

The Eschenburg Controversy in German Political Science

Hubertus Buchstein¹, University of Greifswald

Abstract

This article discusses one of the latest accounts of recent German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the controversy over Theodor Eschenburg. The controversy started in the spring of 2011 within the German Political Science Association (DVPW). The debate produced numerous articles in German newspapers and more than two dozen contributions in political science journals between 2011 and 2016. It was the most heated historico-political dispute among German political scientists after 1945. The article discusses the pros and cons in this controversy and explains why the debate became so heated. In addition, it discusses the factors that influenced political scientists to take sides in the controversy. The author, a former president of DVPW, was actively involved in this debate which brought the association to the brink of division at its climax in 2013.

Keywords: Theodor Eschenburg, German Political Science Association, politics of the past, German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, aryanisation, commemoration

Introduction

The Eschenburg controversy within the German Political Science Association (DVPW) between 2011 and 2016 was the most heated dispute among German political scientists on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in their own case. For decades, German political science had benefited from a narrative that distinguished it as unique among all university disciplines: whereas there was more or less strong continuity in academic life following the Nazi regime, political science in West Germany², which was newly established after 1945, explicitly

Redescriptions, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 2017), © *Redescriptions Association*
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/R.20.1.6>

considered itself to be a “science of democracy”.³ The precondition for the field to be established as a new scientific discipline at the universities at all, in contradistinction to the already existing disciplines of public law, sociology, philosophy, and history, was the special status it claimed by using this designation. Nonetheless, its rise was very slow at first. The first two professorships were established in 1949, and even in 1961, there were no more than 21; today, there are more than 350 in addition to around 1 600 (untenured) assistant professors and lecturers.⁴

“Science of democracy” meant that the discipline referred to democracy in a positive sense at three levels.⁵ At the normative level, it provided the argument and reasons for democracy and criticized dictatorial alternatives. At the empirical level, the discipline examined the conditions for stabilizing and improving democratic systems. Thirdly, at a pedagogical level, it considered itself a practical promoter of democratic ideas after the end of the Nazi regime and became involved in establishing civic education in German schools. This positive self-understanding as a “science of democracy” also included the personnel. The West German faculties of public law, history, philosophy, and sociology were dominated by professors who had already been involved in academic life in the Nazi period, some of whom had been dedicated proponents of the Nazi regime. In contrast, the professors appointed in the new discipline of political science had not been involved in academic life under the Nazi regime – they either returned to Germany after having emigrated, for example Ernst Fraenkel and Eric Voegelin; had been in the resistance against the Nazi regime, for instance Otto Heinrich von der Gablentz and Wolfgang Abendroth; or had spent the “Third Reich” in “inner emigration”, such as Dolf Sternberger. Therefore, West German political science also had a clean slate in terms of its personnel, which made for an exceptional position at German universities in this respect as well. At least that was the historico-political narrative which was cultivated for a long time and has by now become firmly canonized in the historiography of the discipline. The German Political Science Association (*Deutsche Vereinigung für Politische Wissenschaft*, DVPW), which was founded in 1951, was quite proud of the discipline’s role as the “science of democracy”, from which it self-confidently derived the particular importance of establishing the discipline at universities across Eastern Germany following the end of the German Democratic Republic in 1990.

The lofty narrative about the history of the discipline was shaken once and for all in the course of the Eschenburg controversy. This controversy began in the spring of 2011 within the DVPW and brought the association to the brink of division for a time at its climax in 2013. The debate has produced numerous articles in German newspapers and more than two dozen contributions in political science journals.⁶ Only gradually, in light of newly discovered records and a distance of three years, have the after-effects of the

most heated historico-political dispute among German political scientists faded away.

Eschenburg, the *Praeceptor Germaniae*

The trigger for the dispute was the question whether or not the DVPW should continue to award its scientific prize for outstanding lifetime achievement in political science, which was named for Theodor Eschenburg, in his name. Theodor Eschenburg (1904-1999) was one of the founding fathers of political science in the Federal Republic of Germany. He was born into a bourgeois family in Lübeck; Thomas Mann even included the family in his famous novel “Buddenbrooks” under the pseudonym “Consul Huneus”. Following his high school degree (*Abitur*), Eschenburg studied history and economics in Tübingen and Berlin. After completing his doctorate in history in 1928, he also studied law in Berlin. On the side, he was active in the right-wing fraternity *Germania*. When inviting him to speak at *Germania*, Eschenburg had made personal contact with foreign minister Gustav Stresemann, who had a strong influence on his political character. In 1930, Eschenburg ran unsuccessfully for the Reichstag for the *Deutsche Staatspartei*, which he had co-founded. Due to the dire financial situation of German universities at the time, Eschenburg had no professional prospects in academia following his doctorate, so he sought employment in the business community. Alexander Rüstow, who was to play an important role in establishing political science in West Germany after 1945, placed him in a position as an aide with the *Verein Deutscher Maschinen-Anstalten*, an engineering industry trade association. From there, he moved to the executive board of the trade association of button and zipper manufacturers in 1932. In a number of articles he defended the Weimar Republic in the 1920s against its critics on the far right and looked for a compromise with the democratic left on issues like constitutional reform, political education, foreign policy, and the flag.⁷ In the crisis of the republic he sympathized with the right-wing presidential governments of chancellors Brüning, Papen, and Schleicher and their pro-business policies (see Eschenburg, 1932a; 1932b).

In 1933, Eschenburg joined the law firm of the Jewish lawyer Berthold Cohn as an equal partner. The firm served as liaison for about twenty trade associations of the dry goods industry in Berlin. Eschenburg never became a member of the NSDAP, but did join the SS Motor Brigade (*SS-Motorsturm*) in 1933 – as a concession to protect his Jewish business partner, as he wrote in his memoirs.⁸ After Cohn had fled to the US in 1936, Eschenburg was the sole head of the Berlin law firm. In March 1937, he was also appointed ombudsman of the auditing division of the Economic Group Clothing Industry’s

Specialty Subgroup Button and Clothing Fasteners Industry (*Beaufragter der Prüfungsstelle für die Fachuntergruppe Knopf- und Bekleidungsverschlussindustrie*). Such authorities, which were established by trade associations in parallel to the monitoring agencies of the Nazi state, were responsible for monitoring and control of prices and markets and especially of exports and imports. Eschenburg had this position, which required him to make business trips to various European countries, through the end of the war, and events occurred in the context of these professional activities that were to trigger the controversy about Eschenburg in 2011.

Due to his job, Eschenburg was able to spend the last weeks of the war in Switzerland. After he had joined up with his family again in southwest Germany that summer, he used the networks of his student days in Tübingen to begin a brilliant career in post-war Germany. He first worked for various agencies in the French occupation zone as a commissioner for refugees, then for the Ministry of the Interior of the then federal state of Württemberg-Hohenzollern. Here, Eschenburg was one of the architects of the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, which was newly established in 1952. As early as 1949, at the suggestion of Carlo Schmid, Eschenburg became an honorary professor at the University of Tübingen for the newly established discipline of Political Science. He chose the history of the Weimar Republic as the subject of the first classes he taught. In 1952 Eschenburg was appointed Full Professor of political science at the University of Tübingen – even though he lacked a habilitation qualification – and resigned from his position as Councillor of State in the Ministry of the Interior. Thus, he belonged to the first group of full professors – numbering just seven – of the discipline being newly established at Germany's universities.

Eschenburg taught political science in Tübingen until his retirement in 1973 and was also rector of the university for a time. In his political science works,⁹ Eschenburg concentrated especially on the practical workings of Western Germany's political institutions, focusing mainly on various aspects of modern parliamentary democracy. He also criticized the overly large role of interest groups in democracy and devoted himself to questions concerning the history of ideas. But above all, Eschenburg gained a reputation as a political historian of parliamentarism in the Weimar Republic, the political decisions in the phase between 1945 and 1949, and the early years of the Federal Republic of Germany. Eschenburg was a member of the DVPW since its foundation in 1951. He played an important role in the first 15 years of the association and served as its president from 1956 to 1959. Eschenburg became well-known far beyond the boundaries of his field. He was co-editor of the *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, the most important journal of current history, and was an important figure establishing civic education at German schools and universities.¹⁰ He trained generations of students who later took on important roles in politics

and journalism, and he regularly wrote political commentaries in the leading German weekly *Die Zeit*. He also kept contact with numerous personalities from the scientific, political and administrative communities. Eschenburg was considered a liberal-conservative public intellectual whose voice had weight in the public debate. Time and again, he would pick arguments with government and opposition politicians regardless of their political party or stream.

Eschenburg mentored the Federal Republic's political community in this way for almost five decades. In old age, he was the last living founding father of political science in Western Germany and was revered by many as an incorruptible doyen of Western German political science. His public role was often described as that of a *praeceptor Germaniae* with high moral standards keeping watch over observance of the rules of parliamentary democracy – a title which Eschenburg himself appreciated to no small extent. In the last years of his life, he received a number of public honours, and his autobiographical memoirs from his childhood to 1933 (Eschenburg, 1995) became a major success. Theodor Eschenburg died in Tübingen on 10 July 1999 at the age of 94. His renown had extended beyond Germany's borders; in his obituary of Eschenburg in *The Independent*, British academic David Childs attested that he had “emerged from the ruins of Hitler's Reich with an unblemished record” (Childs, 1999).

Searching for an Appropriate Name: The Theodor Eschenburg Prize

One reason why the controversy about Theodor Eschenburg could shake German political science so vehemently twelve years after his death was that Eschenburg had been placed on such a high pedestal that any critical inquiry seemed out of the question. This informal ban was also in force in the DVPW when a fitting name was sought for a new award that the association wanted to confer.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the idea had come up time and again to institute a special award of honour for an outstanding oeuvre in political science, following the model of other associations such as the American Political Science Association (APSA). Such plans were made a reality under the presidency of Christine Landfried. Connected to the institution of the award was the consideration that not only the awardee, but also the DVPW and political science overall would benefit from the positive media attention it would bring about. The prize was to be awarded every three years at the major DVPW conferences, which would also infuse these events with a more ceremonial character.

In order to be able to gain the desired media attention for the awarding of the prize, the DVPW leadership sought to identify a namesake for it who was known to the public and would be met with positive responses. The fact that Eschenburg, the last of the founding fathers of political science, was well-known, as documented by the many obituaries following his death in July 1999, suggested the idea of naming the new award for him and thus enhancing its value. For the award was only intended to recognize the lifetime achievement of a political scientist, and was not to be endowed. The proposal to select Eschenburg as the namesake came from Ulrich von Alemann, then vice president of the German Political Science Association. His suggestion was accepted with a large majority by the then Executive Committee and Council of the DVPW without much discussion and without considering alternatives (Ernst Fraenkel, Otto Kirchheimer and Dolf Sternberger would have been other options) during their meeting in November 1999 in an *ad hoc* procedure. Because he was well-known to the public at the time, his name seemed virtually ideal for the new prize. In addition, selecting this name was meant to send a signal to bring the association closer together by choosing a colleague from the liberal-conservative camp who had remained loyal to the DVPW all his life – even in times when some of his colleagues had left the DVPW and founded a new organization in the 1980s. Until the debate erupted in 2011, the subsequent DVPW Executive Committees and Councils – of which the author of this article was a member from 2006 to 2015 – did not see any reason to question their predecessors' 1999 decision.

After Theodor Eschenburg's family had also agreed, the prize was awarded for the first time at the 2003 congress under the presidency of Jürgen Falter. The first recipient of the Theodor Eschenburg Prize for outstanding contributions to political science was Gerhard Lehmsbruch. In 2006, the prize was awarded to Helga Haftendorn, and in 2009 to Wilhelm Hennis. All three prize-winners are high-ranking political scientists with an impressive oeuvre. In the laudatory speeches during the award ceremonies, reference was regularly made to Theodor Eschenburg as an outstanding role model. These ceremonies quickly became one of the pleasant high points at the DVPW congresses.

So why should highly esteemed, liberal-conservative Eschenburg, who did not shy away from disputes, with a scientific oeuvre in which he explained the functioning of the constitutional institutions and argued in favour of aligning with the West, no longer be considered a scientific role model for the DVPW? Does German political science not have every reason to memorialize Eschenburg by naming the prize for him simply for his outstanding services in establishing political science as a university discipline, more than virtually any other founding father; for his advocacy for civics as a subject to be taught in schools in Baden-Württemberg; for doing his utmost for institutions promoting civics education beyond schools, thus contributing to creating greater demand for

professionally trained graduates of this discipline? Civics, or social studies, was also enshrined in the school curricula of the other federal states, which guaranteed the survival of the young university discipline in the early years of the Federal Republic, not least with respect to the critically suspicious representatives of the neighbouring disciplines history, law, sociology and economics. In other words, given that Eschenburg was a founder of the discipline in the true sense of the word – why should the DVPW renounce the symbolic capital connected to this name?

The Trigger of the Controversy: Newly Discovered Records about “Aryanisation” of Jewish Property

In January 2011, the pleasant routine of awarding the prize was disrupted by the publication of an article by Rainer Eisfeld in the *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (Eisfeld, 2011). Eisfeld critically examined Eschenburg's two memoirs. For one thing, he confronted Eschenburg's description in the first volume of his role in the campaign of *Germania*, which was a duelling fraternity, to beat up pacifist Emil Julius Gumbel in 1925, with the historical source material. He accused Eschenburg of incorrectly describing the events and glossing over his own negative role in these events after the fact. For another, Eisfeld presented documents from files of the Nazi Reich Ministry of Economic Affairs giving evidence of Eschenburg's participation in the “Aryanisation” of the Berlin plastics company of Wilhelm Fischbein, who was Jewish, in the autumn of 1938. According to Eisfeld, it was apparent in both of the cases he investigated that Eschenburg's published memoirs had been “given an apologist tint” and that nothing was to be found in his memoirs or in other speeches or texts of his with respect to his involvement in “Aryanisations” during the “Third Reich”. In other words, he did not accuse Eschenburg of being a Nazi in the narrower sense of the word – he had neither been a member of the NSDAP nor had he participated in murders and other major crimes of the “Third Reich” – and Eisfeld did not accuse him of being an anti-Semite, either. Instead, his allegation was that Eschenburg had been involved in the “Aryanisation” of Jewish property for opportunistic reasons to further his career.

As soon as people became aware of the article, this accusation against the widely acclaimed *praeceptor Germaniae* was taken up by the daily press, first in the newspaper *Die Welt*, which is beyond suspicion of having leftist ambitions (Kellerhoff, 2011). This publication caused further journalists to direct questions toward the DVPW. They asked to what extent the accusations were true and if so, whether Eschenburg was still a suitable namesake for the academic prize. Some concerned DVPW members also asked what the accusations were all about.

The immediate reactions within the DVPW could not have been more divergent. There were indignant critiques of Eisfeld's article, which some considered unscientific and therefore not even worthy of publication. But there was also agreement with the accusation raised by Eisfeld that Eschenburg had inexcusably failed to publicly disclose his professional activities during the "Third Reich" after 1945. And there were many questioning and irritated reactions from members of the association who wanted to know more, and more detail, about Eschenburg's activities during the Nazi period (see Buchstein, 2011).

The author of this article, who was at that time president of the DVPW, and the entire leadership of the association, initially reacted sceptically to Eisfeld's evaluations. It was also for this reason that they were unsure how to react to questions from journalists and some DVPW members. The leadership was also concerned about the next award ceremony, scheduled for the autumn of 2012 in Tübingen, which they did not want to see drawn into a potential controversy about Eschenburg. Claus Offe had been selected in the spring of 2011 as the next prize-winner.

The DVPW leadership agreed that they did not want to evade the issue. A controversy had been going on for years about how close Arnold Bergstraesser had been to the Nazi regime before he was forced into exile in 1936 (see Krohn, 1986). In addition, new accusations had been raised against another founding father of the field, Michael Freund, namely that he had gotten too involved in the regime under Nazi rule: as an NSDAP member; as a Reich Literature Chamber (*Reichsschrifttumskammer*) member, which he had sought at a very early point in time; and as the author of a piece on Georges Sorel in which he placed him in the same ideological line as National Socialism (see Meinschien, 2012). On the other hand, it was true of Freund as well that he had presented himself as a "victim" – claiming that the National Socialist University Teachers' League in Freiburg had immediately revoked his authorization to teach, that a Nazi functionary had proven to be an archenemy who had made life difficult for him, and more.

In this situation of self-critically questioning the field's own history, the Executive Committee and the Council of the DVPW decided in the autumn of 2011 to commission a report of their own in which Eisfeld's evaluations and accusations were to be reviewed. Hannah Bethke was commissioned to prepare the expert report; she had just completed a study on Arnold Brecht and was familiar with the archives. At the same time, it was also decided to use the congress in Tübingen to initiate a debate going beyond Eschenburg and focusing on the "problem of continuity" in German political science as a whole. For it was becoming clearer and clearer that the hypothesis of a field which, in contrast to its sister disciplines sociology, economics, history and law, actually had started from scratch after 1945 – precisely because it had been established as a new university discipline – could not be maintained as before in light of

the latest research findings. Hannah Bethke's expert report was available at the beginning of the DVPW congress in Tübingen in September 2012 (Bethke, 2012). Concerning Eschenburg's involvement in the "Aryanisation" of Wilhelm Fischbein's company, the report confirmed the information given in Eissfeld's article in all the important points. It supported the hypothesis that in his professional work Eschenburg had functioned in accordance with the Nazi regime.

Eschenburg's involvement in the "Aryanisation" proceedings was an element of his professional work during the "Third Reich" which those who knew him as a public figure after 1945 had not been aware of until then and about which he had systematically stayed silent in his memoirs, too. But how was this involvement to be interpreted?

Historical research on the Nazi period has by now detailed very precisely how significant the illegal expropriation of the Jewish population's property was for stabilizing the ruling system: not only did the "Aryanisation" of Jewish businesses play an important role here, but also the Reich Flight Tax (*Reichsfluchtsteuer*) raised prophylactically, as it were, from the Jewish population; the Jewish Property Tax (*Judenvermögensabgabe*, "Judenbuße"; the payment of atonement by Jews); and finally the appropriation of all property owned by Jews – from financial savings, portfolios, securities, and real estate to furniture, clothing, and books, to bicycles, sewing machines and tools – which must be called nothing other than murderous mass robbery. All this contributed to buoying up the regime, since the additional revenues enabled the government to keep taxes on the non-Jewish population relatively low, and Jewish property was used to fill gaps in the supply of consumer goods.

It was only during the past decade that researchers once again turned to the files of the "Chief Finance Presidents" (*Oberfinanzpräsidenten*), which were kept in the tax authorities' archives and in which this robbery was documented in scrupulous detail. In this context, Götz Aly speaks of a dictatorship with majority appeal that doled out favours, and he demonstrates how the NSDAP was able to rely on well-functioning government agencies that carried out the robbery as an administrative act.¹¹ It was in this sense that Hannah Bethke, too, assessed Eschenburg's role as a "small cog in the machinery" that "had contributed to the ability of the Nazi regime to function" after she had presented and evaluated the files in detail. Bethke also stated that Eschenburg had "not faced up to this part of his past, even after 1945". At the end of her report, Bethke criticized the DVPW for having failed to critically question Eschenburg's role under the Nazi regime before naming the prize for him. The last sentence of her report states that "the DVPW could make up for this failing by removing Eschenburg's name from the prize" (Bethke, 2012: 567).

The day before the award ceremony, a special plenary session entitled "German post-war political scientists during the Nazi dictatorship: Theodor

Eschenburg, Michael Freund and Arnold Bergstraesser” took place. The atmosphere was extremely tense, and several times an uproar seemed imminent. The debates about Bergstraesser and Freund were completely overshadowed by the one about Eschenburg.¹² Gerhard Lehbruch and Günter C. Behrmann accused Eisfeld, Bethke, and other critics of Eschenburg’s role during the Nazi regime of lacking appreciation of Eschenburg’s difficult situation during the “Third Reich” and reproached them for interpreting the proceedings documented in the files incorrectly without more intimate knowledge of Eschenburg as a person. In particular Lehbruch attacked the critics of his doctoral advisor (Lehbruch, 2013a; 2013b). He argued that Eschenburg had developed into a champion of democratic parliamentarism as early as the days of the Weimar Republic and had not departed from this fundamental conviction during the Nazi regime. In addition, after 1945, Eschenburg had never hidden the fact that he had not been a “hero of the resistance”, but that as an opponent of the regime, he had wanted to survive those years unharmed, together with his family, in one way or another.

Lehbruch, who was born in 1928 and had experienced the Nazi regime himself as the child of parents active in the church-based resistance (see Jesenitschnig, 2010), regarded the accusations raised against Eschenburg as the self-righteousness of a younger generation ignoring history. In her report, Hannah Bethke had called Eschenburg a “*Mitläufer* in the widest sense” (Bethke, 2012: 527) of the Nazi regime and distinguished her political use of the term *Mitläufer* from its juridical meaning during the Denazification procedures in 1945–46.¹³ Contra Bethke’s wider use of the term, Lehbruch insisted that this term was not applicable for Eschenburg. In his understanding Eschenburg was an opponent of the regime. From the outset, the controversy was thus not only about the facts (what had Eschenburg done or not done) but also about the proper terms for their evaluation.

Claus Offe’s Public Criticism of the Naming of the Prize

The following evening, the controversy escalated. Claus Offe (born in 1940) had been selected as the 2012 prize-winner in May 2011, before the controversy around Eschenburg had gathered momentum. It was fitting that the venue of his speech was Eberhard Karls Universität in Tübingen, where Eschenburg had worked as a political scientist.

In all fairness, Hannah Bethke’s report had been made available to Offe a few days prior to the award ceremony. In contrast to his three predecessors as prize-winners, Offe then refrained from referring positively to Eschenburg during the award ceremony at the DVPW congress “Promises of Democracy”

(“*Die Versprechen der Demokratie*”) in September 2012. At the end of his acceptance speech (Offe, 2012), Offe explained with reference to Bethke’s report how problematic he thought it was to name the science award for Eschenburg. He criticized Eschenburg as a person who had not grappled self-critically with his own behaviour in the protected space of the Federal Republic of Germany, and who had moreover even certified the moral integrity and professional competence of those who had been at the peak of the power structure in the Nazi period.

The reason for his discomfort with the name of the prize, he said, was that he could not regard Eschenburg as a role model. For one thing, he did not consider his work scientifically outstanding.¹⁴ In Offe’s view, however, Eschenburg’s failures as a model lay above all in his problematic way of dealing with the Nazi period and his own role during this time. Yet for Offe, the decisive criticism was less Eschenburg’s involvement in the “Aryanisation” procedure. As Offe explained, actors’ actual motivations, the constraints on their actions, and their ideas of rationality could be deduced only to a limited extent from studying files after the fact, so that it was difficult to interpret them unambiguously – and thus also to assess them fairly. Instead, what was decisive for him was the way in which Eschenburg presented his own behaviour in retrospect, and incidentally also the behaviour of outstanding representatives of the “Third Reich”: in Offe’s succinct words, “sugarcoating, downplaying and justification”. Offe recommended that the DVPW should refrain from using Eschenburg’s name when awarding the prize in the future.

As he explained in more detail in his Tübingen speech, Offe had hesitated to accept the prize after his initial joy about its being offered to him. Born during the “Thousand-Year Reich”, as a representative of a generation for which dealing with the Holocaust, the rupture of civilization, was the driving force for civic engagement and which was confronted with countless minor and prominent *Mitläufer* as well as many of the perpetrators who continued to hold positions of responsibility in the political, legal, academic, and cultural institutions of the Federal Republic – being offered the award could only pose a dilemma for him in light of the accusations against Eschenburg, which had become known during the time when the recipient was chosen. On the one hand, Offe could not recognize an adequate model in the person after whom the award had been named for the reasons already mentioned, which will be discussed in greater depth below. On the other hand, the academic prize of the DVPW is not a Theodor Eschenburg Prize in the sense that it is awarded in the tradition of the Tübingen professor’s work. The jury selecting the prize-winner is not, for example, a student group or the person’s heirs, and in the statement of reasons for the decision, the recipient’s work is not placed in the same context as that of the person the award is named for,

as is usually the case with awards connected to the name of a person. Instead, it is the prize of the German Political Science Association, which is awarded to honour a colleague's scientific achievements. Offe explained that he had not wished to decline this honour, not least out of respect for the professional association.

With his clear, even sharp words, Offe did not make it easy for parts of his audience, which included Eschenburg's family and many of his Tübingen students. Offe fundamentally disrupted the cultural conventions and the both ceremonial and light-hearted atmosphere which had already begun to build up in the Tübingen auditorium by explaining why he had initially hesitated to accept the prize at all. After all, accepting a prize honours not only its recipient, but also the work and the person it is named after, and every prize-winner is placed in an affirmative relationship with that person.

The Further Debate: The Rifts Deepen

Claus Offe's speech was considered unjustified and unseemly by more than a few members of the audience. Suddenly, the Eschenburg affair had become the Claus Offe scandal. Quite a number of commentators in the regional and national press criticized Offe sharply. Not only did the articles by Willi Winkler in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Rüdiger Soldt in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Hans-Joachim Lang in the *Tübinger Tagblatt* and Sybille Krause-Burger in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*¹⁵ reject the criticism of Eschenburg, but they reproached Offe for accepting the DVPW prize for his oeuvre at all. Some of the accusations many colleagues raised against Offe were *ad hominem*, calling him an "APO bully" (APO being the abbreviation for *außerparlamentarische Opposition*, extra-parliamentary opposition, a part of the student movement in the 1960s) or accusing him of hypocrisy, since he could have rejected the award outright.

Because Hannah Bethke had recommended removing Eschenburg's name from the DVPW's science award and Claus Offe had suggested this as well, the Executive Committee and the Council of the DVPW had no option but to make a decision in this matter. The new president of the association, Gabriele Abels, endeavoured to arrive at a decision with as much input from DVPW members as possible. For this reason, a two-day conference took place in Passau in June 2013, and everyone interested in the debate about Eschenburg was invited to attend. The questions raised there included which criteria were appropriate for evaluating Eschenburg's behaviour during and after the Nazi period and how other scientific disciplines dealt with the issue of "coming to terms with the past". It is true that people focused more on the substance of

the issues in their discussions at the conference and informally even sought opportunities for finding a compromise – but their differences about how to assess Eschenburg and the question of the name of the award remained unresolved.¹⁶

These internal debates in the DVPW were accompanied by a series of articles about Eschenburg in newspapers and scientific journals. Here, too, the topic remained controversial. For example, historian Anne Rohstock stated that Eschenburg had to be considered part of the anti-democratic political right wing during the Weimar Republic. In this context she quoted a source from 1930 which indicated that Eschenburg as a 19-year-old had even welcomed Hitler's *coup d'état* of 1923 (Rohstock, 2012: 199). According to her reading of the historical sources, Eschenburg had found his way to unconditional support for parliamentary democracy only after 1945. In contrast, Udo Wengst declared in the *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, the leading research publication on contemporary history in Germany, that Eschenburg could be characterized as a democrat as early as the late Weimar Republic, despite some inconsistencies in his behaviour after 1945. According to Wengst, Eschenburg had been an opponent of National Socialism because of this political stance. The criticism of Eschenburg, he said, was excessive because it did not factor in his personal friendship with Jewish people even during the “Third Reich” and because it generally stemmed from a lack of understanding of Eschenburg's precarious situation during the Nazi dictatorship (Wengst, 2013).

In a further article in the *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, the journal's two full-time editors, Hans Woller and Jürgen Zarusky, rejected Wengst's assessment and called Eschenburg's role in the Reich Group Industry (*Reichsgruppe Industrie*) “certainly intensive and assiduous” (Woller and Zarusky, 2013). Hans-Peter Schwarz, for his part, reproached Eisfeld in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* because his research in the files had made him into a “snooper” (Schwarz, 2013) and accused him of using methods like those of the Inquisition.

The Executive Committee and the Council of the DVPW had announced a decision about the name for late October 2013 so that there would be clarity before selecting a prize-winner for 2015. In the run-up to the decisive meeting on 27 October, the controversies flared up yet again. Tine Stein and the author of this article jointly published a piece in the September issue of *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* (Buchstein and Stein, 2013) in which we defended Claus Offe's often-criticized behaviour and demanded that the DVPW should no longer use Eschenburg as a namesake for its scientific prize. The reasons we gave were less details about Eschenburg's role as a follower in the “Aryanisation” proceedings during the “Third Reich” and more that Eschenburg had never dealt critically with this role after 1945, but had instead

publicly defended other followers and even co-perpetrators in his journalistic contributions.

The proponents of Eschenburg as a namesake for the prize also took action. In an “Open Letter”, 114 political scientists – most of them members of the DVPW, among them seven former presidents of the association and the first three Eschenburg prize-winners – called on the Executive Committee of the DVPW “to retain the naming of the scientific prize”. There was not yet sufficient clarity, they claimed, about the accusations levelled against Eschenburg posthumously. On the other hand, his “merits concerning the establishment of German political science as an academic discipline, its public standing, and the development of democracy in the Federal Republic were undisputed”.¹⁷ Retracting the name of the award would embarrass the association’s previous office holders and simultaneously “issue a widely visible and insupportable judgment that one of the founders of the DVPW was unworthy”.

The question of how to deal with the name of the prize remained controversial within the Executive Committee and the Council as well. But while the debate among the members involved in the controversy escalated and more than a few of the e-mails sent back and forth contained angry threats to leave the DVPW, suspicions, ugly invective, insinuations, corrections, conspiracy theories and furious admonishments to return to objectivity, the discussions within the DVPW’s governing bodies always remained friendly in tone and fair in dealing with one another. The motion the author of this article put forward in the internal consultations to retain the prize and do away only with the name did not receive a majority at the end of the debate within the Executive Committee; nor did the demand of the 114 to retain the name of the award. In this situation, the Executive Committee decided unanimously after a longer discussion to follow the proposal of a “judgment of Solomon” according to which the prize was not to be awarded at all in the future, which would remove the immediate reason for the bitter debates within the DVPW. The reason given both the membership and the media for doing away with the prize was that in light of the acrimonious historico-political dispute within the DVPW, it could “no longer fulfil ... its originally intended function to honour the oeuvre of a political scientist of outstanding merit and to create a sense of identity for the professional association”.¹⁸

The decision to do away with the Eschenburg Prize entirely was an unsparingly open expression of the insurmountable differences of opinion in this matter within the DVPW. In light of the vehemence and the stinging words with which some of those involved conducted the debate, it had to be considered a success if the adversaries at loggerheads with each other were at least able to reach a “reasonable disagreement” (in the John Rawlsian sense). But at first, the decision did not succeed in calming the situation down, as had been hoped,

but triggered new controversies in the DVPW and the media instead. The majority of the media commented negatively on the decision. They criticized that instead of taking a clear position for or against the use of Eschenburg's name, the DVPW had taken the most convenient path, namely avoiding the decision by abolishing the prize. Jürgen Kaube accused the DVPW of being "extremely dishonest" (Kaube, 2013), since it had not had the courage to decide clearly for or against Eschenburg. In the *Tagesspiegel*, Hermann Rudolph spoke of a "betrayal of [his] legacy" (Rudolph, 2013). Eckhard Jesse called abolishing the prize a "character assassination" (Jesse, 2013a) of Theodor Eschenburg. In another commentary in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Hans-Peter Schwarz accused the DVPW of a "posthumous campaign" and "German McCarthyism of the most contemptible kind" (Schwarz, 2013). And in a contribution in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Oliver Schlumberger even imagined a conspiracy instigated against Eschenburg's academic legacy by Eisfeld together with the author of this article (Schlumberger, 2013).

The reactions within the DVPW to the decision to abolish the prize were less harsh than in the media. Although several prominent political scientists published in part vehement criticisms of the Executive Committee's decision,¹⁹ there were now new colleagues speaking out against using Eschenburg's name. Joachim Perels accused Eschenburg of not having taken note in a scientific sense of the most important contemporary works in legal theory on the power structure of Nazi Germany – Ernst Fraenkel's "Dual State" (1941) and Franz L. Neumann's "Behemoth" (1942) – in his works on contemporary history. Eschenburg had blocked out the views of the opposition against Hitler, of "different, critical witnesses of the times", and had rejected normative categories based on the rule of law as analytically unsuitable. According to Perels, Eschenburg had thus stumbled onto the "slippery slope of a positivist reproduction" (Perels, 2014) of the Nazi power mechanisms and the self-images of the regime's supporters in the civil service and politics. Helmut König took stock of the debate in the journal *Merkur* and gave the DVPW credit for having proven to be a "student of Eschenburg's that was open to learning" (König, 2014); by deciding to abolish the prize and its name, one could discern the attempt to care for a good institution – here, he meant the DVPW – instead of continuing to expose it to a divisive conflict.

Helmut König's expectation was correct in the sense that the wave of members leaving the DVPW failed to materialise. Of the almost 1 750 members, fewer than 15 left the association – but they included three former presidents: Christine Landfried, Jürgen Falter and Gerhard Lehmbruch. To this day, they have not rejoined the DVPW.

Another Round in the Debate

In 2014 and the first half of 2015, the controversy entered a new round, which in many ways appears merely like a re-run of the first rounds. Hans-Joachim Lang, who had previously defended Eschenburg in several newspaper articles with the argument that he had had Jewish friends in his private life, tried to interpret the documents found up to that point in such a way that they did not show unequivocally that Eschenburg had actively participated in the “Aryanisation” of Fischbein’s property (Lang, 2014). Yet Lang failed to mention important documents and described others incompletely (see Eisfeld, 2014b). Theo Sommer, longstanding editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Die Zeit*, declared that “retroactively denying [Eschenburg’s] accomplishments because of some files about the expropriation of Jewish businesses in the 1930s that were difficult to interpret would be just as wrong as pulping *The Tin Drum* because Günter Grass had been a member of the Waffen-SS as a 17-year-old” (Sommer, 2014).

Udo Wengst’s long-announced biography of Eschenburg appeared in early 2015 (Wengst, 2015). Wengst used the book to repeat his rigorous defence of his former doctoral advisor. Not surprisingly, the biography soon came under attack by critics of Eschenburg as being apologist since, according to the critics, it ignored important new research findings on Eschenburg and consequently presented some matters incorrectly.²⁰ Yet Wengst’s biography shows clearly that Eschenburg did not lead a marginal existence in the “Third Reich”, but that his regular salary made him a top earner during the Nazi dictatorship. Because of his profession, according to Wengst, “Eschenburg was among those who lived in prosperity during the ‘Third Reich.’” “It goes without saying”, Wengst continues, “that this was not without effect on his attitude toward the system” (Wengst, 2015: 98)²¹. However, the biography does not provide new research findings on the question of Eschenburg’s concrete involvement in “Aryanisation” proceedings, but merely reinterprets the documents Eisfeld found in an idiosyncratic way. Finally, Wengst counters the accusation that Eschenburg had been completely silent about this after 1945 with the following words, which are quite remarkable for a historian: “Since Siedler and Fest (the two original interviewers for the second volume of his memoirs in the 1980s – HB) did not ask about ‘Aryanisation’, Eschenburg did not talk about it” (Wengst, 2015: 116).

Almost simultaneously with Wengst’s long-awaited biography, two further articles appeared in which the authors, Anne Rohstock and Rainer Eisfeld, documented three additional cases of “Aryanisation” – or liquidation – of Jewish companies in which Eschenburg had been involved. Newly discovered records showed that following the *Anschluss* of Austria to the German Reich

in 1938, Eschenburg was also involved in “Aryanisations” in Vienna (Eisfeld, 2014b). In one of the cases, Eschenburg is even accused not only of having been merely a more or less passive *Mitläufer* in the bureaucratic proceedings of stealing Jewish property, but of actively taking the initiative himself for beginning and assiduously conducting the expropriation. Eisfeld called this kind of activity by Eschenburg “conservative collaboration” (Eisfeld, 2014: 107) with the regime.

Anne Rohstock also followed new clues in the archives about Eschenburg’s activities in the parts of Europe occupied by Germany during the war and found that as a functionary of the business community, Eschenburg had been involved routinely and on his own initiative in the “cold ‘Aryanisation’”²² (Rohstock, 2015) of numerous Jewish companies. For example, she discovered two letters by Eschenburg to the Reich Board for Foreign Trade (*Reichsstelle für den Außenhandel*)²³ from 1941 which provide evidence that as an industry functionary Eschenburg continued to actively pursue Siegfried Seliger, a Jewish German in Copenhagen whose Berlin company had already been “Aryanised” in 1938, and who had fled to Denmark. As a result of Eschenburg’s activities, Seliger’s new Danish company was “Aryanised” too in 1942. Seliger was lucky that he could escape by boat to Sweden in the fall of 1943 and survive the Holocaust.

These additional facts did not impress Eschenburg’s defenders. Eckhard Jesse emphasized once more in 2015 that in light of Eschenburg’s achievements, it would have been better for the success of political science as a discipline in Germany if the association had retained his name for the award. But he admitted that choosing a different name – he mentioned Ernst Fraenkel and Dolf Sternberger – would have been a far better option in light of the newly discovered documents in the archives (Jesse, 2015). Udo Wengst also struck a less negative tone in his most recent publication. After viewing and weighing up the documents first found by Rohstock, he stated that in light of the fragmentary body of source material, it was impossible to determine conclusively whether Eschenburg and his agency had only issued opinions in favour of “Aryanising” or liquidating Jewish businesses in the occupied areas or whether Eschenburg may have occasionally supported such businesses and their Jewish owners. According to Wengst, whether or not a conclusive assessment could be reached would depend on whether further documents were found that could potentially result in new insights about the bigger picture (Wengst, 2016).

The last stage in these disputes for the time being was the special plenary session of the DVPW at its congress in Duisburg on 23 September 2015. This time it was not supposed to be about the Eschenburg debate again; entitled “The DVPW as an actor in the politics of memory”, the special plenary focused on the self-critical question how the DVPW had handled this debate.

US sociologist and memory scholar Jeffrey K. Olick had been invited to begin the discussion by commenting on the Eschenburg controversy from an external perspective. Olick calmly placed the DVPW debate within other discourses about the politics of dealing with the past in the Federal Republic. In contrast to the Historians' Debate (*Historikerstreit*) in the 1980s, representatives of younger generations were also involved in the Eschenburg controversy, which moreover could not be divided in two political camps. Beyond that, Olick could not see much that was new in the debate: "Indeed, to be frank, in the course of reading the Eschenburg debate against the long history of debates not only about the German past, but about memory of the German past, I have sometimes been cautiously tempted by the well-known line from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, namely that history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce" (Olick, 2016: 374). Yet he had been very surprised by the vehemence of the conflict.

In stark contrast to the Tübingen congress three years before, the tone of the discussion in Duisburg was sober and respectful, and it was clear that those involved were moving toward a "reasonable disagreement". But most remarkable was that political scientist Ulrich von Alemann, who had originally proposed Eschenburg as the person after whom the DVPW's lifetime achievement award was named in 1999 and who also had been among the 114 who had signed the "Open Letter", publicly distanced himself from his previous position in the statement he gave on the podium. He now arrived at a similar conclusion as Eisfeld, Bethke, Offe and the author of this article, but by a different path. Alemann relied above all on a piece of information he had taken from Wengst's biography of Eschenburg, which had appeared a few months before. According to it, Eschenburg had not muddled his way through the "Third Reich" in "inner emigration", as Alemann had previously assumed on the basis of Eschenburg's statements, but had had a high income and had run an upper-class household with domestic staff and a chauffeur in a villa on one of Berlin's priciest streets, next door to the private home of the director of the *Reichsbank*.²⁴ For that reason, Alemann said, he now saw Eschenburg "more as a collaborator (*Mitmacher*) than as a follower (*Mitläufer*)". This was not a reason to condemn everything Eschenburg had achieved, but "he was not suitable after all to be considered a model academic in the field of political science in our German democracy" (Alemann, 2015). It was above all this public revision of his previous views that gained Alemann considerable personal respect and that brought the Eschenburg controversy to a conciliatory end at the DVPW's Duisburg congress (for the time being?). The DVPW demonstrated in this special plenary session that it was finally able to apply its political-science competence to the analysis of political scientists dealing with one another, too.

Conflict Cleavages

Viewing the protagonists in the Eschenburg controversy from the perspective of the sociology of science, what stands out first is that the two usual patterns for explaining the cleavages in this historico-political conflict do not apply. The positions are not distributed according to the right-left model conventional in politics. The defenders of Eschenburg and the naming of the prize are to be found across the entire political spectrum: from very far on the left (Ekkehart Krippendorff), classical social democratic (Frank Decker), left-liberal (Gerhard Lehbruch), conservative (Eckhard Jesse) to further into the conservative camp (Hans-Peter Schwarz). The same is true of the critics of Eschenburg and the naming of the award.

Its proponents and opponents cannot be differentiated by age cohort, either. The older generation of professors over 65, some of whom knew and experienced Eschenburg personally, the middle generation of full professors over 50, and the younger generation of professors born after 1970 are each represented on both sides. This finding is remarkable because from the perspective of research on political socialization, it would be expected that those whose political socialization took place when greater efforts were being made in (West) Germany to “come to terms with the past” would respond differently from the generation whose political socialization had occurred earlier. Only among early career scholars born after 1980 who were members of the DVPW was there a significant majority rejecting Eschenburg as a namesake for the award.

Two further explanatory models do not apply, either. There was no congruence between the opinions in the controversy and areas of specialization within political science. And finally, there were no discernable correlations between the positions taken by those involved in the controversy according to whether they were from East or West Germany. Two different models are plausible: firstly, that former citizens of the German Democratic Republic would have shown greater understanding for Eschenburg being a follower of the regime on the basis of their own experiences of living under a dictatorship, or secondly, that they would have rejected this all the more strongly for the same reason.

The only correlation in the Eschenburg controversy between social positions and opinions that is even partly evident, concerns personal proximity to Eschenburg or his students (and their students). Those who supported Eschenburg on the front line, as it were, were all students of his for many years – among political scientists, this is true of Gerhard Lehbruch, Ekkehart Krippendorf and Hans-Peter Schwarz; among the historians Udo Wengst, and among the journalists Hermann Rudolf, Theo Sommer and Hans-Joachim Lang. It seems as if they succeeded in transferring this special loyalty toward their own academic teacher to the following generation of students (and their

students) – at least this impression is conveyed by network analysis of the list of 114 signatories to the “Open Letter”. Incidentally, such a pattern following personal networks in historico-political debates would not be entirely new in the German history of science – the vehemently conducted debates at the 42nd *Deutsche Historikertag* in 1998 about the role of leading historians such as Thomas Schieder and Werner Conze during the Nazi period were characterized by the fact that it was above all their students (such as left-liberal Hans-Ulrich Wehler) who came to their defence against criticism and accusations (Schulze and Oexle, 1999).

These personal ties could perhaps best explain the vehemence with which the controversy was carried out in the DVPW. Never before in the more than 65-year history of the association – not even during the political disputes in the early 1970s – had a debate within the DVPW been conducted with such polemics and such a shrill tone. At the peak of the debate, Hannah Bethke compiled a by-no-means complete list of such insults and added that “interestingly, [the invectives] often [came] from the pens of those who only too gladly sing the praises of scientific objectivity and seriousness” (Bethke, 2013b: 136).

Silence about His Own Affairs

In the debate about the political status of the so-called “inner emigration” in the “Third Reich”, Hannah Arendt named the “withdrawal from significant participation in public life”²⁵ as “indeed the only criterion” by which to “measure individual guilt” (Arendt, 1965: 127). It is well worth noting that, following Kirchheimer, Hannah Arendt was not concerned with resistance as the only alternative to being a co-perpetrator or a follower. With his highly paid top position in the Nazi regime’s economic management system, Eschenburg had chosen a path different from one of such restraint.

As Claus Offe’s statement clearly indicates, the Eschenburg controversy was also about answering the question whether a person is worthy of having an award granted by a political science association named after him or her if the person in question kept silent about important parts of his or her own cooperative behaviour during the Nazi period, apart from the empty phrase that he or she had been “no hero” and the claim that people who had not experienced the time themselves could not judge such behaviour. The fact that, at times, Eschenburg ironically mentioned in small circles, in his colloquium, that he had briefly been in the SS Cavalry Unit (*SS-Reiterstaffel*) – as some of his students mentioned during the controversy – cannot be considered a sufficient substitute for dealing with the past in the case of a political scientist seeking publicity, as Eschenburg joyfully did. In the case of the public persona of the

political scientist Theodor Eschenburg, publicness matters with respect to this topic, too. Although the conservative philosopher Hermann Lübbe claimed that the collective silence in German post-war society was a functional necessity for establishing West German democracy and that the repression and neglect of the victims' perspectives was coolly condoned for this reason (see Lübbe, 1983), this has never made sense to many others – and not only to the victims. Instead, they attempted to shed light on biographies showing remarkable gaps between 1933 and 1945.

Even though Eschenburg had condemned the “NS terror of Aryianisation” in a newspaper article (Eschenburg, 1961b),²⁶ he never supported such efforts to deal with the past. Quite the contrary, he had sought to publicly exculpate even those colleagues at the University of Tübingen who had stridently defended the Nazi regime's racial theories before 1945 and had criticized students interested in the biographies of these colleagues from other disciplines (see Paulmann, 2008: 190). The same Theodor Eschenburg had, as his students reported, sought and wanted dissent in political debates (see Sommer, 1999).

But rather than, as a political scientist, taking the circumstances of his own life story as an opportunity for a critical scholarly confrontation with the Nazi regime's mechanisms for exercising power, Eschenburg attempted to defend functionaries and *Mitläufer* of the Nazi regime from public criticism. Not only did he protect colleagues in Tübingen, he also defended the role of the then Foreign Office Undersecretary Ernst von Weizsäcker in deporting Jews from France, Belgium and the Netherlands to the Auschwitz concentration camp. He also defended Adenauer's Minister of the Chancellery Hans Globke against any criticism of his role as commentator of the Nuremberg “Race Laws” and inventor of the “one-quarter Jew” as a legal category (see Eschenburg, 1961a; 1973). Eschenburg also issued a glowing character reference for Reich Finance Minister Johann Ludwig (“Lutz”) Graf Schwerin von Krosigk (see Eschenburg, 1977). But he harshly rebuked those making critical comments about these co-perpetrators of the unjust Nazi regime as being entirely ignorant with regard to the specific “ambiance” of the regime and its dilemmas (see Eschenburg, 1987).

A particular motif of political-science thought crops up in all these defences whose analysis should guide further contemporary historical research into Eschenburg as one of the influential public intellectuals: respect for those officials who “tended toward the authoritarian not out of tradition or ideology, but because of their official function, simply for reasons of ‘governability’”. To Eschenburg, Schwerin von Krosigk was “above all a fiscal policy maker of high calibre” (Eschenburg, 1977) who wanted the NDSAP to head the government because it was the largest party. Taking a stance uncritical of the sources, unusual for a historian, Eschenburg saw the Reich Finance Minister's motivation for signing off on the Jewish Property Tax after the November pogrom

(“*Kristallnacht*” in Nazi terminology) in hopes of being able to prevent a “night of the long knives” against the Jews. That tax required the Jewish population to pay for the damages themselves. Schwerin von Krosigk, Eschenburg claimed, had then been urged by friends to stay, and had in the end become convinced that nothing would be gained if he left, but that he would instead have the opportunity to moderate many a thing [if he stayed] – “and he occasionally succeeded in these efforts” (Eschenburg, 1977). However, he provided no evidence for this claim.

One need not be knowledgeable about current research about the financial plundering to comprehend the absurdity of such assessments. In his research on Graf Schwerin von Krosigk, Götz Aly determined that he “himself and with utmost care made sure to make everything property of the state that was taken away from those murdered” (Aly, 2005: 352). Whatever Schwerin von Krosigk may have thought in general about Jews, he factored in the disappearance of those expropriated, never to be seen again. What is more: long before the decisions about the murder of the European Jews were made, Schwerin von Krosigk, Fritz Reinhardt and the top officials of the Finance Ministry invented ever new ways to expropriate Jews to the point where they finally became penniless and had to “be a burden on the state”. It was the experts in the Ministries of Finance and Economic Affairs with their currency regulations and expropriation techniques, which they constantly made more exacting, who made it impossible for many to flee. The experts “provided balance for Nazi rule, whose fundamental construction was unstable – in each case only in a makeshift and improvised way, yet sufficient for almost twelve years of arming the state, destruction, and annihilation” (Aly, 2005: 352).

Theodor Eschenburg did not make the problem of the experts’ individual responsibility for the functioning of the Nazi regime a topic of discussion, although he valued them so highly in terms of their ensuring governability. Instead, he referred to the bureaucratic constraints and the dilemmas of the Hitler dictatorship in which, he claimed, the people criticized had found themselves – combined with a reference not only to their expertise, but also to their personal integrity. Eschenburg reproached their critics for arguing inappropriately and with a political agenda. At the same time, Eschenburg tried in his memoirs to smooth out his political past prior to 1945 through downplaying and omissions and to classify as low as possible the political relevance of his own behaviour during the Nazi period. This way of dealing with their own political past was the rule for many Germans after 1945; this is not true, however, of most members of the new political science discipline and their basic understanding of the science of democracy.

In other words, Eschenburg’s function as a role model for political science was to be considered flawed for this reason as well: after 1945, both in his work as a political scientist and in his memoirs, which were inspired by poli-

tics and pedagogy, he consistently refrained from discussing the question how the problem of individual political responsibility in the machinery of the Nazi regime was to be described and evaluated in terms of morality and political science. Yet this question was highly pertinent against the background of his own role during the “Third Reich”. To be sure, being a role model does not mean being flawless – but an approach to history that is analytical and not apologist requires grappling publicly with one’s own behaviour, potentially self-critically, and in any case it requires the capability for critical reflection.

A Personal Note

As already mentioned, in my official role as DVPW president, I was both deeply involved in the controversial debates among the membership and unsure how to make up my own mind. For a long time, I took the following questioning perspective in the Eschenburg affair out of concern that I might descend into moral self-righteousness: What would I have done in a comparable situation? For every member of a later generation who does not suffer from a pathological form of moral self-righteousness, the honest answer to this question can only be: I don’t know! Only as the debate progressed did it become clear to me that my previous questioning perspective had been one-sided. I also realised the extent to which it induced me to become overly absorbed in a kind of hermeneutics of acting as a follower or a philosophy of concern for the perpetrators, thereby doing nothing less than blocking out the perspective of the victims from that period (to mention just one example, in Eschenburg’s case, Siegfried Seliger as one of the people whose property had been expropriated succeeded only with great good fortune in fleeing into exile across an unsecured portion of the border and saving his life).

Only in the course of intensive discussions with Froma Zeitlin and Daniel and Chava Boyarin at the *Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin*, where I was a Fellow in 2012–13, about various facets of the topic of Germany and what we somewhat helplessly call “coming to terms with the past”, in other words the historico-political function of monuments, places of remembrance and giving of names in Germany, did I change my position. For it became clear to me that the proper question in the case of Eschenburg, as the person after whom the prize was named, was not how we ourselves would presumably have acted under comparable circumstances. The fact that between 1933 and 1945 the overwhelming majority of Germans did not refuse to participate in persecuting their compatriotic citizens who had been classified as “Jewish” is a state of affairs that historians have described extensively – but that does not make such behaviour particularly worthy of respect.

Instead, the key question for the debate about Eschenburg as the person after whom the most important prize granted by the political science association was named is: what behaviour would we *wish* to have displayed if we had been in a comparable situation? Individuals become role models for others because they acted in accordance with these positively defined wishes, and that is why we select them as namesakes for prizes, for example. On the basis of these deliberations I, too, finally came to the conviction in the spring of 2013 that the DVPW should decide not to use Theodor Eschenburg's name for its science prize any longer.

Conclusion

The end of the Eschenburg controversy does not mean that the narrative of West German political science as genuine “science of democracy” has to be fundamentally rewritten. But the historiography of the discipline must learn from the controversy that one should differentiate between three levels of continuities before and after 1945: the institutional level, the cognitive academic level and personal involvements without ties to the sciences.²⁷ It is still correct to state that the professors appointed for the new discipline of political science had not been involved in the academic life of the Nazi regime; not a single teacher or researcher active in the discipline “*Politische Wissenschaft*” during the Nazi period²⁸ – with the notable exception of Arnold Bergstraesser until he lost his job in 1936²⁹ – found a place in the newly established field of political science after 1949.³⁰ But the Eschenburg “case” – and also those of Michael Freund und Arnold Bergstraesser – made clear that German political science would do better in the future to call attention to this special position among university disciplines with less self-righteous pride and instead examine its own history more self-critically. It is an irony that political science as a young discipline in Germany has been such a latecomer to the issues of its past before 1945.

Endnotes

- 1 I would like to thank Sandra H. Lustig for the translation and her critical questions and suggestions. In addition, I would like to thank Jodi Dean, Rainer Eisfeld, Frank Fischer, Michael Hein, Tobias Müller, Kari Palonen, Kerstin Pohl, and Rieke Trimcev for fruitful discussions about the topic and/or critical comments on an earlier version of the manuscript. – The author was a member of the Executive Committee (*Vorstand*) of the German Political Science Association (*Deutsche Vereinigung für Politische Wissenschaft*, DVPW) starting in 2006 and served as its

- president from 2009 to 2012; as the DVPW's former president, he served as a member of the Council (*Beirat*) from 2012 to 2015 and was also involved in the association's decisions. This article presents the author's personal views and is not an official DVPW statement on the naming debate.
- 2 Up until the end of the German Democratic Republic in 1989, political science was not established as a separate field at any of its universities. See Buchstein and Göhler (1991).
 - 3 See the widely accepted historical account in Bleek (2001).
 - 4 For the development and exact numbers of the institutional success story in the first 50 years, see Arendes (2005).
 - 5 For these components of the "science of democracy", see Buchstein (1992).
 - 6 All newspaper and journal articles of the debate as well as numerous other documents are listed on the DVPW website (<http://www.dvpw.de>) under "Eschenburg-Debatte". Some of the contributions were reprinted in a volume edited by Rainer Eisfeld (2016a). All German quotations have been translated for the sake of the international readership of this article.
 - 7 See Eschenburg (1927a; 1927b; 1928a; 1928b; 1929b).
 - 8 See Eschenburg (2000: 21–3). According to Eschenburg, he left the SS in 1934 – since there is no other evidence of his leaving the SS, this detail also became part of the controversy about him.
 - 9 For an overview of Eschenburg's political science oeuvre, cf. Decker (2016).
 - 10 On Eschenburg's achievements in establishing civic education, see Detjen (2016).
 - 11 See Aly (2005) and Kuller (2013). See, as a study specifically on Berlin, Friedenberg (2008).
 - 12 All of the contributions to this Special Plenary Session are documented in Buchstein (2013: 409–525).
 - 13 According to the "Law for Liberation from National Socialism and Militarism" as of 5 March 1946, the US administration officially categorized as "followers" those Germans who were "not more than a nominal participant or insignificant supporter" (Article 12) of the Nazi regime. *Mitläufer* was chosen as the German version of the term even though the word has a broader and less active meaning.
 - 14 Eschenburg's image as a role model for high academic standards has recently been demolished even further by a case of plagiarism. In the late 1950s, the *Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt* (DVA, publishing house) asked him to contribute an epilogue about Tocqueville's reception in Germany to a new edition of the German translation of Alexis de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America". Eschenburg agreed and commissioned Johannes Agnoli, who had recently completed his doctorate in Tübingen, to conduct the preparatory work for such an epilogue (Agnoli, 2004: 47). In the three months from March to May 1959, Agnoli prepared a "research report" comprising 63 typewritten pages and titled "Tocqueville's impact on political thought in Germany" ("*Tocquevilles Einwirkung auf das politische Denken in Deutschland*"). A comparison of Agnoli's manuscript with the epilogue published under the name Theodor Eschenburg as author and titled "Tocqueville's impact in Germany" ("*Tocquevilles Wirkung in Deutschland*") shows that the text bearing Eschenburg's name as the author does include some additions and editorial changes, but that Agnoli's text was used by Eschenburg both in terms of

its train of thought and in most of the specific wording (see Eschenburg (1959) and Johannes Agnoli (1959): *Tocquevilles Einwirkung auf das politische Denken in Deutschland*. Typescript, 63 pages; photocopy in the author's possession – I thank Rainer Eisfeld for giving me this copy from the collection of Niccolò Agnoli). Even in light of the “feudal” conditions at the universities in Germany at the time, which were heavily dominated by the full professors, it is eminently unusual that Eschenburg did not mention Agnoli as the co-author or at least thank him in a footnote. From the perspective of today's standards of professional ethics, Eschenburg's handling of Agnoli's research report is to be considered a case for the Ethics Commission – in any case, exemplary it was not.

- 15 See Winkler (2012), Krause-Burger (2012), Lang (2012) and Soldt (2012).
- 16 Some of the contributions to this conference were published in Ehrlich et al. (eds., 2015).
- 17 *Offener Brief an den Vorstand der DVPW zum Streit über den Theodor Eschenburg Preis*; documented in Eisfeld (2016a: 284–7).
- 18 DVPW press release of 27 October 2013; documented in Eisfeld (2016a: 288–90).
- 19 For critical statements by prominent political scientists, see Landfried (2013), Jesse (2013b), Krippendorff (2013), Decker (2014), Falter (2014).
- 20 See the two critical book reviews by Rainer Blasius and Hannah Bethke in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (on 2 and 11 February 2015) and Rainer Eisfeld's review in *H-Soz-Kult* of 5 June 2015.
- 21 For the exact figures on Eschenburg's annual income between 1933 and 1945 see Wengst (2015: 98).
- 22 “Cold ‘Aryanisation’” means systematically disadvantaging of Jewish companies economically in order to drive them out of the market in favour of other companies.
- 23 The purpose of this agency was to “eliminate” Jews from trading within Germany and beyond its borders. (Eisfeld, 2016b: 116) It appears fair to assume that Eschenburg was aware of this fact.
- 24 Some details about the circumstances under which Eschenburg purchased this villa from its previous owner, Ernst Wolff, a Jewish lawyer, who had emigrated to England in 1938, are still missing (see Wengst, 2015: 125). The author reserves judgment on this matter until more facts are known.
- 25 Arendt referred to Otto Kirchheimer's considerations in his book *Political Justice*: “If active resistance to the oppressor is therefore an illusory yardstick, withdrawal from significant participation in public life of the defunct regime, industrial command posts included, is a legitimate yardstick” (Kirchheimer, 1961: 331).
- 26 In a version of this article, which he later published in collection of his essays, he omitted the word “terror” (Eschenburg, 1972: 123).
- 27 On this differentiation of levels, see Göhler (2015).
- 28 For “Politische Wissenschaft” during the “Third Reich”, see Botsch (2006).
- 29 On Bergstraesser's career between 1933 and 1936 in Heidelberg see Eisfeld (2016a: 57–66).
- 30 For an early empirical verification of this observation, see Buchstein and Göhler (1986).

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