

RESEARCH ARTICLE

“Religious Affiliation: Dissident.” Josef Doppler, a Political Scholar on the Margins of Academia?

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Abstract: The paper aims to offer insights into the relationship of a political scholar towards established academia, based on the variegated life of Josef Doppler, a Bratislava-born left-wing intellectual. At first, in a short theoretical introduction, the notion of the political scholar, coined by Franz Neumann, and its difficult relationship towards academia is elucidated. Then, a short sketch of Doppler’s life covers its most important stages: his communist activities in Prague, Frankfurt, where he was in contact with Max Horkheimer, his second stay in the Czechoslovak Republic, finally his exile in Britain and his military service. Subsequently, the paper examines how and to what extent the notion of the political scholar is relevant for each of Doppler’s different concrete situations, and discusses the strategies how Doppler tried to cope with the problems connected to them.

Keywords: academia; critical theory; Czechoslovak exile in Britain; antifascism; dissident communists

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Introduction

At the beginning of February 1934, not too late in the evening, around half past nine, a – given the language of his protocol – Slovak policeman in Prague deemed himself obliged to carry out his duty: While inspecting one of the fancy-dress balls of the carnival season in the old town, he spotted two young men, disguised by wearing cardboard signs, the first “marked ‘I am the neighbor of my moderate wing’, and with a symbol in the form of a swastika. [...] His companion, who had on his back a cardboard sign as well, marked ‘I am the moderate wing of my neighbor’, and a symbol of a heart, pierced by three arrows, turned it over to me and disappeared.”² The first young man,

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2 Národní archiv, Prague (hereafter NA), f. Policejní ředitelství Praha II – prezidium – 1931 – 1940, k. 666, sign. 41/D-22/25 (12 February 1934), p. 4.

however, had to present his credentials, as since 1933, the DNSAP, the German National Socialist Worker's Party in Czechoslovakia, had been banned by the republic, and the use of its symbols was considered a crime, even if the swastika in this case seemed a little odd, more like a mixture of a gallows, a fasces (the symbol of the Italian fascists) and a swastika. When a few days later the file ended up on the desk of the police officer concerned with political issues, he was baffled when he started the investigations and noted: "Pro domo: During the investigation it was ascertained that Josef Doppler," as that was the young man's name, "is a communist and not a 'hakenkreuzler',"³ i.e., a Nazi. Thus, a few days later, Josef Doppler found himself in the rather awkward situation of explaining at a police station what turned out to be a political joke during carnival gone awry. Doppler elucidated that he and his friend had disguised themselves as a parody of the communist party's dogmatic theory of social fascism, which saw in social democracy fascism's twin, hinting at the fact that the police were not well informed regarding his party affiliation, as he had been expelled from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia during the winter. In a handwritten note Doppler added to the file: "According to my political views, I am a Trotskyite. The inscriptions on the cardboard attached to my back were just a joke, which I wanted to present at the masquerade. They were supposed to be an allusion to a dictum of Stalin's in the sense that 'fascism and social democracy are twins' and that 'social democracy is the moderate wing of fascism.'⁴ The sources do not tell us whether the policemen got the joke in the end, but there were no further inquiries in that peculiar case.

While at first glance this whimsical episode seems to have only anecdotal value, one can take it as a springboard for an exploration of Doppler's intellectual profile and his relationship to academia, which is the broader topic of this article.

The episode hints at the fact that Doppler can be seen as what the political scientist Franz Neumann called a "political scholar."⁵ With this notion, Neumann tries to describe the contemporaneous form of the intellectual who "is, or ought to be, the critical conscience of society in each of its historical periods."⁶ As such, the political scholar not only focuses on academic research, but reflects on and also tries to have impact on the social situation. During the nineteenth century,

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 FRANZ L. NEUMANN, *The Social Sciences*, in: *The Cultural Migration. The European Scholar in America*, ed. Idem, Philadelphia 1953, pp. 4–27, here p. 13.

6 Ibid., p. 4.

Neumann points out, this role was aggravated by the rise and expansion of the new form of the nation state and the accompanying bureaucratization of many sectors of society, among them universities and other institutions of higher learning, which resulted in “the trend to transform the intellectual into a functionary of society.”⁷ This development puts the political scholar at odds with the social sector he is most connected to, his home ground so to say; academia. Nietzsche had already written ferocious polemics against the rise of the “*Philistines of Culture*”⁸ who did not reflect on this problem. While one can doubt the value of the remedies that Nietzsche later recommended against this development, in the backdrop of the buoyant German nationalism after the victory over France in 1871, he lucidly demonstrated the problem: “This paradox – the scientific man – has lately dashed ahead at such a frantic speed in Germany, that one would almost think the scientific world were a factory, in which every minute wasted meant a fine. To-day the man of science works as arduously as the fourth or slave caste: his study has ceased to be an occupation, it is a necessity; he looks neither to the right nor to the left, but rushes through all things – even through the serious matters which life bears in its train – with that semi-listlessness and repulsive need to rest so characteristic of the exhausted laborer. *This is also his attitude towards culture.*”⁹

This lack of self-reflection and of critical distance towards society even intensified in the twentieth century, according to Max Horkheimer, who was, as will be shown, one of Doppler’s (ironically academic) teachers. To him, as a part of the triumph of instrumental reason, a reason which focusses only in the improvement of the means to reach a certain goal, but does not reflect on the goal itself, academia turned into a strongly hierarchical and authoritarian self-serving community, a racket, which demands a sacrifice of the intellect in order to belong to its in-group: “A series of smooth transitions leads from the sacrifice of his own mother, which the future magician must make to his racket, to the dissertation at the universities, through which the adept proves that his thinking, feeling and speaking have irrevocably taken on the forms of the academic racket.”¹⁰

7 Ibid., p. 11.

8 FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer, in: *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Vol. 4: *Thoughts out of Season. Part One*, ed. O. Levy, New York 1924, pp. 1–98, here p. 11.

9 Ibid., p. 61.

10 MAX HORKHEIMER, Die Rackets und der Geist, in: *Max Horkheimer. Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 12: *Nachgelassene Schriften 1931–1949*, eds. A. Schmidt, G. Schmid-Noerr, Frankfurt am Main 1995, pp. 287–291, here p. 289.

While these stabs at the function of academia might be polemically pointed, they portend the problematic relationship between political scholar and academia, between cultural and social critique on the one hand and conformism on the other. However, as Neumann pointed out, the solution cannot be found by simply politicizing academia, a thought he abhorred: “Let there be no misunderstanding. I do not consider it the task of the universities to preach democracy. In this, I fully stand with the ideas of Max Weber expressed in his famous lecture *Wissenschaft als Beruf*”¹¹ in which Weber famously postulated the strict division of political values and research. But remembering his interwar experiences in German-speaking academia, Neumann points at the way the claim of being nonpolitical was often used: “But it is most certainly not the function of the universities to ridicule democracy, to arouse nationalist passions, to sing the praise of past systems – and to cover this up by asserting that one is ‘nonpolitical.’”¹² Neumann even gives some examples of how it looked when “universities became the very centers of antidemocratic thought”¹³: “When I came to Leipzig in the fall of 1918, the economics professor thought it necessary – in October 1918 – to endorse the peace terms of the Pan German Union and of the General Staff, while the historian proved conclusively that democracy was an essentially non-German form of political organization, suitable for the materialistic Anglo-Saxons, but incompatible with the idealism of the Germanic race. When I transferred to Rostock in the summer of 1919, I had to organize students to combat the anti-Semitism openly preached by university professors.”¹⁴

Mentioning the topic of antisemitism,¹⁵ Neumann touches upon another possible reason for Doppler’s position on the margins of academia. The aforementioned Weber drew in his famous lecture (held in 1917) a rather grim picture of the career perspective of Jews in German-speaking academia: “When young students come to me to seek advice about qualifying as a lecturer, the responsibility of giving it is scarcely to be borne. Of course, if the student is a Jew, you can only say: *lasciate ogni speranza*.”¹⁶ Even in the First Czechoslovak Republic, where open antisemitism did not characterize political culture, and

11 F. L. NEUMANN, *Social Sciences*, p. 15.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

15 On the use of “anti-Semitism” vs. “antisemitism”, see <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/spelling-antisemitism> [26.10.2024].

16 MAX WEBER, *Science as a Vocation*, in: *Max Weber. The Vocation Lectures*, eds. D. Owen, T. B. Strong, Indianapolis 2004, pp. 1–31, here p. 7.

the official republic stood up for the victims of antisemitism in affairs like the case of Samuel Steinherz, there was, especially at the German University in Prague, a “significant, far less obvious, everyday antisemitism,”¹⁷ which became more and more radical and common over the years. Doppler did not emphasize his Jewish background, in fact he even tried, while being a member of the Communist Party, to hide it. In 1938 he confessed to Max Horkheimer, with whom he had been in contact since the early 1930s: “Under the pressure from a discipline to which I was subject at the time, I concealed my Jewish ancestry between 1930 and 1933, as this was considered politically expedient by the authorities concerned, and I failed to inform you or the institute of this when this obligation became ineffective for me at the end of 1933.”¹⁸ However, as antisemitism is not about how its victims identify themselves, but about the projections of the antisemites, academic antisemitism was probably one of the forces pushing him towards the margins of academia as well.

To sum up, it was mainly his position as political scholar and his Jewish ancestry that put Doppler on the margins of academia. However, being on the margins of academia does not mean being out of academia; it rather creates a relationship fraught with tensions between the scholar and academia.

To this day, there is not much historiographical literature on Josef Doppler, although, as this article wants to prove, studying his case unearths interesting connections and aspects of left-leaning dissidents in Central Europe and their precarious position on the margins of academia. The only texts up to now are by Jiří Plachý, who wrote short biographical sketches of Doppler’s life from a military historian’s perspective, focusing mainly on Doppler’s ill-fated service in the Czechoslovak Army in Exile.¹⁹ Apart from these texts, there are only a few remarks on Doppler’s name in the literature. Johann Wolfgang Brügel dedicated his early and formidable work on Czech-German

17 OTA KONRÁD, *Geisteswissenschaften im Umbruch. Die Fächer Geschichte, Germanistik und Slawistik an der Deutschen Universität in Prag 1918–1945*, Berlin 2020, p. 70. For an overview of academic antisemitism during the interwar period, see REGINA FRITZ, GRZEGORZ ROS-SOLIŃSKI-LIEBE, JANA STAREK (eds.), *Alma Mater Antisemitica. Akademisches Milieu, Juden und Antisemitismus an den Universitäten Europas zwischen 1918 und 1939*, Wien 2016.

18 Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt a. M./Archivzentrum (hereafter UBA Ffm), Nachlass Max Horkheimer, 12 – Korrespondenzen unter anderem mit Carl Dreyfuss (I 6, 184–311), Letter from Doppler to Horkheimer (November 1938), p. 2.

19 JIŘÍ PLACHÝ, *Filosofové v battledressech*, Praha 2020, pp. 84–88; IDEM, „Zapomenutý“ voják, filosof a sociolog – PhDr. Josef Doppler, *Vojenské rozhledy* 1/2013, pp. 187–193, <https://www.vojenskerozhledy.cz/kategorie-clanku/personalie/zapomenuty-vojak-filozof-a-sociolog-ph-dr-josef-doppler.html> [1.11.2023].

relations to “the memory of the German volunteers of the Czechoslovak Army in Exile, who were killed in action”²⁰ naming among them Doppler, and his name and a short biographical note appear in a letter in the published part of Max Horkheimer’s correspondence.²¹ Most recently, Doppler has been mentioned briefly in a new history of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung, IfS*).²² The scarcity of these mentions should not come as a surprise, given the focus of this text that aims to examine Doppler’s position on the margins of academia. As he never really was at the center of the academic scene and as his life was tragically cut short, he never had the impact he perhaps deserved or even the chance to write a comprehensive opus. However, his experiences might serve as an interesting example for the ways and strategies people on the margins of academia dealt with their situation and with the academic establishment. This paper aims to probe the question of what leeway, which limitations, and which possibilities this position offered them. How does the contradictory relationship between Doppler and academia appear concretely? And did it change over the course of time? These are the paper’s leading questions.

In this short introduction and literature review, two important moments in Doppler’s life have already been hinted at, his contact with Horkheimer and his death while battling Nazi Germany. Given his low profile, a short biographical sketch seems in order, before we can focus on the main question of this text. In order to do so, first Doppler’s early approach to academia will be explored, what it meant to him to be a political scholar. In the next step, Doppler’s situation during his stay in Frankfurt will be discussed, followed by an analysis of his activities back in Prague and later in British exile.

Josef Doppler – A Biographical Sketch

Josef Doppler was born in 1910 into a German-speaking Jewish family in Bratislava (back then Preßburg/Pozsony/Prešporok). His father, Egon, who had been born in Budapest, was an industrialist, his mother, Mathilde, had been born in Plzeň. For a few years, Josef Doppler attended a grammar school with Hungarian as the language of instruction; only after the foundation

20 JOHANN WOLFGANG BRÜGEL, *Tschechen und Deutsche. 1918–1938*, München 1967, p. 9.

21 ALFRED SCHMIDT, GUNZELIN SCHMID NOERR (eds.), *Max Horkheimer. Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 15: *Briefwechsel 1913–1936*, Frankfurt am Main 1995, pp. 342–344.

22 PHILIPP LENHARDT, *Café Marx. Das Institut für Sozialforschung von den Anfängen bis zur Frankfurter Schule*, München 2024, pp. 359–360.

of the Czechoslovak Republic, was German introduced as the language of instruction. One can assume that he was multilingual and fluent in Slovak, Czech, Hungarian and German. In 1928 he enrolled at the German University in Prague, his main subjects being German philology, philosophy, and history. Around the same time Doppler joined the Kostufra (*Kommunistische Studentenfraktion*), the Czech communist party's (KSČ) student organization, as well as the party itself. His political activism and his participation in demonstrations led to numerous troublesome encounters with the police²³ (even before the episode mentioned above), leading to some fines, which might have contributed to his decision to leave Prague in 1930 for Frankfurt am Main, where he continued his studies and became a student of Horkheimer, who had recently become the director of the Institute for Social Research and professor at the university. Horkheimer seemed to have been impressed by Doppler, as he was among the few students who took part in some of the institute's internal discussion circles²⁴ and in 1932, Doppler started to publish reviews for the institute's journal, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*.²⁵ When in January 1933 the institute was forced by the rise of Nazism to close, Doppler continued his studies in Prague. The institute's non-dogmatic version of Marxism seems to have left a mark on Doppler's political thinking: Sometime during the winter of 1933/1934 he was expelled from the KSČ.²⁶ His stay in Prague did not mean he severed his ties to the institute at all: From 1934 to 1935 he received a grant from the institute, which had gone into exile, at first to Geneva and Paris, and later to New York. The grant enabled Doppler to write his dissertation, which he handed in in 1936. The topic of the dissertation, which was supervised by Emil Utitz, a professor of philosophy at the German University in Prague, was

23 NA, f. Policejní ředitelství Praha II – všeobecná spisovna (1931–1940), k. 5399, sign. D 940/1 Doppler (3 May 1930), p. 9.

24 THEODOR W. ADORNO, JOSEF DOPPLER et al., Wissenschaft und Krise. Differenz zwischen Idealismus und Materialismus. Diskussion über Themen zu einer Vorlesung Max Horkheimers, in: *Max Horkheimer. Gesammelte Schriften* 12, pp. 349–397.

25 In total, Doppler published four reviews (two separate and one double review) on the following books: FRANZ MEHRING, *Zur deutschen Geschichte*. Gesammelte Schriften und Aufsätze, hrsg. von Eduard Fuchs. Soziologische Verlagsanstalt. Berlin 1931, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 3/1932, pp. 430–431; JAN SLAVÍK, *Husitská revoluce, studie historicko-sociologická* (Die hussitische Revolution; historisch-soziologische Studie). Orbis-Verlag, Prag 1934, and EMIL STRAUSS, *Die Entstehung der tschechoslowakischen Republik*. Orbis-Verlag, Prag 1934, *Ibid.* 3/1935, p. 453; KARL KAUTSKY, *Aus der Frühzeit des Marxismus*. Engels Briefwechsel mit Kautsky. Orbis-Verlag, Prag 1935, *Ibid.* 3/1936, p. 429.

26 FRIEDRICH BEER, *Hast Du auf Deutsche geschossen, Grandpa? Fragmente einer Lebensgeschichte*, Berlin 1992, p. 262.

a critique of Oswald Spengler's philosophy of history. Eventually, between 1936 and 1938, his ties to Horkheimer loosened. Doppler tried to make a living as a teacher at different German-speaking high schools in the Czechoslovak Republic, but had problems with the ever more nationalistic and fascist body of teachers.²⁷ While his contact with Horkheimer was dormant, he engaged in discussions with émigré circles in Prague, among them representatives of the Vienna Circle and with left-leaning Czechoslovak intellectuals from the Historical Group (*Historická skupina*). The disastrous fall of 1938 saw Doppler in České Budějovice, where he had found a job as a German teacher at the local Czech commercial academy. In order to prepare for his exile, he renewed contact with Horkheimer, who tried to help as much as possible. In 1939, Doppler fled to Great Britain and started a postgraduate project as a fellow at Corpus Christi College in Oxford with the title "Masaryk and Democracy" (*Masaryk a demokracie*), which was, however, never brought to completion, as already in 1940, he joined the Czechoslovak army in exile. Under the umbrella of the army, Doppler could continue his studies for some time and was active in the Masaryk Society²⁸, but in 1942 he had to return to his unit. Even then, he managed to publish at least one article in 1944.²⁹ In September 1944 he was shipped to France.³⁰ On October 15, 1944 Doppler was killed by a German sniper while on a reconnaissance mission during the siege of Dunkirk.³¹

Doppler's Early Approach to Academia

Looking at this short biographical sketch, containing the names of important universities like Prague, Frankfurt, and Oxford, one might wonder in which sense Doppler can be considered as being on the margins of academia. It will be shown however, that among other factors, his political activism created a certain distance towards the academic establishment in the first place.

27 UBA Ffm, Nachlass Max Horkheimer, 12 – Korrespondenzen unter anderem mit Carl Dreyfuss (I 6, 184 – 311), Letter from Doppler to Horkheimer (November 1938), p. 2. There are hints that a grievance against Doppler had been filed with the German-speaking Czechoslovak school board; the detailed files could not be found, however. NA, f. Zemská školní rada Praha – část 1919–1952, kniha 61, Osobní 1936–1940.

28 F. M. HNÍK, Oxford o Československu, *Čechoslovák. Nezávislý týdeník* 5/1941, p. 3.

29 JOSEF DOPPLER, T. G. Masaryk and the German "Titanism," *The Central European Observer* 6/1944, p. 83.

30 J. PLACHÝ, „Zapomenutý“ voják.

31 IVAN PROCHÁZKA, *Dunkerque. Válečný deník Československé samostatné obrněné brigády (říjen 1944 – květen 1945)*, Praha 2006, p.18.

Around 1928, there was an ideological battle waging amongst the ranks of the KSČ, which would lead eventually to the party's "Bolshevization" at its fifth congress in 1929. Having been a melting pot of rather diverse left-wing groups since its foundation in 1921, a stricter, more Moscow-oriented course was plotted after a group under Klement Gottwald took over the helm. Traces of this development can be seen in discussions of the Kostufra on their relationship towards academia and the role of communist students in it. When Doppler joined the Kostufra, in their "political resolution" the communist students still defined their relationship towards academia, after they had underscored how important the connection to proletarian economic struggles was, as follows: "Besides this, it is however imperative to wage the ideological struggle against bourgeois science. It is necessary to fight against the illusion of 'objectivity' of bourgeoisie science, it must be shown in concrete examples, that this science is a class science, serving the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. It is necessary to show that this kind of science, as well as the whole capitalist system, is in crisis today and that the further development of science, as well as the solution of the social question in society, can only be brought about by social revolution. However, it is not enough to unveil the class origin and the class function of bourgeois science (a social critique), but it is necessary to point out its material erroneousness (a logical critique)."³² This double thrust of the critique put the Kostufra and Doppler on the margins of academia, while still being far away from rejecting it altogether, constituting the conflicting relation between political scholar and academia mentioned before. Especially the focus on a logical critique, which made it necessary to formulate an intrinsic critique of the content of the different fields of academia, prevented it from simply rejecting all arguments as "bourgeois," without having to confront them. However, in the process of Bolshevization, this emphasis on a logical critique was abandoned. In a later version of the political theses on the work of the Kostufra, a change in tone and thrust shows the results of the Bolshevization: "The Kostufra, which fights for the purging of science and academia of all reactionary, especially religious, influences (whose importance is increasing in this period of fascization of science and academia), links this struggle with a reference to the Soviet Union, the only country in which science can develop freely as proletarian science, as well as to social revolution, which alone can wrest science from the bourgeoisie."³³

32 NA, f. Sbíрка – Organizace mládeže, k. 42, i. č. 539, Politická resoluce, p. 2.

33 NA, f. Policejní ředitelství Praha II – všeobecná spisovna (1931–1940), k. 5399, sign. D 940/1 Doppler, Politische Thesen (2 February 1930), p. 13.

A copy of these theses was found when Doppler was arrested by the police once again, so he did know them. However, his later conflicts with the party hint at the fact that his enthusiasm towards the Soviet Union and its development in the early 1930s was not as fierce as required. Especially his period of residence in Frankfurt and the contact with early critical theory and Horkheimer might have fed his doubts.

Doppler in Frankfurt

In Frankfurt, Doppler's position on the margins was enriched by different layers, and he seemed to reflect his position to a certain degree. That he chose to study at the Institute for Social Research was, given his political background, no big surprise, but kept him from joining mainstream academia as well, as the institute's relations towards the university were also complicated and precarious. The institute itself formed a borderland of academia, as it was an institute associated with the university while never fully forming part of it. Because of this and because of its fame as a center of Marxism, it was eyed warily by the university.³⁴ The institute also underscored its distance towards the university, as its first director, Carl Grünberg, had already made clear that the newly founded IFS should form a counterweight to traditional academia. The historian Martin Jay sums up the relevant parts of Grünberg's inauguration speech in 1924: "At the outset of his remarks, he stressed the need for a research-oriented academy in opposition to the then current trend in German higher education towards teaching at the expense of scholarship. Although the Institut was to offer some instruction, it would try to avoid becoming a training school for 'mandarins' prepared only to function in the service of the status quo."³⁵ Thus, the IFS saw itself in a similar position as the political scholar Doppler, forming, so to say, a collective political scholar. Thus far, the institute was a perfect match for Doppler, who also played a bit with the university's formal procedure of enrollment. This reflects the fact that a central element of the process of turning academics into functionaries of society was the increased bureaucratization, as Neumann pointed out.

34 WOLFGANG SCHIVELBUSCH, *Intellektuellendämmerung. Zur Lage der Frankfurter Intelligenz in den zwanziger Jahren*. Frankfurt am Main 1982, p. 94; HANS-PETER GRUBER, „Aus der Art geschlagen“. *Eine politische Biografie von Felix Weil (1998–1975)*, Frankfurt am Main 2022, pp. 178–180; P. LEHNHARDT, *Café Marx*, pp. 85–101.

35 MARTIN JAY, *The Dialectical Imagination. A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923–1950*, Berkeley 1996, p. 60.

In one of his enrollment forms, Doppler answered the question about his religious affiliation with the word “dissident,”³⁶ underscoring not only his skepticism in religious, political, and scientific matters, but giving as well another example of his sense of humor. But his enrollment papers also disclose another aspect of Doppler’s situation: Being now in Germany, it is also interesting to see how Doppler’s national status was defined. As he answered the question about his citizenship during enrollment with “Czechoslovak,” he was considered a *Reichsausländer*, a foreigner in the German Reich, as a stamp on his form proclaimed. At the same time, he was of course a member of a German-speaking minority abroad.

But in an interesting twist of fate, Doppler could use this peculiar status to his advantage. During spring and summer 1932 he went back to the Czechoslovak Republic on a sabbatical to write his thesis, planning to return for the 1932 fall term. However, when Doppler applied for a renewal of his passport, the Czechoslovak authorities, taking into account his prior participation in illegal communist manifestations, the distribution of leaflets and his political activism in general, decided in the first instance that “taking into consideration these circumstances, the local department came to the conviction, that if the passport would be issued to the applicant, it might be misused in a way that might seriously endanger our interests of the state.”³⁷ Doppler had to hire a lawyer and hand over a certificate of good conduct by the University of Frankfurt which confirmed that his “moral conduct has not given occasion for complaints” along with a recommendation letter from Horkheimer in order to countermand this decision.³⁸

This was not the end of the story, however: By the time Doppler finally received his passport, the enrollment period had expired and he had to apply for late enrollment. In his justification for this application, Doppler naturally did not mention the true reasons for the doubts of the Czechoslovak police, but used his status as *Reichsausländer* and the national and political tensions between Germany and the Czechoslovak Republic in a sly way.

36 Universitätsarchiv Frankfurt am Main (hereafter UAF), Abt. 604, Nr. 6451, Studentenakte Josef Doppler (6 December 1932), p. 16.

37 NA, f. Policejní ředitelství Praha II – všeobecná spisovna (1931–1940), k. 5399, sign. D 940/1 Doppler (27 February 1932), p 1.

38 Ibid. The lawyer was, by the way, the German-speaking social democrat Egon Schwelb, who later became a member of the juridical branch of the government-in-exile in London and later still a well-known human rights expert.

Given the background that in spring and summer 1932 the Czechoslovak Republic had disbanded the *Völkssport*, a German national socialist paramilitary group camouflaged as a sports association and then legally prosecuted its leaders in a sensational trial,³⁹ Doppler reasoned on his delayed enrollment: “The motive for the problems that the police caused regarding my passport has to be seen in the attempt to curb the spiritual connections (*die geistigen Beziehungen*) that link Germandom in the Czechoslovak Republic and the German Reich as much as possible. Such connections were, e.g., seen as incriminating moments during the recent political trials, the affiliation to the German studentry as a greater German organization was considered undesirable in the interest of state security. The initial rejection of my application for a passport by the police in Prague was motivated by the reasoned suspicion that my stay in Germany endangered the security of the state.”⁴⁰ This way, by painting himself as the victim of alleged Czechoslovak nationalism and paranoia, Doppler moved the university authorities to grant him late enrollment, a feat that he most probably never would have accomplished if he had told the truth about the reasons for his problems related to his travel documents.

Back in Prague

Unfortunately, Doppler’s triumph over academic bureaucracy did not last long. His late enrollment was granted at the beginning of December 1932, but he had to quit his studies in Frankfurt with Hitler’s rise to power in January 1933. In the following months, based in Prague, he had to wage a bureaucratic war with Frankfurt University’s rapidly Nazifying authorities to receive his certificates and in August 1933, he was banned from further studies at all universities within the Reich.

Although he started to receive a grant from the institute in mid-1934, he remained on the margins of academia. His first proposal for a dissertation on Spengler was rejected in Prague.⁴¹ Being banned in Nazi Germany from studying, Doppler ironically worked for a short time “on behalf of the Professor for Eastern European History who substitutes as Professor for Modern History,

39 MICHAL BURIAN, *Sudetoněmecké nacionalistické tělovýchovné organizace a československý stát v letech 1918 až 1938*, Praha 2012, pp. 165–166.

40 UAF, Abt. 604, Nr. 6451, Studentenakte Josef Doppler (1 December 1932), p. 13.

41 UBA Ffm, Nachlass Max Horkheimer, 12 – Korrespondenzen unter anderem mit Carl Dreyfuss (p. I 6, 184 – 311), Letter from Doppler to Horkheimer (22 Juni 1934), p. 1.

[Josef] Pfitzner,” the Nazi Vice Primator of Prague to be, “who is, because of his studies in [Michail] Bakunin, interested in that topic, in [Arnold] Ruge.”⁴² Doppler’s plans to write a dissertation on Ruge or “a topic of the epoch of ’48 in Czech history”⁴³ did not come to fruition, however.

As limiting Doppler’s existence on the margins of academia was most of the time, at some moments it did give him leeway and enabled him to carry out noteworthy interventions. Having no career to endanger, he could abandon all academic decorum and was free to speak his mind – even in academic settings and against all diplomatic usances. So, when in September 1934 the 8th International Congress of Philosophy took place in Prague, Doppler contributed to the discussions in remarkable ways by stridently criticizing members of the German delegation, underscoring his role as political scholar.

In panel VII “The Descriptive Point of View and the Normative Point of View in the Social Sciences”⁴⁴ a member of the German delegation, Willy Hellpach, from the University of Heidelberg, held a lecture titled “The Central Subject of Sociology: *Volk* as a Natural Fact, Spiritual Form and Creation of the Will”⁴⁵. As can be easily discerned already by the title, the lecture was a thinly veiled apology of Nazi *völkisch* thought – Hellpach simply postulated the *Volk* as an archetypical phenomenon (*Urphänomen*), by which allegedly all the epistemic problems of sociology can be solved. As simplistic as this thesis sounds, it actually is, just worded in a very pompous way. Hellpach concludes his concoction, literally using central notions of Nazi ideology: “From its central subject ‘*Volk*’, sociology finally receives, to use a formula that is much used nowadays, ‘blood and soil’, solid ground and warm blood, so to speak. Instead of forever fighting about itself, it will finally achieve something on its own, if it remains a social science in its entirety, and can only become a fruitful one because at its core it has found itself as a science of the ‘*Volk*’.”⁴⁶

In the ensuing discussion, Hellpach’s lecture was harshly criticized by a number of participants, where it was mainly pointed out that Hellpach’s thesis was simply a subreption, an intellectual sleight of hand: By claiming

42 Ibid., Letter from Doppler to Horkheimer (27 August 1934), p. 1. Pfitzner published his (and most likely some of Doppler’s) findings in 1932. There is as well a reprint: JOSEF PFITZNER, *Bakuninstudien. Quellen und Forschungen aus dem Gebiete der Geschichte*, Berlin 1977.

43 UBA Ffm, Nachlass Max Horkheimer, 12 – Korrespondenzen unter anderem mit Carl Dreyfuss (p. I 6, 184 – 311), Letter from Doppler to Horkheimer (27 August 1934), p. 1.

44 COMITÉ D’ORGANISATION DU CONGRÈS, *Actes du Huitième Congrès International de Philosophie à Prague 2–7 Septembre 1934*, Prague 1936, p. 249.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., p. 265.

Volk as an archetypical phenomenon the questions that are simulated to be answered are simply ignored. But an especially strident rebuttal came from Doppler. In this rebuttal, he interestingly echoed the claim of the Kostufra's original political resolution to combine a logical and a social critique. Similar to the previous speakers, Doppler criticizes the logical fallacy of Hellpach's lecture, but then argues that this fallacy, which he describes as throwing together the notions of state and *Volk* without any difference, is connected to the social relations in Germany, its tendencies towards total domination and its authoritarian ideology: "Such ideology must, of course, be understood as a product of the German present, of the" and here Doppler quotes Hellpach "state factors of life, of the willingness to submit to an individual or a group will under the leadership that establishes the statutes and its executive organs."⁴⁷ Submission is the keyword here; by obscuring the historicity of society and its rational potentials of liberation by its mystification as archetypical phenomenon, submission is treated as something natural and inevitable.

A lecture by another member of the German delegation was also harshly criticized by Doppler. In Panel XIV "The Crisis of Democracy," Paul Feldkeller presented his cultural pessimistic, counter-rationalist and elitist theories under the title "Geophilosophy and Historiurgy."⁴⁸ His main question is whether it is possible to shape and to influence history. Mixing the esoteric thoughts of Herrmann Keyserling and Spengler, Feldkeller claims that the main problem is that through the intellect, organic culture was destroyed and abstract civilization established, the latter developing destructive tendencies. Only an elite of thinkers, who steel themselves and who must be prepared even for self-sacrifice, can turn the tide. Feldkeller concludes: "This is the mission that only philosophy can resolve: Changing the intellect and thus to changing the world, or realizing its impossibility and looking into doom's eye as valiantly as the Germanic gods were facing the end of the world."⁴⁹

This time it was only Doppler criticizing Feldkeller's elaborations. He used Feldkeller's lecture to point out a central problem of all contemporaneous German philosophy: On the one hand, it is based on a strong belief in fate, which implicates quietism, on the other hand, to mobilize the masses, it must preach activism. This problem of the co-existence of rebellious and conformist or authoritarian traits was to be discussed later in the social psychological studies of the IfS in exile on the level of the individual: "This may

47 COMITÉ D'ORGANISATION, *Actes*, p. 287.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 555.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 564.

lead to an irrational and blind hatred of *all* authority, with strong destructive connotations, accompanied by a secret readiness to ‘capitulate’ and to join hands with the ‘hated’ strong. [...] The latter case, when it is combined with an urge to take pseudo-revolutionary actions against those whom the individual ultimately deems to be weak, is that of the ‘Rebel.’ This syndrome played a large role in Nazi Germany: the late Captain Roehm, who called himself a ‘Hochverräter’ in his autobiography, is a perfect example.⁵⁰ This trait of a ‘conformist rebellion’ is noted by Doppler, who combines in his all-encompassing swipe against contemporaneous German philosophy a logical critique with snide remarks regarding the social reality in Nazi Germany, underscoring that more than a few careers are made in German academia because someone else was driven into exile: “Strange: Not only in Feldkeller’s lecture is the Marxian motif of changing the world as the mission of philosophy hinted at. The same forces that came to power in the name of anti-Marxism belatedly reenact Marx’s critique of German idealism. Ernst Kriek, rector of the Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, appointed by the ‘national revolution,’ proclaimed in his inauguration speech the triumph over idealism, but the adjunct professor, who is now teaching philosophy instead of Professors Horkheimer and Tillich, states: now materialism is defeated, now German universities are again in the hands of German idealism. Indeed, this contradiction between activist naturalism and spiritualist idealism is irresolvable for the philosophy of National Socialism. Its promise to change the world appeals to the same plebeian forces which it must abuse, its goals are only guaranteed by a fideism whose truth of faith no longer stems from God, but from the *Führer*.”⁵¹

Doppler ends his contribution with a plea to abandon this irrationalism in favor of rational social change towards more freedom. How his intervention was received at the congress is, alas, not noted in the proceedings.

However, there was a very warm reaction from Horkheimer, to whom Doppler sent his contributions. In his next letter to Doppler, Horkheimer thanked him: “I was sincerely delighted that you called into mind a progressive

50 THEODOR W. ADORNO, ELSE FRENKEL-BRUNSWICK et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York, 1950, pp. 762–763.

51 COMITÉ D'ORGANISATION, *Actes*, p. 565. While it is a nice polemic touch not to mention the name of the careerist who profits from Horkheimer’s and Paul Tillich’s expulsion, it makes a researcher’s life harder nowadays. Doppler could be alluding to Wilhelm Grebe, who was the only adjunct professor for philosophy in 1934/1935 in Frankfurt. JOHANN WOLFGANG GOETHE-UNIVERSITÄT, *Verzeichnis der Vorlesungen Winter-Halbjahr 1934/35 und Personalverzeichnis*. Frankfurt am Main 1934, p. 10.

philosophical position against the untruthful empty talk of some of the participants. Especially in times like these it seems to me that theoretical clarification is particularly important, and I only hope that enough really interested persons at the congress have listened to your contributions.”⁵²

It might be that Doppler to a certain extent impressed one of the professors of Charles University present at the congress: Emil Utitz, who, a few months later, agreed to supervise, with certain reservations, Doppler’s dissertation on Spengler, which had been rejected in early 1933. But again, it was no smooth sailing for Doppler, in whose eyes Utitz was a representative of mainstream academia. He complained in a letter to Horkheimer: “After reading the proposal on Spengler, which had been rejected last year, Prof. Utitz, while voicing the benevolent opinion that it was ‘gifted,’ found also that his own ideas on cultural philosophy were not sufficiently taken into account, and opined that he could not cover a Horkheimer dissertation with his name. My reassurances, that the proposal had been written without any contact within a seminar with you, were received by Prof. Utitz incredulously.”

Along with these lines, Doppler sent a new draft of the proposal to Horkheimer, asking him for comments and adding somewhat apologetically and underscoring that he was definitely not on the same wavelength as his new supervisor: “The blurred terminology is unavoidable opportunism towards Utitz.”⁵³

Into Exile

This opportunism towards academia was in a way successful: In June 1936 Doppler finished his dissertation and graduated. As already mentioned, until 1938 his contact with Horkheimer went into hiatus as the now Dr. Doppler tried to make his living as a high school teacher. But that did not mean that Doppler did not put out feelers to other groups on the margins of academia. When he resumed his correspondence with Horkheimer in 1938, Doppler underscored his contacts to the “young Czech historians of the circle ‘*Dějiny a přítomnost*’ (Past and Present), which also explicitly appreciates the pursuits of the institute [the IfS] and the *Zeitschrift* [the ZfS].”⁵⁴ In Czech(oslovak)

52 UBA Ffm, Nachlass Max Horkheimer, 12 – Korrespondenzen unter anderem mit Carl Dreyfuss (p. 16, 184 – 311), Letter Horkheimer to Doppler (19 October 1934), p. 1.

53 Ibid., Letter from Doppler to Horkheimer (18 April 1935), p. 2. For a detailed discussion of Utitz’s conceptions on cultural philosophy see Lara Bonneau’s article in this issue.

54 Ibid., Letter from Doppler to Horkheimer (November 1938), p. 2.

historiography, this group is better known under the name ‘*Historická skupina*’, the name Doppler mentions is that of their journal.⁵⁵ It was a group of young, left-leaning academics who rejected the predominant positivism in Czechoslovak historiography and tried to get inspiration abroad, discussing in their journal not only the pursuits of the IFS, but also for example the ideas of the French Annales School. They started their discussion evenings in November 1936, and in March 1937 Doppler lectured on “*Rechtfertigungsfunktion des Geschichtsbildes*”⁵⁶ (The Legitimizing Function of the View of History). He was also scheduled to provide an article on this topic for the group’s journal, but this never came to fruition, as after the Munich Betrayal, the journal ceased to be published.⁵⁷

By that time, Doppler was already trying to get out of the betrayed republic. This practical goal also formed the background for one of Doppler’s last academic endeavors we want to discuss here. In his letter from November 1938, he told Horkheimer that he was planning to write a study “on the question of nationalities in the Central European area” and asked for Horkheimer’s help, hoping “as the topic most likely is beyond the institute’s area of interest, rather for a communication [of the text by the institute] to interested Anglo-Saxon circles.”⁵⁸ In other words, he wanted this study to be his ticket to Great Britain or the USA. Horkheimer replied that he would like to help as far as possible and asked for a draft, which Doppler submitted in January 1939. In the cover letter he outlined his intention: “From a scientific point of view, I would like to prove with this complex that it is not a matter of an eternal struggle of nations, but that the relative importance of the national component varies depending on the level of social development, culminating in our time under the drive of imperialist tendencies.”⁵⁹ The draft itself only consists of short notes and key points, but it is intriguing to see how modern some of the points that Doppler made seem to be. It becomes clear that Doppler held Masaryk

55 On the group, see: JOSEF PETRÁŇ, *Historická skupina. (Komentář k vzpomínkám jejich členů)*, in: *Studie z obecných dějin. Sborník k sedmdesátým narozeninám prof. dr. Jaroslava Charváta*, eds. J. Pátek, V. Šadová, Praha 1975, pp. 11–48; JAROSLAV ČEJCHAN, *Vzpomínky na Historickou skupinou*, in: *Ibid.*, pp. 49–54; JAROSLAV VÁVRA, *Ke genezi a místu Historické skupiny*, in: *Ibid.*, pp. 55–62. BOHUMIL JIROUŠEK, *The Journals of the Historical Group, Prager wirtschafts- und sozialhistorische Mitteilungen* 12/2010, pp. 101–116.

56 J. PETRÁŇ, *Historická skupina*, p. 42.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

58 UBA Ffm, *Nachlass Max Horkheimer*, 12 – *Korrespondenzen unter anderem mit Carl Dreyfuss* (p. I 6, 184 – 311), *Letter from Doppler to Horkheimer* (November 1938), p. 2.

59 *Ibid.*, *Letter from Doppler to Horkheimer* (6 January 1939), p. 1.

in high esteem and why he later tried to write about him in Oxford, when he described the latter's political stance with the words "The emancipation from national romanticism: Masaryk's realism."⁶⁰ This rejection of national romanticism, which implies as well an appreciation of a liberal, republican notion of the state, was emphasized by Doppler in other notes as well. Regarding the question of whether the Czechoslovak Republic was a nation state or rather a state of nations, he wrote: "Nation state or state of nations? (the revolutionary national assembly only represented the 'state nation,' but it created a constitution which is founded upon the equal treatment of all citizens and proportional representation)."⁶¹ This shows that Doppler now defended a Western notion of citizenship, which is not based on ethnic affiliation, but focusses on the individual and the form of law. Consequently, Doppler also noted how ideologically charged the term "Sudeten German" was, when he pointed out that it was a rather recent invention and its use had a nationalist thrust: "Sudeten German,' not 'German-Bohemian'"⁶² This remark criticizes the narrative of the unified *Volksgruppe* (German ethnic group) with a long history in the Bohemian lands, by pointing out that the term Sudeten German had developed only recently – a view that was later underpinned by more recent research.⁶³

It is lamentable that neither this study, nor the study on "Masaryk and Democracy" that Doppler worked on in British exile was to be completed. Surprisingly, however, Doppler moved in exile away from the margins of academia, towards its center, without however focusing only on his academic career, as this time his academic endeavors were at the Czechoslovak Army's beck and call. It seems that the general upheaval the world was in did not leave Doppler's relationship to academia untouched.

Organized by the Masaryk Society, of which Doppler was a founding member⁶⁴, a series of lectures and seminars took place at Oxford University, and Doppler was "speaking in the students' seminar on 'Democracy and

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 CHRISTIAN JAQUES, Über die Erfindung des Sudetendeutschtums. Johannes Stauda, ein sudetendeutscher Verleger, in: *Hundert Jahre sudetendeutsche Geschichte. Eine völkische Bewegung in drei Staaten*, ed. H. Henning Hahn, Frankfurt am Main 2007, pp. 193–208.

64 W. St., Obituary. Dr. Josef Doppler, killed on active service, *The Central European Observer* 25/1944, p. 385. Many thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this article who pointed out that there are mentions of Doppler in this and other exile publications.

Planning.”⁶⁵ He obviously also planned to publish a book on Masaryk’s thought, and, according to one of Doppler’s obituaries, it was not only near completion, but was planned to be published in a series curated by the well-known sociologist Karl Mannheim: “In 1941 he was granted eight months’ leave [from the army] for purposes of study, which he used to collect material for a book which his former lecturer at Frankfurt, Professor Karl Mannheim, had intended to publish in his series on sociology and social problems and which was to be entitled: ‘Masaryk, Selected Readings from his Sociological Works.’”⁶⁶

A small sample of Doppler’s work on Masaryk was published shortly before his death in *The Central European Observer*, a fortnightly review in the orbit of the Czechoslovak government in exile. In this text Doppler again proves to be a political scholar, as he analyzes Masaryk’s writings on German “Titanism”, which comprise a cultural and psychological history of the sense of superiority widespread among Germans.⁶⁷ Again, Doppler finds himself here in the borderland between academic research and current political discussions, as his evaluation of Masaryk’s writings serves to clarify the then heated debate whether the current war was being waged against the Nazis or the Germans, about the question of how deeply German National Socialism was rooted in German culture. Like some of the members of the IFS in exile, who joined the American *Office for Strategic Services (OSS)*⁶⁸ to put their theoretical skills in government service, Doppler also tried to aid the Allied war effort by his contributions.

65 N. N., Czechoslovak Affairs at Oxford, *The Central European Observer* 3/1941, p. 34.

66 W. St., Obituary, p. 386. While it is possible that Doppler attended lectures by Mannheim in Frankfurt, it is not plausible that he had closer contact with Mannheim, given his proximity to Horkheimer back then and the latter’s strained relations with Mannheim and the chasm between the theories of a critique of ideology (Horkheimer) and the sociology of knowledge (Mannheim). See HELMUT DUBIEL, Ideologiekritik versus Wissenssoziologie. Die Kritik der Mannheimschen Wissenssoziologie in der Kritischen Theorie, *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie* 2/1975, pp. 223–238.

67 On Masaryk’s analysis of German titanism, see also FLORIAN RUTTNER, *Pangermanismus. Edvard Beneš und die Kritik des Nationalsozialismus*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2019, pp. 51–69.

68 ALFONS SÖLLNER (ed.), *Zur Archäologie der Demokratie in Deutschland*, Vol. I: *Analysen von politischen Emigranten im amerikanischen Geheimdienst 1943–1945*, Frankfurt am Main 1986; RAFFAELE LAUDANI (ed.), *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany. The Frankfurt School Contribution to the War Effort*, Princeton 2013.

Conclusion

Of course, it is hard to find conclusive words for such a variegated life as Doppler's, that left many threads unfinished. The study aimed to show how Doppler's position on the margins of academia and as a political scholar influenced his life and his academic productivity, and how, in different stages of his life and under different conditions, Doppler coped with this situation. Perhaps one might say that in many respects this position fostered his intellectual productivity, often making him sharpen his wits against the counter-current of the mainstream and an adverse society. As his interventions at the 8th International Congress of Philosophy showed, his position gave him a certain amount of freedom to express his thoughts without any reservations and in a quite polemical manner. In his dealings with bureaucracy, Doppler proved that he knew how to use his position in between different national groups to his advantage. Also, his attempt to get in touch with other scholars who were critical of the academic establishment, like the members of the Historická skupina, must be seen as one of Doppler's strategies to cope with this situation.

However, these speculations and the idea of Doppler's heightened intellectual productivity due to his position on the margins of academia should not lead to a glorification of this situation. While in some respects this situation helped his intellectual development, better integration into academia, a higher position in the academic hierarchy might have been more beneficial for Doppler personally, as he could have brought his talents to better use than being a front-line soldier.

One might raise the question whether Doppler's position on the margins of academia is simply a result of the fact that he was killed in action while still rather young (34 years). Some remarks in his obituaries point in that direction – although one ought to approach statements in obituaries with caution; *de mortuis nihil nisi bene*. In his obituary in the *Čechoslávák*, a weekly newspaper published in British exile in Czech, Doppler's death was considered “a big loss not only for the German-speaking part of the Czechoslovak emigration, but also for the whole young academic generation in Czechoslovakia.”⁶⁹ And indeed, his academic career gained traction while he was in exile. But simply conjecturing that this development would continue in the future and predicting for Doppler a constant climb on the academic career ladder

69 N. N., In memoriam dr. J. Doppler, *Čechoslávák. Nezávislý týdeník* 49–50/1944, p. 7.

ignores two factors. Firstly, this would not do justice to Doppler's role and self-perception as a political scholar, who always had a critical approach towards society and always put this critique first and his academic career second. The fact that he considered acts that promoted his career as "opportunism," as acts which might be necessary but one should not be proud of, underscores this point.

Secondly, this question ignores the fact that Doppler's academic success in exile was the result of the exceptional situation of exile, where all normal academic mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion were suspended or at least deeply shaken. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine that Doppler, who had been expelled from the Communist Party and who had considered himself for a time a Trotskyite (even writing a statement in this sense in an official police file) and later openly supported Masaryk's ideas, would have had a bright academic future in post-1948 Czechoslovakia.

In the end, in a sense it was exactly Doppler's stance as political scholar, one who takes his theoretical positions seriously and does not see them isolated from his social practice, that motivated him to volunteer for the army. As one obituary states, "Doppler was one of the first who shortly after the outbreak of the war enrolled in the Czechoslovak army, in order not only to avow themselves to their citizenship, but also to Masaryk's idea of the state."⁷⁰

70 Ibid.