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From Goethe to Gundolf

ESSAYS ON

GERMAN LITERATURE

AND CULTURE
7. Goethe, the Brothers Grimm and Academic Freedom

My subject is German professors. It may need a word by way of prefatory explanation. For if in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, especially in the nineteenth century, so few men and women of excellence in letters, the arts and learning in general were associated with universities, the old ones in particular, the opposite was true for Germany. In 1842, John Sterling, the friend of Julius Hare and John Stuart Mill and F. D. Maurice and the subject of a Life by Thomas Carlyle, wrote an essay, ‘Characteristics

of German Genius’. After praising German ‘elevation and fulness’, ‘reflection’ and ‘earnestness of heart’, he produced a list of about thirty German notabilities in what he called the ‘three great forms assumed by the genius of the Germans, — in History, Philosophy, and Poetry’. Over half of the names listed were at some time university professors (he forgot Martin Luther): Cristoph Martin Wieland, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Friedrich Schiller, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Friedrich Eichhorn, Johannes von Müller, both Schlegel brothers, F. A. Wolf, Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Johann Heinrich Voss, Barthold Georg Niebuhr, Friedrich Carl von Savigny (both brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, were closely associated with the Humboldt brothers, Wilhelm and Alexander). Some of these are also poets, and the list of poet-academics in Germany could also be extended. We are not dealing here with a subject marginal to German culture, but one which is central. It is therefore important to clear away misapprehensions and to see aright its role in the specific area which I have chosen from among the many possibilities it offers: academic freedom.

_The Times Higher Education Supplement_, commenting on Lord Jenkins of Hillhead’s successful amendment of May 26, 1988 to the Education Reform Bill then before the House of Lords, whereby academics were guaranteed the freedom to question established knowledge, to advance new ideas irrespective of their controversial or even unpopular nature, without the danger of losing post or privileges in the institutions in which they work, went on to say: ‘Lord Jenkins’s amendment does not insist on the lehrfreiheit [freedom in teaching] enjoyed by Prussian universities in the 19th century. In our evaluation of academic freedom we have fallen below Bismarck’s Germany’. The tone suggests acquaintance with the high moral stance of Matthew Arnold. It is nevertheless hard to know quite what the leader-writer meant, but I take the inference to be drawn to be this: that, if Otto von Bismarck’s Germany, which we know to have been strident, rampant, illiberal to Catholics and Social

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3 Ibid., 406, 409.
4 Ibid., 417.
5 Ibid., 415.
6 _The Times Higher Education Supplement_ (May 27, 1988), 36.
Democrats, expansionist, pushy, could nevertheless guarantee academic freedom, should we, in more enlightened times and with the benefit of a historical perspective, settle for less than they enjoyed a hundred years ago? Such a view is not new. In 1846, perhaps with more justification, Walter C. Perry, in his book *German University Education, or the Professors and Students of Germany* (a work that, incidentally, anticipates much of what Matthew Arnold has to say) states:

> We find it difficult, at first, to understand how such a degree of liberty can consist with an arbitrary form of government like that of Prussia. Yet we know that this ‘Lehrfreiheit’ is no empty boast, but a solid, and, to a country without a constitution, an invaluable privilege — a privilege so dear to every German’s heart, that there are probably not more than two or three of the sovereigns of Germany who would desire or venture to infringe upon it.\(^7\)

Probably true. Perhaps we students and teachers of German in this country are partly to blame that sentiments, certainly true in 1846, can in 1988 be applied by a reputable journal with little differentiation to the years 1871–90. For the Germans themselves of Bismarck’s day were acutely aware that academic freedom, which now — let us not forget — went hand in hand with a great deal of political and constitutional freedom, had not been bought without a struggle and was a prize most securely to be held on to. Indeed, if there was a period in German history in which academics positively luxuriated in privileges guaranteed by the state, it was under Bismarck. But it was also a time when academics, of the distinction of Theodor Mommsen or Rudolf Virchow, were active in liberal politics. But, then again, we are using a generalization which is slipshod and misleading. In mentioning Bismarck, let us not forget that, in matters of higher education, the Prussian writ did not run in at least half of the German universities; and important centres of culture, academic or otherwise, were to be found outside the confines of that state or its chancellor.

Whether in Protestant Berlin or in Catholic Munich, the privileges were the same: addressing the University of Munich in 1867 (not long before German unification), Ignaz von Döllinger was able to speak of

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\(^7\) Walter C. Perry, *German University Education, or the Professors and Students of Germany. To which is Added, a Brief Account of the Public Schools of Prussia, with Observations on the Influence of Philosophy on the Studies of the German Universities*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, 1846), 11.
universities as the ‘highest court of appeal in matters of the intellect’, its teachers as a ‘priesthood’ of scholarship.\(^8\) The historian Friedrich Meinecke, looking back in his memoir, \textit{Die deutsche Katastrophe/The German Catastrophe}, on his own university days in Bismarckian Berlin, recalled that while these were but the silver age of classical liberalism, not the golden, they were days in which men like his academic teachers, Johann Gustav Droysen, Heinrich von Treitschke and Wilhelm Scherer, were still scholars of real distinction, while the thought of a cultural collapse such as that later produced by National Socialism seemed impossible.\(^9\) There were, of course, academics in those days who abused their privileged status (some would say that of the historian Treitschke, even more so of that Berlin professor who called the university the spiritual life guards of the house of Hohenzollern).\(^10\) There were voices which warned of the pernicious encroachments of the state, of particular interests, on the universities’ hallowed ground\(^11\) (Meinecke tells how the plan to set up a chair of history in a faculty of Catholic theology was seen by Mommsen as an axe laid to the tree of academic freedom).\(^12\) These were perhaps not good days in which to be a Social Democrat and an academic, but, then again, the state could be secure in its assumption that very few academics were.\(^13\) Eduard Spranger, writing in 1913, spoke doubtless for most in saying that those who are subject to direct state intervention usually owe it to their ill-chosen and tactless behaviour (‘reichlich ungeschickte Formen’).\(^14\) The assumption that universities should be guaranteed maximum freedom to pursue


\(10\) The words, quoted in various different forms, were uttered by Emil Du Bois-Reymond in his rectorial address on August 3, 1870: ‘Nun wohl, die Berliner Universität, dem Palaste des Königs gegenüber einquartiert, ist durch ihre Stiftungsurkunde das geistige Leibregiment des Hauses Hohenzollern’. Emil Du Bois-Reymond, \textit{Reden}, ed. by Estelle Du Bois, 2 vols, 2nd ed. (Leipzig; Veit, 1912), 1, 418.

\(11\) For one among many see Ernst Bernheim, \textit{Die gefährdete Stellung unserer deutschen Universitäten}, Festreden der Universität Greifswald 8 (Greifswald: Abel, 1899), esp. 13 and 21.

\(12\) Meinecke, \textit{Die deutsche Katastrophe}, 139.

\(13\) A reference to the notorious ‘Lex Arons’. See F. Paulsen, \textit{The German Universities}, 252; and McClelland, \textit{State, Society, and University in Germany}, 267f.

research and to teach — within widely extended limits — was one which still informed two of Max Weber’s most important essays, ‘Der Sinn der “Wertfreiheit” der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften/ The Meaning of Ethical Neutrality in Sociology and Economics’ (1917) and ‘Wissenschaft als Beruf/Science as a Vocation’ (1919). It was not always so, and it was not always to remain so. For the rest of my time, I wish to examine, not how academic freedom actually was won and certainly not how professors basked in it, but how university and state collided in their separate interests and how this typifies the intellectual climate of Germany in what Meinecke called its ‘golden age’.

What is academic freedom? What did the Germans mean by it? How was it defined? Why was it so important? The very phrase has a German ring to it, for it was a peculiarly German concern. Let us begin with the definition used by an acute observer of the German university system, Matthew Arnold: ‘Lehrfreiheit and Lernfreiheit, liberty of the teacher and liberty for the learner; and Wissenschaft, scientific knowledge systematically pursued and prized in and for itself, are the fundamental ideas of that system’.\textsuperscript{15} That was by and large the reality which Arnold was able to observe in Bismarckian Germany. Writing earlier in the century, before 1848, however, Perry, in the already-cited book on German university education, gave the whole matter a rather different slant:

It is this important feature in their constitution which has gained for the universities the honourable designation of the ‘last bulwark of German freedom’. It is this which ensures to the highly-gifted minds of Germany, the means and opportunity for the full and free development of their powers, and a fitting sphere of usefulness and honour. It is this which secures a ready entrance for newly-discovered truths of science into the minds of the rising generation, at the very time when they are most free from prejudice, and filled with the most disinterested love of truth and knowledge. If in an evil hour — and there are many who are capable of advising such a measure — the sovereigns of Germany should be induced to circumscribe or destroy the liberty of teaching of their

professors, the glory of their universities will quickly pass away, and the progress of science itself will receive a powerful check.\textsuperscript{16}

Perhaps even more tellingly, Perry goes on to quote Jacob Grimm’s dictum that academic freedom was ‘freedom from restraint which is enjoyed at the university, and there alone’,\textsuperscript{17} thus a permitted liberty which it was in the interest of the state to promote and foster.

Depending on how you approached them, German universities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had a double function: to train suitable candidates for the civil service and state administration, and to promote scholarship. In the eighteenth century, these two aims rarely met on common ground.\textsuperscript{18} The University of Halle, the first Prussian university institution effectively to deserve that name, may serve as a convenient illustration. Its statutes of 1694 had been based on the notion of ‘libertas philosophandi’,\textsuperscript{19} the freedom to teach and do research. Yet time and time again, the university and its professors were to be reminded by the state, often in trenchant personal memoranda from the king himself, that what was required was orthodoxy, in matters of religion and philosophy; it wanted utilitarian courses completed in a minimum of time, and it wanted results — hence the infamous order from King Frederick William I to the rationalist philosopher Christian Wolff in 1723, to leave Halle and all Prussian territories within forty-eight hours on pain of death;\textsuperscript{20} but, even under his great-nephew Frederick William II in 1794, instructions to two theologians to stop teaching the new theology if they wished to avoid dismissal.\textsuperscript{21} Or the instruction to the professors of 1731 that ‘die Professores fleissig, sowohl publice als privatim über nützliche Materien lesen, auch die Collegia in jeder Fakultaet dergestalt mit einander concertiren sollen, damit die Studiosi so geschwind als es möglich, ein jeder in der Scientz

\textsuperscript{16} Perry, \textit{German University Education}, 11.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{19} Paulsen, \textit{The German Universities}, 46.
\textsuperscript{20} Wilhelm Schrader, \textit{Geschichte der Friedrichs-Universität zu Halle}, 2 vols (Berlin: Dümmler, 1894), II, 459.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 480.
worzu er Lust hat, seinen cursum bequemlich absolviren könne’;\textsuperscript{22} or Wilhelm von Humboldt’s predecessor as minister responsible for education, Julius Eberhard von Massow, decreeing as late as 1804 that the notion of independent research being superior to teaching the young was not even worthy of further discussion.\textsuperscript{23} In the thirty universities that the German-speaking lands had around 1800, the general tone was hardly different: at most it depended on the ruler or his appointed servants. Christian Thomasius, incidentally the first German professor to lecture in his native language, and also the first rector of the University of Halle, might show concern for general education, seeing the universities as \textit{seminaria reipublicae}, ‘Pflanz-Garten des Friedens’.\textsuperscript{24} But these were far removed from notions of ‘Bildung’ or ‘self-cultivation’, as defined by my predecessor W. H. Bruford.\textsuperscript{25} Johann Gottfried Herder’s ‘friedliche Provinz’,\textsuperscript{26} that he imagined as he sketched a grand scheme of education on his way from Riga to Nantes in 1769, remained for most of his lifetime remote from reality. In real life, academic existence was dismal, repetitious, straitened, apart perhaps from the kingdom of Hanover’s showcase University of Göttingen; its only real advantage perhaps being that it offered to those of poor and humble background — Kant, the classicist Christian Gottlob Heyne, Fichte among them — the chance to rise through the state’s pedagogical province into a social status and respect that the less gifted of their estate could not achieve, to escape the rigidity of the social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{27} And yet, as the century proceeded, some of these universities, Halle in terms of freedom of pedagogical activity, Göttingen in terms of the freedom of political thought and Jena in terms of speculative philosophy, became places

\textsuperscript{22} ‘The professors, to read diligently both privately and in public on useful subjects, coordinating courses in each faculty in such a way that the students, each one in his chosen discipline, may finish their courses as swiftly as possible’. Ibid., 464.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 494.


where alternatives to the state-ordained and state-dominated system, the mere maidservant of absolutism, were posited. The new critical philosophy of Kant, the French Revolution, the speculative systems of Romantic idealist philosophy, and not least the collapse of the old political order in the German states, notably after 1806: all of these factors contributed to the formulation of new ideas of university and state and their interrelation.

The key word was ‘Wissenschaft’, a word difficult to translate accurately into English, only satisfactorily rendered as ‘science’ in the older and no longer current sense of the unity of all knowledge. Kant, in 1798, in his Der Streit der Fakultäten/The Contest of Faculties, had claimed that it was the role of philosophy to establish truth for all branches of knowledge, speculative or practical, thus positing an overarching principle of truth as opposed to one of mere utilitarianism. In statements all made in the first decade of the nineteenth century, Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Henrik Steffens, and Wilhelm von Humboldt, later Hegel, all proceeded from the central notion of the unity of all knowledge, its universal totality, its organic wholeness. Thus, for Fichte, science was a process of continuous intellectual productivity; for Schelling, it was an organism, whole in itself, in which even the smallest part of the organization reflects that whole. In Schleiermacher’s formulation, it was the concern of a university to waken in the young the idea of ‘Wissenschaft’; to enable this idea to take hold in each specialized area of study, so that it would be as second nature to relate everything to ‘Wissenschaft’; not to examine each area on its own, but in its relation to and in connection with the ‘großer Zusammenhang’, the

wider and general contexts and issues; bearing in mind at all times the unity and totality (‘Einheit und Allheit’) of perception, which will lead to independent research, discovery, and presentation. How was such an ideal to be realised? How was such ‘Wissenschaft’ to thrive, when, in Schelling’s words, it was part of ‘Urwissen’, primal knowledge itself and drawn from the absolute realm of infinity, where ‘Wissenschaft’ ceases to be itself the moment it is relegated to being a mere means to an end and not an end in itself? There were basically two answers, neither of them radically different in their ultimate implications. Either the state must be excluded altogether from the affairs of ‘Wissenschaft’, that is, the university in its proper calling (Schleiermacher’s, Humboldt’s and Fichte’s view); or, in Schelling’s and Steffens’ view, the state must become the bearer and agent of all the very highest ideas, and thus function as the guarantor of independent and disinterested scientific endeavour. Schelling and Steffens were doubtless naive; but they had none of the shameful self-confidence with which Martin Heidegger in 1934, over a century later, helped to preside over the complete sell-out of the Humboldtian idea and tradition to the National Socialist state.

All of these notions were in the air, and formed part of the founding declarations of the great University of Berlin which came into being in 1810, the first German university consciously and deliberately set up in a capital city at the centre of state control, but to be independent of it. There were also very practical ideological reasons for not wishing to be meshed with the state: the French, as occupying powers in Prussia and elsewhere in Germany, had closed the University of Halle and were planning to abolish others and set up a number of separate specialist schools in the kingdom of Westphalia. The recent political shake-up had seen a number of universities, once ancient and venerable, disappear in reorganization or conquest: Erfurt, Mainz, Wittenberg, Helmstedt, to mention but four. Berlin would provide — and this is also Wilhelm von Humboldt’s vision — a place where the state and true humanity would kiss each other, where ‘Bildung’ and statecraft would lie down together in an organism that was humane and liberal. The state would leave the

32 Weischedel, Idee und Wirklichkeit, 123.
33 Schelling, Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums, 12f.
34 Spranger, Wilhelm von Humboldt und die Reform des Bildungswesens, 203–94; Spranger, Wandlungen im Wesen der Universität, 14.
sciences (‘Wissenschaften’) to themselves, where they would work out the unifying principle behind all knowledge. All must be subject to one ideal, derived from one principle; these two in their turn to be subsumed under one overall idea. The air this university would breathe would be, in Fichte’s word, academic freedom, this itself vested in divine and natural law. Small wonder that, when Hegel delivered his inaugural lecture in Berlin 1818, he could proudly claim that the closed entity of the universe has no power that can resist the force of philosophical perception. For it was to be the philosophers who were to believe above all in this system that the state university seemed to guarantee and underwrite. It might not occur to them, as it did to the great physician Virchow in his rectorial address in 1893, looking back over the century, that while Wilhelm von Humboldt’s University of Berlin in 1810 may have been the finest expression of the philosophical age, the return in 1827 to Berlin of his brother, Alexander von Humboldt, ushered in the ‘naturwissenschaftliches Zeitalter’, the age of science and its inevitable specialization.

Whereas the Prussian state universities, and subsequently all within the German confederation, were to accept the principle of freedom of teaching and learning, academic freedom in a very general sense, this did not mean that the state was handing over the authority for its institutions of higher learning to a state-free republic of letters and sciences. For, as an irony, Prussia introduced state examinations for candidates for its administrative service in 1810, the very year of the foundation of the University of Berlin, the ‘Staatsexamen’ that has become an accepted part of the universities’ function ever since. Indeed, the price to be paid for freedom within the university system, a liberty, which, as the English commentators noted, was not enjoyed by most of their fellows, was in fact an arrangement with the state; the state, for very practical reasons but also out of concern for prestige, not wishing to lose its reputation for fostering learning and scholarship. This meant, in effect, a deal between the state and the university teacher. We see for instance August Wilhelm

36 Ibid., 231.
37 Ibid., 314.
38 Ibid., 417.
Schlegel, professing Sanskrit at the new Prussian University of Bonn, engaged in epistolary tussles with the Prussian authorities over his status, and privileges and salary,\textsuperscript{40} while stating grandly elsewhere that historical criticism must, if it is to prosper, enjoy total autonomy, not be subservient to any authority outside itself, it alone to decide on the veracity of its own problems (Weber’s ‘Wertfreiheit’).\textsuperscript{41} The state did, indeed, put up with behaviour on a personal level that hardly sat well with Fichte’s or Schelling’s ideals. Schleiermacher and Hegel were at daggers drawn; Fichte was as prickly a colleague as one could imagine; Wilhelm von Humboldt echoed other university administrators in likening academics to a bunch of actors\textsuperscript{42} (an ominous foreshadowing of King Ernest Augustus of Hanover’s analogy with harlots and dancing-girls, on the occasion of the dismissal of the Göttingen Seven). The state could, and did, tolerate the prima donna (Hegel, for instance) where its own interests were not in question. Yet, where strong academic personalities, in the name of freedom — an extension of academic freedom — came into direct conflict with the state, the reaction was different. Already the Carlsbad Decrees of 1819 saw in Prussia dismissals and suspensions and a general clampdown.

The two examples to which I now turn and which form the actual title of my lecture on academic freedom and the long and difficult way towards its eventual achievement, are those of Johann Wolfgang Goethe and the brothers Grimm, one the university administrator, the others professors, in their separate ways caught up in their concern for academic standards inside a constitutionally guaranteed system, both illustrating, again in different ways, the gulf fixed between Humboldtian ideals and Realpolitik. I can only touch on the main points as I see them, but in my view they are significant ones for the subject under discussion. For here

\textsuperscript{40} This is documented in Briefe von und an August Wilhelm Schlegel, ed. by Josef Körner, 2 vols (Zurich, Leipzig, Vienna: Amalthea, 1930), I, 362, 373.


\textsuperscript{42} Weischedel, Idee und Wirklichkeit, xxii. Goethe’s colleague, the minister C. G. von Voigt, referred to the Jena professors as ‘eine dem Theatermenschen ähnliche Faction’. Quoted in Schubart-Fikentscher, Studienreform, 27.
we see Goethe the universal poetic genius submitting to the restrictions of state polity.

The subject of Goethe and the university, like Goethe and the law, Goethe and justice, Goethe and revolution, is not one easily addressed or easily answered. On the one hand, one can say that Goethe saw universities rather as a means to an end than as an end in themselves. His own university career in law had been a practical training for legal practice and stood him in good stead as an administrator and eventually a minister of state in the small duchy of Saxe-Weimar, where he was later to assume responsibility for the affairs of the scientific collections and institutes of learning, notably the University of Jena. Goethe’s own forays into the world of learning and scientific endeavour were not those of the academic expert, but rather of the privatier — in the eighteenth-century sense — the individualist who has no need to concern himself with the merely academic side of a debate or a merely academic audience. On the one hand, in administration, Goethe was an eighteenth-century cameralist; on the other, he was concerned that there should be interdependence between the estates and organic progression towards improvement of the common weal. But universities raised particular problems of statecraft, especially in the post-revolutionary ferment. On the one hand, Goethe regarded the University of Jena as a ‘geistiger Freihafen’, a haven of the intellect, where ideas that elsewhere might seem seditious could be expressed; but the other side involved the real concern that things might get out of hand, the students might become even more riotous as they picked up the ideas current in Paris; there might be the need to restrain the ruling Duke Carl August — a Prussian general to boot — from sending in the troops against the students and provoking the very violence from which Goethe by nature recoiled.

There had been the recent calamitous and damaging incident in 1799 of the dismissal by the duke of none other than Fichte from his post...

as professor extraordinary at Jena, originally on a charge of atheism, but in fact for *maledictio principis*, insulting the ruling prince through unhelpfully intemperate outbursts that impugned the honour of all who disagreed with him. But then, the presence in Jena of an unruly and unpredictable intellectual was probably more than a small state and its university administration could cope with. It might detract from the university’s reputation. Its existence was precarious enough, with only the petty states of Weimar, Gotha, Meiningen, and Coburg to finance it. Universities like Wittenberg and Helmstedt were being closed; might Jena go the same way? Yet Fichte had been imprudence itself in his behaviour in Jena and had quarrelled with most of his colleagues; his very presence invited student unrest. Goethe’s role in all this is not unequivocal: he was prepared to use his power base in Weimar when it suited him and no amount of ‘Goethepietät’ can get round that. The damage done by Fichte in Jena was in fact nothing compared with that caused by him once out of Jena; it moved a number of able men to leave Jena (Schelling, for instance) and was contributory to the break-up of the Romantic circle in Jena; the student numbers sank. For this we cannot blame Goethe; instead, we must acknowledge that his position of confidence and trust with Duke Carl August involved him in severe tests of loyalty where even-handedness was not a possible option. Yet Goethe shared his master’s fear of disorder and revolutionary stirring: he passed over the prospect of obtaining Schelling for Jena in 1816, fearing not only a re-run of the Fichte affair but revolution itself (whatever that might mean).45 Ironically, Schelling went on to have many ribbons pinned to his coat and to accept a Bavarian patent of nobility — the other, and less attractive, aspect of academic freedom.

The case of the Jena professor Lorenz Oken46 may, however, have been the immediate cause of Goethe’s unwillingness to have Schelling around to compound his troubles. Here are the main points. Oken, like


Fichte, from humble background and with the same forthrightness of expression and lack of deference that had been Fichte’s undoing, had come to Jena in 1807 as a ‘prof. extr. Med’. His inaugural lecture as a professor of zoology, in 1809, Ueber den Werth der Naturgeschichte, besonders für die Bildung der Deutschen/On the Merit of Natural History Especially for the Education of the Germans,\textsuperscript{47} owed much to the spirit of Fichte and Schelling in its emphasis on the dependence of all specialized science on a philosophy of nature which is itself the ground and guarantor of all moral, political, and legal systems. Echoing Schelling, that philosophy is now returning to its roots in nature philosophy, he states the need for ‘ein Ganzes’\textsuperscript{51} (‘a whole’) as the basis of all scientific endeavour, involving not just the systems of nature itself, the animal and plant world, but its relationship to man and the state. His peroration pleads in a direct address to the students that they have not come to university for ‘Versorgung’, i.e., to provide for later professional needs, but for ‘universale Bildung’ (‘education on a universal scale’).\textsuperscript{48} Thus the professor of zoology is making here the unchallenged claim for academic ‘Lehrfreiheit’ as the basis of all his subsequent lecture courses (Humboldt avant la lettre). Goethe would not be in basic disagreement with any of this, only he had a different emphasis, seeing in the closely observed phenomenon, the limited sphere of activity, not just in the grand system, evidence of the same universal type or archetype that is Oken’s concern. He may not however, have been best pleased that Oken nowhere made reference to his discovery of the intermaxillary bone, where we have conclusive proof that Oken knew of Goethe’s work in comparative anatomy and never mentioned it.\textsuperscript{49} That was, to say the least, undiplomatic and was not to help him when he issued a direct challenge to state authority.

For what happens when academic freedom, as defined in the very general terms of Fichte and Schleiermacher, becomes a weapon for political freedom? Notions of academic freedom that surrounded the

\textsuperscript{47} Ueber den Werth der Naturgeschichte, besonders für die Bildung der Deutschen. Von Oken, bei der Eröffnung seiner Vorlesungen über Zoologie (Jena: Frommann, 1809). The only copy of this rare work in this country appears to be in Julius Hare’s collection in Trinity College. See Chapter 17 in this volume.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{49} Bräuning-Oktavio, Oken und Goethe, 35.
foundation of the University of Berlin were not out of place in the atmosphere of Prussian reform and the calls before 1815 for a nation that would throw off the French yoke. After 1815, however, more care might be needed. True, the petty state of Saxe-Weimar had put on a liberal face by adopting a constitution, admittedly of a very limited sort, yet allowing for freedom of the press. Goethe, his political instincts normally conservative, was not pleased, fearing opposition, not harmony, between the estates. His attitude to Oken remained ambivalent: while admitting (later, and privately) that Oken’s work might be mentioned in the same breath as Alexander von Humboldt’s, he found Oken’s overbearing behaviour (and failure to show deference to him, Goethe, the scientist) unbearable. His worst fears about press freedom were confirmed when in 1816 Oken began publishing his periodical *Isis* (our hermetic tradition again). For *Isis* was not only a platform for Oken’s scientific ideas — for which it remains important in the history of zoology; it used (abused, in Goethe’s view) its press privilege to offer affront and insult to other states in the post-1815 settlement. One is indeed surprised that Oken got away for so long with what he did and that the authorities (that included Goethe) chose to ignore him for as long as they did. A compromise was mooted: banning the printer in Jena, but not the publisher. But then the Wartburg student festival in the summer of 1817, warmly supported by Oken and *Isis*, although not in any revolutionary sense, had been on Duke Carl August of Weimar’s territory. More powerful neighbours like Austria and Prussia took note: Goethe had had what may have been a mauvais quart d’heure with Metternich in Carlsbad on the subject.

An insult offered to a Russian official in February of 1819 brought things further to a head; if that was not enough, the former Jena student Karl Sand chose that moment to murder the poet, courtier and Russian police spy August von Kotzebue in Mannheim. It only needed §78 of the Carlsbad Decrees for Oken’s dismissal to become inevitable; for here academic freedom was hedged around with words concerning ‘misuse

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50 Ibid., 74.
52 For most of this see Bräuning-Oktavio, *Oken und Goethe*, 75–95.
of position in influencing the minds of the young’, which was open to very large and commodious interpretation. The Berlin theological professor de Wette, who had written a letter to the mother of Carl Sand, lost his post — despite energetic protests from his colleagues. The Jena professors — to their credit — did the same in respect of Oken (whose dismissal had none of the grim immediacy surrounding Christian Wolff’s from Halle nearly a hundred years earlier). Goethe’s position in this is, again, equivocal. It is all very well to say that Goethe opposed the institution for which Oken stood, not the man himself. That is only applying sophistry to a thoroughly disagreeable and unedifying incident. If we do wish to see it in perspective, it might be worth saying instead that Oken’s pattern follows closely that of Fichte’s: the anti-courtly, anti-authoritarian strain of the university generation around 1790 (with the explorer and revolutionary Georg Forster as a kind of academic mentor) or the rhetoric of the Freikorps and Burschenschaften found their limits in severe test cases where the state saw its function as restoring order. And Goethe was for order, in the form of a paternal and patriarchal enlightened absolutism. Yet that was hardly compatible with the inhibiting spirit of the Carlsbad Decrees.

Oken’s tragedy had been his failure to recognize that ‘Bildung zur ernsten Humanitaet’ and ‘Liebe zum Ganzen’ (phrases from his inaugural lecture) were not proof against the interests of the state, if the state saw these threatened by a freedom of utterance underwritten by ‘libertas philosophandi’. Cynics might say that Oken should have done like so many academics of his generation and enjoyed the rich pickings offered by a regenerated university system that was prepared to tolerate more from its academic citizenry than from the rest of its subjects. But even those in positions of some prestige — Schleiermacher, for instance — knew that vigilance was necessary if academic freedom

53 Ibid., 78.
54 Weischcadel, Idee und Wirklichkeit, 275–84.
56 ‘Education promoting serious humanity’; ‘love of the whole’. Oken, Ueber den Werth der Naturgeschichte, 11.
was to be little more than the heady rhetoric of a founding generation.\(^{57}\) Wilhelm von Humboldt, it should be noted, had withdrawn completely from the *vita activa* into the private *vita contemplativa* of comparative linguistics, where the real needs and concerns of the university no longer intrude. And, in fairness to Goethe, it must be recorded that he too refused to continue in university politics after the Oken affair.

My second example, the case of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, the best known of the so-called Göttingen Seven, is linked with Humboldt and his reforms in an important way. On a perhaps superficial level it marks the Grimm brothers’ emergence out of the world of purely private scholarship into that of the university and its peculiar responsibilities. For the Grimms were, until their translation to Göttingen in 1830, librarians and archivists, not immune to the conflicts between state and scholarship (they had to work for King Jerome in Kassel) but shielded from some of its effects. In securing them, the University of Göttingen was enhancing its reputation as a centre of pure scholarship — in the national language and literature, something that the Romantic movement had brought about. In another sense, it was aligning itself with the main thrust of the Humboldtian ideal in scholarship. Jacob Grimm’s autobiographical sketch of 1831 makes that clear. The reminiscence of student days in Marburg leads over to the awareness that, since then, the state has extended its influence over university affairs — through those very Staatsexamina that were part of the price paid for the Humboldt reform.\(^{58}\) Uniformity, pressure of examinations, coverage of material, all these are factors which impede the flight of the intellect (Grimm’s image). If the state can never allow the student fully to pursue his course of study without some consideration of the end in view, he hopes that professors at least may be free from prescription in the material on which they lecture. For Grimm’s account of himself makes it clear that it was not the study of the law in itself (his original course), but the incidental study of history and literature that made him what he was later to become. In a way more concrete than Fichte or Schelling or Schleiermacher could formulate it, the Grimm brothers, in their various philological, lexicographical, literary and antiquarian

\(^{57}\) Weischedel, *Idee und Wirklichkeit*, 293–98.

studies, proceed from an original unity. They may not use words like ‘Allheit’, but they do believe in the essential oneness of all cultural manifestations that are informed by language, a common language that is the key to national past, national present, national personality, national progress, national virtue. It will involve the shift of meaning in the word ‘Vaterland’ from being the place in which one was born and grew up, to the territory in which all are united in a political ‘Allheit’ through language. (That is the stated ideal.) This will involve the most careful scrutiny of the past, the present, and the future — as both brothers formulated it in letters to their friend, the Romantic poet Achim von Arnim.\(^5^9\) The scrutiny of that national continuum requires of the scholar and liberal intellectual a vigilance towards the state and its constitutional guarantees.\(^6^0\) If, therefore, a constitution granted by King William IV of Great Britain and Hanover is peremptorily suspended by his brother and successor, the brutish Ernest Augustus (the least attractive of Queen Victoria’s assortment of uncles), the intellectual must raise his voice. Jacob Grimm makes the point that if beneficiaries of a freedom unique to universities do not speak out, who then will?

The case of the Göttingen Seven, dismissed by King Ernest Augustus and told to leave Hanoverian territory, becomes the test against which all subsequent questions of university and state in Germany are measured (even more than 1848–49). It is very interesting to find the standard books on the German universities, written about the turn of the century, looking back at Göttingen and registering how far we have come since then\(^6^1\) (perhaps not without the satisfying thought that Göttingen was now Prussian). Yet, in referring to ‘German’ universities, I am committing an all-too-common solecism: commentators at the time and since have not been slow in pointing out that the Göttingen Seven need only cross the border into Hesse-Cassel and enter into the service of other states in the confederation\(^6^2\) where the ruler did not refer to his professors as

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59 As set out in Achim von Arnim und die ihm nahe standen, ed. by Reinhold Steig and Herman Grimm, 3 vols (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1894–1913), III, 5–44.
61 Such as Paulsen, The German Universities, 260.
62 Ibid., 77.
‘Huren und Tänzerinnen’. (And the only time, incidentally, when it was true to speak of ‘German’ universities under central state control, was under National Socialism.)

And yet it would be wrong to leave the Grimm brothers and academic freedom on that note. Wilhelm Grimm is incidentally one of the many professors at the Frankfurt parliament of 1848–49. Their courage, liberalism and quiet dignity finds its best expression in a place where perhaps we would least expect it and in a work that has been read throughout the world more than Goethe or Schiller or Thomas Mann or Kafka: the famous Kinder- und Hausmärchen, Grimms’ Fairy Tales. No English reader of the tales then and now would read the preface to the 1840 edition, for these prefaces were never translated, and few modern readers of the German edition will find those words reprinted, except in a scholarly context.

Students of the nineteenth century will find, to my mind, no book more symbolical in iconography, layout and text than this one of 1840, in expressing at once the ‘elevation and fulness’ that so appealed to John Sterling, their appeal to ‘Gemüth’, where the soul, emotions, and the finer sensitivities meet, and the sobriety conditional on experiencing political tyranny. For we proceed from a frontispiece (Brother and Sister) with its child, deer, flower-bearing angel, witch and owl (the underlying message of the stories) to a title page decorated with the life-giving symbols of insects, to the second preface to Bettina von Arnim, whose children had been the first recipients of the collection. Wilhelm Grimm had sent her the revised edition in 1837, still affirming the tradition of scholarship in Göttingen as professed by the great classicist Heyne; shortly after he and his family were forced out of Göttingen, it was she who had received them and given them succour. Now in the spring of 1840 nature comes to foster

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love and temper hatred, a reminder of how, in the spring of 1813, when the first volume appeared, the Russians had been garrisoned in Kassel and the hope of liberation was as spring (‘war das Gefühl der Befreiung der Frühlingshauch’). Yes, Romantic language from one of the great representatives of the Romantic movement. Yet a reminder that the movement and its great achievement in university reform — perhaps its greatest lasting achievement — was caught up in the real issues of politics and was forced to come to terms with the exigencies of a system that represented but few of the ideals that ushered in the University of Berlin. The fairy-tales — and their preface — are part of that Romantic cultural ‘Allheit’, the most accessible part no doubt; but they stand symbolically beyond that for academic integrity in the face of crude deployment of power and for a proper sense of the role of the university in the life and affairs of the nation.

Befreiung der Frühlingshauch, der die Brust erweiterte und jede Sorge verzehrte.\textsuperscript{66}

Cassel am 17. September 1840

\textsuperscript{66} ‘With these words I sent you the book three years ago from Göttingen; today I send it to you again from the place where I was born, like the first time. In Göttingen I could see from my study lime trees rising high above the roofs, planted by Heyne at the rear of his house, that had grown up with the university’s renown: the leaves were yellow and about to drop when I left my dwelling on 3 October 1838: I do not believe I shall ever catch sight of them again in full spring leaf. I was detained there some weeks, which I spent in a friend’s house, in the company of those whose affections I shared. When I took my leave, my carriage was held up by a procession: it was the university joining a funeral cortege. I reached here in the dark and entered the same house that I had left eight years ago in the bitter cold: how surprised I was when I found you, dear Bettina, sitting beside my loved ones and giving aid and succour to my ill wife. Since that fateful time that destroyed my peaceful existence you have been warm and loyal in sharing our lot, and the feeling that imparts is like the beneficent warmth of the blue sky that now casts its light into my room, where I see again the sun, from its rise in the morning until it completes its course over the mountains, the river flashing by at their feet: the scent of oranges and limes makes its way up to me from the park and I feel that I am youthfully invigorated in love as in hate. Can I wish for a better time to take up these fairy-tales again? For it was in the year 1813 that I was working on the second volume, when my brothers and sisters and I could scarcely move for troops billeted in our house, Russian soldiers making noise in the next room; but in those days the feeling of liberation was the spring air that made us breathe freely and made off with every care.’