Next, the confrontation with an “alien tradition” might as well be the putative imposition of positivism, or, at the political level, a kind of provincial attitude towards supposedly non-German traditions like those represented by the analytic schools of philosophy, the various strains of the philosophy of science, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Popper, Reichenbach, and a host of others. Landgrebe in his response to Walter Cerf clearly saw these forcibly exiled thinkers as “alien to the German tradition.” But there is a more important notion of “alienation” at work here: the kind one feels towards a tradition that one “no longer unquestionably accepts.” Gadamer often employs the terms *Enttäuschung* or *Verfremdung* together, though not interchangeably, to designate this distance from past interpretations in the contemporary *praxis* of philosophy and the *Geisteswissenschaften*.

In Gadamer’s hermeneutics, the explication (*Erklärung*) of texts is made more complex by the understanding (*Verstehen*). Understanding in the human sciences required more than an application of method to clarify meaning. As Gadamer clarified in a late interview,

In contrast to the natural sciences, the humanistic disciplines have no methodologically ‘assured results that we can pass along free of questions. Rather, in the *Geisteswissenschaften* we are constantly learning new things from what has been passed down to us. A genuine readiness for experience goes along

with this also, an openness to the claim to truth that confronts us in what is handed down to us.⁵³⁵

Understanding in the human sciences requires an openness to “what is handed down to us.” Often Gadamer calls it a “conversation” or *Gespräch* that one initiates with the text, or indeed with another interlocutor that occurs against the background of tradition (*Überlieferung*). We can raise the question of the difference between “conversing” with a text and communicating with another human being below. For now, it is important not only to clarify Gadamer’s position, but also the basis for its continued influence on the thought of his students. Gadamer modeled his philosophical hermeneutics on the practice (*Praxis*) of teaching. Gadamer maintained that “Hermeneutik ist vor allem eine Praxis, die Kunst des Verstehens und des Verständlichmachens. Sie ist die Seele allen Unterrichts, der Philosophieren lehren will.”⁵³⁶ The germ for *Truth and Method* developed largely from Gadamer’s lectures from the 1930s onward, and the imagery and examples used to portray the key concepts of his philosophical hermeneutics come from the spoken word rather than written or formal language—thus he maintains a distinction similar to the French structuralists between *parole* and *langue*.⁵³⁷

Tradition or “Überlieferung”—literally “what has been handed down”—framed the background for understanding and was comprised of so many past interpretations and conversations that had sedimented in the language in which any hermeneutical

⁵³⁵ Gadamer, “Conversations with Carsten Dutt: Part I: Hermeneutics,” in *Gadamer in Conversation*, 53.

⁵³⁶ Gadamer, Beitrag in Pongratz, *Philosophie in Selbstdarstellungen*, 3:79.

⁵³⁷ Gadamer, “Interview: Writing and the Living Voice,” in *On Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, 63-64.

engagement must be inscribed. This often unthematized and pretheoretical level of meaning functioned as the “foreunderstanding” and “prejudgment” that any human being brought to the interpretation of a text, or to a conversation. Gadamer’s formulation was admittedly very close to Heidegger’s analysis of being-in-the-world, and the tendency of Dasein to “cover things up.” However, whereas Heidegger was interested in a modality of Dasein in a very general, ontological sense, Gadamer focused on Dasein reading a text, or conversing with another. What is more, while Gadamer took the turn to language as the “house of Being” very seriously, he did not endorse the enigmatic way that his teacher had of expressing this basic point. Heidegger in his late works viewed Being as a kind of “fate” and “sending”—a *Schicksal and Geschicht*. For Gadamer, this was a very imprecise formulation of what was once referred to as the historicity of Dasein. Unlike his teacher, Gadamer did not shy away from using the term ‘Mensch.’ “The human being was that life form that had language.”⁵³⁸ Rather than speaking of language as “the house of Being,” Gadamer referred to it as “the house of *the* human being.”⁵³⁹ In this way, one could argue, Gadamer succeeded in rendering Heidegger’s late philosophy more intelligible and relevant to the practice of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. “Being” may have been the possibility of thinking; however, it becomes in Heidegger’s work a kind of empty, or, at least, ambiguous signifier. It is “das Nichts”; in other words, the possibility

⁵³⁸ Gadamer, “Mensch und Sprache,” in *Kleine Schriften I: Philosophie – Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1967), 93; in English, Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 60.

⁵³⁹ Gadamer, “Die Aufgabe der Philosophie,” in *Das Erbe Europas* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989), 172-73; also discussed in Gadamer, “Conversations with Carsten Dutt,” 57-58.

for having a world of beings (Seinde) and also the kind of riddle, or paradox that comes with the realization that Being is also not having a world.⁵⁴⁰ Being was necessarily a very difficult signifier precisely because Heidegger tried to create a place holder for the idea that what Dasein has in the way of understanding can no longer be conceived in philosophy as one with the real. The reality of the idea, which, for Hegel, was based on its rationality had proven ephemeral in Heidegger's view because of the scientific/technical world picture of the age. Being was the sign of this loss of identity and unity; it is in fact "nothing" because the philosophical-scientific language that predominated in the modern age could no longer account for it.

Gadamer, however, gave a much clearer explanation for this problem in his distinction between truth and method with regard to the interpretation of a text. Because of the historicity of understanding in the *Geisteswissenschaften*, one approached a text always under the influence of the history of prior interpretations and inherited assumptions. What Gadamer called "wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein" was simply the idea that the interpreter (or participant in conversation) was linked both to the immediate context in which the hermeneutic praxis took place as well as to the history of effects that served as the horizon of fore-understanding for this praxis. "Hermeneutic work," Gadamer contended, "is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness. . . . It is the play between the traditionary text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between

⁵⁴⁰ One is reminded of Max von Brück's allusion to the Sphinx, where after all the answer to the riddle is man—and even more appropriately, man through all the stages and limitations of life, i.e., in his finitude.

being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.*”⁵⁴¹ Most importantly, however, was the reference to consciousness. To be sure, Gadamer did not intend to side-step Heidegger’s project by referring back to the metaphysical notion of a subjective consciousness, or Kant’s “understanding [that] thinks the connections of things a priori.”⁵⁴² Rather, Gadamer followed Heidegger’s analysis in *Sein und Zeit*, suggesting that “Understanding too cannot be grasped as a simple activity of the consciousness that understands, but is itself a mode of the event of being.” “Nevertheless,” Gadamer suggested, “it seems to me that it is possible to bring to expression within the hermeneutical consciousness itself Heidegger’s statements concerning ‘being’ and the line of inquiry he developed out of the experience of the ‘turn.’ I have carried out this attempt in *Truth and Method*.”⁵⁴³

Language was not some ancillary by-product of a consciousness and grounded in a transparent, logical structure; nor was it merely an instrument or tool.⁵⁴⁴ “Language is the real mark of our finitude. It is always out beyond us.” Therefore, Gadamer stated, “there is no individual consciousness at all in which a spoken language is actually present.”⁵⁴⁵ The notion that the logic of scientific method could do away with or close the “in-between” of our distance and proximity to language was an illusion—one brought

⁵⁴¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295.

⁵⁴² Immanuel Kant, “Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft eintreten können,” in *Kants Werke-Akademie Textausgabe*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1968), 260.

⁵⁴³ Gadamer, “On the Problem of Self-Understanding,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 50.

⁵⁴⁴ Gadamer, “Man and Language,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 62.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

about by the gesture of detachment from tradition inaugurated by the self-assertion of modern scientific method. Gadamer and many others of his generation complained of the predominance of this instrumental relation to language, which in many respects was the linguistic counterpart to the dominance of specialization in the applied sciences. Gadamer publically expressed his concerns about the fate of philosophy and the humanities in the age of positivistic science in his opening speech before the Congress of the AGPD in 1966 over which he presided as president. He declared,

Die Sprache des technischen Zeitalters, die mehr und mehr die Sprache der jüngeren Generation wird und die uns Ältere mit der leise komische Attitude des altmodisch-kunstvollen Redegebrauchs zeichnet, bleibt noch Sprach. Unzweifelhaft ist die Verfremdung, die mit der technischen Begriffsapparatur in die Sprache eindringt, selber ein Ausdruck und Abdruck unsere Wirklichkeit, in der wir leben. Aber diese Verfremdung zu einer rein funktionalen Sprache, die aus technischer Nomenklatur und exakt klingenden Feststellungen und Folgerungen besteht, geht in die Sprache, die wir alle sprechen, ein und erleidet damit die Dialektik der Präzision.⁵⁴⁶

Here, in quite a rhetorical turn, Gadamer reversed the arguments that had been raised against the language of Heidegger and existentialism, which had recently been recapitulated by Theodor Adorno in *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*.⁵⁴⁷ Now, it was the jargon of Marxism and “positivist theory” that posed the greatest threat to conceptual precision in philosophy and the human sciences as a whole. The issue was not the different “terminology” used in the specialized sciences; this was a necessary outcome of creating

⁵⁴⁶ Gadamer, “Die Stellung der Philosophie in der heutigen Gesellschaft,” Opening Address of the Eighth German Congress for Philosophy, Heidelberg 1966, in Gadamer, ed., *Das Problem der Sprache* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1967), 14.

⁵⁴⁷ Theodor Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965).

specific areas of research and the need for competence. Rather, Gadamer argued, the “Jargon der Technik” militated against the character of language (*Sprechen*) itself; by closing down the interplay between past interpretations and the “consciousness of effects” in living speech, it rendered communication and understanding impossible. In light of the unbridgeable gap between “specialists and enthusiasts” (“Fachleute und Liebhabern”), Gadamer maintained that it was “die allgemeine Aufgabe des philosophischen Denkens . . . diesen Verfremdung zu widerstehen, sie zurückzuschmelzen in echte, denkende Anstrengung.”⁵⁴⁸ This was a gesture towards a renewed public resonance for philosophy, and obviously a response to the fear the, particularly the young were either being alienated by the technical language of a rationally administered society, or seduced by the philosophemes of Marxism or, even of “Eigentlichkeit.” He might have felt the need to take it upon himself to stimulate greater interest in the organized public conferences of philosophy, which, since Plessner’s “Symphilosophien” of 1950, had at least claimed a desire for the participation of non-specialists and lay “enthusiasts.” However much Gadamer tried to convince his audience that the AGPD was “kein Fachverband,” there was no question that the practice of philosophy and the human sciences occurred within the universities and institutes, where understanding occurred only in the small circles and research groups that Gadamer and his closest students and colleagues helped to found. The important questions for these figures were the viability of their discipline and its independence from the external

⁵⁴⁸ Gadamer, “Die Stellung der Philosophie,” 15.

demands of social change. “Jargon” of all kinds would dominate the public discourse of the mid to late 1960s, while the philosophers and *Geisteswissenschaftler* intensified their focus on attaining clarity and precision in their own terminology and above all in research projects related to the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*) and philosophy that operated, as Gadamer himself must have realized because of an intellectual tradition to which only the elite of initiates had access.

For Gadamer, understanding in philosophy, the human sciences, and in any meaningful conversation had to rely upon the “enabling prejudgments” handed down from tradition. This was most apparent in the conversation, in living speech where “[t]he real event of understanding goes beyond what we can bring to the understanding of the other person’s words through methodical effort and self control. . . . It is not really ourselves who understand,” Gadamer argued, “it is always a past that allows us to say, ‘I have understood.’”⁵⁴⁹

But what happened to conversation when this relation to the past was broken? More importantly, what if this living relation to tradition that makes possible the moment, or “event” of understanding possible is disrupted, or displaced, how can it be recovered? This was the concern of the teachers like Gadamer, when confronted with the eager young students of philosophy after the Second World War. These young people had not only been deprived of this living relation to the German intellectual past by the political suppression and censorship of culture, they also came with the strong need to catch up.

⁵⁴⁹ Gadamer, “The Scope of Hermeneutical Reflection,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 58.

This *Nachholbedürfnis* was intensified not only by the impoverished times following the war, but because the modern condition itself had pushed the “needy consciousness” towards future goals to be achieved by the imposition of political programs which in turn relied on a crass, instrumental relation to science. As Gadamer’s long-time friend, Gerhard Krüger observed,

Wir können heute – nach allem, was geschehen ist – nicht in derselben Weise Tradition haben wie die Philosophen in der Antike, im Mittelalter, oder auch so wie noch in der ersten Hälfte der Neuzeit, – vor dem verhängnisvollen Verlust der Tradition, oder genauer gesagt: vor dem Verlust der Sache, in deren immer wiederholter Erforschung sich ganz von selbst die lebendige, sachlich erfüllte Tradition bildet und fortsetzt.⁵⁵⁰

The relation of philosophers to tradition had not been the same since the cataclysmic events of revolution and war that ushered in the modern experience of time. Philosophy began at a loss because of the crisis caused by the failure of German idealism in which

die geschichtlichen Wandlungen, die sich früher immer noch auf dem Grunde und in den Grenzen der festgehaltenen Tradition vollzogen hatten, und die eigentlich immer nur als Modifikationen und Reinigungen der Tradition selbst gemeint worden waren, sie gewannen jetzt das Übergewicht über die Tradition. . . und nun began mit Hegel die eigentliche und rein modern, die Geschichte der Philosophie einbeziehende Art des Denkens, die uns . . . in die Situation der Krise hineingeführt hat.⁵⁵¹

The idea of a crisis in modern consciousness after Hegel was a notion that many young figures like Reinhart Koselleck, Jürgen Habermas, and even Hans Blumenberg would take over from the work and ideas of older figures like Krüger and Löwith. For the

⁵⁵⁰ Gerhard Krüger, “Die Bedeutung der Tradition für die philosophische Forschung,” *Studium Generale* 4, no. 6 (June 1951): 328.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 325.

moment, however, we must understand the practical ways in which the teachers attempted to bridge this gulf between generations and their unequal relationships to tradition.

Gadamer would seem to have been the most successful. The loss of tradition manifested itself in an inability for fruitful conversation and mutual understanding; thus, the answer was simple. One had to engage this youth in conversation, but under the most favorable conditions. Here Gadamer followed the practices of his teachers. He gathered students and interested outsiders together in small groups and focused them first on the explication of key texts from the philosophical tradition. In true German form, one began with the Greeks. Gadamer's earliest experiment was with the so-called "Alpbacher Kreis," a group of students and assistants, who gathered together in the picturesque ski resort in Alpbach, Austria in the late 1940s. Dieter Henrich and Hans-Robert Jaufß among others attended these intellectual conversations with Gadamer and several other instructors from Heidelberg. Gadamer recollected these early attempts at intellectual renewal with great fondness. In a letter to Jaufß on his 60th birthday in 1981, Gadamer recalled,

Ich erinnere mich noch sehr genau, wie Sie mir in den Anfängen meiner Heidelberger Tätigkeit über den Weg gelaufen sind. Sie und Ihre Gattin gehörten ja zu dem Alpbacher Kreis, der teils von Schülern von Hess, teils von meinen eigenen Schülern gebildet war und damals zu jenen Versuchen gehörte, neue studentische Lebensformen zu entwickeln. Wie weit liegt das alles zurück. Inzwischen sind die Universitäten aus allen Nähten geplatzt, und man kann kaum noch vorstellen, daß eine so zwanglose Kameradschaft zwischen Professoren und Studenten einmal existiert hat, wie wir sie in jenen Jahren erlebten.

Gewiß war es auch die besondere Stauung und Entladung, die das Kriegsende gebracht hatte, was damals sehr verschiedene Jahrgänge, frühere Soldaten und blutjunge Anfänger, in eine Art akademischer Gleichzeitigkeit versetzt hatte. Mir rief diese Erfahrung, die auch für den akademischen Lehrer ihren rechten Reiz hatte, die entsprechende Erfahrung ins Gedächtnis, die ich selber am Ende des ersten Weltkrieges in der Rolle eines Studenten machen durfte. Vielleicht war die Zeit nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg bei aller Schwierigkeit des Wiederaufbaus von einem größeren Optimismus erfüllt als die Zeit meiner eigenen akademischen Jugend. Aber harte Zeiten waren es gewiß für Ihre Generation. Wenn Sie heute zurückdenken, mag Ihnen Ihr jetziger Wirkungsort und Ihr eigener Rang, den Sie sich im Felde der Forschung erobert haben viel Freude und Befriedigung gewähren. Ich selber möchte [Ende S. 1] zum Ausdruck bringen, daß der starke Widerhall, den Sie als Forscher und Lehrer erzeugt haben, auch für mich selber eine rechte Freude ist.⁵⁵²

Gadamer and his students focused on the close reading of texts and the clarification of language, taking up Hegel or Kant anew and, in many cases, challenged the interpretations of the Master, Heidegger with detailed, careful hermeneutical studies.⁵⁵³ This was accompanied by the Hegel revival, and what was interesting about the Hegel reception was that it bridged so many of the schools. Again, these were not ‘schools’ in the traditional sense, but groups of thinkers at different levels of their careers. The four main areas that fostered this rich intellectual activity were Heidelberg (around Löwith and Gadamer), Münster (around Ritter), and Frankfurt with Habermas and the younger Schnädelbach certainly influenced by Adorno.

⁵⁵² Hans-Georg Gadamer to Hans-Robert Jauß, Heidelberg, September 21, 1981. Gadamer Nachlass, DLA Marbach am Neckar.

⁵⁵³ See, for example, Dieter Henrich, “Über die Einheit der Subjektivität (Review of M. Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, 2nd edn [Frankfurt, 1951]),” in *Philosophische Rundschau* 3, no. 1-2 (1955): 28-69.

The discussion of Hegel's philosophy, particularly the relation between the rational and the real, nature and history, and the philosopher's relationship to the French Revolution and the Prussian Restoration represented the most influential and meaningful reconsideration of German Idealism and the expectations for philosophy in the 1950s. The 'Zusammenbruch' of Hegelian philosophy and with it the critical project of German Idealism in the 1840s was viewed as a watershed in the history of modern philosophy and in German intellectual history. All the great, formative works of the history of philosophy in the 1940s and 1950s structured the narrative of modern thought according to the formula of before and after Hegel.⁵⁵⁴ This is not to say that the key thinkers of the German tradition before Hegel, Fichte or Kant, played no role in the reconsideration of the character of modern philosophy; however, Kantianism, especially the Neo-Kantianism that followed the collapse of Hegelianism in the late nineteenth century had exhausted itself in the crisis of the sciences and philosophy of the 1920s and 1930s. Many of the leading philosophers of the 1950s saw the Neo-Kantian "Schulphilosophien" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as the embodiment of the stagnation of German philosophy. Neo-Kantianism was caricatured as a dogmatic movement narrowly focused on questions of epistemology and method. Certainly, figures like Herman Cohen, Heinrich Rickert, or Wilhelm Windelband were respected, but they became overshadowed by the more radical philosophies of *Existenz*, *Lebensphilosophie*, the

⁵⁵⁴ Foremost was Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel bis Nietzsche: der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts: Marx und Kierkegaard*, 2nd edn. (Zurich and Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1950 [orig. 1941]).

renaissance of Kierkegaard in the theology of the interwar years, Husserl's phenomenology, and of course by Heidegger's assault on subject-centered, logocentric philosophies. Though a figure like Ernst Cassirer remained greatly influential into the early 1930s, the students were being produced by Husserl, Heidegger, and those influenced by Dilthey and the *Historische Schule*.

Yet even though, as many commentators pointed out, Heidegger's students and also those strongly influenced by his thinking dominated the philosophy departments in the post-1945 West German universities, something rather astounding happens when their students begin to come into their own: the older traditions come back to the fore, but in renewed and highly constructive forms. The teachers like Gadamer, Löwith, and Ritter encouraged their students to study the primary texts, starting with the Greeks, naturally, but moving on to the German idealists. One finds amazing dissertations and habilitations on Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. To the outside observer, one might find this further proof of German provincialism; however, when these young students turned back to the foundational texts of modern German philosophy, they also 'discovered' as it were the thinkers like Dilthey, Cassirer, and Cohen: the thinkers who had truly sought to build upon these old systems. Heidegger's works were little help in understanding Kant or Hegel. If one read these texts, produced from Heidegger's lectures of the early 1930s, one learned about Heidegger, not about the thinkers he appropriated. The anachronism in the publication of Heidegger's earlier lectures alongside the enigmatic postwar lectures caused serious problems for those younger thinkers, who wanted not only to understand

Heidegger's path of thinking, but solid, reliable explication of the key figures of the German intellectual tradition. The ones who could give them this were in some cases their teachers; but they also returned to the original sources, many of which were being republished in new critical editions and complete works. These projects made it possible to retrace the paths of scholarship on Kant and Hegel, for example, which opened up a larger store of thinking on tradition than what the 'radical' thinking of the 1920s could provide. Much of this scholarship had been lost during the 1930s because of suppression and emigration of key thinkers, alternatives that would have not been so greatly eclipsed by Heidegger's figure had it not been for the Nazi *Machtergreifung*.

This said, one cannot discount Heidegger's own pupils as part of this process of renewal. Karl Löwith's work, particularly his two books published in exile, *Hegel bis Nietzsche* (1950) and *Meaning in History* (1953) were required reading for many of the young students, who would later become leading professional philosophers.⁵⁵⁵ One then moved from Löwith's *Hegel to Nietzsche* back to the work of Franz Rosenzweig and Richard Kroner. The period after Hegel was no longer a kind of no man's land of positivists and Neo-Kantians, as students discovered the Young Hegelians, the Right Hegelians, and even Karl Marx. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche had remained popular; but

⁵⁵⁵ Karl Löwith, *The Meaning of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949); the first German edition appears as Karl Löwith, *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen. Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1953). Hanno Kesting and Reinhart Koselleck, both students at Heidelberg, assisted in translating the English text into German, and their close friend, Niclaus Sombart was assigned *Meaning in History* as well as *Von Hegel bis Nietzsche* in his courses with Alfred Weber.

the mystique of the radical appropriations of the 1920s was lost on the younger philosophers. In a sense, the burden of the legend of the 1920s produced a kind of dialectical response, an antithesis and new synthesis from the apprentices of the teachers, who had been so animated by the pathos of the interwar years. Gadamer, Löwith, Spranger, Ritter could speak of the great impact that Spengler's *Decline of the West* or Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* had on their generation; one heard too of the George-Kreis, or the old, more radical Frankfurt School, of a more revolutionary Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*. But these texts were no longer read in their most living moment. The "wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein" of the students was irrevocably displaced by the drastic events of the intervening years. For the postwar youth, these rediscovered texts were not revolutionary events, as they had been for their teachers. Rather, the students read these works, not without interest and admiration to be sure, but they were artifacts of a different epoch that were studied, but not 'lived' as events.

Joachim Ritter's 'Collegium Philosophicum' in Münster

Possibly no other grouping of thinkers sought to reinvest the human sciences with renewed intellectual and practical relevance than the circle of younger students that gathered around Joachim Ritter in Münster by the mid 1950s. Ritter's "Collegium Philosophicum" was a semi-official—in that it was an unannounced seminar—group of advanced *Hochschüler*, Dozenten, and Habilitants that gathered together to discuss philosophical texts and present *Referate* and sometimes even to hear the occasional guest

speaker. What has come to be known only later at the “Ritter Schüle” was comprised not only of those advised by Ritter in Münster, but of young philosophers from around West Germany seeking intellectual community and philosophical discussion in a somewhat informal, though critical atmosphere. Hermann Lübbe, perhaps the most accomplished of the scholars to have attended Ritters Collegium, viewed Ritter’s influence retrospectively as an effective response to the needs of his generation. Many came to Ritter’s group in search of intellectual orientation and to share ideas with other young scholars, who shared to material and psychological burdens of the immediate postwar years. Ritter’s approach was to focus on this age group’s strong desire for reconnection to past learning and to harness their diligence, which so many of his, the teachers’ generation, found so enervating. Lübbe recalled how “Joachim Ritter machte daraus über beiläufige Bemerkungen einen Grundsatz akademischer Moralistik, nämlich den des schuldigen Respekts der Angehörigen wissenschaftlicher Kommunitäten für die fulle dessen, was bereits getan und herbeigeschafft sein mußte, und zwar zumeist von anderen Leuten, bevor überhaupt Wissenschaft einschließlich der Philosophie wieder stattfinden konnte.”⁵⁵⁶

Lübbe and other members of the Collegium such as Odo Marquard stressed Ritter’s openness to alternative viewpoints, much more extreme than his own. Above all

⁵⁵⁶ Hermann Lübbe, “Affirmationen. Joachim Ritters Philosophie im akademischen Kontext der zweiten deutschen Demokratie,” in Ulrich Dierse, ed., *Joachim Ritter zum Gedanken*, in Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz, *Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse*, no. 4 (2004): 90.

the group focused on the interpretation and teaching of classic texts in the Greek and German philosophical tradition. In this sense, the meetings were very conventional and in substance no different from what occurred in small circles around figures like Hans-Georg Gadamer in Heidelberg or Ludwig Landgrebe in Kiel. Although direct political discussion of the recent political past, the confrontation with National Socialism, did not take place, Lübke and other ‘Ritter Schüler’ insist that the subject was not actively suppressed.⁵⁵⁷ Likewise, even at the height of the supposed restorative 1950s, Ritter’s discussion group and his own work did not indulge in the widespread anti-Marxism of these years. Apparently, no subject was deemed taboo, and Ritter’s *Collegium* became a kind of refuge and “place of freedom.”⁵⁵⁸

By 1960, Ritter and his circle exerted a great influence over the direction of research in academic philosophy, institutional renewal, and the reconceptualization of philosophy and the *Geisteswissenschaften*. In the early 1960s, Ritter, along with Gadamer were influential members of the German Research Community (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) and the *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz*. Ritter and Gadamer took over the editorship of the *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* after the illness and sudden death of Erich Rothacker in 1965. Rothacker had conceived of the journal as a “Bausteine zu einem historischen Wörterbuch der Philosophie.” Though Gadamer was also part of the planning for the future Wörterbuch, it was Ritter who

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 90-91.

⁵⁵⁸ Jürgen Siefert, “Joachim Ritters ‘Collegium Philosophicum’ in Münster,” 194-95.

assumed control of the project and used his assistants and the members of the *Collegium* as the administrative and scholarly basis for what became the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, the first volume of which appeared in 1971.⁵⁵⁹

For Ritter, the project of replacing the old “Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe” edited by Rudolf Eisler in 1899 and republished from 1927-1930. Like the old “Eisler,” as it was referred to, the new *Wörterbuch* was meant to serve philosophy as a means of clarifying its terminology, though not within a static system of unchanging scientific concepts, as was thought to exist at the turn of the century. Rather, the new project took a decidedly historical approach. “Dazu gehört,” Ritter insisted, “daß die Zuwendung zur Geschichte der Philosophie nicht mehr nur als antiquarische Forschung verstanden wird, sondern positive zur erinnernden Vergegenwärtigung geworden ist.” Ritter also recognized the changed position of philosophy vis-à-vis the other sciences and the importance of the focus on the history of philosophy in a time when philosophers could no longer aspire to the completeness of a system. As Ritter observed, “[d]ie Scheidewand zwischen System und Philosophiehistorie ist durchlässig geworden.”⁵⁶⁰ This was apparent to Ritter and his students in the new studies of Hegel.

Hegel’s thought was appropriated more readily than other major thinkers of the German tradition, as an alternative to the prevailing world views after 1945: positivism, Marxist materialism, and the many forms of existentialism. Hegel figured prominently in

⁵⁵⁹ Joachim Ritter, ed., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe & Co. Verlag, 1971-). The *Historisches Wörterbuch* was completed in 2007 and comprises 13 volumes.

⁵⁶⁰ Joachim Ritter, “Vorwort,” in *ibid.*, 1:vi.

Gadamer's distinction between method and truth. Hegel's thought represented the revolutionary break in modern thought (Löwith). Not the least because he was the quintessential thinker of the events that ruptured the modern consciousness: The French Revolution. As Joachim Ritter stated in 1957: "For Hegel, the French Revolution is that event around which all the determinations of philosophy in relation to its time are clustered, with philosophy marking out the problem through attacks and defenses of the Revolution." In the lines that followed, Ritter elaborated the meaning and lineage of Hegel's relating thought to reality. This the heritage and the starting point of modern philosophy taken hold of by Ritter's students and other younger readers: "There is no other philosophy that is a philosophy of revolution to such a degree and so profoundly, in its innermost drive, as that of Hegel."⁵⁶¹ Identifying the origins, usually in Greek thought, or German Idealism and the radical 'breakdown' of this tradition in the nineteenth century were the tasks that the older, established thinkers set themselves in the 1940s and 1950s. It was less important for them to produce their own original work. More importantly, there was a need for synthetic and didactic works that identified the living options, and perhaps the blind alleys, for contemporary philosophy. Likewise, in the case

⁵⁶¹ Joachim Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution* [1957], trans. Richard Dien Winfield (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1982), 43.

of Ritter, Hegel studies became the source for the redefinition of the *Geisteswissenschaften* and the programmatic idea of their compensatory function.⁵⁶²

⁵⁶² Joachim Ritter, "Die Aufgabe der Geisteswissenschaften in der modernen Gesellschaft," in *Subjektivität: sechs Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), 105-171. This important work was first given as a lecture in August 1961 in Münster and published in expanded form in 1963.

Conculsion

The question we set out to answer is how a discipline, or set of disciplines, in this case, philosophy and the humanities redefined their role within the university and society in a period that all agreed was a time of ‘crisis’ for the traditional form of the German university. Of course, the philosophers had spoken of crises for as long as they engaged in a truly self-reflective kind of thinking. Idealism was the name for this, and every German thinker would agree that self-reflexive philosophy reached its apogee with Hegel’s system. After the death of the last system builder, German philosophers were said to have lost their primacy and relevance within the university, within culture, and among the other, specialized sciences. The latter continued to assert their independence with greater intensity as an expanding industrial society produced the need for more professionals, experts, technicians and bureaucrats. The “idea” of philosophy lost its claim to reality.

By 1960, the interests of the philosophy profession had shifted to questions of tradition and the history of philosophy, the relationship of philosophy to the sciences, and not necessarily in opposition to the natural or empirical sciences. As the next generation came into place, the practices of philosophers began to change. Conferences became more serious intellectual affairs, which were focused on one large theme for which there would be a limited number of lectures, but more colloquia, or panels dedicated to a particular aspect of the greater problem at hand. The meetings of the AGPD in 1960 in

Munich, 1962 in Münster, and 1966 in Heidelberg were truly interdisciplinary exchanges that brought together specialists from fields outside of traditional philosophy: the Heidelberg historian, Werner Conze, Helmut Schelsky, Arnold Gehlen, and the Göttingen physicist, C. F. von Weisacker—as well as some philosophers, considered to be social theorists or cultural critics like Adorno. The conference of 1962 on “Das Problem des Fortschritts” was clearly meant to appeal to a wider audience of non-academics by headlining Karl Löwith and Theodor Adorno as key-note speakers. Many were simply interested in the juxtaposition of two thinkers of such very different demeanor, image, habitus, distance in the field, but whose work did reach a wider audience of non-specialists, if not a good deal of the educated, bourgeois public. However, the conference could also be seen as a showcase for younger philosophers who not only began to challenge the accepted narratives of the German tradition and modernity as a whole, but who also sought to take head on the problem of the loss of relevance in the practice of the philosopher.

The crisis of the sciences and *Kulturkritik* of the 1920s that still defined the realm of the conceivable in their teachers’ responses to the idea of progress and the latter’s unfavorable accounts of all proscriptive philosophies of history, gave way to real efforts to understand and to reinvestigate the history of philosophical concepts. Although this led to greater collaboration and the formation of new interdisciplinary institutes like the Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Forschung at Bielefeld founded in 1968, greater professional exchange between philosophers, historians, and social scientists at this elite level could

not accommodate the persistent problems of the changing needs of the student body and expanding administrative duties required of professors in “reform” universities of the 1960s. Hans Blumenberg would later express disappointment with the reform university of Bochum to which he moved with high hopes in 1966.⁵⁶³ Administrative duties and the new university’s limitations prevented the realization of Blumenberg’s ideal of *Bildung* and the view of the university he set out when he arrived in Bochum. In an unpublished lecture given shortly after his arrival, Blumenberg posed the problem clearly,

Welche Erwartungen erweckt die Universität, und welche Erwartungen erfüllt sie? Ohne Frage leben wir in einer Zeit der tiefenden Enttäuschung an der Universität. Der Unwille, oft auch das Mißverständnis, die ihr in der Kritik der öffentlichen Meinung entgegengebracht werden, haben tiefere Wurzeln als das Versagen, das ihr hinsichtlich ihrer Leistungsfähigkeit für die moderne Gesellschaft und gegenüber ihren Anforderungen an Ausbildungseffektivität vorgeworfen wird.⁵⁶⁴

Employing the concept of the scientific “Weltmodell,” Blumenberg expressed the inability of the individual subject to master the idea and reality of the university, “Zu sagen, daß wir ein wissenschaftliches Weltmodell besitzen, heißt von einer Objektivität zu sprechen, die kein Subject mehr hat.”⁵⁶⁵ It was a point of view reminiscent of Freyer

⁵⁶³ Blumenberg to Gadamer, Blankenstein, August 16, 1967, p. 2. Nachlass Blumenberg. DLA Marbach

⁵⁶⁴ Blumenberg, “Weltmodell und Lebenswelt,” unpublished lecture. There is no date attached to this document. Its similarity to the following two manuscript drafts indicates a development in the same period. The similarity of its subject matter to the themes of *Legitimität* (1966), the lecture “Die Bedeutung der Philosophie für unsere Zukunft” delivered within the context of the Europa-Gespräch 1961 and “Weltbilder und Weltmodelle” delivered in 1961 and published in *Nachrichten der Giessener Hochschulgesellschaft* [30 (1961): 67-75] as well as “Lebenswelt und Technisierung” (1963) and “Die Vorbereitung der Aufklärung als Rechtfertigung” (1967), lead me to place its formulation in the mid 1960s, as well as a entry in Blumenberg’s Notizbuch that lists a lecture entitled “Weltmodell und Lebenswelt” 29.9.1966, on the occasion of the opening “Feier der Ruhr-Universität Bochum.”

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 9.

and Gehlen's notion of the human being in the age of technology caught up in the effects of "secondary" processes. However, Blumenberg seemed to express a view not very different from Gadamer in the latter's belief that university could no longer realize its classical ideal except in elite groups of students around a particular instructor, or in specialized institutes.⁵⁶⁶ The last attempt of Blumenberg and others of his generation to realize a new ideal of interdisciplinary exchange was the founding of the ZiF at Bielefeld in 1968. Reinhart Koselleck wrote to Blumenberg in 1973 to express his disappointment that the latter had not accompanied him to the new university in 1968, after being instrumental in its founding. Koselleck wrote,

Freilich haben Sie sich vermutlich richtig entschieden, denn die geplanten Vorzüge von Bielefeld schrumpfen dahin. Dauernd werden neue Reformen über die noch nicht angelaufenen gestülpt und wenn sich alles unter dem Dach einer Gesamthochschule versammelt hat, werden wir alle Studienräte im Hochschuldienst sein. Eine neue Hierarchie des Ehrgeizes wird gezüchtet werden, es werden Oberstudienräte im Hochschuldienst wachsen, Oberst-, -General-Generaloberstudienräte, alles unter dem Deckmantel paritätischer Professoren. Die Studierenden werden in Klassen gezwängt und nach strengen Lehrpläne für die Praxis präpariert. . . . Die Soziologen in Bielefeld sind zerfallen, die Juristen und Linguisten haben sich durch das Blockstudium -vorerst- isoliert und wir Historiker versuchen nach, die Kluft zwischen den Ständen so überbrückbar wie möglich zu halten. Wenn auch noch der Wechsel zwischen Forschung und Lehre entfällt, sind wir auf dem Boden der Provinz angelangt.⁵⁶⁷

Koselleck expressed the disillusionment of his and perhaps even his teachers' generations in the wake of 1968. Although the philosophers and Geisteswissenschaftler had made good on the intention of changing the "attitude" of the Mandarin *Ordinarienuniversität*,

⁵⁶⁶ Gadamer, "The University of Leipzig, 1409-1959: A Former Rector Commemorates the 550th Anniversary of its Founding [1959]," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History*, 35.

⁵⁶⁷ Reinhart Koselleck to Blumenberg, Nussloch, July 18, 1973. Nachlass Koselleck. DLA Marbach.

they found their projects pushed to the extreme by the political generation that could no longer abide the separation of politics and science.

Ultimately, the high-minded goals of humanistic education and critical *Bildung* were relegated, much like Koselleck's ZiF, to a province within the every-expanding university devoted to professional training and specialized expertise. The classic ideal of the university as the realm of free teaching and research as well as the more modern belief that the university could serve a social function if not a political one are given up on as the philosophers followed along in the "mass professionalization" of science and intellectual culture. Philosophers, students and teachers were caught in a dilemma. The learning process in which they believed depended on isolation (*Einsamkeit*) and also freedom—a negative freedom from intrusion that also necessitated the support of the state—and, at the same time, many, particularly among the younger generation recognized the need for greater inclusion, which by the mid 1960s had become deeply politicized by the demand for student involvement in university reform, curriculum and leadership. This seemed to mandate a duty and vocation to the scholar to address social concerns. Unfortunately, institutional constraints and a clash in the view of the political past between the youth of the late 1940s and early 1950s and the youth of the mid to late 1960s created confusion on the part of the philosophy professors as to how to address the genuine social concerns of their students and a reluctance on the part of the students to extend consideration to an age group that was never in a position to fully fathom the political experiences of their youth except intellectually, perhaps, through the mediation

of tradition. The so-called 45er generation's contact with their teachers, the relationship that was so key to overcoming the trauma of the lost and empty years of the Third Reich, could not be reproduced in the learning process of the following generations. Only further analysis of the experiences and ideas of the first postwar philosophical generation can offer ways of mending this problematic gap, which I believe represents a new disinheritance caused not by an overt political catastrophe, but by a loss of the ability to communicate and accommodate difference.