

JEFFERSON EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

PROBING EDUCATION

University of Vienna (Part One)

Directed Readings and Analysis
By Rev. Charles Brock
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Editor's note: This Jefferson Publications series examines ancient universities that thrive today – how they have shaped the world and influenced education methods, citizenship, the meaning of government, and cultural life. Today's article is the first of two parts on the University of Vienna in Austria.

19th in a Series

The **University of Vienna** is a public research university in Vienna, Austria. Founded by Duke Rudolph IV in 1365, it is the oldest university in the modern German-speaking world and among the largest institutions of higher learning in Europe. The university is associated with 16 Nobel prize winners and has been the home to many scholars of historical and academic importance.

Pope Urban V granted an endowment to the university in 1365, while papal assent was finally received in 1384. This led to the University of Vienna and its faculty of Catholic Theology being granted the status of a full university. The first university building opened in 1385. It grew into the biggest university of the Holy Roman Empire, and during the advent of Humanism in the mid-15th century was home to more than 6,000 students.

In its early years, the university had a partly hierarchical, partly cooperative structure, in which the rector was at the top, while the students had little say and

were settled at the bottom. The magister and doctors constituted the four faculties and elected the academic officials from amidst their ranks. The students, but also all other Supposita (university members), were divided into four Academic Nations. Their elected board members, mostly graduates themselves, had the right to elect the rector. He presided over the Consistory, which included procurators of each of the nations and the faculty deans, as well as over the University Assembly, in which all university teachers participated. Complaints or appeals against decisions of the faculty by the students had to be brought forward by a magister or doctor.

Being considered a Papal Institution, the university suffered a setback during the Reformation. In addition, epidemics, economic stagnation, and the first Siege of Vienna by Ottoman forces had devastating effects on the city, leading to a sharp decline in enrollment. For Emperor Ferdinand I, this meant that the university should be tied to the church to an even stronger degree, and in 1551 he installed the Jesuit Order there. As time went on, conflicts between the Jesuit school and the university arose. This led Emperor Ferdinand II, in 1623, to pass a law that incorporated the Jesuit College into the university. It was only in the mid-18th century that the Jesuits lost influence over the university and when Empress Maria Theresa ensured that the university went under the control of the monarchy. The university would later focus on the education of physicians and civil servants. Her successor Joseph II continued her reforms and further liberalized the university, abolishing official attire and allowing both Protestants and Jews to enroll by 1782, as well as introducing German as the compulsory language of instruction the year later.^[3]

Significant changes were instituted in the wake of the Revolution in 1848, with the Philosophical Faculty being upgraded into equal status as Theology, Law and Medicine. Led by the reforms of Leopold, Count von Thun und Hohenstein, the university was able to achieve a larger degree of academic freedom. Women were admitted as full students in 1897, although their studies were limited to Philosophy. The remaining departments gradually followed suit, although with considerable delay: Medicine in 1900, Law in 1919, Protestant Theology in 1923, and finally Roman Catholic Theology in 1946. Ten years after the admission of the first female students, Elise Richter became the first woman to receive habilitation, becoming professor of Romance Languages in 1907; she was also the first female distinguished professor.

In the late 1920s, the university was in steady turmoil because of anti-democratic and anti-Semitic activity by parts of the student body. Professor Moritz Schlick was killed by a former student while ascending the steps of the university for a class. His murderer was later released by the Nazi regime. Following the Anschluss, the annexation of Austria into Greater Germany by the Nazi regime, the University of Vienna in 1938 was reformed under political aspects, and a huge number of teachers and students were

dismissed for political and "racial" reasons. In April 1945, the then 22-year-old Kurt Schubert, later acknowledged doyen of Judaic Studies at the University of Vienna, was permitted by the Soviet occupation forces to open the university again for teaching, which is why he is regarded as the unofficial first rector in the post-war period. On April 25, 1945, however, the constitutional lawyer Ludwig Adamovich senior was elected as the official rector of the University of Vienna.

A large degree of participation by students and university staff was realized in 1975, however, the University Reforms of 1993 and 2002 largely re-established the professors as the main decision-makers. However, also as part of the 2002 reform, the university, after more than 250 years of being largely under governmental control, finally regained its full legal capacity. The number of faculties and centers was increased to 18, and the whole of the medical faculty was separated into the new Medical University of Vienna. *Wikipedia*

A famous alumna

Elfriede Jelinek (born October 20, 1946) is an Austrian playwright and novelist. She is one of the most decorated authors to write in German and was awarded the 2004 Nobel Prize in Literature for her "musical flow of voices and counter-voices in novels and plays that, with extraordinary linguistic zeal, reveal the absurdity of society's clichés and their subjugating power." Next to Peter Handke and Botho Strauss she is considered to be the most important living playwright of the German language.

Her father was a chemist, who managed to avoid persecution during World War II by working in strategically important industrial production. However, many of his relatives became victims of the Holocaust. Her mother, with whom she had a strained relationship, was from a formerly prosperous Vienna family. As a child, Elfriede attended a Roman Catholic convent school in Vienna. Her mother planned a career for her as a musical "Wunderkind." She was instructed in piano, organ, guitar, violin, viola, and recorder from an early age. Later, she went on to study at the Vienna Conservatory, where she graduated with an organist diploma; during this time, she tried to meet her mother's high expectations, while coping with her psychologically ill father. She studied art history and theater at the University of Vienna. However, she had to discontinue her studies due to an anxiety disorder, which resulted in self-isolation at her parents' house for a year. During this time, she began serious literary work as a form of therapy. After a year, she began to feel comfortable leaving the house, often with her mother. She began writing poetry at a young age. She made her literary debut with *Lisas Schatten* (*Lisa's Shadow*) in 1967 and received her first literary prize in 1969. During the 1960s, she became active politically, read a great deal, and "spent an enormous amount of time watching television."

She married Gottfried Hüngsberg on June 12, 1974. "I was 27; he was 29. I knew enough men. Sexuality was, strangely, the only area where I emancipated myself early on. Our marriage takes place in two cities. It's a kind of *Tale of Two Cities* in the Dickensian sense. I've always commuted between Vienna and Munich. Vienna is where I've always lived because my friends are here and because I've never wanted to leave Vienna. In the end I've been caught up here. Munich is my husband's city and so I've always traveled to and from, and that's been good for our marriage."

Jelinek's political positions, in particular her feminist stance and her Communist Party affiliations, are of vital importance to any assessment of her work. They are also a part of the reason for the controversy directed at Jelinek and her work. Editor Friederike Eigler states that Jelinek has three major and inter-related "targets" in her writing: what she views as a capitalist consumer society and its commodification of all human beings and relationships; what she views as the remnants of Austria's fascist past in public and private life; and what she views as the systematic exploitation and oppression of women in a capitalist-patriarchal society. Jelinek has claimed in multiple interviews that the Austrian-Jewish satirical tradition has been a formative influence on her writing, citing Karl Kraus, Elias Canetti, and Jewish cabaret in particular. In an interview with Sigrid Löffler, Jelinek claimed that her work is considered an oddity in contemporary Austria, where she claims satire is unappreciated and misunderstood, "because the Jews are dead." She has stressed her Jewish identity as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, claiming a continuity with a Jewish-Viennese tradition that she believes has been destroyed by fascism and is dying out.

Jelinek's output has included radio plays, poetry, theater texts, polemical essays, anthologies, novels, translations, screenplays, musical compositions, libretti and ballets, film, and video art. Jelinek's work is multi-faceted, and highly controversial. It has been praised and condemned by leading literary critics. In the wake of the Fritzl case, for example, she was accused of "executing 'hysterical' portraits of Austrian perversity." Likewise, her political activism has encountered divergent and often heated reactions. Despite the controversy surrounding her work, Jelinek has won many distinguished awards; among them are the Georg Büchner Prize in 1998; the Mülheim Dramatists Prize in 2002 and 2004; the Franz Kafka Prize in 2004; and the Nobel Prize in Literature, also in 2004.

Female sexuality, sexual abuse, and the battle of the sexes in general are prominent topics in her work. Texts such as *Wir sind Lockvögel, Baby!* (*We are Decoys, Baby!*), *Die Liebhaberinnen* (*Women as Lovers*) and *Die Klavierspielerin* (*The Piano Teacher*) showcase the brutality and power play inherent in human relations in a style that is, at times, ironically formal and tightly controlled. According to Jelinek, power and aggression are often the

principal driving forces of relationships. Likewise *Ein Sportstück (Sports Play)* explores the darker side of competitive sports. Her provocative novel *Lust* contains graphic description of sexuality, aggression and abuse. It received poor reviews by many critics, some of whom likened it to pornography. But others, who noted the power of the cold descriptions of moral failures, considered it to have been misunderstood and undervalued by them.

Her novel *The Piano Teacher* was the basis for the 2001 film of the same title by Austrian director Michael Haneke, starring Isabelle Huppert as the protagonist. In April 2006, Jelinek spoke out to support Peter Handke, whose play *Die Kunst des Fragens (The Art of Asking)* was removed from the repertoire of the Comédie-Française for his alleged support of Slobodan Milošević. Her work is less known in English-speaking countries. However, in July and August 2012, a major English language premiere of her play *Ein Sportstück* by Just a Must theatre company brought her dramatic work to the attention of English-speaking audiences. The following year, in February and March 2013, the Women's Project in New York staged the North American premiere of *Jackie*, one of her *Princess Dramas*.

Jelinek was a member of Austria's Communist Party from 1974 to 1991. She became a household name during the 1990s due to her vociferous clash with Jörg Haider's Freedom Party. Following the 1999 National Council elections, and the subsequent formation of a coalition cabinet consisting of the Freedom Party and the Austrian People's Party, Jelinek became one of the new cabinet's more vocal critics.

Many foreign governments moved swiftly to ostracize Austria's administration, citing the Freedom Party's alleged nationalism and authoritarianism. The cabinet construed the sanctions against it as directed against Austria as such, and attempted to prod the nation into a national rallying (*Nationaler Schulterschluss*) behind the coalition parties.

This provoked a temporary heating of the political climate severe enough for dissidents such as Jelinek to be accused of treason by coalition supporters.

Wikipedia

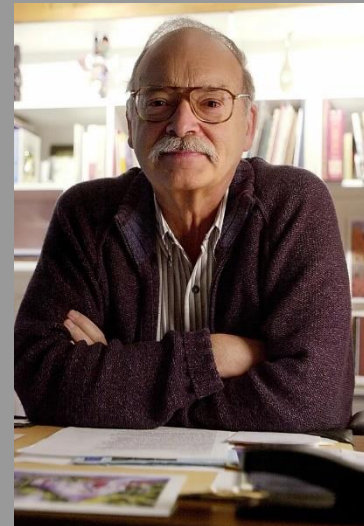
What can we learn from this Viennese University for education today? For universities to be under state control is a huge mistake. It must be under the direction of the professors and the students, not necessarily in that order. Once the state interferes, we have huge problems.

Regarding the education of students, they need a broad background along with their “major” to do big things like Jelinek. This should be encouraged while they are students. We don’t want to give them so

much homework or lab work that they are overwhelmed and unable to pursue all that our universities have to offer in other parts of academia and personal development. They need to be involved in college politics, the arts, social events, sports, and personal quests. On the other hand, there must be some oversight so that they are not only party goers either. All need to find a balance during their university time that they can draw upon for the rest of their working lives – which in so many cases is now a lifetime.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Charles Brock, an Erie native, is an Emeritus Fellow, Chaplain, and Director of Ministerial Education at Mansfield College, Oxford, UK, where he taught for 35 years. He serves as the Director of the Institute on the American Dream at Penn State Behrend. Rev. Brock is acting minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Girard, Pa., and he is a Founding Member of the Jefferson Educational Society. Rev. Brock serves as the Director of the Brock Institute for Mega Issues Education at the Jefferson and serves as Secretary of the Jefferson Educational Society's Board of Trustees.



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