[Prepublication version. Forthcoming in Robert Lane, Ed., *Pragmatism Revisited* (Cambridge UP). Do not cite without express permission of the author. Standard Peirce and Dewey references used throughout.]

Pragmatism and academic freedom: the university as intellectual experiment station from Humboldt to Peirce and Dewey

Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey's thinking on universities, their function, and what is required in support of that function was deeply influenced by University of Berlin founder Wilhelm von Humboldt's reform of the Prussian educational system. This chapter traces that influence and describes Dewey's role as one of the founders of the modern American conception of academic freedom. It concludes with a consideration of threats posed to universities and academic freedom by authoritarianism, and possible responses to those threats offered by Peirce and Dewey.

German universities

Modern *de jure* academic freedom was first enacted in early 19th century Germany with the founding of the University of Berlin. While Humboldt is often credited with originating the modern concept of academic freedom, his approach emerged from German idealist thought and scholarship on universities and academic freedom spanning Kant, Schleiermacher, and Fichte.[1] As Director of Education during the Stein-Hardenberg reforms of Prussia, Humboldt refined and implemented an already existing conception of academic freedom.

The University of Berlin was established in 1809 by Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia as the flagship state university to be guided by Humboldt's broader *Bildungsreform*. Prior to 1809, Prussian universities, like most universities in Europe, were very conservative, and they were organized around the transmission to students of fixed curricula of established knowledge, typically attached to particular vocations.[2] Humboldt was critical of the vocational focus of Prussian universities. On his view, universities should promote *Bildung*—fostering students' self-cultivation to promote their moral and intellectual maturity. University alumni should be good men and good citizens first and could always receive specialist vocational training thereafter as required, he reasoned. In addition to this commitment to a broad holistic education rather than vocational training, the Humboldtian university was distinguished by an emphasis on research, the unity of teaching and research, and a deep commitment to academic freedom.

At the University of Berlin, rather than being relegated to research institutes that operated separately from the teaching faculties, research was part of the central academic mission. Teaching was no longer primarily by means of lectures aimed at transmitting a set (often

[1] Claude Piché (2010) characterizes Humboldt as being charged with deciding between Schleiermacher's and Fichte's vision for the University of Berlin and ultimately aligning with Schleiermacher.

[2] That said, Richard Anderson (2020: 546) and others caution against treating Humboldt as the single-handed inventor of the modern German university. Humboldt drew on elements already present in German universities. Moreover, much that is today associated with the "Humboldtian university" emerged after Humboldt.

vocational) canon to students. Many courses were taught using seminar format. Instructors were active researchers and brought their research into the classroom. Students too were actively involved in research. Recentering the academic mission on research and breaking down the divide between research and teaching in this way supported the formation of the student as a human being (*Bildung*) by cultivating their intellectual autonomy, curiosity, and critical thinking.

Humboldt paired two conceptions of academic freedom: a positive conception (*Akademische Freiheit*) and a negative conception (*Einsamkeit*), which he frequently joined together as "*Einsamkeit und Freiheit*." For Humboldt, *Akademische Freiheit* included both *Lehrfreiheit* (the freedom to teach) and *Lernfreiheit* (the freedom to learn). At the University of Berlin, faculty were at liberty to conduct research and engage in teaching wherever the evidence took them rather than being bound by a set curriculum. Similarly, students were permitted to choose whichever courses they wished to take, and there were no defined years of study or regular examinations. Thus, *Akademische Freiheit* is the positive freedom to pursue inquiry wherever it leads, and it is a freedom equally held by academic staff and students.

Humboldt conceived the negative conception of academic freedom that protects researchers from interference or reprisal as *Einsamkeit*—"solitude" or "isolation" (or sometimes, "loneliness"). In this characterization, Humboldt sought to describe a separation from outside interests that would insulate both individual scholars and universities from interference in their pursuit of truth. Insofar as *Einsamkeit* aimed to protect whole institutions, it was an early exemplar of what is today termed *institutional autonomy*.

Notice that as a positive freedom *Akademische Freiheit* describes the way that the University operates. As a negative freedom, *Einsamkeit* describes protections for the university. The need to provide protections against external and in particular political interference was especially important since German universities were state institutions, essentially a branch of government. Thus, from 1848 to 1933, German constitutions enshrined academic freedom protections (Anderson 2020: 547 and Veit 1937: 37).[3]

The University of Berlin's thoroughgoing commitment to academic freedom was evident in its appointment of Johann Gottlieb Fichte as one of its first professors and the first head of its philosophy faculty. A decade earlier he had been dismissed from his chair at the University of Jena over his putative atheism and forced to flee to Berlin due to the ensuing controversy. A year after the University of Berlin's founding, Fichte was unanimously elected as its rector. His 1811 inaugural address, "Concerning the only possible disturbance of academic freedom," lays out his vision for the new university founded on academic freedom.[4]

The model established at the University of Berlin quickly spread throughout Prussia and the rest of (what is now) Germany. With the founding of the German Empire in 1871, the University of Berlin (by then renamed the Royal Friedrich Wilhelm University of Berlin) became the most important university in the Empire, and its model was taken up worldwide.

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[3] Fritz Veit's (1937) description of academic freedom as it was understood and constitutionally protected in the Weimar Republic (1918–33) compared to its abolishment under Hitler is sobering.

[4] Fichte's understanding of the purpose of a university is different from Humboldt's. Where Humboldt is focused on *Bildung*—individual self-development—Fichte regards the University as promoting the development not of the individual but of humanity. See Lodewyckx (1941) and Piché (2010).

In both Peirce and Dewey, we find important echoes of Humboldt's reinvention of the university. In particular, both Peirce and Dewey follow Humboldt in valorizing research and holistic education over vocational training. Peirce is especially enthusiastic about the modern research university and aligns more closely than Dewey does with Humboldtian university pedagogy, but he does not directly discuss academic freedom. Dewey explicitly wrote about academic freedom. Further, as the founding president of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Dewey was instrumental in adapting academic freedom into, and codifying it for, the American university context.

However, that context was very different from the one in which Humboldt first articulated academic freedom. Humboldt established the University of Berlin and its foundational principles with the support of the King of Prussia. Thus, this first modern articulation and implementation of academic freedom was top-down and primarily conceived as a positive freedom. By contrast, the AAUP's codification of academic freedom in the United States was member-driven and primarily focused on negative freedom (Humboldt's *Einsamkeit*). Further, the University of Berlin and the German universities that were modeled on it were public institutions and hence immune to many of the pressures private U.S. universities faced (and indeed still face).

Peirce and the way of inquiry

Peirce was aware of Humboldt, but it is unclear how well he knew his work. Tullio Viola has established that Peirce mentioned Humboldt a couple of times but that these were brief mentions and not discussions. Moreover, Viola cannot find direct evidence that Peirce read Humboldt (Viola 2011: 398, 416n37). Further, even if Peirce did read Humboldt, he likely didn't read his thought on universities, which was only rediscovered around 1900 (Anderson 2020: 546). There are strong, repeated echoes of Humboldt in Peirce, but these might owe as much to Peirce's knowledge of university systems and his admiration for German universities as they do to familiarity with Humboldt's thought.

We find the clearest expression of this admiration in "The First Rule of Logic," Peirce's fourth Cambridge Conferences Lecture at Harvard University in 1898. In that lecture, Peirce characterizes American universities as "miserably insignificant," asking, "What have they done for the advance of civilization? What is the great idea or where is [the] single great man who can truly be said to be the product of an American university?" By contrast, Peirce declares that "[t]he German universities have been the light of the whole world." He situates German universities among English universities ("rotting with sloth" but nonetheless having produced great thinkers from Locke and Newton to Cayley, Sylvester, and Clifford) and the medieval Universities of Bologna (which "gave Europe its system of law") and Paris (where "that despised scholasticism took Abelard and made him into Descartes"). On Peirce's account, all of these university systems advanced civilization more than American universities because "they were institutions of learning while ours are institutions for teaching" (EP2: 47–8).

Himself the son of a Harvard professor, Peirce grew up steeped in university life and culture. He also took considerable interest in the history of universities, as evident in his detailed discussion of medieval universities in his definition of "university" for the *Century Dictionary* (CD 6624, 1891). While he barely mentions Humboldt and rarely (if ever?) mentions the University of Berlin, Peirce must have been aware of the revolutionary new model for

universities introduced at the University of Berlin. Certainly, he was intimately familiar with the adoption of that model by the Johns Hopkins University.

By the early nineteenth century, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of American universities (Muller 2004: 12). Due to the perceived limitations of U.S. colleges, combined with enthusiasm for the Humboldtian research university and its commitment to the natural sciences, more than 10,000 Americans attended German universities during the nineteenth century (ibid. 2004: 14). Among them, notably, were several future pragmatists, including William James, Josiah Royce, W.E.B. Du Bois, and George Herbert Mead.

German universities provided a ready blueprint for the reform of U.S. universities. University of Berlin alumnus Andrew D. White used the German system as a model in his founding of Cornell (ibid.). Charles William Eliot's reform of Harvard drew on his experience at Marburg (ibid.: 15). The Johns Hopkins University offered the most dramatic example of the influence of the German system.

Founding President Daniel Coit Gilman had been a student at the University of Berlin in 1854 and 1855. In preparation for founding Johns Hopkins in 1876, he returned to Germany in 1875 and visited a number of universities, including Strasbourg, Freiburg, Göttingen, and Berlin. Gilman was explicit that Johns Hopkins was to be an American university, not a German one. However, the German influence was clear in Johns Hopkins' establishment as the United States' first research university. Many of the first faculty members charged with this mission were themselves graduates of German universities. Johns Hopkins soon earned the nickname "Göttingen in Baltimore." According to former (1972–90) Johns Hopkins president Steven Muller, Johns Hopkins amounted to "the single most direct, dramatic and far-reaching translation of the German university idea to the U.S." (ibid.: 15).

In 1878, Peirce's father, Harvard mathematics and astronomy professor Benjamin Peirce, recommended Charles to Gilman for a professorship in physics at Johns Hopkins, whereafter Peirce (*fils*) found himself under consideration for the headship of the Department of Physics. As part of his application for this position, Peirce sent Gilman his thoughts on physics pedagogy—including the physics pedagogy of his competitor for the position, Henry Rowland—and his own proposal for administering the Department of Physics. Peirce rated Rowland's approach to teaching very highly. In particular, he approved that Rowland eschewed "lecture experiments" (controlled "experiments" performed as demonstrations during lectures), which Peirce regarded as "exhibitions of natural magic" and "untrue instruction" (SW 326). Peirce favored instead physics pedagogy that put students into the role of researchers, saying that "the professor's object ought to be to let the pupil as much into the interior of the scientific way of thinking as possible" (SW 326). Students, Peirce continued, should be apprentices in the discipline (SW 328). Peirce concluded the letter by saying how delighted he would be to be appointed at Johns Hopkins: "You are the only real university in America" (SW 330). In the end, Rowland, not Peirce, got the headship, although Peirce was invited to lecture on logic.

Two themes in this letter help us to connect Peirce with the German model. First, Peirce's high regard for Johns Hopkins—the only university in America!—reveals his excitement at the arrival in the U.S. of the German model. Second, Peirce's approach to pedagogy closely aligns with Humboldt's principle of the unity of teaching and research and his model of students learning through participating in research rather than merely attending lectures. These two themes recur in Peirce's writings for over twenty years.

In an 1880 Fourth of July address to Americans in Paris, Peirce again praised Johns Hopkins: "One university in our country, the Johns Hopkins University at Baltimore, has been

carried on upon principles directly contrary to those which have governed the other colleges. That is to say, it has here alone been recognized that the function of a university is the production of knowledge" (SW 334). Peirce then repeated the theme of learning as apprenticeship, this time explicitly connecting it to research productivity. He characterized Johns Hopkins' instructors and students as "a company who are all occupied in studying together," by which means in "four short years the members of this little university have published some one hundred original researches, some of them of great value—fairly equal to the sum of what all the other colleges in the land have done (except in astronomy[5]) in the last twenty years" (SW 334–5). In 1900, Peirce directed similar praise at Clark University, another private research university founded a few years after Johns Hopkins: "The Clark University, in recognizing the pursuit of science as its first object, with teaching … as only a subordinate, or at most a secondary object, has perhaps the most elevated ideal of any university in the world; and I believe it to be so much better for the individual students" (SW 334).

Peirce's discussions of university research-intensity are typically interwoven with discussions of pedagogy. His 1878 letter to Gilman includes thoughtful discussion of physics pedagogy for both majors (special students) and non-majors (general students). His 1880 and 1900 discussions of Johns Hopkins and Clark discuss students as fellow researchers. Superficially, his characterization of teaching as a subordinate or secondary object of a university may seem to be in tension with his commitment to students and to pedagogy. In fact, though, it is consistent with his years-long pattern of favoring learning over teaching.

This principle is perhaps most explicit in his (above-quoted) fourth Cambridge Conferences Lecture complaint that American universities are "miserably insignificant" because they are institutions of teaching rather than institutions of learning. However, it occurs elsewhere too, including notably in his long and eccentric definition of "university" in the *Century Dictionary*, which begins: "An association of men for the purpose of study, which confers degrees which are acknowledged as valid throughout Christendom, is endowed, and is privileged by the state in order that the people may receive intellectual guidance, and that the theoretical problems which present themselves in the development of civilization may be resolved" (CD 6624, 1891). According to Max Fisch, on seeing this entry, the *Century* editors wrote to Peirce asking him to change "study" to "instruction," to which Peirce replied that "they were grievously mistaken, that a university had not and never had had anything to do with instruction and that until we got over this idea we should not have any university in this country" (Fisch 1986: 36).[6]

A decade later, a misquotation by Peirce reaffirmed his view about teaching and learning. In his 1900 review of Clark University, Peirce writes: "A great university bears upon its seal the remark of its founder: 'I wish to found an institution where any man can learn anything'" (SW 333). Peirce is clearly referring to Cornell University, and its founder Ezra Cornell's famous founding principle, "I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study."[7] Peirce's substitution of "can learn anything" for "can find instruction in any study" betrays wishful thinking about another university that he held in high regard.

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[5] Recall that Peirce's father taught astronomy at Harvard. Charles sometimes worked for the Harvard astronomy department too.

[6] See also Fisch (1955–6: 47).

[7] This founding principle is displayed on the website of the Cornell University Brand Center: *https://brand.cornell.edu/messaging/founding-principle/*

A final Humboldtian theme that is woven throughout Peirce's thought is his preference for what is today termed curiosity-based research over study aimed at practical applications. This preference emerges midway through his *Century Dictionary* definition of "university," albeit obliquely. There, in his discussion of the medieval organization of the University of Paris, Peirce describes the four original faculties—theology, canon law, medicine, and arts—and notes that study in arts was regarded as preliminary because the other three faculties "alone, as attacking vital problems, entitled the university to its high privileges" (CD 6624, 1891). Peirce continues that, since study in arts was regarded as preliminary, men conferred the degree of master of arts continued to be referred to as *scholars*, "a word which has consequently come to imply sound learning outside the three professions" (ibid.). Two details are significant here. First, in his philological remark about "scholars," Peirce associates contemporary scholarship and "sound learning" with non-professional faculties. Second, he characterizes professional faculties as "attacking vital problems." Keen readers of Peirce will recognize that for him, this characterization was not intended as praise.

Several years later, in his first Cambridge Conference Lecture, Peirce declared himself "an Aristotelian and a scientific man, condemning with the whole strength of conviction the Hellenistic tendency to mix Philosophy and Practice" (EP2: 29, 1898). He famously made this declaration as an act of churlishness after William James, who had secured the lecture series for him, asked Peirce to use the lectures to address "topics of vital importance" (EP2: 30)—this against Peirce's plan to use the series to outline objective logic. Peirce adapted his plan for the lecture series, but also devoted several minutes to a sarcastic discussion of "Topics of Vital Importance." Of course, he couldn't have anticipated any of this when he wrote his entry for the *Century Dictionary*, but his research for that entry had already primed him to reflect on the comparative roles of scholarship and application to vital problems/topics within the university.

In short, Peirce offers two objections to scientists or philosophers applying their research to vital topics. First, on his view, it is sentiment and instinct, habituated from experience, that guide us in practical matters. As habits on which we are prepared to act, guiding sentiments amount to beliefs for Peirce. However—and here is his second objection—scientific inquiry must treat beliefs as provisional propositions in order to remain open to new discovery:

> [W]hat is properly and usually called *belief* … has no place in science at all. We *believe* the proposition we are ready to act upon. *Full belief* is willingness to act upon the proposition in vital crises, *opinion* is willingness to act upon it in relatively insignificant affairs. But pure science has nothing at all to do with *action*. The propositions it accepts, it merely writes in the list of premises it proposes to use. Nothing is *vital* for science; nothing can be. (EP2: 33)

On Peirce's account, philosophy is in an "infantile condition" since philosophers tend to come not from laboratories but from theological seminaries and therefore "desire to amend the lives of themselves and others" (EP2: 29).

In his 1900 review of Clark University, Peirce revisited his view that education's purpose is not to improve individual lives but to serve a higher purpose. He writes:

> The great mediaeval universities, the modern German universities, the new science colleges of England, which did, and do, great things for their students personally, were never in the least founded for their students' individual advantage, but, on the contrary,

> because of the expectation that the truths that would be brought to light in such institutions would benefit the state. This end was, and is, so constantly in view that the scholars are led to regard their own lives as having a purpose beyond themselves. (SW 333)[8]

If universities are to be sites of novel inquiry rather than mere transmission of established canons, Peirce believed, we must identify and reduce obstacles in the way of inquiry. In his fourth Cambridge Conferences lecture, Peirce described what he termed the first rule of reason, "that in order to learn you must desire to learn and in so desiring not be satisfied with what you already incline to think" (EP2: 48). For Peirce, this rule has one corollary: "Do not block the way of inquiry" (ibid.). Peirce regarded this corollary as essential for the good functioning of institutions of higher learning. For Peirce, the scientist is not merely free but in fact obliged to remain open to the truth of any propositions that are potentially testable, at least until they have been adequately tested. This does not necessarily mean testing the proposition oneself since, as Peirce admits, other considerations of method and of the economy of research ought to influence our investigations. However, he regards it as a sin "to set up a philosophy which barricades the road of further advance toward the truth" (ibid.).

In Peirce, then, we see Humboldtian principles and values—and in particular a deep commitment to *Akademische* Freiheit—within an American context, and in particular in a context in which the American research university was first emerging. Dewey echoes and develops several Peircean themes while contributing to a distinctly American codification of negative academic freedom (*Einsamkeit*).

Dewey, the modern university, and the birth of the AAUP

As far as I can tell, Peirce never used the phrase "academic freedom." By contrast, Dewey was instrumental in the development of one of the twentieth century's most important expressions of academic freedom, the American Association of University Professors' 1915 Declaration of Principles. While he was a key player in the introduction of the concept and implementation of academic freedom protections in North America—which in turn inspired international academic freedom standards[9]—Dewey came late to the notion that academic freedom required protection.

In 1902, in a piece called "Academic Freedom" (published thirteen years before the formation of the AAUP), Dewey outlines the nature and scope of academic freedom, ultimately concluding that it was safe in America. In that discussion, Dewey echoes key themes from Humboldt and Peirce, in particular the difference between (largely vocational) teaching institutions and research- and learning-oriented universities. On Dewey's account, the former inculcate fixed ideas while the latter pursue truth. Dewey emphasizes that ecclesiastical, political, and economic organizations have the right to found institutions to propagate their

[8] This theme recurs in Peirce's fourth Cambridge Conferences lecture, in which he says that he hopes to learn whether "Harvard is an educational establishment or whether it is an institution for learning what is not yet thoroughly known, whether it is for the benefit of the individual students or whether it is for the good of the country and for the speedier elevation of man into that rational animal of [which] he is the embryonic form" (EP2: 50).

[9] For an overview of the international chapter of this history, see Dea (2021: 203–7).

creeds. By contrast, universities are in the business of seeking truth, not preserving established knowledge-systems.

Unlike Humboldt and Peirce, though, Dewey recognizes that the distinction between teaching institutions, where academic freedom does not obtain, and universities, which depend on academic freedom, is not clear-cut. He notes that some institutions are in transition from historical missions and allegiances to particular bodies to being fully functioning universities. At such institutions, Dewey says, academic staff have the right and duty to pursue free inquiry, but they can still be bound by institutional commitments. When the tension between free inquiry and institutional commitments becomes too great, Dewey advises that academic staff have "the liberty of finding a more congenial sphere of work" (MW2: 54). Dewey argues that if the institution is frank about its commitments, then it has every right to defend them, but that academic staff can still "hope and labor for the time when the obligation in behalf of all the truth to society at large shall be felt as more urgent than that of a part of truth to a part of society" (ibid.). Even in denominational institutions, the line between institutional mission and academic freedom can be difficult to draw, according to Dewey. He gives the example of a religious school at which free inquiry into anatomy is encouraged but geological study is delimited for theological reasons. Dewey departs from Humboldt's and Peirce's sharper delineation between training institutions and universities because he wants to be clear that academic freedom issues can arise in part or over time in institutions that aren't primarily organized around the pursuit of truth.

His focus in the article, though, is universities, with respect to which "any attack, or even any restriction, upon academic freedom is directed against the university itself" (MW2: 55). He writes:

> To investigate truth; critically to verify fact; to reach conclusions by means of the best methods at command, untrammeled by external fear or favor, to communicate this truth to the student; to interpret to him its bearing on the questions he will have to face in life—this is precisely the aim and object of the university. To aim a blow at any one of these operations is to deal a vital wound to the university itself. The university function is the truth-function. (Ibid.)

Dewey says that the mission of universities and the indispensability of academic freedom in support of that mission are clear. However, confusion over academic freedom can arise because not all areas of study are as well-established scientifically, and not all are accepted by the public as well-established sciences. According to Dewey, mathematics, physics, astronomy, and chemistry are so well established, and seen to be so, that it is nearly impossible for academic freedom challenges to arise in those areas. Of course, this was not always the case; he points to historic controversies and academic freedom challenges in astronomy.

Dewey regards biology as still in transition, with evolutionary theory undergoing academic freedom challenges. He finds the transitional state of biology as particularly evident at smaller colleges. "[N]o university worthy of the name" would entertain limits on the teaching of, or research into, evolutionary theory, but public challenges to evolutionary theory could shake many smaller colleges "to their foundations" (MW2: 56). Dewey offers a sociological explanation for this difference. On his view, "large portions of society … have not come to recognize that biology is an established science," but "the more influential sections of the

community upon which the universities properly depend" (ibid.) generally accept biological science.

Academic freedom challenges are more common in the social sciences and humanities because they are both less well-established as sciences and less regarded as sciences by the public. "[T]he aspirations [and] the tendencies" of these disciplines are scientific, "but to the public at large the facts and relations with which these topics deal are still almost wholly in the region of opinion, prejudice, and accepted tradition" (MW2: 56–7). Further, when these disciplines touch on people's lives, people respond with skepticism, hostility, or "sensational exploitation" (MW2: 57). Dewey weighs two sides: on one hand, academic freedom protections are all the more important in the face of public hostility; on the other hand, some opinions by arts scholars really are just opinions and no more deserving of protection than are the opinions of any intelligent person, but coming from academic staff, they take on an official character and seem to represent the university.

For Dewey, academic freedom issues in transitional and contested areas often come down to context and personal judgment. He says that Germans are more open to new ideas because they don't see novel speculation as affecting the conduct of life. By contrast, Americans, like the English, see theory and practice as continuous and are hence more conservative about new ideas. Likewise, the very same controversial idea in the social sciences can be conveyed in a way that seems objective and thus does not "excite the prejudices or inflame the passions even of those who thoroughly disagree" or in a provocative way that "rasps" the public's feelings (MW2: 59).

Dewey rejects the worry that "there is a growing danger threatening academic freedom" (MW2: 61). Given advances in higher education, the public would not put up with moneyed benefactors interfering even with controversial expression by academic staff. The real danger to academic freedom according to Dewey is the risk that the expansion of universities in various ways interferes with the free conduct of academic work—work that Dewey finds more important than academic free speech. Dewey regards it as important to be alive to this risk because it is the result of subtle organizational and operational realities that, unlike inappropriate interference by a benefactor, would not receive sensational press coverage and hence may go unnoticed.

Dewey identifies four features of modern universities that get in the way of scholarly work, all of which remain familiar in our own time: financial pressures, administrative duties, scholarly specialization, and administrative centralization. To be true to their academic mission, argues Dewey, universities must expand, but this expansion costs money. The financial resources required for expansion can quickly become ends in themselves, and they can disincline academic staff from taking scholarly risks because they imagine those risks as potentially harming the affairs of the university. Further, as universities expand, academic staff are obliged to take on administrative services roles that draw their time and energy away from scholarship. At the same time, as universities expand, scholarly specialization becomes possible and increasingly the norm. Dewey admits that "in the long run the method of specialization will justify itself, not only scientifically, but practically" (MW2: 64), but he worries that in the short term it spells a kind of enervating individualism:

> It leads the individual … into bypaths still further off from the highway where men, struggling together, develop strength. The insidious conviction that certain matters of fundamental import to humanity are none of my concern because outside of my *Fach*, is likely to work more harm to genuine freedom of academic work than any fancied dread of interference from a moneyed benefactor. (Ibid.)

Finally, Dewey worries that increased centralization, while "necessary for the economical and efficient use of resources" within the modern university, at the same time "restricts initiative and responsibility" (MW2: 65).

Despite Dewey's prescient worries about the modern university, he is optimistic about academic freedom. He describes the "decay of external and merely governmental forms of authority" and a concomitant increase in the desire for wisdom and respect for inquiry. These social forces will work "to free the university spirit … from its entanglements and concealments" (ibid.). Alongside these social forces, Dewey regards scholarly associations as increasingly wishing to have a voice in higher education and predicts that scholarly associations will organize in order to defend the academic mission beyond any one university or discipline.

Dewey's prediction was correct. In 1913, the American Economic Association, the American Sociological Society, and the American Political Science Association all adopted identical resolutions striking committees to investigate "liberty of thought, freedom of speech, and security of tenure for teachers" in American educational institutions (Ludlum 1950: 15). The three groups met in 1914 and formed a joint committee to consider and elaborate some general principles relating to academic freedom. This committee ended up being the precursor to Committee A, the AAUP's long-standing and still enduring Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee.

In 1913, a letter signed by a large number of Johns Hopkins University professors and sent to the faculty of nine other universities suggested a conference to explore the creation of a national professional association for university teachers. Dewey was subsequently appointed chair of the organizing committee. The inaugural meeting of the American Association of University Professors was convened January 1, 1915, with over 250 members in attendance and Dewey as president.

Behind the scenes, philosopher Arthur O. Lovejoy had been a motive force—by his own account spending two years corresponding with hundreds of academics to recruit them as members, but also twisting Dewey's arm to accept the nomination for president. Here is Lovejoy's recollection years later:

> It appeared to me … that Dewey was *the man* because of his reputation, and I persuaded Dewey to accept the chairmanship. It was not at all that he was hostile to the idea … but he said he had so many irons in the fire that he couldn't take the time which he feared would be required …. But I had a long talk with him and made clear that he was the man who had to do it. He was the one man in the country in view of his reputation at the time. So, he finally agreed that he would accept.[10]

The dual reasons for the founding of the AAUP were the need to defend academic freedom, especially in light of a number of cases that, according to Lovejoy, "broke out in our far west,"[11] and the perceived need for increasingly professionalized university teachers to have a

[10] This and the subsequent quotation of Lovejoy are partial transcripts of an undated audio recording, available at *https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/Lovejoy_Dewey.wav*

[11] Lovejoy was one of several professors who in 1901 resigned from Stanford University in protest after economics professor Edward Ross was dismissed for expressing views that one of

professional association similar to the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association. While Lovejoy emphasized the importance of a professional association that would defend academic freedom, in his inaugural address as AAUP president Dewey denied that this was the primary purpose of the association: "A word upon the subject of the relation of the association to academic freedom may be in place, especially as it has been mistakenly stated in the public prints that this matter is the chief cause of the formation of this organization" (MW8: 102). Dewey continued that all academic staff are aware of academic freedom infringements and regard them as an "attack on the integrity of our calling" (ibid.), but that such attacks are too rare to justify forming an association like the AAUP and are in any case better dealt with by existing learned societies. "In any case, I am confident that the topic can not be more than an incident of the activities of the association in developing professional standards" (MW8: 103). He said that the AAUP should be as committed to the responsibilities that accompany academic freedom as to academic freedom itself, then optimistically concluded that "the existence of publicly recognized and enforced standards would tend almost automatically to protect the freedom of the individual and to secure institutions against its abuse" (ibid.).

With the creation of the AAUP, the earlier joint committee on academic freedom was replaced by a new AAUP committee (today known as Committee A), which in December of 1915 released its "1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure." While Dewey was not among the authors of the Declaration, his 1902 reflection on academic freedom had an outsized influence on it (Ludlum 1950: 19). The Declaration reprised the Humboldtian assertion of the freedom to teach and the freedom to learn but, in light of the AAUP's remit, confined itself to the former. On the AAUP's account, the freedom to teach comprises three subsidiary freedoms: "freedom of inquiry and research; freedom of teaching within the university or college; and freedom of extra-mural utterance and action" (AAUP 1915: 292). The Declaration does not further discuss freedom of inquiry because it is "so safeguarded that the dangers of its infringement are slight" (ibid.). It focuses instead on freedom of teaching and freedom of extramural expression. It refers to a number of recent investigations regarding violations of the latter, which it therefore regards as of particular importance, but focuses on freedom of teaching because, it claims, the general principles of both freedoms are so similar as not to require separate treatment.

The Declaration draws heavily on Dewey's 1902 discussion of different types of educational institutions and distinguishes between "proprietary institutions" and public institutions (ibid.: 292–3). Following Dewey, it concedes that proprietary institutions have the right to propagate specific doctrines. By contrast, institutions established to serve the public rather than to promote particular opinions do so by pursuing free inquiry. When boards of trustees interfere with professors' free inquiry, they thereby assume the proprietary attitude on behalf of their institutions and in so doing disqualify their institutions for public support (ibid.: 293). Of course, the AAUP did not and does not have the authority to limit public funding or fundraising in this way. Still, the dictum is a wonderful application of pragmatic consequentialism to the academic mission.

According to the Declaration, in order to serve the public good, university trustees and professors should operate independently of each other, just as the executive and judicial branches

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the university's founders, Jane Stanford, found offensive, and for which she called for his resignation. The American Economic Association investigated the case, the first time that such a body had intervened in an academic freedom matter (Ludlum 1950: 10–11).

of government do. Further, professors require protection from the public to serve the public good. The Declaration urges that the university should be "an inviolable refuge" from "the tyranny of public opinion," an "intellectual experiment station, where new ideas may germinate and where their fruit, though distasteful to the community as a whole, may be allowed to ripen until finally, perchance, it may become a part of the accepted intellectual food of the nation or of the world" (ibid.: 297). The Declaration follows what Dewey had written in 1902 in observing that different disciplines are subject to interference in different historical periods and social contexts and that "the danger zone has been shifted to the political and social sciences" (ibid.: 296), in which the need for academic freedom is therefore more evident.

The Declaration seeks to define both the rights and the duties associated with academic freedom. It holds that scholarly conclusions are defensible insofar as the scholar's methods and spirit are scholarly: "that is to say, they must be the fruits of competent and patient and sincere inquiry, and they should be set forth with dignity, courtesy, and temperateness of language" (ibid.: 298).

In its final section, the Declaration offers practical proposals to defend the principles it has spelled out. These include establishing faculty committees to advise on professorial reappointments, defining tenure, formulating transparent grounds for dismissal, and entitling professors to (more or less collegial) judicial hearings before dismissal.

The characterization and defense of academic freedom offered in the 1915 Declaration, along with the practical proposals to enact that defense, became the basis for modern academic freedom policies and procedures within the United States and beyond. In adapting *Akademische Freiheit* to America, they introduced important changes demanded by the American context. For instance, *Einsamkeit* required constitutional protection because German universities were branches of government. By contrast, defending American universities and scholars from external influence across an array of different kinds of institutions—some publicly-funded, some private, but all overseen by arms-length boards of trustees—required policies and procedures defended by scholarly organizations and collegial bodies. Where *Akademische Freiheit* bifurcated into the freedoms to teach and to learn, the AAUP needed to introduce protections of professors' extramural expression due to a series of cases of professors' experiencing reprisal for just that. At the same time, though, as a professional body, the AAUP focused on its members' rights and therefore ignored the freedom to learn. As the AAUP became the voice of academic freedom in America (and beyond), students' freedom to learn—which had been central to *Bildungsreform*—fell into neglect.[12]

As crucial as the 1915 Declaration was, it was rather tentative compared to modern academic freedom protections, in particular in the balance that it sought to strike between "*full and frank expression* and *temperateness of language*" (Eastman and Boyles 2015: 20). The First World War was the AAUP's first major test, a test it did not pass.

Academic freedom under authoritarianism

In 1918, the AAUP's Committee on Academic Freedom, chaired by Lovejoy, issued a wartime supplement to the 1915 Declaration. That report took the view that different approaches to academic freedom apply in wartime. It issued the opinion that professors should be terminated

[12] Dewey's role in this shift is in some ways inapposite given the importance of inquiry-based and student-centered approaches in his philosophy of education.

immediately if convicted of disobeying laws related to the war, and, if indicted, should be suspended from the university pending the verdict (Lovejoy et al. 1918: 34–5; Eastman and Boyles 2015: 23–4). It further specified that professorial speech encouraging resistance to military conscription should be grounds for dismissal (Lovejoy et al. 1918: 37–38; Eastman and Boyles 2015: 24).

Dewey was initially in support of the war, but he came to regret having fallen under the sway of nationalism (Eastman and Boyles 2015: 21–4). In 1917, Columbia University bypassed the faculty committee (on which Dewey sat) charged with investigating academic freedom cases and dismissed two professors for opposing conscription. Dewey resigned from the committee in protest (ibid.: 22–3). After the war, the divide between Dewey's and Lovejoy's positions continued to grow. Lovejoy played a key role in developing the AAUP's 1925 successor to the 1915 Declaration, which excised many of the 1915 justifications for academic freedom and added a new clause prescribing dismissal for treason (ibid.: 24, 25–6). Dewey objected that this new stipulation could be used "to justify the dismissal of teachers whose views on national policy were contrary to the patriotic sentiments of the time" (quoted in ibid.: 26), but Lovejoy was unconcerned.

If the First World War weakened academic freedom in America, the rise of the Third Reich destroyed it in Germany. On May 10, 1933, right-wing students marched through university towns, convening on campuses to burn "un-German" books. At the University of Berlin, the home of modern academic freedom, 40,000 people attended a Joseph Goebbels rally and book-burning. Hitler's Minister of Education selected the rectors for German universities, and announced that "the future basis for all studies in German universities would be the Nazi racial theories" (quoted in Beall 1969: 486). Fifteen hundred faculty members across the country were dismissed. By 1939, 45 percent of German faculty members had been replaced by Nazis.

Wherever authoritarianism is on the rise in our own time, we see corresponding attacks on academic freedom. In recent years, Hungary's ban on teaching gender studies inspired similar bans in Florida and Wyoming, and a number of U.S. states have banned the teaching of critical race theory. The December 2023 United States Congress hearing on antisemitism marked a new chapter in state interference in academic freedom. Representatives' interrogation of three university presidents was deeply chilling, and two of the presidents' replies were politically weaponized to force their resignations. The 2024 election of Donald Trump and the worldwide rise of right-wing populist governments will bring continued threats to academic freedom.

In this context, Humboldt's, Peirce's, and Dewey's conviction that universities can be free and solitary intellectual experiment stations feels impossibly optimistic. Can their thought help us to defend academic freedom today? Perhaps the greatest lesson to be learned from tracing the arc that stretches from the University of Berlin to Peirce's and Dewey's reflections on the function of universities and academic freedom is that both universities and the principles by which we defend them evolve with their context.

Historical contingencies in early 19th-century Prussia made possible the modern research university and constitutional protections for academic freedom. Historical conditions in the United States led to research universities being founded there, albeit without constitutional protections, but with a new commitment to protecting university teachers' extramural expression. Both Peirce and Dewey were deeply aware of the changing character of higher education and of variations within higher education. Peirce drew a bright line between institutions of teaching and institutions of learning. Dewey was sensitive to the gradual and sometimes partial emergence of free inquiry within and from parochial institutions, to the distinct and evolving challenges faced

by different scholarly disciplines, and to the effect on positive academic freedom of the material and structural conditions created by university expansion. Regrettably, he also became aware of the ways in which well-intentioned academic freedom protections can be weakened by war and nationalism.

Peirce and Dewey also teach us that universities' academic mission is a social mission, not an individual one. For Peirce, scholars regard their lives as having a purpose beyond themselves. For Dewey, "genuine freedom of academic work" occurs on the "highway where men, struggling together, develop strength" (MW2: 64, 1902). Accordingly, Dewey helped unite scholars across the country and across the disciplines to defend academic freedom. Scholars' collective organizing was, and remains, especially important in the absence of a government mandate or constitutional protections. In contexts, such as our own, in which governments are actively hostile to academic freedom, solidarity among scholarly personnel is imperative.

No doubt, difficult new tests of academic freedom lie ahead that will block the way of inquiry. As they always have, universities and their animating principles will evolve in the face of this new context. As they do, scholars must ally together, animated by a purpose beyond their own lives, to ensure that the next evolution is not the last.

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