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Abraham Flexner, American Philanthropy and Weimar Germany

Abraham Flexner is well-known to historians of education and philanthropy for his influential career as an educational reformer and foundation administrator,¹ but his advocacy on behalf of German universities and his leadership in restoring U.S.-German intellectual ties after the First World War have received comparatively little attention.² In the 1920s Flexner became one of the leading advocates for American philanthropic investment in Germany. Although he devoted most of his energies to persuading his colleagues at the Rockefeller Foundation to include Weimar Germany in their plans for postwar Europe, he also worked behind the scenes to encourage individual philanthropists—including Julius Rosenwald, Alanson B. Houghton and John D. Rockefeller, Jr.—to make financial commitments to German universities and scientific organizations.

In the aftermath of the First World War German institutions faced undeniably difficult circumstances. Military collapse and the postwar political crisis disrupted the German economy, and the Versailles Treaty imposed severe economic penalties on the defeated country. University enrollments suffered from the decimation of the college-age male cohort, and mandates to invest university funds in wartime bonds proved ruinous to university endowments. With postwar inflation, scholarship and other charitable funds soon lost all value. The distinguished theologian and historian Adolf von Harnack, appealing for funds on behalf of the Prussian Academy of Sciences and academic groups, compared his prostrate country to the ravaged Germany of 1648 in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War. Writing after the French occupation of the Ruhr, Ernst Jäckh, the director of the Deutsche Hochschule für Politik, vividly described postwar Germany as “. . . outlawed through the Treaty of Versailles, dictated to and humiliated, blockaded and invaded,

occupied, stricken by fever and famine, like Pharoah's seven years of famine, empty and grievous."³ The defeat, the dismal economic situation, intensified by the continuing Allied blockade, and the huge loss of life among young men who would have matriculated in the half decade between 1914 and 1919 made university life joyless and bleak. Even as the nation's universities began to resume operations, German scholars and scientists found themselves cut off from scholarly communication with the United States, Britain and France. Wartime animosities had led to the formation of a new international scientific organization that pointedly excluded Germany and Austria, and even after the signing of the Versailles Treaty no immediate attempt was made to revive the more inclusive prewar scientific unions.⁴

This de facto boycott of German science left Germany an island apart in the early 1920s. Flexner's desire to reestablish contacts with his German colleagues or to renew old friendships was relatively rare in 1919-20. It is tempting to explain this singular attitude by Flexner's background. Growing up in Louisville as the son of German-speaking Alsatian Jewish immigrants, Abraham Flexner shared many formative experiences with the German-American communities in the Ohio River valley. Flexner's parents spoke German and Yiddish at home, and his mother was especially prone to drop German proverbs and folk sayings into her admonitions. When in 1906 Flexner joined the thousands of American scholars who studied in prewar Imperial Germany, he went predisposed to appreciate the German university.⁵ Convinced that the most rigorous work on the psychology of learning and its application to education was being done in Germany, Flexner spent the academic year 1906-7 in Berlin. He would return to Germany in 1910 and 1912.

Throughout his career Germany would provide Flexner with examples of educational practice that he sought to transplant to the United States. When the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching commissioned him to analyze medical education in the United States, Flexner drew upon German practice as the implicit yardstick by which he measured American shortcomings in a landmark report of 1910. A companion volume to his American report set out the chief features of medical training in Great Britain, France and Germany, and this second Carnegie assignment enabled Flexner to deepen his already extensive ties with leading German medical scientists and professors.⁶ The powerful examples he drew from these comparative studies and the cogency of his thinking about how medical education should be structured led Flexner to an appointment at the Rockefeller-funded General Education Board (GEB), at the time one of the largest U.S. philanthropies and a powerful sister to the Rockefeller Foundation.

The First World War inevitably disrupted international educational and scientific ties as well as the philanthropic plans of the Rockefeller funds.

Along with many German Americans, Flexner regarded Woodrow Wilson's wartime policies with grave misgivings. "All this preparedness talk," he snapped in 1915, "is nothing in the world but preparedness against Germany."⁷ Although he deplored the submarine campaign—ironically, he had returned from Europe in 1912 on the ill-fated *Lusitania*—he blamed Wilson for not demonstrating an even-handed policy against the British blockade, a failure he predicted would force the Germans to return to the attack in the North Atlantic. At the same time he regarded German war aims as indefensible and he lamented the heavy-handedness of German occupation policy in Belgium, faults he ascribed to the ascendancy of Prussian militarism. In the end, Flexner reluctantly supported American intervention and blamed the Kaiser and his advisers for the disasters that befell the empire in the hard years of 1918 and 1919.

This stance, along with his strong support of assimilation by Jewish and other ethnic minorities, spared him from the anti-German backlash that swept wartime America. After the war Flexner frequently contrasted Germany's academic and industrial successes with its territorial ambitions and military failures. "When I was last abroad eight years ago, I thought Germany had the future of the world in the hollow of its hand," he wrote in 1920, "and so it had. If it had disbanded its army and sunk its navy, it would have conquered the world by sheer force of brains and organization."⁸ Flexner continued to believe that German scholars and scientists would have a vital role to play in postwar reconstruction and that Rockefeller philanthropic efforts in Europe should make it a priority to rebuild international scholarly cooperation.

Rockefeller philanthropies were only beginning in the 1920s to emerge as independent organizations with professional staffs. In part to sidestep political controversies in the United States about the use of these large charitable funds, most of the numerous Rockefeller charitable establishments—this list would include the Rockefeller Foundation (created in 1913), the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research (1901), the International Health Board (1913), and the China Medical Board (1914)—concentrated their work in medical education and public health. While not exclusively focused on these issues, the General Education Board (1902-3) devoted much of its considerable resources to medical education and became best known for its support of efforts to improve the quality and professional status of American medical education. Because its charter limited its grant-making to the United States, a parallel but smaller fund, the International Education Board was created in 1923. The short-lived Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial was established in 1918 to further causes championed by the founder's late wife, and by the 1920s Rockefeller philanthropy included no less than four separate grantmaking organizations as well as personal giving by the family. The two largest funds, the GEB and the Rockefeller Foundation (RF), were primarily

concerned with the medical sciences—medical education in the case of the GEB, and applying scientific medicine to public health on an international basis in the case of the RF. In the years just after the war, Flexner was at the apogee of his influence within the Rockefeller offices, the result of his acclaimed reports and his personal ties to John D. Rockefeller, Jr, under whose auspices he had conducted several independent studies that helped set grantmaking policies for both the General Education Board and the Foundation.

While this background gave Flexner enormous influence on American medical schools and enabled him to set policy for all the Rockefeller boards in medical education,⁹ in 1922 his responsibilities for medical education at the General Education Board, limited by its charter, encompassed only the United States. By contrast, the Rockefeller Foundation conducted most of its grantmaking on an international basis and increasingly became the main charitable vehicle for the Rockefellers, but its focus on improving public health left Germany, where national standards were already high, out of bounds. In the immediate postwar years Flexner became deeply involved in an ongoing internal debate among the Rockefeller boards about the wisdom of moving beyond the family's traditional emphasis on medical education and public health, and as he championed new programs for Germany, Flexner paid little attention to formal organization charts or job descriptions.

As soon as the war ended, Flexner looked for an opportunity to restore communications with his German colleagues, but it was not until 1922 that he finally found time to make an extended European trip which took him to Paris, Berlin and other cities. In the meantime the Rockefeller Foundation viewed public health in war-torn Europe as a priority and launched an emergency program following a fact-finding trip to Central Europe in 1920 by Edwin Embree, the secretary of the Rockefeller Foundation and Flexner's protégé.¹⁰ Embree's report convinced the officers and trustees that the postwar financial crisis was crippling efforts to build new medical schools and create a modern infrastructure of hospitals and other public health facilities in the successor states. Embree reported that the interruption of scholarly communications during wartime had led to a sense of isolation almost everywhere, and this hiatus was made worse by the postwar economic stagnation and disorder. Subscriptions to foreign journals had virtually ceased, as many institutions in the new states simply did not have sufficient resources to buy foreign medical journals or to catch up on wartime losses. "At every university visited," the annual report of the Rockefeller Foundation noted, "an urgent desire was expressed for British and American research journals."¹¹

As a result of Embree's survey, the Rockefeller Foundation agreed to send American scientific journals to medical school libraries in countries which were "suffering from an adverse exchange rate." In 1920 this meant Austria, Hungary,

and Czechoslovakia but shortly afterwards the new states of Poland and Yugoslavia were added to the program of emergency assistance. The Foundation also chose five medical centers it deemed most strategic—at Vienna, Graz, Prague, Budapest and Innsbruck—and bought additional research materials and laboratory equipment for them.¹² Under this formula, Germany was not included for major support, but 19 German universities received back issues of medical journals as part of this emergency program in 1921. Limited though they were, Flexner welcomed these steps and watched the German scene with continued concern for his academic friends and colleagues.

Even before the onset of the disastrous inflation of 1923, Flexner insisted that these important research centers were under severe strain. “The danger of intellectual disintegration can hardly be exaggerated,” he wrote to his brother, Simon, who sat on the Rockefeller Foundation board of trustees. “The intellectual elements in all Europe are making a brave stand, and nowhere more so than in Germany.”¹³ Continuing in a Spenglerian vein, Flexner added:

The men with whom I have talked on this trip . . . have for the moment but one concern, namely, to save European civilization. They are making every possible sacrifice and are devising every possible form of cooperation and organization in order to keep things going. Nobody who has not known Germany previously and seen it now can understand either the danger on the one hand or the efforts to prevent shipwreck on the other.¹⁴

As an example of the distress he found everywhere, Flexner cited the case of one distinguished scientist whose laboratory continued to maintain high standards. Far from being content with his work, Flexner found his old friend embittered by the isolation in which he had worked since 1914 and worried by the decline in his savings. “He told me that his fortune had been absolutely swept away and that he could now hardly afford to ride in a streetcar,” Flexner confided to his brother. “When he takes a train, he travels third class, as indeed all intellectual Germany does now.”¹⁵ Even in 1922 inflation was mounting and German researchers were driven to desperate measures to maintain programs. As an example, Flexner found one pathologist conducting his experiments with chickens instead of laboratory mice. There was no shortage of the mice, his informant explained, but the chickens laid eggs which could be sold daily at the latest inflationary price, thus paying for their own maintenance until they made the ultimate sacrifice for science.¹⁶

Flexner returned from his European trip in 1922 a determined advocate of an expanded German program. Indeed, even before he left Europe, Flexner began urging upon his colleagues an emergency program in medical research for

German scientists and medical schools. Writing from Paris to Richard Pearce, the director of the Rockefeller Foundation's program in medicine, Flexner suggested that the Foundation set aside as much as \$100,000 for such a program to be administered for the Foundation by a German advisory committee.

Flexner also enlisted the support of the American ambassador, Alanson B. Houghton. Houghton shared Flexner's admiration for the German universities, a result of his prewar studies at Göttingen.¹⁷ Flexner was delighted to find that Houghton, whose own resources were considerable thanks to his family business, the Corning Glass Works, had already formed a group in support of his German alma mater and had donated money to its relief.¹⁸ The ambassador confirmed the anecdotal evidence Flexner had gathered from his prewar associates. Almost overnight, Houghton pointed out, German educational foundations and endowed research institutes, including the prestigious Kaiser Wilhelm institutes, had gone from princes to paupers. Seconding Flexner's appeal for new funding for German medical science, the American ambassador gently chided him for understating the problem. "You have stated the conditions here with so studied a moderation that the actual facts go far beyond your words," Houghton declared. "A vital emergency exists."¹⁹

Emergency, in fact, was the word German scientific and university leaders used to describe their plight. A triumvirate of eminent Germans, including Harnack (whose appeal on behalf of the Prussian Academy of Sciences was cited earlier), Fritz Haber of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society and longtime Prussian education official Friedrich Schmidt-Ott, had issued an appeal in 1920 that led to the creation of the Emergency Association for German Science—the *Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft* (hereafter referred to simply as the *Notgemeinschaft*). In the United States Franz Boas, the German-born scholar who revolutionized cultural anthropology, worked energetically to collect funds on behalf of this emergency committee.

Armed with the ambassador's letter and his own observations from his fact-finding tour, Flexner began a concerted effort to change Rockefeller Foundation policies by appealing directly to the trustees. His brother Simon, an eminent scientist in his own right, sat on the foundation's sixteen-member board and both Flexner brothers enjoyed the confidence of the Rockefeller heir, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who chaired the board. Flexner also had an important ally in the Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, and he had reason to believe other members—notably Raymond Fosdick and Vernon Kellogg—might be sympathetic given their involvement in wartime humanitarian efforts and the postwar creation of new international organizations.

In addition to his letters to his brother, Flexner championed the cause of German universities in messages to George E. Vincent, the president of the Rockefeller Foundation. In July, 1922, he assured Vincent that both the German

government and the universities were “doing absolutely every conceivable thing in the way of economy, cooperation, self-sacrifice, and privation to keep things alive.”²⁰ Flexner also drew a telling comparison with the Foundation’s expenditures on relief efforts during the war and its support of public health measures after the war’s end in Central Europe. If the Rockefeller Foundation and its allied boards were spending so much on palliative efforts, did it not make sense to channel some funds into basic medical research? If so, where better than in Germany’s universities and research labs?

When the war broke, nations and especially children had to be fed, and much was done to diminish physical suffering and damage. Now it is intellectual Europe—not only in Germany, but in France, Switzerland, Holland, and Scandinavia—that is threatened. Having done what could be done for the European body, does it not behoove us to do what can be done for the European mind? The situation cries aloud for another Hoover, a Hoover who will save from wreckage, as far as he can, the intellectual life of Europe. It will cost much less than it cost to feed Europe and, unless it is done, years and years will be required to repair the hurt, if it can be repaired at all.²¹

This flurry of letters from Paris and Berlin had been intended to prompt Vincent and the Foundation to match the Notgemeinschaft’s sense of urgency and to act quickly at a summer board meeting.

But the eloquence of Flexner’s appeals failed to convince the Rockefeller trustees that quick action was called for, and his high-pressure campaign to aid German researchers started to unravel almost immediately. Had he been fully convinced by Flexner’s pleas, Vincent might simply have had the executive committee (which included Fosdick, Kellogg and two others in addition to Vincent) ratify the plan and authorize the officers to administer the fund. Instead, Vincent sent a two page summary of Flexner’s main points to all board members and offered them the opportunity to vote either in favor of Flexner’s plan or an alternative that all action be postponed until the Foundation could conduct a thorough study of the needs of medical researchers in Austria, Germany and other countries.²² Although some trustees may have shared Flexner’s sense of urgency, others objected on purely practical grounds that any fund created in the summer would come too late to allow faculty and clinicians to plan for the coming year. Vernon Kellogg, who knew conditions in Eastern and Central Europe better than most, thought that bad as conditions might be in Germany, they were undoubtedly worse in Austria and other Central European states. If the trustees were to authorize such an emergency program for German medical researchers, why should they

not do likewise for other former belligerents? In the end, only Julius Rosenwald supported Flexner's plan, and the remaining trustees voted to take Vincent's thinly veiled hint and table the idea until further study could sort out the relative needs.

Meanwhile, Flexner's proposal had landed like a bombshell on the desk of his colleague Richard M. Pearce who, as the director of the Division of Medical Education, was the Rockefeller Foundation official with actual responsibility for conducting medical grantmaking in Europe. Although Pearce had forged close ties with Simon Flexner when both taught at the University of Pennsylvania and still maintained good relations with him, Abraham Flexner remained unimpressed by Pearce's low-key style and felt no compunction in going around him to address Vincent and the Foundation's trustees directly.²³ But Vincent, echoing Kellogg's reservations, convinced the trustees that the Foundation needed to look at the German situation through a wider lens. In November, following the plan Vincent had suggested, the Foundation dispatched Pearce to Europe to survey the status of medical research not only in Germany but also in Austria, Hungary, and other newly independent states in Central and Eastern Europe.

Pearce set to work quickly examining and then demolishing Flexner's claims. After only one week in Germany, Pearce sent Vincent an eight-page letter disputing many of Flexner's conclusions. "Conditions in medicine are not as bad as in Austria, Hungary and the Succession States," Pearce insisted, echoing trustee Vernon Kellogg's assessment.²⁴ Pearce also pooh-poohed the hardship anecdotes that Flexner employed liberally. "I think I have just heard the champion story concerning the lack of supplies," Pearce confided to his colleague Alan Gregg, "that of a German professor who, in order to have some gold-chlorine for experimental work had the gold fillings removed from his teeth."²⁵

German university laboratories, hospitals and clinics did not suffer from a lack of equipment, Pearce maintained, because prewar Germany had invested in state-of-the-art apparatus and facilities. Even if there were no funds to replace machinery and equipment after four years of wartime shortages and the postwar slump, Pearce thought Germany remained far ahead of its neighbors in these areas. Real distress and acute shortages came in laboratory supplies, scholarly literature and library budgets, and "even with a fair abundance of apparatus, much of it cannot be used because of the high cost of chemicals" and other supplies, including laboratory animals. And, he added, "neither individuals or institutions can afford to buy books."²⁶

Student enrollments were declining, Pearce noted, but the consequences of a "lost generation" on the scientific and medical pipeline had been greatly

exaggerated by Flexner's informants. At hospitals and universities Pearce found regular staffs replete with "men waiting for appointment, and there is therefore no real difficulty about succession as to quantity." Pearce conceded that worries about the quality of the next generation of medical researchers might be better founded given a cohort "with fewer men, with funds, to devote their time to research while waiting for appointment." But Pearce's interviewees also expressed "the old German point of view—that if a man really loves science, he will stick to it, even if he starves."²⁷

After carefully sketching the state of affairs in Germany, Pearce concluded that "the problem is to help the promising individual who may be of some value to medical science in the future—A. F. [Flexner's] conclusion—without disturbing the general level of university expenditures and without upsetting the general scale of living of the individual."²⁸ By the end of his memo, Pearce had whittled the emergency aid program to Germany to a recommendation to provide fellowships for promising younger M.Ds and funds to purchase publications needed by German medical schools and universities.

Flexner continued to hammer away at Vincent, and through his brother Simon, the Rockefeller trustees. Taking aim at the Foundation's policy of financing medical institutions in the new nations of Eastern and Central Europe from 1920 to 1922, Flexner argued that funds would be better spent in Germany. From France, Flexner wrote in disappointment to his brother on these efforts:

Vincent cabled me the other day that the Foundation would take no action on German medical relief at this time and of course I accept the result, which was not altogether unexpected. . . . Nevertheless, the continued fall of the mark—it has lately fallen with greater rapidity than ever the Austrian *kronen* fell—emphasizes the point I made that the universities are on the way to disintegration. An appropriation of \$100,000 would have enabled them to keep an important group at work under promising conditions next year. It could, I think, have been made without pledging the Foundation to a continuation even for another year. During that year the subject could have been further studied. I cannot but feel that it is a pity that, after voting an equal sum to be distributed among the poor and in many instances unpromising institutions in Eastern Europe, the Foundation could not see its way clear to do at least so much for the German universities.²⁹

Some evidence that Flexner's appeals were not entirely in vain comes from the Foundation's annual report for 1922. By the end of that year the emergency program of small grants for subscriptions and laboratory equipment had been

extended to twelve different countries in Eastern and Central Europe, including Germany. In Germany no less than 55 medical libraries received help with foreign subscriptions. "Surveys made during 1922 showed that German and Polish laboratories were approaching the conditions from which Austria had suffered two or three years earlier," the Foundation noted. Although there may have been an element of tactical retreat in Pearce's sudden conversion to a limited German grant program, it appears he returned from his own fact-finding mission convinced that the Rockefeller Foundation should extend its program of emergency aid to Germany, and more importantly, that the problems of medical research were not confined to the purchase of supplies and exchange rate difficulties. "Serious as were the problems of literature, equipment, and supplies, the question of personnel was absolutely vital," the Foundation concluded. For the first time, the Rockefeller trustees indicated a willingness to go beyond the small program launched in 1920: "Until the autumn of 1922 it had not been necessary to grant fellowships to men for study in their own countries, but the plight of medical scientists in Germany and increased costs of research menaced the quality, if not the very existence of German medical science."³⁰

Initially, Pearce agreed with Flexner that the Foundation would be better advised to administer the fellowship plan itself rather than grant these funds to the *Notgemeinschaft*. A committee of German medical scientists was formed and charged with recommending the most promising researchers who would receive small personal stipends and funds for laboratory equipment. At the same time Pearce understood the importance of the new German organization and proposed to offer it a non-voting role on the fellowship selection committee, a slot that, ideally, would be filled by either Haber or a medical scientist and not Schmidt-Ott the bureaucrat. Though willing to offer him an *ex officio* role, Pearce thought Haber, though useful for his prestige, too remote from current medical practice. He rejected out of hand most of Flexner's suggestions for the proposed advisory committee. Finally, Pearce simply ignored Flexner's recommendation to add the Ambassador Houghton to the committee; instead, he proposed to have the Foundation's European Vice President, Selksar "Mike" Gunn, serve as the Foundation's representative and have the Foundation's office in Paris handle all the paperwork and payments. However, this arrangement proved awkward, and the Foundation soon reversed course, making a yearly grant to the *Notgemeinschaft* to administer these "resident fellowships."

Meanwhile, as the Rockefeller Foundation's internal debate played itself out, Franz Boas had created an American committee in support of the *Notgemeinschaft* and began soliciting funds from a long list of American university leaders and faculty interested in German universities and scholarly societies. In addition to his supporters in New York, at

least one allied committee was formed in St. Louis; membership in these fund-raising committees was drawn largely from the sizable population of German Americans and especially from American scientists and scholars who had studied in prewar Germany. Between 1920 and 1922 Boas and his allies provided the *Notgemeinschaft* with support totaling 1.7 million German marks.³¹ And, as Boas' frequent letters to Schmidt-Ott in 1922 and 1923 show, this broad-based fund-raising effort, with numerous small donations, reflected a deep attachment by American scholars to their German counterparts.³² While Flexner certainly shared that bond, he would base his case for Rockefeller grants and other donations to German institutions on an appeal to international scientific progress rather than traditional ethnic or personal loyalties.

The relative success of the Boas committees can also be explained by the widening disparity between the postwar American and German economies. Between 1920 and 1922, even before the onset of the runaway inflation, the dollar bought ever larger numbers of marks. At an exchange rate of 200 marks to the dollar, the level reached in February, 1922, the seemingly large sum given by Boas and other German-American academics would have required only \$8,500. By contrast, the Rockefeller Foundation's medical sciences program set aside \$55,000 in 1923 for its limited program in support of medical researchers and medical school facilities in Germany.³³ While the Foundation actually spent only \$3,394 that year, the following year saw the trustees approve a new appropriation of up to \$100,000 and expenditures for the German emergency program rose to over \$65,000.³⁴ Clearly, Flexner's advocacy in 1922 meant a significant increase in funding for German medical sciences, and once the Rockefeller spigot was turned on, the volume of American support increased dramatically.

As important as they were to German medical researchers, these early Rockefeller programs were limited in scope and were considered by the trustees and officers as part of an emergency, and therefore temporary, program. For Flexner, these small steps represented a sensible response to the European situation, but they hardly constituted a decisive shift in Rockefeller philanthropy. By the end of 1922 Flexner could congratulate himself on having convinced his colleagues in the medical program of the Rockefeller Foundation to extend emergency aid to Germany, but his own ambition of becoming the intellectual Hoover who would restore international scholarly and scientific community was far from being realized.

Meanwhile, two other Rockefeller philanthropies, the International Education Board and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial—the former in the natural sciences, the latter in the social sciences—followed in Pearce's and Flexner's footsteps. Just as the Foundation had responded to the

appeals of German medical schools in 1922, so too the Memorial aided the *Notgemeinschaft* in its emergency campaign by providing subscriptions to journals in the social sciences to each of Germany's 23 universities. In addition to this good will gesture, the Memorial provided more extensive support to eight of the university libraries and made additional grants to three research institutes: in history at Berlin; in economics at Kiel; and in sociology and political science at Heidelberg.³⁵

Although the International Education Board made fewer grants in Germany than the Memorial, it set a precedent for the Rockefeller Foundation by offering substantial support to two German scientific institutes at Göttingen in mathematics and physics. In contrast to the strategy pursued by the Foundation in medical education and public health, Wickliffe Rose, the director of the International Education Board, favored a policy of concentrating the Rockefeller boards' resources behind basic science at leading institutions. Rose and his advisers identified the collaboration between mathematicians and physicists at Göttingen as one of the most promising developments in the natural sciences, and as early as 1924 Rose decided to help the German university improve its physical facilities. Large grants in 1924 and 1926, totaling slightly over \$357,000, enabled the Göttingen mathematicians and physicists to consolidate their research programs in two adjoining buildings, including an entirely new structure designed to house the mathematics institute.³⁶ Rose's funding strategy, based on scientific merit, had the effect of directing more attention to German research centers and universities. When the Rockefeller Foundation added psychiatry to its medical interests, it too made a "bricks and mortar" contribution to a research institute at the University of Munich.

But when Rose and the International Education Board made support of basic scientific research in physics and the natural sciences a worldwide priority, and the Memorial began promoting research in the social sciences on an international scale, Flexner became increasingly worried about the extent to which the work of the Rockefeller philanthropies weighted their grants and prestige entirely in the direction of scientific research at the expense of the humanities and general education. In 1928 these developments came to their logical conclusion when the promotion and application of basic research—the advancement of knowledge—became the unifying principle of a newly-reorganized Rockefeller Foundation. Most of the previous grantmaking programs were incorporated in this enlarged Rockefeller Foundation, a single organization that could make grants anywhere in the world and whose mandate was broadened to embrace not only medical research but all the fields formerly covered by the Memorial and the International Education Board. After this consolidation of the Rockefeller funds, the Rockefeller Foundation inherited the German projects and interests of the earlier programs.³⁷ Ironically, just as

the reorganized Rockefeller philanthropies began to meet his original challenge, Flexner found himself pushed to the sidelines.

The new foundation accepted Flexner's pleas by adding a program in the humanities, but it rejected his arguments about organizing grantmaking around educational functions and along geographical lines. The General Education Board remained a separate body but one with diminishing funds, and the Rockefeller office once again passed over Flexner for its top leadership position. Even though he had played a key role in calling attention to the needs of German science, and in so doing had forced an internal debate about the Foundation's priorities, Flexner would have no role in administering any of the funds going to German institutions. In the reorganization his own specialty, medical education, was assigned to the new Foundation. Seeing no meaningful role anywhere in the new organization chart, Flexner resigned and accepted an invitation to give a series of lectures at Oxford. Although no longer involved in grantmaking, Flexner was by no means finished with advocacy for the German university and German science.

Flexner continued to use the German university as the yardstick by which he might measure American higher education, and he realized that, just as he had done in his famous report on medical education, he could once again use the German model to provoke a debate over the proper purposes of higher education and priorities for its funding by America's private foundations. In a soundly conceived educational system, Flexner maintained, the sciences and humanities could not be disassociated and should not be divorced in educational thinking; but the preference for the practical and the useful was leading even the best American universities to deemphasize the liberal arts and to lower standards.

These themes dominated Flexner's work in his last years in the Rockefeller office, as his memoranda on the humanities and the re-organization of the Rockefeller funds show, and they came together for a public audience in his Rhodes lectures at Oxford in 1928. The result was a brilliant and barbed comparative study of American, English and German higher education.³⁸ Often wickedly funny, especially when cataloguing the faults of American universities and their presidents, Flexner aimed many of his sharpest arrows in the direction of Nicholas Murray Butler, the President of Columbia University and the leading figure in the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. But while Columbia received the harshest and most extended criticism for its extension division and journalism school, he also denounced the Harvard Business School, the failings of the medical school at the University of Chicago, and new programs at Yale, including its grandiose Institute of Human Relations which had just received major funding from Flexner's erstwhile colleagues in the Rockefeller office.

For Flexner, the culprits in American education were shoddy thinking about the purposes of higher education and relentless pressures for vocationalism. The latter, especially among the public universities, found its expression in a “service” mission that masked anti-intellectual tendencies. “. . . [E]very effort to make the university serve society or industry directly at a lowered intellectual level is deplorable,” Flexner declared at Oxford. Though speaking about the German university’s postwar compromises, his message applied no less to the United States.³⁹ In contrast to the American “*multiversity*” (to use Clark Kerr’s famous characterization), the German university was not confused about its mission or its place in society. Untainted by vocationalism and achieving its mission through a tight linkage of teaching and research, the German university existed solely to advance knowledge. “Of the soundness of German theory,” Flexner tartly concluded, “there is no stronger proof than American practice.”⁴⁰

Although Flexner knew that the Prussian government in fact had intervened in university governance in the prewar period, his writings suggested that he viewed such interference as on a par with, or less serious than, the political pressures routinely experienced by American state universities. In retrospect, Flexner’s blindness to the political dangers facing the Weimar universities seems remarkable, and many subsequent scholars have faulted the German professoriate for its own complicity in some of the worst abuses of these years.⁴¹ Nonetheless, after comparing the three national systems, Flexner awarded the top prize to Germany, maintaining that “Germany has in theory and practice come nearest to giving higher education its due position.”⁴² When his lectures were published in 1930, Flexner ended the German chapter with astonishing lack of foresight, concluding that “lack of money is perhaps the most serious of the problems confronting the German university today.”⁴³

Freed from day-to-day administrative work thanks to his resignation, Flexner set about to remedy this defect by championing a quiet plan to mobilize American philanthropical support for German universities. Julius Rosenwald, judging by the fragmentary correspondence that survives in both his and Flexner’s papers, became a willing conspirator and, as an active board member of the Rockefeller Foundation, a crucial ally in Flexner’s strategy. Even before Flexner could conclude his fund-raising campaign, he persuaded Rosenwald to provide support for Emil Abderhalden, who had aided him with his earlier medical school surveys and who remained one of the German scientists he admired most.⁴⁴ In 1929 the Chicago philanthropist also agreed to provide travel funds for several prominent German administrators and academic leaders identified by Flexner, setting aside up to \$11,000 for Flexner’s use; among those aided by Rosenwald’s grant were Robert Ulich of the Saxon ministry of education and Oskar von Miller, the founder of the Deutsches Museum

in Munich.⁴⁵ Some idea of Flexner's ambitions for organizing an American campaign in aid to German universities can be had from a confidential letter he wrote in 1929 to Rosenwald. Flexner informed the Chicago philanthropist that he had approached John D. Rockefeller, Jr. "regarding the formation of the German Committee and the project of raising \$15,000,000 on this side."⁴⁶ Rockefeller apparently listened with interest, unafraid of the large sums Flexner hoped to raise from him and other donors, including Rosenwald, investment banker Felix Warburg, and former ambassador Alanson Houghton.⁴⁷

While the Rockefeller Foundation and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. were central to Flexner's plan, he had reason to believe that he could count upon cooperation and donations from other prominent American philanthropists. Many of the latter made substantial gifts to German causes in the 1920s, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide a comprehensive accounting. No organization tracked foundation giving in the United States until 1931 when the Twentieth Century Fund conducted the first national survey, and the United States did not require tax-exempt organizations to file statements with data until 1943. But the number of American foundations and individual donors active in Germany in the 1920s was limited, and in addition to the Rockefeller Foundation and its affiliates, would have included the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and perhaps a handful of smaller funds.

The Carnegie Endowment made support available to German organizations active in promoting international law and the study of international relations. Most notably, the Endowment provided important support to Albrecht Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's institute for international law in Hamburg and established a highly symbolic Carnegie Chair at the Deutsche Hochschule für Politik in Berlin.⁴⁸ Even before these institutional grants, James Shotwell, the Columbia University professor who directed the Endowment's monumental historical survey of the origins and costs of the First World War, made it a point from the outset to include German scholars and a German point of view. Yet, while historians often treat the Carnegie Endowment's work in tandem with the Rockefeller programs, the two American foundations were far from equals in the scope of their activities or the amounts spent in Germany. Despite its highly visible presence in Berlin through its support of the Carnegie chair at the Hochschule, the Endowment actually spent very little in interwar Germany. In a report summarizing all Carnegie spending from 1910 to 1941, apparently no German institution received a cumulative total as much as \$100,000 over the decade of the 1920s. None, in fact, are even listed as major recipients, an omission that no doubt stemmed from a wartime desire to call little attention to the Endowment's previous work in Germany and in equal part from the fact that the actual contributions were statistically insignificant in Carnegie's overall giving.⁴⁹

Flexner, who had worked in both the Carnegie and Rockefeller offices, understood the limitations of these early American philanthropies all too well. For that reason, he sought to enlist support from some of the wealthiest individual Americans and his short list of potential donors began with two American ambassadors to Germany. In the mid-1920s Flexner had received timely support from the American ambassador to Germany and Corning Glass heir, Alanson B. Houghton. Houghton's successor, Jacob Schurman, took an even more active interest in German universities. Schurman's involvement with a fund-raising campaign on behalf of Heidelberg university may have given Flexner the idea for his own, more ambitious effort. Although he had studied at Berlin and Göttingen, Schurman's strongest personal ties were with the University of Heidelberg where he had spent the academic year 1878-79 studying philosophy. As the American ambassador from 1925 to 1930 he was an active participant in many German academic gatherings, giving speeches in fluent German, among others, to the German Shakespeare society, to groups celebrating the centennial of Carl Schurz' birth, and at the dedication of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society's Berlin headquarters, the Harnack House. Heidelberg, however, remained his favorite cause, and in 1927 Schurman committed himself to raising nearly half a million dollars in the United States for the university's plan to erect new buildings in the heart of the historic university town. The university clearly placed its faith in the American scholar and university president, bestowing an honorary doctorate on him in 1928—fifty years after Schurman's matriculation but well before the promised funds arrived.⁵⁰

Schurman first turned to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. who agreed to make a substantial contribution.⁵¹ The Rockefeller heir pledged \$200,000—but with the condition that he would honor his pledge only if Schurman succeeded in raising an equal amount from other donors. Schurman used the Rockefeller challenge to pry loose almost twice that amount from other donors, and he was soon able to present the University of Heidelberg with well over half a million dollars for its new lecture halls.⁵² But both Schurman and Houghton made their donations directly to the German universities and their gifts pre-dated Flexner's appeals in 1929 and 1930. While Flexner's letters to Rosenwald mention encouragement from Houghton, there is no indication that he or Schurman agreed to make further donations.

Although he remains best known for his creation and subsidy of the Harvard Classics series, a third American philanthropist, the expatriate banker-turned-classicist James Loeb, donated substantial funds to the psychiatric institute at the University of Munich. Loeb's support, beginning in 1916 before American entry into the war with a gift of half a million German marks, helped establish the new institute and made it a leading center for psychiatric research. Unfortunately, the postwar inflation eroded the substantial endowment that

Loeb's first donations had created. While he continued to provide funds for research salaries, his greatest contribution in the Weimar years may have been his introduction of the Institute's director, Emil Kraepelin, to the Rockefeller Foundation. Given the difficulties in translating fluctuating exchange values of the German currency for his supplemental gifts in the 1920s, Loeb's total support for the Munich institute cannot be given precise figures but it seems likely to have been worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.⁵³ Finally, his estate made a substantial gift to the Munich institute as late as 1933.⁵⁴

Well before the end of the decade, then, American philanthropists and their foundations had committed several million dollars in aid to specific German research centers and universities. Given fluctuating exchange rates and the difficulties in finding exact amounts for some gifts, any estimate of overall American giving in Weimar Germany before 1933 must remain tentative. But it seems likely that all these gifts combined did not exceed five million and were probably closer to three million dollars. Flexner's ambitious proposal for the creation of a new fund of up to 15 million dollars would have increased American support by at least threefold, if not more.

For a campaign of that size, as Schurman's efforts demonstrated and as Flexner well knew, all roads began and ended with an appeal to the Rockefeller heir. Despite his large gift to Heidelberg the previous year, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. refused to rise to Flexner's bait. In December, 1929, he replied with a studied "no," advising Flexner that such a program of educational aid ought logically to fall to the Rockefeller Foundation, because ". . . except perhaps in case of emergency, the General Education Board and the Foundation should represent the educational interests of the family . . ." ⁵⁵ But when Flexner turned to the Foundation, he found Rockefeller's chief adviser, Raymond Fosdick, less than enthusiastic about contributing the five million dollars Flexner wanted from the Rockefeller philanthropies. Writing to Rosenwald three weeks after the letter from Rockefeller rejecting his personal appeal, Flexner reported:

Today I had a conversation with Mr. Fosdick as to the possibility of cooperation on the part of the Foundation. The Foundation has recently appropriated \$6,000,000 towards the rebuilding of the medical school in Paris—a total appropriation therefore of \$5,000,000 towards the sum we were aiming at would be a very modest one. Fosdick explained that the difficulty was that Mr. Debevoise [the general counsel] had held that the Foundation could not appropriate money to another agency, thus abandoning in a way its own responsibilities. This raises a legal point regarding which I have no opinion, but I have asked Mr. Fosdick to talk with the incoming president, Dr. [Max] Mason, as to the possibility of participation up to \$5,000,000 on some other basis.

I myself feel pretty sure that where there is a will, there is a way, but I am frankly not sure as to the will.⁵⁶

The Rockefeller Foundation did not entirely disappoint Flexner, however. While there does not appear to have been any formal commitment to Flexner's goal, Mason (who had studied in Germany) shared Flexner's high regard for German science. In 1929 alone the Foundation appropriated well over half a million dollars to several German research agencies, including most notably the *Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften* (Kaiser Wilhelm Society for the Advancement of Science) and the *Notgemeinschaft*. And, the following year, the Rockefeller trustees approved a sizable appropriation of \$685,000 for the construction of two Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes in a Berlin suburb. When combined with a smaller appropriation in 1929 for similar construction purposes by a third Kaiser Wilhelm institute, the Foundation had approved expenditures of slightly more than a million dollars for modernizing German research facilities in little more than a year. Although this was far short of the five million he had hoped to raise, Flexner was ecstatic over the Foundation's sizable grants. The Rockefeller Foundation, he assured Rosenwald, "is entering upon a progressive policy in Germany."⁵⁷

Flexner's enthusiasm for the change in Rockefeller Foundation grantmaking masked another problem of growing importance, namely how science policy should be set and by whom. As a champion of universities, Flexner initially feared extra-mural institutions such as the Kaiser Wilhelm Society might siphon funds from the universities. As its name implied, the Kaiser Wilhelm Society and its numerous specialized research institutes had been created in the *Kaiserzeit*.⁵⁸ Designed in part to imitate and in part to compete with privately-funded centers such as the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research and the Pasteur Institute in France, these prestigious German institutes stood outside the universities and drew upon both public and private funders. Yet while willing to concede a role to these highly-specialized research institutes, Flexner worried that centralized research funding organizations such as the *Notgemeinschaft* would both politicize and bureaucratize the distribution of scarce funds. When he first advocated aid for German science in 1922, Flexner sought to exclude the *Notgemeinschaft* from any substantive role in its distribution. He distrusted the *Notgemeinschaft's* leadership, dismissing Schmidt-Ott as "a fine old gentleman" who might be entrusted with the distribution of periodicals and similar routine matters at best. Flexner seems to have blamed Schmidt-Ott for the deficiencies of the NDW's decision-making, telling the RF office in New York, "His organization is elaborate and clumsy, as I suppose was inevitable."⁵⁹

Even before he became the director for the medical sciences program following Pearce's sudden death from a heart attack in 1930, Alan Gregg had become the first Rockefeller Foundation official to articulate a strategy for dealing with these new German intermediary institutions. Assigned to the Paris office to handle the Rockefeller Foundation's rapidly growing European program, Gregg accepted much of Flexner's diagnosis but, like Pearce, thought it more efficient to have the *Notgemeinschaft* in Berlin, rather than the Foundation office in Paris, administer the medical fellowships. At the same time Gregg agreed with Flexner that Rockefeller programs in the medical sciences should make strengthening German scientific institutions a priority.⁶⁰ Gregg's growing familiarity with the leading centers of research in German medical science left him impressed with the possibilities for a wide research program that would reinforce his own pioneering commitment to mental health and fundamental work in psychiatry and neurology.⁶¹ Looking back on the first decade of the Weimar Republic, Gregg saw reasons for optimism in the medical sciences. "After ten years of abnormal difficulty and dislocation German medical science is emerging into a condition which warrants our adoption of some constructive programs," Gregg wrote. "From 1922 to 1926 we contributed on an emergency basis without ever considering capital aid." But he now thought the time had come to extend the methods of the various Rockefeller educational boards, including matching grants and other forms of large scale aid, to Germany, where "opportunities present themselves for capital expenditure . . ."⁶² Gregg became the first of the Rockefeller Foundation directors to seize these opportunities, recommending and administering large grants to Kraepelin's institute in Munich, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Brain Research in Berlin (1929), and Otfried Förster's clinic for neuro-surgery in Breslau (1931).

Where Flexner warned against the perils of centralized administrative bodies, Gregg seems to have sensed that the centralized nature of the *Notgemeinschaft* and the Kaiser Wilhelm Society (KWG) provided opportunities as well as dangers. In any case, Gregg did not proceed from a clear master plan but instead felt his way forward from his initial enthusiasm for the Kraepelin institute in Munich to a deeper involvement with the Kaiser Wilhelm Society's numerous Berlin-based institutes. Gregg's desire to understand the "big picture" prompted long conversations with the leadership of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society about the worsening economic climate, the tensions within the governing Weimar coalition and the implications of these changes for German science. For in addition to the perils of bureaucratization, Flexner deplored the supposed incursions of political parties in matters of scientific research and university policy, and reflecting the biases of his very

traditional German professorial contacts, he blamed the Social Democrats for the shortcomings in Weimar support for science.⁶³

These conversations about the vulnerability of German scientific institutes to political pressures formed the prelude to a remarkable but largely unnoticed request to the Foundation. Echoing Flexner's complaint, the Kaiser Wilhelm leadership told Gregg that "political appointments are creeping into university life in Germany."⁶⁴ The Kaiser Wilhelm Society asked Gregg and the Foundation to consider an unrestricted appropriation to the Kaiser Wilhelm Society, explaining that while the large grants to the Munich and Berlin institutes were appreciated, "A gift to a man or to a special institute, from the RF for example, does very little to strengthen the position of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft as an institution independent of political influences."⁶⁵

Gregg, however, was not so easily persuaded nor was he as blind to the political tilt of the German scientific establishment as Flexner, confiding to his official diary, "Of course, I can see the obverse of this picture—that the KWG direction is already political in that it is of the old régime."⁶⁶ Gregg appears to have tested Flexner's claims that the Social Democrats and the left in general were politicizing German science. At a later meeting, a senior KWG official [Adolf Morsbach] conceded that the Social Democrats, the villains in Flexner's view, were in fact quite sympathetic to budget requests from the Kaiser Wilhelm institutes and from the universities generally.⁶⁷

In addition to a one-time capital grant for general purposes, the Kaiser Wilhelm Society also suggested that Gregg and his colleagues might award it a block grant for fellowships or other research expenses much as the Foundation had done for the *Notgemeinschaft* from 1922 to 1928. But the KWG officials were most interested in securing a large, unrestricted gift whose interest they could employ as they saw best. The full extent of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society's request can be found in a memo Gregg circulated to the senior officers of the Rockefeller Foundation. The KWG asked for no less than 20 million marks—5 million dollars at the then prevailing exchange rate—in a one-time, unrestricted gift.⁶⁸

Since Flexner had proposed an identical sum for the Rockefeller Foundation as part of his plan, the Kaiser Wilhelm request suggests that its leadership may have been aware of Flexner's maneuvers. Alan Gregg's diary contains circumstantial evidence that Flexner encouraged his German friends to expect more aid and to be aggressive in seeking Rockefeller support. While in Leipzig, for example, Gregg met with a number of university medical faculty and at dinner, Dr. Karl Sudhoff alluded to Flexner's plans. "Sudhoff with a great wink said to me, 'I know what your people are planning to do here; I have spoken with Abraham Flexner.'"⁶⁹

Whatever the truth may be about an unwritten pledge by Mason and the Foundation—and no “smoking gun” has turned up in the Foundation’s records—Flexner himself remained on the sidelines in this game. His disciple Gregg, in any case, offered all the encouragement German medical school and university scientists needed. Despite his obvious sympathies for the Kaiser Wilhelm Society’s leadership, Gregg agreed only to forward their request to New York for consideration by the Foundation. Gregg served as an honest broker, summarizing the German scientific organization’s requests and presenting arguments in favor of such a course of action. Perhaps somewhat surprising given his strong endorsement of Flexner’s vision for large scale support of science in Germany and his increasingly close working relationship with the Kaiser Wilhelm Society, Gregg also attached a strong counter-argument against any Rockefeller subsidy along the lines requested by the KWG. He concluded that the Foundation would be abdicating its own role if it simply wrote a blank check to the research foundation. Since the proposal went nowhere, it is safe to conclude that the foundation’s top officials agreed with Gregg.

This rejection proved only a short interlude in the deepening romance between the American foundation and the German science organization. Within the space of two years Gregg expanded support for German science by negotiating a complex proposal from the Kaiser Wilhelm Society to build not one but two large research institutes in close proximity to the Society’s offices in the Berlin suburb of Dahlem. Oddly, while the request for major support of Otto Warburg’s institute for physiology and cell biology fell squarely within Gregg’s responsibilities for medical research, it was also Gregg’s lot to handle a parallel request to build an institute for theoretical physics. The latter project has been the subject of numerous studies and need not be belabored here, but the Berlin authorities had used the promise of a dedicated institute to lure Einstein to Berlin. However, the lack of funding had stalled the project until Gregg agreed that the two projects could be combined for consideration by the Foundation. The Foundation quickly agreed to provide funds for the institutes and their Nobel Prize-winning directors. Not long afterwards, Gregg recommended for funding another large-scale request from the KWG, this time a proposal to build a third new institute devoted to neurology and research on the functioning of the brain.

As Gregg’s outsized role in the Foundation’s relations with the Kaiser Wilhelm Society and his continuing support for German projects demonstrates, the large grants from the Rockefeller Foundation cannot be ascribed solely to Flexner’s influence. Instead, Flexner’s greatest contribution was to put the case for including Germany forcefully within the Foundation’s boardrooms and for conducting a subtle, albeit unsuccessful, campaign

to raise private funding for German science. There was, of course, a sad postscript to this story of American involvement with the German academy in the Weimar years. With Hitler's rapid consolidation of power and the National Socialist government's increasingly strident anti-Semitic measures, the German university that Flexner had celebrated soon disappeared. The fervor with which many German intellectuals and professors embraced the "national revolution" also embarrassed Flexner. Columbia University historian Charles Beard, a leading public intellectual of his day, curtly explained why the initial success of Flexner's critique had proven short-lived. "The book made a temporary sensation, but the charm of its constructive proposals was marred by the subsequent conduct of properly trained and conditioned professors in Germany after the advent of Hitler and his 'Aryan' learning."⁷⁰ For once Flexner was forced to agree with his critics. Writing to a friend in the spring of 1933, after complaining of being "overwhelmed with German refugees," he confessed, "I feel that I ought to recall my book on *Universities* and rewrite the last chapter."⁷¹

Postscript: 1933.

Not long after he had published *Universities* Flexner once again found himself raising funds for distinguished German scientists and educators—this time to secure their passage to the United States and to find appointments, often temporary, for them at American universities. Fortunately, for some of the most eminent German victims of persecution, Flexner could offer immediate relief. Following his departure from the reorganized Rockefeller Foundation, Flexner had persuaded the Bamberger family, grown wealthy from their ownership of the Macy's department store, to endow a new center for advanced study. The Institute for Advanced Study, in Flexner's original vision, would serve as a model for how American higher education should give priority to the single-minded pursuit of difficult scientific or humanistic problems while rewarding a very limited but distinguished set of researchers with free time and generous salaries. Taking shape just as the Nazis were ousting Jewish professors, Flexner's new institute was able to offer posts to Einstein and others when it opened in October, 1933. As Flexner himself wryly noted in 1939, "the Institute for Advanced Study is indebted to Hitler for Einstein, [Hermann] Weyl and [John] von Neumann in mathematics; for [Ernst] Herzfeld and [Erwin] Panofsky in the field of humanistic studies, and for a host of younger men who during the past six years have come under the influence of this distinguished group and are already adding to the strength of American scholarship in every section of the land."⁷²

At the same time Flexner also worked to help place endangered German

scholars at other institutions beyond his small institute in Princeton. Joining his brother, attorney Bernard Flexner, (who played a leading role in the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced German Scholars) Abraham Flexner took a deep interest in the fate of many more scholars and intellectuals than he could ever hope to bring to Princeton. Among those who could thank Flexner for assisting them in relocating were the eminent mathematicians Richard Courant and Emmy Noether. Although this story has been told many times, this postscript to his Weimar crusade meant that in a very real sense Flexner's campaign to save German science had come full circle, but now his donors and philanthropists were transplanting what one early account called the "saving remnant" to American soil and incorporating German teachers into American institutions.⁷³

Flexner's crusade to save Weimar science, though initially spurned by many of America's richest donors, had now become an urgent priority for American philanthropy.

Independent Scholar
Washington, D.C.

Notes

¹ After graduating from Johns Hopkins University, Abraham Flexner (1866-1959) began his career as an educator by founding a private school in Louisville, Kentucky. His success in preparing students for college attracted the attention of Harvard president Charles William Eliot, who invited him to pursue graduate studies in psychology and educational practice. Continuing his studies in England and Germany (1906-7), he returned to write a series of influential polemics attacking the deficiencies in American education. Among many controversial proposals Flexner called for an end to mandatory Latin in college preparatory curricula and faulted American colleges and universities for failing to demand higher standards of high school graduates. Impressed by his independence and his willingness to attack sacred cows, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching asked Flexner to evaluate American medical education (even though he held no advanced degree in any field of medicine). Flexner identified major shortcomings at most American medical schools and urged that many be closed. The Flexner report (1910) called for better training of physicians in the basic sciences, greater familiarity with laboratory methods, and an end to conflicts of interest by making university medical appointments well-paid, full-time positions. In 1913 John D. Rockefeller, Jr. gave the outspoken critic a chance to put his ideas into practice by directing the medical education program at the General Education Board, the first of the Rockefeller grant-making foundations. Flexner remained with the GEB until 1928; after leaving the Rockefeller office, he created the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N.J.

² An exception is Thomas Neville Bonner's biography, *Iconoclast: Abraham Flexner and a Life in Learning* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). But even Bonner devoted only a handful of pages to the events of 1922 and only a passing mention to the campaign to create a fund for German universities described here.

³ Ernst Jäckh, "Germany and the League: An Address before the Foreign Policy Association in New York, Philadelphia and Boston," 3. (No place of publication; January 1927). Library of Congress pamphlet collection.

⁴ Daniel Kevles, "Into Hostile Camps: The Reorganization of International Science in World War I," *Isis* 62 (1971): 47-60.

⁵ The overall number of these students is unknown, but Flexner's biographer estimated that some 10,000 Americans studied in German and Austrian medical schools between 1870 and 1914. See Thomas N. Bonner, *American Doctors and German Universities: A Chapter in International Relations* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963).

⁶ *Medical Education in the United States and Canada: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* (New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1910) and *Medical Education in Europe: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* (New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1912).

⁷ Abraham to Simon Flexner, November 20, 1915. Simon Flexner Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

⁸ Abraham to Simon Flexner, December 29, 1920. Simon Flexner Papers.

⁹ On Flexner's powerful role in shaping these policies, see Steven C Wheatley, *The Politics of Philanthropy: Abraham Flexner and Medical Education* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

¹⁰ Wheatley, *The Politics of Philanthropy*, 113-15 on Flexner's tutelage of Embree.

¹¹ *Annual Report, 1920* (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 1921): 287.

¹² *Ibid.* On the origins and context of this relief program, see Paul Weindling, "Public Health and Political Stabilization: The Rockefeller Foundation in Central and Eastern Europe between the Wars," *Minerva* 31(1993): 253-67.

¹³ Abraham to Simon Flexner, July 9, 1922. Simon Flexner Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ On Houghton's influential role in U.S.-German relations, see Jeffrey J. Matthews, *Alanson B. Houghton: Ambassador of the New Era* (Lanham, MD: SR Books, 2004) and Frank Costigliola, "The United States and the Reconstruction of Germany in the 1920s," *Business History Review* 50 (1976): 477-502.

¹⁸ Writing to RF president George E. Vincent, July 9, 1922, Flexner noted, "He is endeavoring out of his own pocket to help keep things alive at his own university, Göttingen." Copy in Simon Flexner papers. Despite Flexner's assertion, there is no record in Göttingen of any large gifts from Houghton. His papers at Corning Incorporated apparently do not list any such donation. Communication from Corning Department of Archives and Records. Despite the absence of a documentary trail, it seems unlikely that Flexner would have added this comment unless he knew of contributions made or instigated by the ambassador.

¹⁹ Houghton to Abraham Flexner, July 10, 1922. Copy in the Simon Flexner Papers.

²⁰ Flexner to George E. Vincent, July 9, 1922. Simon Flexner Papers.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Vincent may have thought that the executive committee's powers did not extend this far. Foundation bylaws provided that the executive committee could commit funds up to \$200,000 for projects "within general policies approved by the Corporation . . ." But was a German emergency fund a new policy or a continuation of a previously approved policy?

²³ William H. Schneider, "The Men Who Followed Flexner: Richard Pearce, Alan Gregg and the Rockefeller Foundation Medical Division, 1919-1951," in Schneider, ed., *Rockefeller Philanthropy and Modern Biomedicine: International Initiatives from World War I to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 20002): 12-15 on Pearce's difficulties.

²⁴ Pearce to Vincent, November 13, 1922. Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC): Rockefeller Foundation Record Group 1.1/series 717. box 8, folder 47.

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²⁵ Pearce to Gregg, November 14, 1922. RF 1.1./series 717, box.8, folder 47.

²⁶ Pearce to Vincent, November 13, 1922. RF 1.1./series 717, Box 8, folder 47.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Abraham to Simon Flexner, August 7, 1922. Simon Flexner Papers.

³⁰ *Annual Report*, 1922, 38. The initial advisory committee included Heinrich Poll of the University of Berlin, Max von Frey of the University of Würzburg, and two others –Versé of Marburg and Matthes of Königsberg—whose full names were not given.

³¹ Ulrich Marsch, *Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft: Gründung und frühe Geschichte, 1920-1925* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994): 129-30.

³² Two letters contain itemized lists of the small donations, totaling \$1,780, and specify the German libraries, projects or researchers to whom American donors wished to send their contributions. Boas to Schmidt-Ott, Nov. 22, 1922; Boas to Schmidt-Ott, Jan. 17 and 29, 1923. Franz Boas Papers, MSS B.B61 American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia. Accessed January 14, 2021: <https://diglib.amphilsoc.org/islandora/object/text%3A108730#page/2/mode/1up>

³³ Rockefeller Foundation, *Annual Report*, 1923, 315.

³⁴ Rockefeller Foundation, *Annual Report*, 1924, 368.

³⁵ Malcolm Richardson, "Philanthropy and the Internationality of Learning: The Rockefeller Foundation and National Socialist Germany," *Minerva* 28 (1990): 21–58, and pp. 36-45 for the social science grants.

³⁶ George W. Gray, *Education on an International Scale: A History of the International Education Board, 1923-1938* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1941) and Reinhard Siegmund-Schultze, *Rockefeller and the Internationalization of Mathematics between the Two World Wars* (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 2001).

³⁷ The reorganization of the Rockefeller charities is explained in Raymond B. Fosdick, *The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952): 135-44. For a critical view of the restructuring, however, see Abraham Flexner, *Funds and Foundations: Their Policies Past and Present* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952): 77-100. Historians of philanthropy and science have generally sided with Fosdick: most notably, Robert Kohler, "A Policy for the Advancement of Science: The Rockefeller Foundation, 1924-1929," *Minerva*, 16 (1979): 480-515.

³⁸ Published as *Universities: American, English, German* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1930).

³⁹ Flexner, *Universities*, 334.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 311.

⁴¹ Beginning with Frederic Lilge, *Hitler's Professors* (New York: Yivo, 1946) and continuing through Fritz Ringer's *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969) and Fritz Stern, *Einstein's German World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) among many titles.

⁴² Flexner, *Universities*, 305.

⁴³ Ibid., 360.

⁴⁴ Flexner to Rosenwald, April 19, 1930. Abraham Flexner papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁵ Julius Rosenwald papers, University of Chicago Library, Box 15, folder 3 for Ulich's subsidy.

⁴⁶ Abraham Flexner to Julius Rosenwald, November 20, 1929. Abraham Flexner Papers.

⁴⁷ While it seems unlikely that Flexner was unaware of the efforts of a group of Pennsylvania businessmen to create a new foundation devoted to German-American affairs, he does not seem to have considered asking any of the founders of the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, other than Ambassador Schurman perhaps, to join his effort. On the origins of the foundation, see Frank Trommler, "The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, Nazi Germany and German Americans," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 54 (2019): 159-86.

⁴⁸ On Rockefeller and Carnegie Endowment support for the Deutsche Hochschule, see Peter C. Weber, "Transnational Asymmetries: US Philanthropic Foundations and the German School of Politics in the 1920s and 1930s," in Bauerkämper and Witkowski, eds, *German Philanthropy in Transatlantic Perspective*, 75-93.

⁴⁹ Robert M. Lester, *Forty Years of Carnegie Giving: A Summary of the Benefactions of Andrew Carnegie and of the Work of the Philanthropic Trusts which He Created* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941); also, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Summary of Organization and Work, 1911-1941* (Washington, 1941). Elizabeth Piller, "A Tumultuous Relationship: Nicholas Murray Butler and Germany in the Era of the Two World Wars," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 67 (Fall, 2020): 71-100," deftly explains how Butler nevertheless parlayed such small sums into substantial influence.

⁵⁰ Biographical details from the guide to the Jacob Gould Schurman's papers, Cornell University Library's Rare and Manuscript Collection.

⁵¹ Rockefeller first sought advice from Wickliffe Rose, who recommended making the gift. Rose to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. December 21, 1927. RAC: International Education Board record group, Series 1, Box 4, folder 53.

⁵² On Schurman's gift, see Detlef Junker "Botschafter Jacob Gould Schurman und die Universität Heidelberg," in Michael Wink and Joachim Funke, eds. *Stabilität im Wandel* (Heidelberg, 2016): 146-66. An English version, "Ambassador Jacob Gould Schurman and the University of Heidelberg," can be found in the Heidelberg Center for American Studies, *Annual Report 2014-2015* (Heidelberg, 2015): 166-84.

⁵³ The convoluted history from the Institute's wartime creation through the subsequent decline of its endowment and the RF contribution is summarized in Hanns Hippus, et. al, *The University Department of Psychiatry in Munich: From Kraepelin and his Predecessors to Molecular Psychiatry* (Heidelberg: Springer Medizin Verlag, 2008): 102-8. Loeb's initial gift, just under \$100,000 at the then prevailing exchange rate, was matched by Gustav von Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach, who also secured support from other sources. What can be quantified is the impetus Loeb's matching gift set in motion, stimulating over 1.6 times his initial gift and commitments from the Kaiser Wilhelm Society for operating expenses. On Kraepelin's negotiations with the Rockefeller Foundation, see Richard Noll, *American Madness: The Rise and Fall of Dementia Praecox* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011): 270-74.

⁵⁴ The short biography of Loeb by the Loeb Classical Library puts this gift's value at one million dollars. From the website <https://www.hup.harvard.edu/features/loeb/founder.html> accessed August 4, 2020. Loeb also bequeathed his estate, Hochried, near Murnau to the university for use as a clinic.

⁵⁵ John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Abraham Flexner, December 9, 1929. Abraham Flexner Papers.

⁵⁶ Flexner to Julius Rosenwald, December 30, 1929. Abraham Flexner papers.

⁵⁷ Flexner to Rosenwald, April 25, 1930. Abraham Flexner papers.

⁵⁸ On the founding of the Society by Kaiser Wilhelm II, see Fritz Stern, *Einstein's German World*, 106-11.

⁵⁹ Abraham Flexner to Richard Pearce, July 9, 1922. Simon Flexner papers.

⁶⁰ On Gregg's relationship to Flexner, see Wheatley, *The Politics of Philanthropy*, (n.9): 167-68.

⁶¹ Gregg's pioneering role in promoting psychiatric research is discussed in Wilder Penfield, *The Difficult Art of Giving: The Epic of Alan Gregg* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967); Jack D. Pressman, "Human Understanding: Psychosomatic Medicine and the Mission of the Rockefeller Foundation," in Christopher Lawrence and George Weisz, eds, *Greater Than the Parts: Holism in Biomedicine, 1920-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), and Schneider, "The Men Who Followed Flexner," (n. 23): 7-60.

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⁶² Memorandum, Alan Gregg to Richard M. Pearce, “Report of Kaiser Wilhelm Institute für Hirnforschung,” March 25, 1929. Quotes from the attachment, “Report on Brain Institute of Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft in Berlin.”

⁶³ For a succinct overview of these political currents, Gerald D. Feldman, “The Politics of *Wissenschaftspolitik* in Weimar Germany: a Prelude to the Dilemmas of Twentieth-century Science Policy,” in Charles S. Maier, *Changing Boundaries of the Political* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 255-85.

⁶⁴ RAC: Gregg Diary, December 6, 1929.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., entry for December 9, 1929. Morsbach’s political score card: “Social Democratic party is friendly to KWG— as is also Nationalist group, but People’s party is not.”

⁶⁸ A copy of Gregg’s undated one-page summary, “Request for aid to Kaiser-Wilhelm Gesellschaft,” can be found in RF record group 1.1, series 717, box 2, folder 9. The New York office stamp—the date of receipt from Paris—is January 18, 1930.

⁶⁹ Diary entry for December 15, 1929. Gregg apparently enjoyed goading his indiscreet German host. The entry continues, “I said, ‘So?’ with a rising inflection, and he said, ‘Ja, ja!’”

⁷⁰ Charles A. and Mary Beard, *America in Midpassage* (New York: Macmillan, 1939): 904.

⁷¹ Flexner to Welles Bosworth, May 9, 1933. Abraham Flexner papers.

⁷² Abraham Flexner, “The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge,” *Harper’s Magazine*, 179 (June, 1939): 550-51. For the Institute’s formation and early years, Steve Batterson, *Pursuit of Genius: Flexner, Einstein and the Early Faculty at the Institute for Advanced Study* (Wellesley, Mass: 2006) and Ed Regis, *Who Got Einstein’s Office? Eccentricity and Genius at the Institute for Advanced Study* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1987).

⁷³ Herbert Agar, *The Saving Remnant: An Account of Jewish Survival*. (New York: The Viking Press, 1960). On Flexner’s role, the best overview can be found in Bonner, *Iconoclast*, 264-68.

