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Johan Ernst Gunnerus as a University Reformer of the Enlightenment

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Abstract

In 1771 J.E. Gunnerus outlined a reform of the University of Copenhagen. The reform plan was commissioned by J.F. Struensee who at the time was the ruler of Denmark and Norway and was part of a wide reform movement aiming at a thorough modernization of the Danish states. The article summarizes parts of the university reform project and discusses them in the context of Enlightenment philosophical thinking on the nature of scientific knowledge. One by-product of the university reform proposal was a projected university in Norway. The reform proposals came to a standstill when Struensee was overthrown in 1772.

Key words:

J.E. Gunnerus, J.F.Struensee, Nordic Enlightenment, University reform.

Introduction

In the summer of 1771 Bishop Johan Ernst Gunnerus in Trondhjem received an order from the King summoning him to Copenhagen as

soon as the duties of his diocese would allow him. The letter, signed by the King's cabinet secretary, Johann Friedrich Struensee, announced that further instructions would be given him upon his arrival in the capital.¹ Gunnerus arrived in Denmark in September and was received by Struensee, who was no longer a cabinet secretary. Two months earlier, he had been elevated to a Count and given the title of a Cabinet Minister. In this position, Struensee was the *de facto* ruler of the country in the mentally unstable king Christian 7's name. Struensee instructed Gunnerus that it was the King's will to proceed to a thorough reform of the University of Copenhagen, and that Gunnerus had been chosen to prepare the plans for it. Gunnerus accepted the commission and received further written instructions from Struensee on 1 October.² With the assistance of a young philologist and student of Theology, Johan Henrik Tauber (1743-1816), whom he had chosen to be his secretary, Gunnerus used the following weeks to draw up a comprehensive plan for university reform which he delivered to Struensee in person on 17 December.³

The proposal would come to nothing, however. One month later, 17 January 1772, Struensee was overthrown in a palace revolt, imprisoned, and later sentenced to death. On 28 April he was beheaded on a heath outside Copenhagen before tens of thousands of onlookers. Meanwhile, Gunnerus was politely thanked by the new regime for his assistance, but had to go back to Trondhjem empty-handed. The project for a new university in Norway, which Gunnerus had added to his plans, was laid aside together with the rest of his proposals. The new government sought to reverse the many reforms initiated during Struensee's hectic time in power, and return to the old order. This also applied to the university.

The actual contents of Gunnerus' reform plans for the University of Copenhagen have never been studied in detail, and only excerpts of the plans have been published (Nyerup 1805: 385-95). Ole B. Thomsen has so far given the fullest account of the project, but only as a preamble to his thorough analysis of the subsequent reform of the university that actually was carried out in 1788 (Thomsen 1975). In her contribution to the 500-year history of the University of Copenhagen, Birgit Løgstrup briefly treats Gunnerus' reform proposal as one of many attempts made by the Danish government to modernize the university during the

Enlightenment, from the first half of the 18th century up to 1788 (Løgstrup 1991).

In contrast, Gunnerus' plans for a Norwegian university have been given a comprehensive treatment by Norwegian historians (Nielsen 1911, 1914). In a long tradition of nationalistic history-writing, Gunnerus' university project was hailed as a pioneering effort for Norwegian cultural, and subsequent political, independence (Monrad 1861, Sars 1891, Midbøe 1960). In recent years, Gunnerus' Norwegian university plans have again caught the attention of Norwegian historians, as part of a reappraisal of the Norwegian Enlightenment (Storsveen 1997, Nielsen & Supphellen 2005, Andersen, Brenna et al. 2009). The paradoxical situation remains, however, that the by-product coming out of Gunnerus' mission has been more thoroughly studied than its primary part, and, consequently, not in its full context.

The assignment given to Gunnerus to make plans for a university reform would suddenly take him near the centre of some of the most dramatic events in Danish history through all times. The rise and fall of Struensee, the court physician who became the King's confidant and the Queen's lover, and who was the absolute ruler of Denmark for some hectic months before his catastrophic end, have never ceased to fascinate historians as well as a public hungry for romantic drama drawn from reality.⁴ One of the questions to be addressed is, consequently, how it could be that Gunnerus – the respected bishop and theologian, philosopher and natural historian – was drawn into this turmoil, – and also, as a corollary question, how could it be that he got out of it seemingly without any stain on his reputation?

Even if Gunnerus' university reform never came to realization, they are nevertheless interesting in the context of the European university during the Enlightenment. The importance of universities in the Enlightenment period has been a question of debate among historians. Whereas an earlier commonly held view was that the important scientific and philosophical developments of this period mostly took place outside of the universities and in opposition to their dogmatic conservatism, more recent research has pointed to the fact that, especially in Northern Europe, the 18th century universities in many countries emerged as centres of enlightened Philosophy, Law and Natural Sciences (Gascoigne 1998). Attention has particularly been drawn to the German states, where the new-

founded universities of Halle and Göttingen represented models of a reformed university, able to assume the role of Enlightenment beacons, even if the university reforms of the 18th century often have been eclipsed by the celebrated renewal of the German university institution which was to come in the following century (McClelland 1980). In this context, the plans for a reform of the University of Copenhagen as part of Struensee's ambitious plans for the reshaping of the Danish state and the Danish society according to Enlightened principles, deserve a further look. What were the aims of the reforms, what was assumed to be the university's future role and status in an Enlightenment 'ideal state', and to what extent could the Wolffian philosopher and conservative theologian Gunnerus and the radical, French-inspired agnostic Struensee come to agreement on questions like these?⁵

The final reform proposals emerging from Gunnerus' mission are very broad in scale and scope. In the present context, only parts of the reform will be given an in-depth analysis. Focus will be on the highly unconventional organization of the university that Gunnerus proposed – with four faculties: one for Theology, one for Law, one for History, and a large Faculty of Philosophy. As we shall see, this organization (or, more properly, reorganization) of the university reflects Gunnerus' view of the different character of the various parts of the universe of knowledge, and also his view of how the university should be turned into an institution for the training of experts in the various branches of knowledge, with the specialized *doctor's* degree as its prime concern.

Three Physicians in Search of a Bishop

University reform had been on the agenda of the Copenhagen court several months before Gunnerus was called down from Trondhjem. Through a cabinet order of 4 January 1771 the King instructed the university *consistorium* to come up with a proposal for a new organization of their institution.⁶ By that time, the King's private chambers, where the 20-year old Christian 7 was working side by side with Struensee (at the time 32), had become the epicentre of an intensive reform movement shaking the Danish states.

Struensee and Christian 7 first met in 1768, when Struensee was appointed personal physician to the teen-ager King. Winning the King's complete confidence – as well as the Queen's affection –

Struensee made a rapid career to the summit of the state, and now he was inspiring the King to use his absolute power in a forceful drive for promoting progress. Together, the King and Struensee were drawing up reform plans aiming not only at a thorough reorganization of the state apparatus, but more widely, at a fundamental change of the societal order in all parts of the Danish monarchy. Their reforms were in line with the ideas of the European Enlightenment, tending towards the radical principles of the French *philosophes*, whom they both admired. One of the first grand-scale reforms stemming from the tandem team was – on 4 September 1770 – the announcement of full freedom of speech and print, and the abolition of all censorship in the King's lands. Such legislation was without precedent in Europe, and it earned Christian 7 the compliments of Voltaire himself. This reform was followed by a large number of others, leaving practically no part of society or the state apparatus untouched. During the year and a half to follow, some 2,000 orders were issued at an accelerating pace from the King's cabinet, where Struensee was soon to be working alone (Hansen 1916-23). King Christian's mental condition was deteriorating, and he was gradually reduced to the role of signing whatever document Struensee laid before him. From the summer of 1771 it was arranged so that the King's signature would no longer be necessary. Henceforward, Struensee exerted himself the unlimited powers entrusted to the King by the Grace of God, and under the Danish Constitution – *Kongeloven* - of 1665.

An initiative for a reform of the university, an important and costly state institution, could not come as a surprise under these circumstances, and even less so, as a number of the myriad of pamphlets published under the newly-won freedom of press revealed widespread discontent with the university and the way it functioned (Thomsen 1975: 478-506). However, when the professors on the university *consistorium* duly produced their answer to the King's order, in a report of 23 March 1771, they had only few changes to propose.⁷ The professors themselves obviously regarded the university as a sound and well-functioning corporation. This was in no way sufficient for Struensee, who pressed for a thorough reorganization of the university. In the following months, alternative plans for proceeding with university reform were discussed in the King's cabinet and among Struensee's aides. A plan to put up a committee of four members was considered, but dismissed in favour

of giving the task of drawing up the plans for university reform to one man, bishop Gunnerus.

Why was Gunnerus given this assignment? In his memoirs, his assistant J. H. Tauber cites Gunnerus as explaining that this had been decided already during the reign of Christian 7's father. When Gunnerus in 1758 left Denmark to become a bishop in Norway, Frederik 5 had said to him that he would one day ask him to come back to Copenhagen to help bringing the university in a better shape. A note to this effect must have been found in the Royal archives, Gunnerus suggested (Tauber 1922: 123).⁸ This explanation seems ill-founded. By 1771, all the noble grandees who had been Frederik 5's privy councillors had been removed. The Privy Council itself had been dissolved in December 1770, as part of Struensee's policy of centralizing power to the King's cabinet. Gunnerus' former mighty patron, Count A.G. Moltke, once Frederik 5's closest advisor, had been evicted from court at the same time. In any case, neither Christian 7, who resented his father's patronizing councillors, nor Struensee, who had had them removed, could have felt inclined to consult the men of the previous regime.

When Gunnerus – and Tauber – would insist on such an explanation, it has to be understood in the context of what followed after Struensee's fall. Struensee's months in power were not to be seen as a period of positive enlightened reform. On the contrary, Struensee's fall was met with large popular demonstrations of joy. Those who had been the usurper's friends were commonly regarded as corrupt traitors, and, what was worse, as immoral and godless. The many reform projects were dismissed, either for being tyrannous, impious and harmful, or as impracticable fosters of the fallen tyrant's sickish brain. Those who had been in favour under the Struensee regime therefore had every reason to emphasize their connections back to the reign of Frederik 5.

Consequently, every use of source material dating from after Struensee's fall should be cautious. Any one who had been close to Struensee would find it in his interest to disassociate himself from the fallen usurper, atheist and libertine, and to diminish his own role in Struensee's frenetic reformatory regime. On the other hand, Struensee's fall from power produced in itself valuable source material. Interrogated by the commission put up to investigate the alleged crimes of Struensee and his associates, Struensee's successor as court physician, Professor Christian Johan Berger (1724-1789),

explained that it was he, in fact, who had advised Struensee to call upon Gunnerus to make plans for the university reform (Petersen 1891: 395).

Berger says he had never met Gunnerus personally before, but states as the reasons for his proposal the bishop's qualifications as "a native of the country, a competent and famous man, well-known all over Europe". He also gave an additional reason to call upon the bishop of Trondhjem: Secretly, Berger saw it as an advantage that it would take Gunnerus a long time to arrive, as he hoped that "the exaggerated fervour of reform would by then have slowed down" (Petersen 1891: 396). The latter statement can hardly be taken at face value. During the interrogation, Berger did his best to downplay his role in Struensee's reforms and to assure that he had distanced himself from him by the time Struensee had made himself a Cabinet Minister and assumed absolute power.

Christian Berger had, in fact, taken quite an active part in court life during Struensee's time in power, and also in Struensee's administration. Already an obstetrician of renown and the Director of the capital's Maternity Hospital as well as Professor of Obstetrics at the University of Copenhagen, Berger was called upon to assist Queen Caroline Mathilde at her first, difficult childbirth in 1768, the year before Struensee came into her life. It was on the Queen's own wish, Berger insisted, that he was appointed court physician in June 1770. Before that time, however, Berger had already come close to Struensee, who not only chose him as his successor as a court physician, but also frequently sought his advice on administrative questions. Berger admits that on his daily visits to his patients at the Royal Palace, he regularly met Struensee in his office, where he "occasionally ... listened to the discourses which at that time were in abundance" (Petersen 1891: 412). His role was undoubtedly more important than that of a passive listener. Struensee chose Berger to carry out the reorganization of the health services and the poverty relief of Copenhagen which should be undertaken with great speed.

Appointed by Struensee Director of the reorganized Royal Frederik Hospital, and medical director of several other social institutions in Copenhagen, Berger by 1771 had become the country's chief public health administrator. In his statement at the inquiry, Berger cites with pride the role he had played in these positions. Berger felt he had lived up to the expectations as

responsible for reforms carried out according to the best rational, scientific and humanistic principles of the time.

Critics of the Struensee regime have painted a very different picture of Berger. They accused Berger of having been Struensee's close friend and confidant, his *âme damnée*; the dictator's willing instrument for carrying out the most sinister of his projects. (The expression *âme damnée* seems originally to stem from Joachim Wasserschlebe (Wasserschlebe, J (s.a): cf. Petersen 1891:340.) The usual expediency of Struensee's reforms – as well as the lack of respect for corporate privileges and the absence of deference to rank and tradition, and the complete disregard of human considerations for long-serving officials with which they regularly were carried out – also applied to the reforms of the medical institutions. This had earned Berger many enemies. However, the worst doubts about his conduct and character stemmed from the treatment of the Crown Prince. The Queen and Struensee had decided that the heir to the throne should be given an education most strictly adhering to the principles of J. J. Rousseau, and had given Berger the responsibility for overseeing it. Rumours spread that this application of fashionable pedagogy was, in fact, only the cover for a secret plan for taking the Prince's life.

Christian Berger was not the only one to have given Struensee advice on the university reform question during the early summer of 1771. The drafted instruction to a committee to prepare a comprehensive university reform was written by Georg Christian Oeder (1728-1791). Oeder had also authored a memorandum to Struensee outlining the principles on which such a reform should be based.⁹ The physician, botanist and economist Oeder had been brought into the discussions of the university's future organization by Struensee in March 1771.¹⁰ Struensee had decided that the Royal Botanical Garden together with the Royal Natural Museum should be transferred to the university. Oeder was asked to come up with a solution for how the university could fund the running costs as well as the salaries of the directors of the two institutions, which hitherto had been covered by the King's Treasury. The university *consistorium* had declared itself unable to find any money for this.

Oeder had himself been the director of the Botanical Gardens since 1754, but he was now picked by Struensee for higher assignments. In the last days of May 1771, Struensee organized a new *Finantscollegium* as a super-ministry responsible for overseeing

the total revenues and expenditures of the state, as well as the economic policy in all its aspects. In this combined ministry of finance, industry, agriculture and trade, Oeder was appointed head of the Norwegian chamber. Oeder knew Norway well. For his work on the *Flora Danica* project – the giant atlas of all plants growing the Danish King’s land which was commenced at Oeder’s initiative in 1752 – he had stayed for long periods in Norway. In his ministry position he was given the responsibility for the development of the Norwegian economy. Norway was commonly believed to possess great riches of natural resources of ore and minerals, plants, fish, animals and arable land that had not yet been exploited. In Struensee’s plans for a renewal of the economic strength of the Danish states, the development of the Norwegian economy would play an important role.

Unlike Struensee and Berger, Oeder was very well acquainted with Gunnerus.¹¹ The two botanists had been in frequent contact both during Oeder’s stay in Norway and afterwards. However, Gunnerus’ name was not on the list of the four persons Oeder suggested as members of a university reform commission, and who all resided in Copenhagen. On the other hand, Gunnerus’ old friend from Trondhjem and his co-founder of the Royal Norwegian Society of Science and Letters, Peter Frederik Suhm, who now lived in the capital, was among the men in whom “*ausgebreitete Einsichte in das Reich der Wissenschaften, und Geschmack mit Redlichkeit vereinigt sind*”, and whom Oeder had found qualified to be members of the committee. The Royal Norwegian Society in Trondhjem, of which Oeder himself was a prominent member, represented precisely the new way of organizing the sciences and taking them into use for the development of the country, which Oeder advocated in his memoranda to Struensee on university reforms (Andersen, Brenna et al. 2009).

Struensee had engaged himself actively in the preparation of the university reform project before Gunnerus’ arrival, and he seems to have shown great interest in the matter. Struensee was known to be a man of few words, but when he received Gunnerus at the Hirschholm Palace in September 1771, the minister surprisingly engaged in lengthy and friendly conversations about the university reform plans, as Gunnerus afterwards told Tauber. Moreover, Struensee produced a written plan for a university reform which already had been drawn up, and handed it over to the Bishop. In fact, in the written

instruction Gunnerus was specifically asked by Struensee to consider whether a university reform could be carried out according to the principles laid down in this plan.

It is impossible to say for certain who had authored the plan. The document was later returned to Struensee by Gunnerus as an appendix to his own report, and it is still kept in Struensee's cabinet archive in the Danish Rigsarkiv. It is not signed and bears no date. According to Tauber, Gunnerus believed that it had been drawn up by Oeder and Berger.¹² It seems, however, that the plan had been produced very close to Struensee himself. The handwriting of the document is that of a clerk working for Struensee in the Royal cabinet.¹³ This makes it likely that Berger had taken a larger part in drafting it, than Oeder. In the summer of 1771, when Oeder was chained to a heavy workload in the Finantscollegium, Berger saw Struensee every day at the Hirschholm Palace, north of Copenhagen, where the royal couple and Struensee had taken up residence, and where their *ménage à trois* was surrounded by only a small court entourage. The Queen was pregnant, and Berger as her physician had come to stay at Hirschholm to prepare for her imminent lying-in.¹⁴

Without going further into the details of court life at Hirschholm, it is fair to



Professor Johan Ernst Gunnerus in front of his books. University Library, NTNU Trondheim.

conclude that the plan that was handed over to Gunnerus must be regarded as the outcome of discussions that had taken place between Oeder, Berger and Struensee before the Bishop's arrival. The plan contained elements that corresponded with the three men's respective priorities: Oeder stressed the necessity of establishing Natural Sciences and Economics at the university, as a prerequisite for the economic development of the Danish lands. Berger's particular interest was in a reform of the university's functions in medical education, following up the reorganization of the hospital institutions in which he was deeply engaged, whereas Struensee's own overarching priority at the time was that of reducing state expenditures.

Struensee had taken over the responsibility for a Danish state in a very weak financial position. Armed neutrality during the Seven Years' War had drained the King's Treasury, and the state was heavily indebted. For Struensee, it was a matter of urgency to gain control of public expenditures and to have them reduced, and, in the longer perspective, to modernize the country's economy and increase its productivity, so that fiscal revenues could be increased without strangling the population. When Struensee defended himself at the inquiry after his fall, he insisted that the urgency of his many reform projects was not the outcome of his own tyrannical instincts, but was a necessity dictated by the state's miserable economic situation. Immediate action had to be taken in order to reform state institutions over a broad range, as well as to induce fundamental change of economic policy, if national bankruptcy should be avoided.

The University of Copenhagen, although richly endowed, had increasingly become a burden to the Treasury, - without contributing much to the necessary modernization of the country. For Struensee, it was of pivotal importance that the administration of the university's funds be reorganized so that the university itself could shoulder its own expenditures, and also be able to take on new responsibilities. If such a reform of the university finances was not foreseeable, Struensee informed Gunnerus at their first interview, it would be of no use to proceed further with the plans.

Plans for a profound reform of the university had been thought out by the three men in Copenhagen, led by Struensee, who was acting as the absolute King of God's Grace, and who had unhesitatingly proceeded to radical reforms of every other part of the state apparatus. Nevertheless, for the university reform, Struensee –

on Berger's advice, and most certainly with Oeder's approval – turned to the Bishop of Trondhjem to come all the way to Copenhagen to assist them.

It would be highly unlikely that Struensee – under the pressure of urgency that he felt so strongly – had found it as an advantage that the late arrival of Gunnerus would slow down the process. He must have had other reasons to opt for Gunnerus to be the one to carry out his plans concerning the university.

As we have seen, Berger later cited as his first reason to call upon Gunnerus, that he was “a native of the country”. Struensee, Oeder and Berger were all born in German states (Berger though of Danish parents). The domination of Germans placed in important state positions was openly resented in Denmark, - without this being an obstacle for Struensee (and, in this respect, neither for his predecessors, the German-born counts that had surrounded Frederik 5) to proceed with ambitious reform plans to be carried out by Germans. The second and third reasons cited by Berger for Gunnerus' calling were that he was “famous, well-known all over Europe”. Gunnerus had taught Philosophy and Natural Law in Jena, and later he scintillated as a teacher at the University of Copenhagen – lecturing on Theology, Natural Law and Philosophy – before he embarked on a completely new career as a botanist and natural historian in Trondhjem, beside his episcopal duties. Gunnerus' philosophical and scientific writings were well-known and respected. Thus, Bishop Gunnerus was in the possession of the one thing that the three men in Copenhagen could not muster: the unquestionable authority of a scholar, and, particularly, the authority of a theologian and a philosopher. The three physicians Berger, Oeder and Struensee all held Doctor's degrees in medicine (Oeder from Göttingen, Struensee from Halle, Berger from Copenhagen) – nevertheless, they called for Gunnerus, *doctor theologiae* (Copenhagen) and *magister philosophiae* (Jena), to carry out their much-wanted university reform.

The university, wrote Oeder in his proposal, should be made into a *Pflanzschule gemeinnütziger Kenntnisse* – “a nursery for generally useful knowledge”. This would be the common goal of the four reformers: Struensee, Berger, Oeder and Gunnerus. In general, “useful knowledge” would be the motto of the academics of the Enlightenment. In the Royal Norwegian Society in Trondhjem, Bishop Gunnerus had brought together the branches of knowledge

that could be subsumed under this wide heading. Unlike other scientific societies of his time, however, Gunnerus had also included Theology in the programme of the Norwegian Society. When the three physicians sought Gunnerus' advice on university reform, they were conscious that Gunnerus shared their understanding of sciences and their use in society, and also, that Gunnerus would be able to carry the reform process further on, into the Faculty of Theology. Finally, Gunnerus could add to the reform process something which the other three men needed for pushing them through: his academic reputation.

In his final report to Struensee, Gunnerus himself stressed that the reformed university had to be given a "correct philosophical and thoroughly coherent organization" (*eine recht philosophische und genau zusammenhängende Einrichtung*). This would imply that in the ongoing process of reforming the state apparatus, the university had to be given a special treatment. The university was not an ordinary state agency, but enjoyed a particular status. The university not only belonged to the state, but also to the realm of Philosophy and Sciences, where authority would have another basis than in the world of politics. The absolute power of God's Grace, and of the written Constitution, did not suffice in the world of learning. Struensee and his advisors accepted this. They aimed at a university reform that would command respect and would be lasting – and, therefore, they called upon Gunnerus, and his unquestionable academic authority, to ensure that it would be so.

The omnipotent cabinet minister Struensee had left it open for Gunnerus to declare himself satisfied or not with the plan that had been drafted in the King's cabinet awaiting the Bishop's arrival. Tauber writes in his memoirs that the reading of the "court plan" for university reform left both him and his principal dismayed. They found it "either a weak and kernless, or a plan- and brainless" project, whose only aim it was to save money for the state (Tauber 1922 p. 125). Tauber omits to mention that Gunnerus himself, in his report to Struensee – formally addressed to the King – had written that he found this plan to be "in almost all essential parts very good and well suited to obtain the most praiseworthy goals of Your Majesty" (*fast in allen wesentlichen Stücken sehr gut und beqvem zur Erreichung der ruhmwürdigsten Absicht Ihro Majestetens*, Gunnerus 1771a).

The plan that Gunnerus submitted for the reorganization differed on important points from the “court plan”, but the Bishop’s words were not just paying lip-service to Struensee. The similarities between the two documents are no less important than the differences. The plans that eventually came out of Gunnerus’ mission as a university reformer, must therefore be seen as the outcome of a process in which three Doctors of Medicine – one of them at the time the acting absolute ruler of Denmark – and the Bishop, Magister and Doctor of Theology J. E. Gunnerus had all taken part.

Reorganizing the Universe of Knowledge

Gunnerus’ plan for a reform of the University of Copenhagen “was not particularly radical”, Ole B. Thomsen comments (Thomsen 1975: 484). It is difficult to agree with this assessment. The plan that Struensee handed over to Gunnerus aimed at a total transformation of the university, its organization and finances, its curriculum and its role in society. The plan was hardly less radical – though considerably less brutal in the treatment of the existing staff - when Gunnerus returned it to Struensee with his own amendments and proposals included. However, Gunnerus had turned a plan for contraction and reduction of staff into a plan for expansion (Gunnerus 1771a-e).

The University of Copenhagen had for more than two hundred years primarily served as a school training future pastors for the Lutheran state church, with the Faculty of Theology as the dominant of its four faculties (of Philosophy, Law, Medicine and Theology). Struensee’s plan would turn this upside down: The Faculty of Theology would be maintained as a school for the training of pastors, but only as an adjacent and separate part of the university, and with its teaching staff reduced by one half.

The reform would be more than a change of the educational programme. The proposed new organization of the university reflected a complete reassessment of the university’s philosophical and scientific basis. The reformed university, according to Struensee’s plan, would consist of only two faculties (or *orders*): The Faculty of Theology, and the Philosophical Faculty. The Philosophical Faculty would comprise eight sub-sections for Philology, “speculative Philosophy”, Physics, Political Science and Economics, Mathematics, History, Law and Medicine. This

organization would with perfect clarity demonstrate that Theology did not belong to the unity of knowledge that could be grouped under the common denomination of “Philosophy”. The rationale behind the dichotomization would be this: Knowledge in Theology – and, consequently, the authority that theologians could legitimately exert on that basis – was in principle of another sort than that of the other branches of knowledge. “Reason” and “faith” were two different things. Faculties were in this context not seen primarily as administrative bodies, but as formal boundaries of jurisdiction. Theology would, consequently, have no jurisdiction over any of the other fields of knowledge represented in the university, and vice versa.

The Medieval University of Copenhagen had been reorganized after the Lutheran Reformation of 1536 strictly according to Philipp Melanchthon’s prescriptions for the Protestant university.¹⁵ The training of pastors was its foremost aim, and the basis of its intellectual authority was the synthesis of Lutheran Orthodoxy and Aristotelian Philosophy that Melanchthon had authorized. The Holy Scripture was the sole basis of theological truth, as Luther insisted, but Aristotelian scholasticism – revised by Melanchthon – was called upon to develop a theological system, and to provide the future pastors with the necessary tools for explaining and defending the faith. Conforming to the organization of knowledge under the rule of Theology, the university was organized under the leadership of the Faculty of Theology. The “lower” faculty – the Arts faculty (the Faculty of Philosophy) – would provide students with propedeutic teaching in the fields that were regarded as necessary for proceeding to the “higher” faculties – beside the Faculty of Theology, there were also small faculties of Law and Medicine. The curriculum of the Philosophical Faculty was dominated by Classic Languages, Hebrew, Metaphysics and Aristotelian Logic, - with some Mathematics added to this. As a matter of course, the Faculty of Theology had the authority both to prescribe what could be taught at the university, and the power to regulate the teaching of the other faculties.

The schema of four faculties under Theology’s leadership, with Lutheran Orthodoxy and Aristotelian scholastic philosophy as its bases and its limitations, dominated the Northern European Protestant university well into the Enlightenment. With the foundation of the Halle University in 1694, however, this order was challenged. On the advice of Christian Thomasius the Elector

Friedrich 3 of Brandenburg (who was to become the first Prussian King Friedrich 1) established a university where the Faculty of Law would aspire to an equal status as that of the Theological Faculty, and derive its authority from sources of knowledge independent of Theology, namely Natural Law, which was drawn from human reason, and Civil Law, which had to be studied historically (Hammerstein 1972, 1985; Hochstrasser 2000).

The model for a reformed university that Halle represented was soon to be copied elsewhere; particularly when the Hanoverian government organized the new university in Göttingen (formally founded 1737). With renewed curricula and renewed organization, these universities stood out in contrast to the scholastic clerical image of the old university, and were able to attract new categories of students. At these universities students from the nobility and the aspiring wealthy middle class would enrol in order to qualify themselves for a career in the service of the state or a position at court (McClelland 1980). Advertising new “tasteful” pedagogy in contrast to the “pedantry” of the old-fashioned university, and granting their students wide freedom, Göttingen and Halle – and soon more German universities that copied their success – would invite their students to follow lectures and seminars in useful and fashionable disciplines like Political Science, Economics and empirical Natural Sciences, where Latin was replaced by the vernacular as teaching language – but they would also offer revised Classical studies, freed of antiquated clerical pedantry.¹⁶

The reformed university would open up for a renewal of the theological disciplines, liberated from the tight bounds of Orthodoxy, with the critical philological Biblical scholarship of J.S. Semler in Halle and J.D. Michaëlis in Göttingen as prominent examples. In Halle, Christian Wolff taught his philosophical synthesis of scientific knowledge and Christian faith. When Wolff first was expelled from Halle in 1723, as his philosophical teaching was unacceptable in the eyes of the Pietists of the Faculty of Theology, and 17 years later brought back and reinstated as an academic “star” teacher with a record salary, it was a clear demonstration of what had happened (Clark 2006: 283-84). Theological correctness was henceforward subordinated to other goals of the university, not least its financial goal: attracting students willing to pay for its teaching. By the mid-18th century, Göttingen, as the foremost reform university, had reached a level of combined academic excellence and financial

success that equals that of Harvard University at the beginning of the 21st.

To Struensee, Berger and Oeder, the dichotomy between “belief” and “reason” would have been evident, and neither theological orthodoxy nor Aristotelian scholasticism should in their view be allowed to obscure empirical knowledge of Nature. The Faculty of Theology had to be dethroned and its jurisdiction restricted to its own field of knowledge, and nothing more. The three physicians had given only two concessions to Theology’s traditional supremacy in their plan: Firstly, whereas all faculties and all professors should be of equal rank (and only seniority should decide the internal order among the teachers), on ceremonial occasions the Theological Faculty would take precedence. Secondly, the *professor primarius* of the Theological Faculty would *ex officio* be the university’s vice-chancellor, and as such *primus inter pares* of the professorial corps as well as the government’s man overseeing the university on its behalf.¹⁷

The double position of vice-chancellor and *professor primarius* of Theology was offered to Gunnerus by Struensee, and he willingly accepted it. What would Gunnerus think of the status the Theological Faculty would be given in the reformed university he was designated to be heading?

Gunnerus accepted the equal rank of all faculties. Theology could no longer aspire to dominate the others. But Gunnerus made his own plan for reorganizing the faculties. The university should not have two faculties, but four: One for Theology, one for History, one for Law, and one large Philosophical Faculty with 8 subsections, as in Struensee’s plan. If Struensee’s plan for two faculties was radical, Gunnerus’ plan for four faculties was no less original. In his final report to Struensee, Gunnerus gave this argument for it:

To include all orders in the theologian and philosophical, seems to me, after a rigorous philosophical critique, not be fully adequate. Philosophy should either be taken pro modo cognoscendi, when it is a faculty of philosophical Erkenntnis, or pro certa disciplina, when it is a science of clear general concepts. In the first case, also theology must be called philosophy. In the second case, history and jurisprudence (*juris prudentia positiva*) cannot be included under the concept of philosophy, while one cannot in these

fields reason from general, clear concepts of the things, or from the nature of the thing, but [in these disciplines] *facta* decide, or *positiva* and *arbitraria* mainly form the basis. It is evident that also in these fields, one must philosophize. However, this should not be taken into consideration, for so must the theologian also do. To distinguish theology from philosophy on the ground that the first concerns the divine and the second the earthly, cannot be done, because philosophy (e.g. in the natural theology etc) also treats divine matters. (Gunnerus 1771c: fol. 1-2)

The Bishop concludes his discussion on this point with a pragmatic comment: Im übrigen hindert nicht die Willkürlichkeit der Zeichen und Wörter, oder die eine oder die andere Hypothese, dass verschiedene Wissenschaften, die damit umgehen, zur eigentlichen Philosophie gerechnet werden können. (Gunnerus 1771c: fol. 2-3) However, Gunnerus insisted on his organizational principle: If Theology did not belong to the Philosophical faculty, then History and Positive Law would absolutely not do so, either. Natural Law, on the other hand, was a philosophical discipline which should be separated from Positive Law and be part of the Philosophical Faculty.

In these seemingly subtle distinctions, Gunnerus reveals himself as an adherent of Christian Wolff's systematic organization of human knowledge. Wolff insisted that there was a clear distinction between Will and Reason. Man-made positive law – as well as man-made history – were voluntary and could therefore not be deduced from principles of reason (Hochstrasser 2000: 167-68, 170). Like Wolff, Gunnerus, on the other hand, regarded Theology – the Science of the Divine – as part of the “philosophical” unity of knowledge that could be deduced from general principles. Reason and faith were not in opposition to each other. The reconciliation of the two was, in fact, the very basis of Wolff's grand synthesis of Christendom and Science. In the revealed Christendom as well as in Nature - God's creation - the will of God made it possible to reach *Erkenntnis* through deduction from general – and, in the last instance, divine – principles. But as man had a free will to make his own positive laws – and make his own history – even in opposition to God's will, these fields of knowledge had to be treated as purely empirical.

In his memoirs, Tauber comments that Gunnerus' way of reasoning often was a challenge to follow – with its systematic organization of groups and subgroups of arguments (also in this part, Gunnerus was a true disciple of Wolff), – and his reasons for proposing 4 instead of 2 faculties may not have been more easily accessible to Struensee than it is to the present-day reader. On the other hand, this may not have affected Struensee - or Berger and Oeder - much, as long as the Bishop was prepared to proceed to the other parts of the reform plans. However, for Gunnerus, the subgrouping of disciplines in faculties – and sub-sections of the Philosophical Faculty – was more than a mere question of administration. In his plan, he insisted that each faculty – and each section – should administer its own doctor's degree. The doctor's degree would be the only degree to be obtained at the reformed university, and – Gunnerus argued – it was of the greatest importance that this was a specialized degree, representing a coherent order of knowledge.

The ancient degrees of *magister* and *baccalaureus* with their demands of knowledge over a broad range of disciplines should be abolished, argued Gunnerus. The aim of the remaining doctor's degree should be to form scholars who had reached “excellence” (*brillierende Stärke*) in their specialized fields. Whereas Gunnerus' plan otherwise exclusively mentions – and praises - the (reformed) German Protestant university as the model to emulate, on this particular point he cites Oxford and Cambridge as praiseworthy examples. The reference to the two English universities may surprise. Generally, these venerable institutions tended to be disregarded as old-fashioned by the men of the Enlightenment. However, Gunnerus points out that in Oxford and Cambridge, students are allowed to specialize in one single field, which he thought also should be allowed in Copenhagen. The *polymathie* practised at the University of Copenhagen was a hinder for scientific excellence, Gunnerus argued, and should therefore be reduced or outright abolished.¹⁸ Each faculty should function as what we today in an anachronistic terminology would call a “graduate school”, and, consequently, with Gunnerus' Wolffian insistence on system, they had to represent, each and one of them, their respective branch of knowledge – a discipline, in modernistic terms – with its own systematic order.

In this way, the reformed University of Copenhagen should become an institution for the training of specialized scholars. It

should be an institution organized for the purpose of pursuing scientific “excellence”, founded on original scholarly work. Doctor’s degrees should be conferred solely upon a doctorand’s written thesis – and only after a thorough examination of his knowledge of his particular speciality, and a public defence of his thesis in a disputation.¹⁹ The only examinations in which the university professors would take part would be doctoral examinations and disputations. The professors’ sole jurisdiction exerted by them as public examiners would thus be over the academic quality of a doctoral candidate. And a doctor’s degree would be the minimum qualification for a university teacher.²⁰

All other university examinations should be abolished, Gunnerus argued, – both the *examen artium* required for entrance to the university, and also the intermediary *examen philosophicum* covering the curriculum of the Philosophical Faculty. The first of these measures was in accordance with Struensee’s plans. The entrance examination took too much time, both for the students and the professors. Struensee – and the two physicians advising him – insisted that the students’ time at the university should be shortened. Teaching should be organized so that no student should need more than three years to have his full programme covered. Shortening the student’s time spent at the university was then – as to-day – a means for economizing with public money as well as that of the students. However, Gunnerus added a new argument for the abolition of the examinations: Examinations mostly encouraged the mere repetition of what the teachers had said in their lectures, or of what was to be read in compendia. This practice was contrary to what Gunnerus established as the pedagogic goal of the university: The students should learn to think independently, to make up their own opinions on the questions they were studying. Encouragement of independent reasoning should be the guideline for the teaching methods of the university.²¹

Gunnerus went further than Struensee’s plans in proposing a radical reduction of university examinations. Not only should the ancient *baccalaureus* and *magister* degrees be abolished. The university was also no longer to hold final examinations for future pastors or civil servants. Those students wanting to make a career in the Church or in the service of the state should instead subject themselves to special state examinations, where bishops and senior clergymen, - or, respectively, judges and practicing jurists - would

decide whether the candidates were qualified for such jobs. For these measures, Gunnerus was again citing the German model as worthy of copying. In Göttingen there were no final examinations for students, but the Hanoverian government organized a *Staatsexamen* for entry to the administration.

Bishop Gunnerus had succeeded in taking the parsimonious plan submitted to him by Struensee, and turning it into an instrument for making the University of Copenhagen a centre for specialized, scholarly studies in a range of disciplines, with the *doctor's* degree as the only public examination for which the university and its professors would be responsible. The doctor's degrees should be based on original written theses. The three physicians who had called for Gunnerus' assistance in the reform of the university, would have had no reason to complain. What Gunnerus proposed, was to make the degree of Doctor of Medicine the model for all faculties – and sub-faculties – of the university.²²

A series of further reforms were proposed by Gunnerus to reshape the University of Copenhagen according to the Göttingen model. The antiquated Latin disputations should be suppressed, as also Oeder and Struensee had proposed. Instead, the professors should write articles to be published in the university's annual yearbook, together with doctoral theses. The university should henceforward be focused on the production of new knowledge - as a *Pflanzschule für gemeinnützige Kenntnisse* – and no longer on the reproduction of traditional learning.

For the Faculty of Theology, Gunnerus suggested a thorough reshuffle. All the professors in office should be dismissed, among them Peder Holm, the Norwegian-born professor whose orthodox teaching and alleged abuse of power epitomized the conservatism and backwardness of the University of Copenhagen. Instead, Gunnerus would appoint new teachers who were familiar with the modern, critical Biblical studies in Germany. Indeed, Gunnerus wanted himself to take up Biblical studies and instructed his secretary Tauber to get hold of the new literature in the field.

The Reluctant Reformer?

Even if the general principles for the reorganization of the university proposed by Gunnerus were in accordance with Struensee's wishes, the Minister had less reason to be pleased with the financial side of

the Bishop's project. Struensee had wanted the Royal Treasury to be relieved of the contributions that it had been forced to make to the university in order to assure extra professorships, and he also wanted to compel the university to take over the financing of the Botanical Gardens and Natural Cabinet. In order to ensure this, in his own reform plan Struensee had foreseen the reduction of the teaching staff to 17 professors and 2 adjuncts. A number of professors, including the senior professors in Theology, Law and Philology, were to be dismissed without pension. Such a personnel policy was in line with what Struensee had enforced elsewhere, and which had earned him many enemies.

Gunnerus tried to soften the reform proposal and advocated that well-served academics could not be treated in such a ruthless manner. However, even Gunnerus advised that no less than 8 professors should be forced to leave and be replaced by others – among them the Bishop of Seeland who hitherto was *ex officio* a professor of Theology. However, the university should pay substantial pensions to those who could not be given suitable alternative employment, Gunnerus insisted. He also argued for a substantial increase of the academic staff, compared to Struensee's proposal. In all, the reformed university after Gunnerus' proposals would count 21 professors, plus the vice-chancellor, as well as 3 adjuncts and one anatomic prosector. Gunnerus also rejected Struensee's proposal that all professors should receive a fixed and equal salary. Instead, he insisted that professors be remunerated according to qualifications and seniority. In this, Gunnerus could be seen as defending the values and interests of the academic community, against the radical reformer Struensee.

However, Gunnerus also tried to align to Struensee's instruction that the university hereafter should shoulder its own expenses. On the basis of seemingly complicated calculations Gunnerus concluded that the university would be able to pay most of the teaching staff's salaries out of its own money, if the university would be allowed to reallocate funds originally destined for student scholarships, into paying teachers' remunerations. However, the university would still need an extra infusion of money from the Royal Treasury to make Gunnerus' ideal university a reality. He calculated this to about 2,200 *Rigsdaler* annually, equalling two professor's salaries. Also, the vice-chancellor's salary would have to be paid by the King.

Gunnerus had objected to Struensee's radical plan for placing the university funds under the control of the Royal Treasury. Like Struensee, Gunnerus proposed that the various lands that belonged to the University, and which hitherto had been separated into separate *corpora* divided between the *professores ordinarii*, should be merged into one common fund. However, Gunnerus suggested that this fund should be placed under the control of the *consistorium*. Thus, the economic autonomy of the university as a corporation would be maintained, even if each professor no longer would be free to keep his *corpus* as his private domain.

Struensee's dismay with Gunnerus' failure to comply with the overall financial goal for the university reform may explain why the Minister received Gunnerus' final report without much enthusiasm. According to his assistant Tauber, the Bishop was dismissed with a curt "*Nun so!*" when he explained the economic aspect of his plan (Tauber 1922: 127). Neither was Struensee more enthused by Gunnerus' proposal for a new university in Norway, which Gunnerus had added outside of his formal commission.

The question of a Norwegian university had been taken up in Copenhagen before Gunnerus' arrival. In his report to Struensee, Oeder had included the possibility of a university in Norway. It would be demanding to keep up two universities instead of one, but "the Norwegians are pressing for a university in Norway", and "the competitive zeal of two rivalling universities would be as useful as the Norwegian demand is justified", Oeder concluded (Oeder 1771b).

For Gunnerus, the Norwegian university had long been an overall goal, Brita Brenna argues in the recent history of the Royal Norwegian Society for Sciences and Letters (Andersen, Brenna et al. 2009: 16-19). For the men of the Enlightenment in Norway, a university had acquired the status of a *sine qua non*. Without a university of its own, Norway, although a country richly endowed with natural resources, would remain doomed to continued backwardness, poverty and foreign domination. Gunnerus' plans for a small Norwegian university clearly point to the economic utility of a university. "To-day any useful machinery for the benefit of the country must be purchased at great cost in Denmark, Sweden, Hamburg or England, even if only a windmill shall be built, which would certainly not be necessary when *mathesos* – and especially the

applicata – were taught regularly at a university”, Gunnerus argued (Gunnerus 1771d).

The ambitions for the Norwegian university were obviously to make Norway self-sufficient with academically trained expertise. Complete - albeit small - faculties of Theology, Law and Medicine should be put up to train the country's own clergymen, jurists and physicians. However, Gunnerus also included a plan for transferring the Royal Society for Sciences and Letters to the new university, which he proposed should be placed in Christianssand. Christianssand on the South Coast was chosen because it was close to Denmark. Young men from Jutland could just as easily come to Christianssand to study as to Copenhagen, Gunnerus argued, and this would help assuring a sufficient number of students. The transfer of the Trondhjem society would be organized swiftly, by removing the bishop of Christianssand and giving the diocese to Gunnerus instead. Gunnerus would then take the Society with him, and also become the first vice-chancellor and *professor theologiæ* of the Norwegian university. In his letter to the King he explained that he would prefer this position to the vice-chancellorship in Copenhagen.

Gunnerus came back from his final audience with Struensee in a depressed mood. The Minister had not been persuaded by his arguments for a Norwegian university, nor, we may assume, by Gunnerus' insistence that the Norwegians could finance their university on their own without burdening the Royal Treasury. This time, Struensee had lived up to his reputation as a man of few words. “*Recht so*” had been his only response to Gunnerus' Norwegian university plans (Tauber 1922: 127).

After this last interview Gunnerus foresaw the imminent downfall of the arrogant statesman, Tauber writes in his memoir, and one month later this was an accomplished fact. Struensee's enemies had conjured to have him and the Queen arrested, and a new regime came to power with the help of the King's stepmother and his half-brother Prince Frederik.

Together with Struensee, a number of his associates, as well as his servants and even his coachman, were arrested and put in jail or held under guard in their homes. “We two shall probably also be arrested”, Gunnerus half-jokingly commented to Tauber when he heard the news (Tauber 1922: 129-30). It was only halfway a joke. Christian Berger was one of those who had been arrested in the night of 17 January 1772 and thrown into a cell in the dungeons of the

Copenhagen fortress, where he was held under the strictest surveillance. Facing charges of conspiring with Struensee against the Crown Prince's life, Berger had reason to fear the worst.

Berger had been closely involved in Gunnerus' work on the university reforms. In fact, Gunnerus had left the part of the reform plans that concerned the Faculty of Medicine entirely to Berger. Berger submitted his own separate report to Struensee, in which he outlined a grand-scale reform of the medical education and also commented on the various reforms proposals from Gunnerus.²³ His comments were supportive of Gunnerus' views, and Berger could also foresee a major role for himself in the future reorganized University of Copenhagen. When Gunnerus expressed that he would prefer to stay in Norway, he mentioned Berger as a possible choice as vice-chancellor at the University of Copenhagen. (Gunnerus 1771e).

Berger's writings on the university reforms were thoroughly scrutinized by the inquiry commission put up to investigate the alleged crimes of Struensee and his followers. However, neither these documents nor other evidence could seriously incriminate Berger, who eventually was released from prison in the summer of 1772 and exiled to Jutland, dismissed from his professorship and deprived of his former honours. His only crime was that of having taken part in Struensee's reform efforts under the King's orders. Berger was never recalled to Copenhagen, but in 1774 he was appointed professor in Obstetrics at the Kiel University, which had then come under Danish sovereignty, and two years later he was further rehabilitated when he was conferred the honorary title of *Etatsraad* (Petersen 1891: 419-20).

The third physician urging university reforms, Georg Christian Oeder, had not been arrested, but he lost his job in the Finantscollegium, which now was dissolved, and was appointed to an administrative position in the King's German Duchy of Oldenburg. This was equal to a forced exile, since Oldenburg was to pass under foreign rule in 1773 as part of the exchange agreement that at the same time transferred the Holstein-Gottorp Duchy to Denmark. The exile lasted his lifetime. When Oeder offered his renewed services to the Danish government, he got an unfriendly answer from the new Cabinet Minister in power, Ove Høegh Guldberg, explaining that the King of Denmark saw no need to recur to "foreign princes' subjects" for the administration of his state (Halem 1793). Much as a reaction

to the German influence under Struensee, the new regime passed legislation in 1776 that reserved state offices in the Danish monarchy to those born in the King's lands.

In contrast, Gunnerus did not feel the wrath of the new regime. From the letters he wrote to Carl von Linné after Struensee's downfall, we can see that Gunnerus was anxious that he also would be identified as one of the fallen tyrant's accomplices, and he took great pains to approach the new people in power in order to reassure his position. Even to the Crown Prince Frederik – aged 4 – Gunnerus made a visit to pay his homage. When he was granted an audience with the Dowager Queen and the Prince Frederik, Gunnerus was very amicably received, however. They both assured him of their great interest in the Royal Norwegian Society. Gunnerus also got the impression that his plans for a university reform had won wide support in court circles. The Dowager Queen even expressed her sympathy with the plans for a Norwegian university. She “wholeheartedly wished for the Norwegian citizens that their demand for a university would be fulfilled”, Gunnerus quotes in the letter to Linné. (Amundsen 1976:146). This was even more surprising, as Gunnerus had to admit that the resistance towards his project for a Norwegian university was widespread among the Danes (Amundsen 1976: 144).

Despite these expressions of royal favour, Gunnerus understood that his time in Copenhagen was over. The university reform process had come to a standstill, and it was more than uncertain whether it would be pursued by the new regime. “Even though I have many friends here, there are also many who want me to go back to Norway”, he wrote to Linné in April of 1772, and “most professors prefer that the old order will continue”(Amundsen 1976:144) Indeed, the professors who had feared for their positions at the university had been most eager to celebrate Struensee's downfall. Professor Holm's house was so lavishly illuminated the day after Struensee's arrest that it looked as if it were on fire, Tauber recalls in his memoirs (Tauber 1922:131).

His mission ended, Gunnerus was given a generous allowance by the Treasury, covering his travel expenditures. He also got the government's promise of a promotion to the diocese of Christiania at the first vacancy, before he returned to Trondheim in the summer of 1772. Blessing his fate, Gunnerus, in a letter to Linné, compared himself to those who had fared worse: “I go home now, with peace in

mind and with pleasure, and even with honour. The others who made plans, even under order, did not fare that well, but then they had forgotten the virtues of the honest and righteous man and let themselves be blinded by honour or money” (Amundsen 1976: 146). He added that he himself had been carefully hesitant to accept the positions of vice-chancellor and *professor primarius* of Theology that had been offered him by the former regime, whose imminent downfall he had long foreseen (Amundsen 1976: 140).

Writing to Linné, Gunnerus seems to have “forgotten” that he himself had asked Struensee as late as November 1771 for the Minister’s permission to proceed to a further thorough reform of the schooling system after the university reforms had been implemented (Hansen 1923: 667), and that he also in his final report in December had asked to be allowed to go ahead reforming the Royal Danish Academy of Science and Letters. Following up on Gunnerus’ explanation to Linné, Tauber, in his memoirs, depicts his former principal as a reluctant university reformer. Only half-willingly Gunnerus had taken on the assignment given him by Struensee, and mainly in order to prevent that some “foolhardy German” would have been called to Copenhagen to rush through harmful university reforms (Tauber 1922: 125). From the available original sources, Gunnerus emerges not as a reluctant reformer, however, but, on the contrary, as a person willingly assuming positions of power, determined to go through with a complete shaking-up of the educational system on all levels, and of all scientific institutions of the monarchy, in alliance with Struensee and without any obligation to ask the advice of those concerned.

It is true that Gunnerus specifically stated to Struensee that he would prefer the vice-chancellorship of a Norwegian university to that of the University of Copenhagen. Apart from demonstrating his unquestionably authentic Norwegian patriotism, Gunnerus would have been conscientious that such a position in Christianssand would have made him less vulnerable to possible court upheavals in Copenhagen. It is also worth mentioning that in Copenhagen Gunnerus would have been *primus inter pares* among professors not automatically willing to accept neither his authority, nor the legitimacy of his reform proposals. In Christianssand, on the other hand, he would have become the undisputable *primus sine paribus*.

The reasons for the new regime’s graceful treatment of the Norwegian bishop could be found in political considerations. The

new people in power in Copenhagen took care to reassure the Norwegian population that their interests would be no less well taken care of under the new regime than they had been under Struensee. The Norwegians' loyalty was of great importance to the new political leadership, and even more so as the King Gustav 3 of Sweden at this time hardly concealed his plans for a Swedish annexation of Norway, - hopefully with the help of dissatisfied Norwegians (Nielsen 1877). War with Sweden could break out any time. Under these circumstances, the Dowager Queen and her son had every reason to make efforts to keep the Norwegians happy. Bishop Gunnerus was wished farewell with full honours, and Prince Frederik accepted the *praesidium* of the Royal Norwegian Society and granted it an annual sum of money out of his own purse.

Back in Trondhjem, Bishop Gunnerus duly returned the royal favours. In a speech to the Society on Prince Frederik's birthday 12 October 1772 he thundered against the ungodly excesses of Struensee and his immoral entourage and exhorted his fellow countrymen to show obedience and loyalty to those who had overthrown the usurper and thereby rescued the King and his realm from the danger of complete destruction (Gunnerus 1772, cf. Sars 1891: 215).

More surprising than the new regime's politically motivated amicable attitude towards Bishop Gunnerus is the fact that even the professors of the University of Copenhagen found it appropriate to thank him politely for the work he had done during his stay in the capital. "I enjoy the satisfaction that the public realizes that I have comported myself as a righteous person during these critical times, so that even the professors (almost all) are pleased with my behaviour", Gunnerus wrote to Linné six weeks after Struensee's downfall (Amundsen 1976:140). This seems to be an adequate observation. Later the same year, Professor Christen Hee praised Gunnerus for having "during his stay here in town with such distinguished application sought to support our Academy [i.e. university]" (Løgstrup 1991: 375). The mathematician Hee was not among those teachers Gunnerus urged be removed, and the university professors may have found reason to thank Gunnerus at least for defending their salaries as well as the university's economic autonomy. It is, however, unclear to what extent the real content of Struensee's reform plans was known to his Copenhagen colleagues.

His reports were submitted confidentially to Struensee and were never published.

Despite the honourable termination of his mission to Copenhagen, Gunnerus returned to Trondhjem as a changed person. He was no longer the old, cheerful Gunnerus as his friends and family had used to know him, his nephew wrote to Linné after his death (Amundsen 1976:148). Gunnerus died a little more than a year after his return to Norway, at the age of 55.

Gunnerus' University Reform in Context

Gunnerus' reform proposals for the University of Copenhagen were far ahead of their time. A university regarded chiefly as a training-ground for experts holding doctors' degrees based on research work they had carried out themselves, not only antedates and surpasses the much-celebrated Humboldtian reforms connected to the establishment of the new Prussian university in Berlin in 1809-10. Even compared to the European university in the mid-19th century, Gunnerus' visions would seem radical. Indeed, only in the late 20th century the Norwegian universities can be said to have adopted the Bishop's views of what their purpose should be.

In Gunnerus' visions, the various scientific disciplines not only should be granted freedom from Theology. They should be given full autonomy as independent branches of knowledge, and only be subjected to their own internal jurisdiction. In their radicalism, his visions were similar to the thoughts of Immanuel Kant in his famous essay *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, published in 1798. As Tim Hochstrasser has pointed out, the first versions of Kant's texts to this book were written as early as the 1770s, - and thus simultaneously with Gunnerus - at a time when Kant was engaged in the question of university reform in the Kingdom of Prussia, urged by Friedrich 2's minister von Zedlitz to deliver his thoughts on this subject (Hochstrasser 2000: 189-97).

Kant foresaw a university where the "lower" Faculty of Philosophy was liberated from the "higher" faculties of Theology, Law and Medicine. The latter faculties would remain bound to the obligation of serving the purposes of the State and the Church. The Philosophical faculty, on the other hand, would only be subject to the authority of science itself, - and thus in the position to judge on the teaching of the other faculties. The rank order inside the university

would in this way be turned upside down. Knowledge in the purest sense was superior to any knowledge subjected to religious, practical or political needs and constraints.

Gunnerus was in no way ready to draw the far-ranging conclusions to which his speculations had led Kant. Kant's Copernican turn-around of philosophy which placed the individual subject and its *a priori* categories of understanding in the centre, was far from Gunnerus' theocentric philosophy.

In the university reforms of the early 19th century, the German idealist philosophy was the common platform for writers like Fichte, Steffens and Schleiermacher, and also for Wilhelm von Humboldt. These thoughts, which were behind the foundation of the Berlin University, came close to a realization of Kant's visions for a university with the Philosophical Faculty as the highest authority, subject only to the authority of Science itself.

The Norwegian university was finally founded in 1811. A successful, well-organized political campaign carried out by the Norwegians had forced King Frederik 6 to give up his resistance to what he feared would become a separatist institution, harmful to the unity of his monarchy (Collett 2009a). The plans for the new university were drawn up in Copenhagen in 1812.²⁴ These plans were not drafted according to the German idealist pattern, and they had little in common with those plans that were simultaneously discussed in Berlin, and which chiefly consisted in the restoration of the well-established German university organization, injected with new philosophical ideas (Andresen 2004: 54-74, cf. Collett 2009b).

The plans for the Norwegian university from 1812 had important traits in common with Gunnerus' reform plans from 1772. In fact, the plans for the Norwegian university can be regarded as being the outcome of debates on how the University of Copenhagen could be reformed, which had been going on more or less continuously since Gunnerus' time. In Norway, at the new university, the reforms that had proven impossible to carry out in Copenhagen could hopefully be implemented (Collett 2009b: 99-102). In the plans for the Norwegian university we recognize the disciplinary specialization in a range of equally-ranked faculties or orders that we find in Gunnerus' and Struensee's reform proposals. Likewise, the final examinations are removed from the university. External examiners would judge on the candidates' suitability for jobs in the Church or the state. Natural sciences and political and

economic sciences are given prominent positions at the university, and also technological studies.

However, the 1812 university plans differ in decisive ways from Gunnerus' plans 40 years earlier. The commission planning the Norwegian university would not give up neither the entrance examination (*examen artium*) nor the "second examination" (*examen philosophicum*) that Gunnerus had wanted to suppress. The Norwegian university should not be the training-ground for specialized scientific experts, trained in one or a few disciplines, but should aim at the education of citizens – based on a broad, encyclopaedic introduction to the various branches of knowledge. In this respect, the Philosophical Faculty would constitute the core of the university, but mainly through the general education that it offered and not through its disciplinary specialization.

Behind the idea of a broad encyclopaedic education we can identify the influence of the Norwegian philosopher and university professor Niels Treschow (1751-1833), who was member of the planning commission of 1812. Though inspired by Platonist thoughts, Treschow never really transcended the Wolffian philosophical system, C. H. Koch argues (Koch 2003: 121ff). However, the pedagogic conclusions he drew from this basis went in the opposite direction of those of Gunnerus. In line with the ideas of J. H. Pestalozzi, Treschow favoured a general education for the responsible citizen, giving a broad outlook on the branches of knowledge and also on the real living world. In Berlin, in contrast, the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt went in the direction of an ideal of *Bildung* on a neo-humanistic basis, through the concentration on Classics, History and Philosophy as instruments for a contemplative cultivation of the mind.

The time had not yet come for J. E. Gunnerus' model for university education, with the highly qualified specialist, trained through his own research in a separate discipline, as the ideal candidate, leaving the university with his doctoral diploma in his pocket.

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Oeder 1771a: *Project eines Commissorii aus dem Cabinet*

Oeder 1771b: *Einige kurzgefasste Gedanken, die Universität betreffend*

Gunnerus submitted 5 different documents to Struensee at the end of his assignment:

Gunnerus 1771a: A covering letter *Alleruntertänigste Erklärung* (addressed to His Majesty the King, signed and dated 16.12. 1771), followed by

Gunnerus 1771b: *Der Hauptplan* (45 folio pages),

Gunnerus 1771c: *Der raisonnierte Plan* (131 folio pages)

Gunnerus 1771d: *Alleruntertänigster Vorschlag und Plan zur Errichtung einer Universität in Norwegen* (27 folio pages)

Gunnerus 1771e: *An additional Pro memoria* which was addressed to Struensee and signed and dated 16.12. 1771.

(Gunnerus 1771b is a summary of the Copenhagen university reform plans, destined for publication. Gunnerus 1771c provides in addition Gunnerus' detailed argumentation.)

Hansen 1916-23 provides a complete enumerated register of the cabinet orders issued 1768-1772

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Notes

¹ Cabinet order of 6. July 1771 (Hansen No. 2142, Hansen 1923: 565.)

² Cabinet order of 1 Oct. 1771 (Hansen No. 2143, Hansen 1923: 566; also in Thomsen 1975 vol. 2: 482-83)

³ Tauber 1865, 1922 gives a comprehensive account of his work together with Gunnerus.

⁴ A whole library of books and countless articles have been written about Struensee and his fate, and a large number of novels, theatre plays, movies, and even an opera draw their material from his tragedy. (The opera *Livlægens Besøg* by the Danish composer Bo Holten was first performed in 2008; already in 1846 Romantic composer G. Meyerbeer's incidental music to his brother Michael Beer's drama *Struensee* was given its first performance.) During the last few years, Danish historians have published new major biographies of the three chief protagonists: Asser Amdisen: *Til nytte og fornøjelse. Johann Friedrich Struensee 1737-1772*, København 2002; Michael Bregnsbo: *Caroline Mathilde – magt og skæbne*, København 2007; Ulrik Langen: *Den afmægtige – en biografi om Christian 7*, København 2008. Among recent fictional writing, Per-Olov Enquist: *Livläkarens besök*, Stockholm 1999, has become an international bestselling novel and has been translated into many languages .

⁵ Struensee's philosophical and theological standpoints are analysed in a brilliant essay by Jens Glebe-Møller (Glebe-Møller 2007). For a discussion of Gunnerus' philosophical views in relation to Wolff, see Koch 2003: 78-85.

⁶ Cabinet order of 4.1.1771. (Hansen 1916: No.220) At this time, Christian 7 still took an active part in cabinet business, and the order is issued according to a hand-written instruction (in French) by the King to his then cabinet secretary Andreas Schumacher. (Hansen 1916: 215-16, cf. Thomsen 1975: 481-82.)

⁷ The original report written in Danish, together with a German translation, is in RA "Struensees kabinetsarkiv". Its contents are summarized in Thomsen 1975: 506-15.

⁸ The statement is reiterated by J.H. Tauber in a letter to Rasmus Nyerup 16.2.1805 (Daae 1861: 77.)

⁹ The two documents Oeder 1771 have no signature and no date. The handwriting of both has been identified as being that of Oeder's private secretary (Nielsen 1914: 451n), and the contents of the documents – including the detailed knowledge of Norwegian affairs which they reveal – leave no doubt that Oeder was their author. This is also confirmed by J.H. Tauber (Daae 1861: 77). It seems clear from the content that the documents are written after Oeder's appointment to the *Finantscollegium* (29 May 1771), but before the cabinet order to Gunnerus was issued (6 July 1771).

¹⁰ Cabinet order to Oeder to this effect was issued 15.3.1771 (Hansen 1916: 216-17.)

¹¹ Glebe-Møller speculates that Struensee might have met Gunnerus at the University of Halle, and that this may have led Struensee to follow Berger's advice and ask Gunnerus to come to Copenhagen. (Glebe-Møller 2007 p 42). Gunnerus came to Halle in 1742 and got to know Struensee's father, who was professor there at the time. However, J.F. Struensee was only 9 years old when Gunnerus left Halle in 1745. Gunnerus went on to Jena and stayed there until 1755, whereupon he returned to Denmark. J.F. Struensee was himself a student in Halle many years after Gunnerus had left. In a letter to Carl von Linné 11.4.1772 Gunnerus specifically states that he had spoken to Struensee only on two occasions, first, when he was received by Struensee at Hirschholm and got his instructions, and, secondly, when he submitted his report (Amundsen 1976: 144.)

¹² In a letter to R. Nyerup 16.5.1805 Tauber writes that "after all that Gunnerus was able to ask and conclude, *Finantsraad* Oeder should be author". (Daae 1861: 77.) In his memoirs Tauber writes more nuanced: "The Court project was rumoured to have *Arkhiater* [court physician] Berger and *Finantsraad* Oeder as its authors". (Tauber 1922: 124.)

¹³ The original document (RA, "Struensees kabinetsarkiv") is marked with pencil: "I F.Martinis Haand". Frederik Martini was employed at court as an accountant of the Queen's private treasury, but is seen to have been doing copying work for Struensee from July 1771. The first cabinet order to Gunnerus on 6.7.1771 is written in Martini's

hand. Martini was later appointed a registrar of the cabinet office (Hansen 1916, p. XIV). O.B. Thomsen mistakenly ascribes the document's handwriting to that of the surgeon Ferdinand Martini (Thomsen 1975: 481, note xx.)

¹⁴ Petersen 1891: 378-86. The cabinet order to Gunnerus was issued the day before the Princess Louise Augusta was born at Hirschholm 7. July 1771.

¹⁵ The history of the University of Copenhagen has been given a thorough treatment in Ellerhøj, Grane et al. 1979-2006. See also Norvin 1937-40; Slottved & Tamm 2009.

¹⁶ The expressions “*mit Geschmack*” and “*ohne Pedanterei*” are keywords in Pütter 1765, which was published for advertising this university's pedagogical and scholarly merits, and was later extended by Pütter himself and other authors, with new volumes appearing in 1788, 1820 and 1838

¹⁷ In his cabinet order to the University of Copenhagen 6.1.1771 the King had announced that after the resignation of the university patron, count Otto Thott, no new patron would be appointed. The university should henceforward be in direct correspondence with the Royal cabinet.

¹⁸ “*Die neuen doctores e.g. scientiarum pulchriorum, historiarum etc. sind eine natürliche und nothwendige folge der neuen Einrichtung der Ordnungen und Classen. Sonst wird der Plan übel zusammenhängen. Die Einrichtung ist also systematisch und philosophisch, und ich mache mich die Hofnung, dass sie unter anderen auch dazu dienen werde, der unter uns ziemlich ausschweifende Polymathie einige Grenzen zu setzen, und verschiedene unser Studierenden näher und stärker zu verbinden gewisse Wissenschaften besser zu ergründen, und darin eine recht brillierende Stärke zu bekommen, wie die Engländer, die in den Collegien in Oxfurt und Cantabrigde studieren, und sich oft nur um eine einige Haupt-Wissenschaft recht bekümmern, um darinne[n] eine mehr als gewöhnliche Stärke zu bekommen*” (Gunnerus 1771c fol. 79-80.)

¹⁹ Gunnerus let it remain optional for a doctorand to choose between a disputation *cum preside* or *sine preside*. In the latter case, the candidate would be solely responsible for the defence of his

dissertation (whereas the disputation in the first case would take place with the Dean of the faculty – or another professor - as *praeses*). This choice was in accordance with the regulations concerning the doctor's degree in the university *Fundats* of 1732. However, Gunnerus insisted that the candidate himself had to author a dissertation that he should defend – which in previous ages had not been mandatory, but had gradually become the norm; it was not formally demanded at the Copenhagen university until 1782 . (Matzen 1879, vol.2: 200ff ; cf. the discussion of the degree of *doctor philosophiae* in Clark 2006, ch. 6.)

²⁰ In order to qualify for teaching at the university, Gunnerus found it obligatory to have gone through a doctoral disputation *sine preside*.

²¹ Other pedagogical reforms in the plans, e.g. Gunnerus' insistence on the use of printed textbooks – after the Göttingen model – demand interest, but will not be further treated here.

²² By the 1770s, it was established in Copenhagen that a candidate for the degree of *doctor medicinae* had to defend a dissertation which he himself had authored, and a disputation *sine preside* was required of those who aspired to a teaching position. (Matzen 1879, vol 2: 220.)

²³ Petersen 1891 pp. 397-401 quotes from a PM to Struensee from Berger dated 21.11.1771, from a copy in the RA in Copenhagen. It seems the date might be wrong. Berger's PM is clearly written after Gunnerus had submitted his final reports in December 1772.

²⁴ The report from the planning commission (*Allerunderdanigst Forestilling fra Commissionen for det Norske Universitets Anlæg og Indretning*, 15.3.1812) is printed with appendices in Holst 1851: 187-246.

