

Robert L. Powers

Adolf von Harnack, Werner Jaeger, and the Crisis of Weimar Culture



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11



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Adolf von Harnack, Werner Jaeger,
and the Crisis of Weimar Culture

Greco-Christian Humanism
at the Crossroads
of Tradition and Modernity

Mohr Siebeck

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*For my late uncle A.L. Compton,
who taught me to dream*

*And for my wife Olivia,
who gave me the courage to keep on dreaming*

Preface

My introduction to German history, language, and literature occurred in 2015, during my first year as an undergraduate. In the beginning, my love for all things German was purely intellectual; the complexities of the language and of the beautiful concepts it expressed challenged me, and curiosity only birthed more curiosity. As my reading fluency improved, my connection to the Germans and to language learning became more personal. I grew up in a deeply fundamentalist church – one full of good-hearted, well-meaning people – that taught young-Earth creationism and discouraged nearly all forms of open and rigorous intellectual inquiry or historical criticism. It is unsurprising, then, that Germany’s great theologians, especially those in the “liberal” tradition, wholly (forgive the pun) entranced me. The notion that religious figures could not only engage directly and candidly with the academic sphere, but also function as integral, eminently respectable parts of that universe – as fellow travelers in pursuit of shared empirical truths – totally transformed my way of viewing the world and studying its history. The artificial, pernicious walls that had bounded my horizons gradually disappeared, and claustrophobic confines gave way to the sweeping panoramas of the European intellectual tradition.

My admiration for modern German theology and biblical scholarship first developed most acutely when I researched responses to Darwinism in the Wilhelmine era for my senior thesis, but encouraged by a prodigious body of rich historiography and intrigued by the collision of tradition and modernity, I soon immersed myself in the dynamism of the ill-fated Weimar Republic. And just as my undergraduate advisor Mark Clark’s passion for German religious thought had inspired me, so, too, did my graduate advisor Suzanne Marchand’s fascination with German scholarship’s Greco-Roman and Orientalist obsessions. Now ten years removed from my first German class, I could not possibly imagine a *Deutsch*-less existence. But the Germans did much more than help me escape the suffocating tendrils of anti-modern fundamentalism. Over the course of the past decade, I have watched the political cultures of the United States and countries across Europe become increasingly toxic, hateful, and polarized, with the apparent room for sensible moderates decreasing apace. The present state of the world thus compelled me to reengage with a story I thought I already knew, and a more generally focused *dissertation* about the struggles of theology and classical studies in Weimar evolved into an intimate – yet more

probing – *book* about the plight of two moderate intellectuals (and their incisive critics) who attempted to navigate the chaotic waters of constitutional revolution and political upheaval the only way they knew how: by returning to – and adapting – the ancient traditions that had shaped the entire course of their respective intellectual and spiritual development. They were, by turns, strikingly prescient and astute as well as frustratingly myopic and stubborn, but their imperfections are precisely what make their stories so human (and oddly therapeutic), allowing us to examine the beautiful tragedy of the Weimar Republic from a unique, personal, and – I hope – original angle.

The theologian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) and the philologist Werner Jaeger (1888–1961) bear witness to the rich, boundary-defying diversity and vivacity of academic – and bourgeois – culture during the Weimar Republic. Separated in age by nearly half a century but united by a common interest in the curriculum of the *Gymnasium*, a concern for pressing theological and societal problems, and professional ties to the University of Berlin, Harnack and Jaeger both acted as representatives of classical studies (*Altertums-wissenschaften*) who sought to reassert the broader educational and political significance of their disciplines. The cultural crises occasioned by World War I and by the subsequent collapse of the monarchical Second Reich led many Germans – young and old – to question the theoretical and practical economic relevance of studying ancient languages and cultures as well as to doubt the spiritual viability of liberal theology, or *Kulturprotestantismus*. In response to these challenges, Harnack and Jaeger combined the techniques of “positivistic” nineteenth-century historicist scholarship with the inward-looking spiritual awareness of early twentieth-century neoromanticism and existential thought. For them, the past was a place of inspiration, and the “creative personalities” (*schöpferische Persönlichkeiten*) of the past were not only to be reconstructed and studied, but admired, absorbed, and used to shape and uplift the modern individuals who now comprised the citizenry of a democratically constituted republic.

Both Harnack and Jaeger thus set themselves the tasks of combatting political extremity and, most importantly, preparing their compatriots for proper self-government by deploying their unique brands of religious, philhellenic humanism. Examining their public and scholarly activity, this study intends to provide a more nuanced, holistic look at intellectual and socio-political life in the Weimar Republic and to contextualize the work of two of its most prominent scholars, neither of whom attached themselves to a particular party. Although I do not deny the value of more policy-oriented, partisan intellectuals, I show that the activity of scholars such as Harnack and Jaeger who sought to serve “the public good” in more intangible ways is equally pertinent – from both a historical and presentist perspective – and thus worthy of analysis. Furthermore, the debates that emerged from the interwar “crises of the humanities” in Germany, though determined to some extent by their temporal boundedness,

reflect pivotal issues that lie at the heart of industrial and technological modernity and that continue to influence contemporary clashes concerning secondary and higher education.

Writing an extended piece of scholarship is no small task under normal circumstances, let alone in the midst and aftermath of a global pandemic. Ironically, in a time of nearly incessant isolation, I have found myself relying on others more than ever. Her impossibly busy schedule notwithstanding, my *Doktormutter* Dr. Suzanne Marchand has guided me every step of the way, pushing me to think and write at high levels (fingers crossed) – even on days when I would have been more than content to settle for mediocrity. My other dissertation advisers, Drs. Susan Grunewald, Brad Storin, and Michelle Zerba, have made invaluable contributions to this project by commenting on drafts and plugging holes in my knowledge and argument that would have otherwise sunk my ship before it left port.

I would like to extend additional and special thanks to Dr. Mark Clark of the University of Virginia's College at Wise, the undergraduate mentor who first taught me to love German intellectual history and to appreciate ideas in themselves, as well as to Dr. Robert Norton of Notre Dame, Dr. Paul DeHart of Vanderbilt Divinity School, and Dr. Mark Chapman of Oxford and Ripon College Cuddesdon, all of whom commented substantively on parts of this book despite being under absolutely no obligation to do so. Finally, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to a host of people at Mohr Siebeck: to the series editors of *Christentum in der modernen Welt / Christianity in the Modern World*, to publishing director Katharina Gutekunst and her assistant Markus Kirchner, and to deputy production head Susanne Mang. Their suggestions not only improved the manuscript substantially and substantively, but also spared me from a number of embarrassing mistakes. I alone, of course, am responsible for any errors or weaknesses that remain – and I am sure there are more than a few.

As we so often forget, however, intellectual support is only half of the story. Behind every work of scholarship stands an unsung team of librarians and support staff who somehow manage to track down even the rarest of books. LSU's Middleton Library cannot boast of world-class collections or abundant financial resources, but its employees are first-rate – hard-working, friendly, and continually helpful. Likewise, this research could never have been completed without the financial generosity of the Central European History Society, which funded a fruitful trip to the *Handschriftenabteilung* of the Prussian State Library, and of the history department at LSU, which covered the costs of an indispensable German paleography course as well as a visit to Harvard's Houghton Library. Perhaps just as importantly, the history department had enough faith in my potential to grant me the Fred C. Frey Dissertation Fellowship (2022–2023); I will remain ever thankful for the year of unencumbered reading (or, at times, deciphering), writing, and pondering that fellowship

made possible, and the quality of the work would have seriously suffered without it. As I retraced the steps of the subjects of this study, whether on Berlin's gorgeous *Unter den Linden*, in the peaceful, studious atmosphere of Cambridge in mid-summer, or on the sofa in my living room, they came alive in ways I never could have expected.

My wife Olivia deserves infinitely more than I could ever give her for all of the support and love – not to mention technological assistance with formatting the text and scanning or photographing archival documents – she has provided me during the research and writing process, all while navigating her journey through veterinary school with inimitable fortitude. I do not exaggerate in the slightest when I say I could not have completed a graduate degree without her. I once chuckled when, as a sophomore in college, I read in the acknowledgments section of a history book (the author and title of which I have sadly now forgotten) that a spouse or loved one was a *sine qua non* for any serious scholarly undertaking. Having now met and married the most selfless, caring human I have ever known, I no longer chuckle, for she is truly a precondition of my success, an ingredient “without which [there is] nothing.” My two cats, Odin and Stella, cannot read (yet), but they, too, deserve thanks for getting me out of bed early and supplying affection when my wife and I need it most.

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Introduction: Socrates and Jesus

“[In both Christianity and Hellenism], there was one respective figure (*Persönlichkeit*) in whom every high thing appeared encapsulated, established, and substantiated. For Christianity, it is immediately clear: new life, with all its goods, was seen in the person of Christ. But Hellenism, too – inasmuch as it presented itself as an elevation above the world of the senses, an ideal worldview, and an earnest morality – possessed a leading hero. Even if he did not lead as exclusively as Jesus Christ, he still represented the greatness before which every Greek soon bowed, one whom they honored as the founder of a new higher life – Socrates. Jesus Christ and Socrates: these two names mark the greatest memories held by humanity.”

– Adolf von Harnack, “Socrates and the Early Church” (1900)

“In his *Wesen des Christentums* (*What Is Christianity?*) Harnack rightly described [the] belief in the infinite value of the individual soul as one of the pillars of the religion of Jesus. But before that it had been a pillar of Socrates’ ‘philosophy’ and Socrates’ educational thought. Socrates preaches and proselytizes. He comes ‘to save the soul.’”

– Werner Jaeger, *Paideia* II (1943)

As World War I came to a close, the siege of Olympus was beginning in earnest. Under attack was not only the lofty academic fortress of the old-guard *Geisteswissenschaftler* (i.e., theologians and philologists), but also the very historicist values upon which that fortress had been founded. The parallel growth of nationalist and democratic sentiment threatened to batter down the gilded gate separating the titans of German classical and theological scholarship from the masses and economic modernization – from a generation of young scholars who, thirsting for something more than hyper-specialized nineteenth-century philology could provide, dared to challenge what was increasingly perceived as a rather dry approach to scholarship and its lack of relevance to individual *Existenz*; without reinforcement, it seemed the gate would likely give way.

Lecture halls that had been, before the war, full of hundreds of students eager to study classical philology now only contained a remnant of “forty or fifty” brave, committed souls, even as universities “found themselves swamped with students” on the whole.¹ In the face of spiritual and intellectual crisis, the traditional philological exercise of textual criticism (*Textkritik*) and liberal historicist theology often failed to justify their relevance to young Germans, some of them returning from the front and embarking on a search for deeper meaning – and economic stability – amid the chaos of defeat. “Have the mass graves of Diksmuide [a Belgian city in West Flanders] – where the blooming German student body was sacrificed – opened up to release this spectral throng (*gespenstische Schar*)? What are those yellowed, rumpled military coats, those bleached out field caps, those greenish officer badges? How many lack even a coat?,” asked Werner Richter, a journalist tasked with narrating the journey of young veterans, with faces “childlike yet wrinkled with age,” hobbling back into the classroom.² Classicist Paul Friedländer, who had been decorated with an Iron Cross for his service as an officer on the eastern front, spoke for an entire broken generation when he, in an oft-cited letter to his former teacher Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1848–1931), declared, “But [...] the war changed me drastically, and I could not, like others, just pick up in 1919 where I had left off in 1914. I now place much higher demands on the necessity that things [objects of research and academic inquiry] have to have for me.”³

With Wilamowitz, who had been the doyen of classical philology in Germany for decades, Friedländer’s words fell on deaf ears. But the generational gap was not so pronounced in every case – and it was anything but insuperable. The aforementioned subjects of this book, the theologian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) and the philologist Werner Jaeger (1888–1961), exemplify the complex interaction of modernity and tradition during the Weimar Republic, the results of which elude any neat or simplistic categorization. Despite hailing from vastly different generations, Harnack and Jaeger both nonetheless drank from the fountain of positivistic nineteenth-century historicism, drew from the well of early twentieth-century neoromanticism, and poured all their efforts into concocting an elixir that would successfully combine the two; they hoped

¹ Friedrich Solmsen, “Classical Scholarship in Berlin Between the Wars,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 30, no. 1 (1989): 117–118; Suzanne L. Marchand, “The Great War and the Classical World: GSA Presidential Address, Kansas City, 2014,” *German Studies Review* 38, no. 2 (2015): 253.

² Werner Richter, “Vivat Academia...?,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, February 20, 1920.

³ Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Paul Friedländer, Caroline Buckler, William M. Calder, and Bernhard Huss, *“The Wilamowitz in Me”: 100 Letters Between Ulrich Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and Paul Friedländer* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1999), 144. Their disagreements notwithstanding, Friedländer continued to venerate Wilamowitz; he even hung a picture of him on his wall in California. See Paul Friedländer, “Erinnerung an Wilamowitz,” in *Studien zur antiken Literatur und Kunst* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969), 681.

thereby to invigorate their disciplines and to nurture their newborn republican polity in a time of vehement tension and polarization. Harnack and Jaeger, possessed of tremendous scholarly cachet, deployed their unique brands of philhellenic religious humanism in the interest not only of defensively combatting anti-republican extremity at either end of the political spectrum, but also (and most importantly) of actively preparing their compatriots – former subjects of the Kaiser’s German Empire who had, in short order, become citizens of a democratically constituted republic – for proper self-government.

In Harnack’s words,

The spiritual world is much too complicated to be schematized by a *single* system of classification or order. That is, classicism and Romanticism are *sisters*. But they are also [mag-netic] *poles*. But they are also *levels* (*Stufen*), such that classicism is superior in some cases, while Romanticism is [superior] in others. Depending on the predisposition of [any given] feeling and thinking individual, there will always be one-sided friends of classicism and one-sided friends of Romanticism; but the thinking cultural politician (*Kulturpolitiker*) should be intent not on separating these diverging types of people, but rather on keeping them together by educating them to respect the depth [and complexity] of [intellectual] problems.⁴

Harnack and Jaeger both considered themselves thoroughly objective in matters of historical, evidence-based research and were not neo-Romantics in any formal or literary sense; neither of them would have taken issue with the basic historicist principle that all phenomena are delimited by the horizons of their particular historical contexts or that a sense of progressive development, albeit it generally ill-defined, lay at the core of historical processes. Like many in the interwar period – one thinks of the prominent example of J.R.R. Tolkien’s hugely popular literary work and seminal lecture “On Fairy-Stories” – they also both undeniably felt compelled to respond to “the soul’s longing for a

⁴ Adolf von Harnack to Roderich von Engelhardt, January 17, 1927, in NI. Adolf von Harnack, K. 30, Bl. 33–34, Handschriftenabteilung, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SBB-PK). The oddly repetitive syntax is in the original, and I did not feel at liberty to change it: “Die geistige Welt ist viel komplizierter u. transzendenter, als dass sie durch *einen* Klassifikations=Ordnungsfaktorplan gemacht werden konnte. Also: Klassik u. Romantik sind *Schwestern*, aber sie sind auch *Pole*, aber sie sind auch *Stufen*, u. letzteres so, dass auf einigen Linien die Klassik das Uebergeordnete ist, auf anderen die Romantik. Das lässt sich im literarisch-Aesthetischen leicht zeigen, schwieriger im Philosophischen, aber auch da liegen die Dinge nicht anders. Je nach der Anlage der fühlenden u. denkenden Menschen wird es stets einseitige Klassik-Freunde u. einseitige Romantik-Freunde geben; aber der denkende Kulturpolitiker soll darauf bedacht sein, die Auseinanderstrebenden nicht auseinander zu treiben, sondern sie zur Ehrfurcht vor der Tiefe der Probleme zu erziehen und damit zusammenzuhalten.” When quoting key passages in German, I have hewed as closely as possible to the original manuscripts, whether typed or written, and transcribed them almost verbatim, except in cases of spacing or typographical issues that may confuse the reader. I have thus tried to refrain from using “[sic]” ad nauseam, and the emphases are in the original unless otherwise noted.

meaning and content in life” and to balance “the fragmentation of modern knowledge” with a “holistic worldview.”⁵

Unlike their victorious counterparts in London, Paris, and Washington D.C., however, German scholars had to contend additionally with the weighty cultural and intellectual implications of thoroughgoing regime change. While the end of monarchical patronage and the collapse of old sureties led many professors of high standing to despair, Harnack and Jaeger recognized that the social and political fluidity of the new Republic presented German mandarins with bountiful opportunities to extend their influence further into a lively public sphere and, in their particular cases, to champion the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions before a broader audience. But with great opportunity came great responsibility. Employing a now classic metaphor, Christopher Browning has likened the “fragile, resilient” Weimar Republic to a “candle cracked in the middle and burning at both ends”⁶; as moderate, non-partisan public intellectuals in this topsy-turvy interwar world, Harnack and Jaeger embraced such responsibility, positing – naively but sincerely – that the ancients and their contemporary academic mouthpieces could, if duly called upon, help mend the riven candle and beat back the flames of extremity. The fates of Olympus and Golgotha – metonyms for the constitutive traditions that shaped the distinctive iterations of Greco-Christian humanism assessed in this book – were, from their points of view, deeply intertwined with the political well-being and ultimate survival of Weimar itself. Their stories demonstrate that moderate solutions to the Weimar crises were on offer and freely available; it was possible for Weimar humanists both to eschew leftist militancy and to resist the thrall of blood-and-soil Teutomania. That these paths were not taken requires us to take account not only of the weaknesses and aporia of the moderates, but also of the swiftness and volatility of political events which overtook reform processes and, in the end, overshadowed Harnack’s Protestant ecumenicism and Jaeger’s neohellenist παιδεία (paideia: the ancient Greek equivalent of German *Bildung*, something like a combination of the English concepts of education, refinement, culturedness, and cultivation).

It remained true, nevertheless, that Olympus and Golgotha faced concerted opposition, and the siege was neither unprecedented nor altogether unexpected. Between 1830 and 1931, the percentage of German university students enrolled in faculties of theology had dropped from 30 percent to a mere 10 percent.⁷ By

⁵ Margarete Kohlenbach, “Transformations of German Romanticism, 1830–2000,” in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 261.

⁶ Christopher R. Browning, “Fragile, Resilient Weimar,” *The New York Review of Books*, February 8, 2024.

⁷ Friedrich Paulsen, *German Education: Past and Present*, trans. T. Lorenz (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908), 193. This decline occurred also in absolute terms: in 1830, 6,076 total Germans studied theology at the university level, while in 1903, only 3,777 did.

the early 1920s, less than a third of German boys were receiving their secondary education at a classical *Gymnasium*.⁸ This meant that at least two out of every three educated German males lacked sufficient preparation in Greek, and in the eyes of the humanistic professoriate, adequate reading knowledge of Latin as well. (This number admittedly appears quite high when one considers how unusual it would seem if one out of every three graduates of American high schools had substantial proficiency in Latin and Greek, but we must also keep in mind that many Germans never finished high school at all in this period and thus could not be counted among the “educated.”) By the end of the 1920s, many of those who *did* graduate from high school and complete their finishing exams – nearly 45% – decided not to bother with university study in any case.⁹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the classics fared no better than theology in the interwar period when it came to winning new converts for the cause. And they were not simply losing to the natural sciences. These old-guard masters of the humanities were absolutely bleeding students to fields unrelated to biology, physics, or chemistry: so drastic was the shift that as of 1924, there were “six times [!]” the number of college students in the disciplines of German, English, and French literature and philology than in those of classical languages.¹⁰

Even as demands for wide-ranging reforms in German secondary education at the comprehensive *Reichsschulkonferenz* of June 1920 – which recapitulated long-standing debates between proponents and detractors of the *Gymnasium* – seemed to fall flat, they laid a partial foundation for the Richert *Schulreform* of 1924/25, a Prussian plan for secondary schools that set the pace nationally (Baden and Bavaria excepted) and preferred “national pathos” and “cultural studies” (*Kulturkunde*) to the tradition of classical *Bildung*.¹¹ “Instead of all this Renaissance of Romance and ancient essence,” the Germanist Richard Benz, especially inflamed by Italy’s political and military betrayal of the Triple Alliance in 1915, had recommended the “rebirth (*Wiedergeburt*) of old German art and culture,” for the Italian Renaissance, which had taken classical Greeks and Romans as its models and monopolized school curricula, represented the

⁸ Fritz K. Ringer, *Education and Society in Modern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 60, 52.

⁹ Walther Kranz, Review of *Was erwarten Schule und Universität auf dem Gebiete des altsprachlichen Unterrichts voneinander?*, by E. Kroymann and O. Regenbogen, *Gnomon* 5, no. 1 (1929): 57–58.

¹⁰ Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis: The Humanities in a Disenchanted Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 186, which helpfully processes the data tables in Hartmut Titze, *Wachstum und Differenzierung der deutschen Universitäten, 1830–1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 91.

¹¹ Hellmut Becker and Gerhard Kluchert, *Die Bildung der Nation: Schule, Gesellschaft und Politik vom Kaiserreich zur Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1993), 276, 363, 385; Ute Preuß, *Humanismus und Gesellschaft: Zur Geschichte des altsprachlichen Unterrichts in Deutschland von 1890 bis 1933* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988), 128–129.

“doom” of Germandom and of the Germanic traditions of the Middle Ages.¹² Still others argued that the influence of Greco-Roman antiquity on German Classicism and Romanticism merited close study – but mostly because one could detect in those movements the particularities of the “restless” German spirit as well as “the unspent youth of East German tribes (*ostdeutscher Stämme*).”¹³

That is not to say, of course, that the classics could not be appropriated in fervently nationalist, or even proto-fascistic, fashion: Eduard Norden was not alone in thanking the Romans for teaching young men how “sweet and fitting it is to die for one’s country” or in seeing the *Aeneid* as an important means of encouraging interwar German youth “to arise as avengers” of their fathers’ defeat.¹⁴ So potent were the perfumes of patriotism, however, that even the Latinist Norden argued that the most important reason for teaching students about the “national strength and greatness of Rome” was to illustrate the strength and heroism of the Germanic tribes that had achieved an “incomparable feat” by bringing the Empire to its knees.¹⁵ Voicing support for Richert’s more Germanocentric policies, the conservative politician Hermann Schuster opined, “Educational material should not be forced on students as something foreign, but made accessible to them as something corresponding to their distinctive [German] essence [...] they will find their own aspirations [...] embodied in

¹² Richard Benz, *Die Renaissance, das Verhängnis der deutschen Cultur* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1915), 40; Julia Scialpi, *Der Kulturhistoriker Richard Benz (1884–1966): eine Biographie* (Heidelberg: Verlag Regionalkultur, 2010), 65, 70. Some philologists who specialized in Germanic language and literature, on the other hand, detested the “secret language of specialists” across the board and called for “related disciplines to work together” in pursuit of the common goal of spiritual and intellectual “universalism.” See Konrad Burdach, *Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Eindrücke eines alten Germanisten* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1930), 47.

¹³ Julius Petersen, *Die Wesensbestimmung der deutschen Romantik: eine Einführung in die moderne Literaturwissenschaft* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1926), 180. Here, Petersen was following in the footsteps of his predecessor Gustav Roethe. Roethe was a fierce defender of the classical Gymnasium, but he, as an ardent German nationalist, had also argued that instructors “have to know [...] the way from Hellas and Rome to Germany,” for teachers needed their “homeland [and a sense of] the present in order to bring the distant past to life.” He also added that “God has his dear Germans in mind when He awakened the ancient Greeks to new life” during the Renaissance. See Gustav Roethe, *Humanistische und nationale Bildung: eine historische Betrachtung* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1906), 33, 12; idem, *Von deutscher Art und Kultur* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1915), 27–29; and Ehrhard Bahr, “The Goethe Society in Weimar as Showcase of *Germanistik* during the Weimar Republic and the Nazi Regime,” in *Nazi Germany and the Humanities*, ed. Wolfgang Bialas and Anson Rabinbach (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 55–56.

¹⁴ Eduard Norden, *Die Bildungswerte der lateinischen Literatur und Sprache auf dem humanistischen Gymnasium* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1920), 29–30, 42.

¹⁵ Norden, *Die Bildungswerte der lateinischen Literatur und Sprache*, 42.

national ideas and national heroes.”¹⁶ The nationalists’ intensified push for a modern, thoroughly “German” secondary curriculum served as both a symptom and cause of the rightward shift of the student body at the University of Berlin, a “stronghold of enemies of the republic (*Republikfeinde*).”¹⁷ With this “new order” (*Neuordnung*), the study of antiquity and instruction in classical languages became one among many “means to an end (i.e., passing the *Abitur* and landing a job),” further undermining the centrality – and perhaps even the quality – of the *Gymnasium*.¹⁸ The gradual reordering of secondary education, which had taken place over the course of several decades, sent shockwaves through the university system and, with the added impetus of a world war, precipitated a sense of profound crisis among those professors who depended on *Gymnasien*, the elite German equivalents of American high school combined with the first one or two years of college, as the case may have been, to send them cohorts of starry-eyed students with years of quality instruction in Greek and Latin under their belts.

Although they began from different points of departure and represented distinct points of emphasis, Harnack, a Baltic German and son of a conservative Lutheran theologian, and Jaeger, son of an unchurched, politically-liberal Protestant family living in the heavily Catholic town of Lobberich in the Lower Rhine, shared an undying commitment to scholarship as well as a faith in the infinite value of every individual and in a broadly Christian, universal – not necessarily Johannine or neo-Platonic – *Logos* (λόγος) or hypostatized *Geist*, in a cosmic structuring principle of perfect divine reason, manifesting Itself throughout history and revealing Itself to diverse, imperfect peoples – but to the Greeks and Jews, above all.¹⁹ Although neither of them formulated this

¹⁶ See *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 48, no. 19 (1923): 408. Schuster, who did not properly enter the political scene until after World War I, was trained as a theologian and had taught religion and history at several *Gymnasien* – in addition to working as an editor for the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*.

¹⁷ Michael Grüttner, “Nachkriegszeit,” in *Geschichte der Universität Unter den Linden, 1810–2010*, ed. Heinz-Elmar Tenorth (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010), 2: 43.

¹⁸ Preuß, *Humanismus und Gesellschaft*, 128–29.

¹⁹ In my review of the extant literature, I have found only one scholar who made serious note of Harnack’s appreciation for *Logos* Christology in his *History of Dogma*. See Heinrich Hoffmann, “Christentum und Antike bei Adolf von Harnack und Ernst Troeltsch,” in *Festschrift für Edouard Tièche, ehemaligen Professor and der Universität Bern, zum 70. Geburtstag* (Bern: Lang, 1947), 29: “Harnack also shows that the doctrine of the consubstantiality (*Wesensgleichheit*) of the *Logos* with God was [...] provided by a Hellenic motif: through the Hellenic doctrine of redemption by means of the divinization of human nature (*Vergottung der Menschennatur*) that had risen [in popularity] since the time of Irenaeus. For the divinization of human nature through the incarnation of the *Logos* was only guaranteed if [the *Logos*] possessed full divinity. Harnack shows conclusively that this doctrine of divinization concerning the Christ who became human represented the best conception of the absorption of human nature by divine nature. Harnack thus came to defend emphatically the infamous Synod of Ephesus of 449 [...] because its doctrinal formulation

faith explicitly or precisely in those terms, it emerges clearly in their works and amounts to a selective “pantheism of history (see below),” a belief system in which one could revere literary luminaries like Goethe and Dante alongside religious revolutionaries like Socrates, Plato, and Jesus; the parallels between the noble martyrdom of Socrates and Jesus were surely not lost on Harnack or Jaeger. Near the height of his scholarly popularity, Harnack confessed privately to his brother Otto, “I am, just like Goethe, a polytheist and a monotheist at the same time (*Polytheist u. Monotheist zugleich*), but because I am also the latter [I rejoice] that the world, and thus science and art, is but rubbish (*Quark ist*), and nothing can escape the love of God and one’s neighbor,” adding, “I am only interested in living individuals [...] and their philosophy or theology is, for me, only one page of their biography.”²⁰

Despite such intellectual and religious flexibility (with the major caveat that the “Orient” and Middle Ages were essentially excluded from this inclusivity), Harnack never parted ways from his Lutheran roots, and Jaeger never parted ways from his youthful love for Latin and Greek. Never losing the temperament of a minister, Harnack remained a theologian focused on the person of Jesus, and Jaeger, never forfeiting his taste for ontological abstraction or for idealized models of the ancient Greek *polis*, remained a classical philologist attached to Greek philosophy and theology from the Pre-Socratics to the Capadocian Fathers, especially Gregory of Nyssa, who accompanied him from the beginning of his academic career until his death. But searching for a “synthesis of Christianity with the most noble treasures of antiquity (even from the pre-Platonic period),”²¹ they discovered at the world-class University of Berlin that a great deal of common humanistic ground lay between Olympus and Golgotha. And they believed most sincerely that such common humanistic ground represented a firm bedrock on which cultural and political consensus could be built – however ill-fated or naïve such a conviction may appear to twenty-first century observers.

The present always carries a jumbled assortment of pieces from the past. No matter how fervently reactionaries or radicals rallied for or against the *status quo ante*, sober young educational leaders such as Jaeger understood that they had much to learn from their forerunners’ meticulous commitment to quality scholarship – just as perceptive members of the old-guard professoriate such

of a single divine nature of the Christ who became human corresponded to the Greek doctrine of redemption much better than did the doctrine of two natures that prevailed in Chalcedon soon thereafter.”

²⁰ Adolf von Harnack to Otto Harnack, July 18, 1900, in Nl. 261 (Otto Harnack), K. 1 (only one box), Bl. 44, Handschriftenabteilung, SBB-PK: “[M]ich interessieren nur die lebendigen Menschen und unter den Lebendigen die Lebendigsten, u. ihre Philosophie oder Theologie ist mir nur eine Pagine ihrer Biographie.” Although Harnack was not ennobled (with the “von” particle) until 1914, I refer to him as Adolf von Harnack throughout my footnotes to avoid confusion and to maintain a convenient degree of consistency.

²¹ See Hoffmann, “Christentum und Antike,” 32. Hoffmann used this wording specifically with regard to Harnack.

as Harnack stressed that scholarship could not lose sight of the fundamental spiritual and emotional needs of the German people, needs that became all the more obvious and urgent in the dark years of the interwar period. Harnack and Jaeger did not prevent their disciplines from slowly losing popularity – an impossible task, at any rate, in a world of proliferating options and economic diversity – nor did they manage to rally the educated middling sorts behind the banner of the Republic. But by standing astride the intersection of the past and the present, and of the academy and educated society at large, they devised a model of public intellectual engagement that, however imperfect, grappled with pivotal national and institutional issues.

Adversity, then, is not always a bad thing; it often *encourages* innovation and *discourages* complacency. Such was certainly the case for Harnack and Jaeger, and that is precisely why their attempts to preserve the spiritual and educational relevance of their disciplines, to walk the line between “scholarship and life,” and to act as stabilizing public intellectuals during the tumultuous Weimar years, which have been neglected or summarily and incorrectly dismissed as “anti-modernist” (à la Fritz Ringer) by most intellectual historians of modern Europe, are so worthy of examination. Delving into the minds of two men who sat atop the hierarchy of the German humanities as the academic crisis reached a fever pitch opens a unique window not only to debates, at once old and new, surrounding the value of a “non-practical” education, but also to the complex interactions between false binaries: “popular” and “elite,” “novel” and “traditional,” or even “practical” and “impractical.” It would be fallacious to presume that Harnack and Jaeger could have single-handedly reversed trends years in the making or to assert naively that they had the best – or even the right – answer to every pressing question. And while the subject of this study is philhellenic “academic humanism,” there were virtually innumerable other humanisms and stimulating intellectual projects – some uncategorizable – in the interwar period that decentered the ancient Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions (or totally reinterpreted them through a phenomenological or Marxist lens); shared looser connections with the world of “pure scholarship” (*reine Wissenschaft*); or repudiated the academic establishment entirely.²² These alternate humanisms extend beyond the scope of this project and deserve their own treatment; thus, with my more narrow interests here, I emphatically do not mean to suggest that the classical, liberal Protestant humanisms of two elite academics were superior to all others and should have the final historical word. It would, however, be equally erroneous to disregard two prominent, sensibly moderate voices in the Weimar philological and theological choirs. We have long trained ourselves to hear only the lows of the basses and the highs of the tenors – much to the neglect of baritones who faithfully chant old refrains *and* boldly soar into new choruses.

²² See, for example, C.H. Becker, “Der dritte Humanismus,” *Vossische Zeitung*, December 25, 1932.

Harnack and Jaeger found their holistic worldviews in the interplay of the mythical (in a literary, non-derogatory sense) or the divine – a label ranging from Plato’s most perfect Being to the Jewish God of Jesus and beyond – and the human within the bounds of history: in one of his last public speeches, Jaeger had proclaimed to a group of students in his hometown of Lobberich, “[I] personally cannot imagine a *Humanum* without a *Divinum*. They were born for each other [...]. Even the Sophists believed that man is a temple-building creature who honors the gods. This *Humanum* together with his *Divinum* – that is what we have to foster.”²³ This interplay never escaped history, but it could transcend history within the individual human, in the great “creative personalities” (*schöpferische Persönlichkeiten*) of the past. The geniuses of the nineteenth-century Romantic movement had, for example, recaptured the insight of the Greek tragedians, Plato, and Aristotle by “rediscover[ing] the true greatness of the mythical tradition” and learning to view “myths as a sort of primordial wisdom of mankind [...] which modern man had sacrificed in his arrogant pride of reason”: the classical Greeks and Christian theologians who inherited their traditions had “a unique capacity [for] detecting the basic law [...] in all things” and for drawing on mythical and religious tradition to examine universal problems that continually recurred in the historical life of humankind and civilization.²⁴ When historicism and neoromanticism – by no means opposites in the respective minds of Harnack and Jaeger – crossed paths in the interwar period, the result was a distinctive humanism composed of the classical Greco-Roman heritage and the Judeo-Christian tradition and grounded in a type of inspired intellectual history or *Geistesgeschichte*, though they did not frequently call it that. Their humanisms were living refutations of Tertullian’s millennia-old contention that Athens and Jerusalem did not belong together. Indeed, they clung fervently to the hope that the spirit of antiquity – of Athens and Jerusalem – would empower a new generation of virtuous, ethically sound German republicans.

In view of the manner in which the life of the mind (theology and philosophy), on the one hand, and public life, on the other, overlapped in the careers of Harnack and Jaeger, there is no easy or simple way to separate their activities into discrete spheres. I have, nonetheless, attempted to divide each of their respective sections into two chapters apiece for the convenience of the reader. This division, however imperfect, proceeds along roughly chronological and thematic lines. Each chapter thus retains a coherence of its own, but this format

²³ Werner Jaeger, “Rede in Lobberich 1959,” in *Werner Jaeger*, ed. Manfred Meis and Theo Optendrenk (Nettetal: Verlag der Buchhandlung Matussek & Sohn, 2009), 116.

²⁴ See Jaeger’s introduction in Gustav Schwab, *Gods and Heroes of Ancient Greece*, trans. Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz (New York: Pantheon Books, 1946), 25–27. Jaeger considered Platonic dialogues “a new kind of myth which blends old mythical elements of symbolic force with new philosophical ideas” and quoted Aristotle’s assertion that a “friend of wisdom is also a friend of [...] myth.” He criticized Euripides, however, for “modernizing his characters,” thereby making them “less profound” and more boringly bourgeois.

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