gymnasien and for at least some of those youths who went on to the universities. The many proposals for reform at times overlapped or conflicted; satisfying the needs of both the “ballast” and future students of science and medicine within the Gymnasium appeared likely to dilute the ancient languages so seriously that they would not survive. Luring the “ballast” to higher Bürgerschulen or allowing the Realgymnasien to prepare pupils for medical studies involved the extension of privileges to young men whose social and educational backgrounds current professionals and civil servants did not believe qualified them for inclusion in the ranks of the Gebildeten; the same type of argument was used against allowing women to become physicians or upper-level teachers. Under Falk, Puttkamer, and Gossler, the Prussian Ministry of Education rejected a common foundation for all secondary schools as an improper way to deal with the “ballast”; it also refused to open the universities any further to Realgymnasium graduates, at first because of doubts about the value of a semiclasical education and concern for the status of physicians, later more because of the overcrowding of the professions. As long as these considerations continued to govern official policy, the tendency would be to make small adjustments in the Gymnasium curriculum rather than open the universities to Realgymnasium graduates, even if Gossler’s rejection of a comprehensive school meant he would make no effort to abolish the semiclasical schools. This dilution and diversification of the classical curriculum produced not only criticism from conservatives such as Lagarde and Treitschke, but also conflict with another vocal group of school reformers, those whom Helene Lange was echoing in her assertion that Gymnasium pupils were already dangerously overburdened with school work.

FOUR

THE OVERBURDENING OF GERMAN YOUTH

What are the results of the present-day school? Exhausted brain power, weak nerves, limited originality, paralysed initiative, dulled power of observing surrounding facts, idealism blunted under the feverish zeal of getting a position in the class.

Ellen Key

Nervousness is the characteristic feature of our time.

Dr. Paul Hasse

European culture in the fin-de-siècle was obsessed by fears of decadence, degeneration, and nervousness. In the post-Darwinian world, where the notion of the survival of the fittest was applied indiscriminately to all areas of human interaction, many people worried that the haste, crowding, and unsanitary conditions of life in modern cities would produce future generations less able to compete in the struggle for existence. Englishmen and Frenchmen worried about declining birthrates that would lead to German domination of Europe, while the German Kaiser popularized the notion of the “Yellow Peril” about to swamp Europe from the East.2 Fictional works such as Henrik Ibsen’s Ghosts and Emile Zola’s saga of the Rougon-Macquart explored themes of hereditary disease and decline; Herbert Spencer inveighed against social welfare policies designed to aid the weaker mem-

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bers of society at the expense of the stronger. Within the medical profession, widespread interest in mental illness and nervous disorders created the atmosphere in which Freud developed his theories.¹

Throughout western Europe, no institution received more attention as being the major source of deteriorating national health than did the classical secondary schools. To a certain extent, the schools were blamed for, or asked to cure, problems stemming from changing life-styles in society at large; but many critics clearly did see grave dangers of “overstressing,” “overpressure,” or “overburdening” in the combination of an excess of mental work with a neglect of physical exercise in the schools. In France, even before the powerful stimulus to fears of decline provided by the defeat of 1870, the poet Victor Laprade decried the “homicidal education” of the lycées and collèges, which he described as “a regimen entirely contrary to nature, which lowers the vital force and enervates the constitution of both the individual and the race subjected to it for too long.”² Jules Simon made similar charges in 1874, and members of the Paris Academy of Medicine even debated the issue in 1875.³ The Scandinavian countries produced two of the first large-scale investigations of the health of secondary school pupils: Niels Hertel’s studies in Copenhagen led to “truly a sad and startling result, quite enough to justify the complaints made about the health of our children”:⁴ Axel Key concluded from his work in Sweden that “the question of the load in the lower grades of our secondary schools is of crucial importance for our young generation and thus for our nation.”⁵ In England, concern with overpressure centered more on elementary than on secondary education, although the rigors of the latter were often cited as a reason why young girls with their constitutional infirmities should refrain from competing on an equal basis with boys. Yet even the English public schools, usually considered as the home of sport and fitness in the nineteenth century, came under attack in an early study of school hygiene that claimed, “If parents and teachers thought more of sound, healthy bodies, and less of encyclopaedic minds, we should have stronger intellects, finer characters, and less vice.”⁶ The Russian Gymnasium also aroused complaints in the late nineteenth century about “the daily overload of abstractions imposed on pupils, especially the younger ones.”⁷

Nowhere, however, did warnings about the dangers posed by the overburdening of secondary school pupils have a longer, or louder, history than in Germany, where the institutionalization of the originally emancipatory ideal of Bildung in the classical schools had led very quickly to charges that boys were being seriously overworked. In 1836, just two years after a Gymnasium Abitur had become a prerequisite for matriculation at the Prussian universities, Dr. C. S. Lorinser accused the classical schools of demanding too much of pupils in too many subjects, which meant that the goals of humanistic Bildung were not reached and “the body is subjected to an unnatural constraint that hinders physical development.” Many educators and physicians denied the accuracy of these charges, but King Friedrich Wilhelm III agreed with Lorinser and pressured Minister of Education von Altenstein into adopting the less stringent requirements of the curriculum of 1837.⁸ Re-

² Aberton, Education and the State in Tsarist Russia, p. 140; Snel, The Classroom and the Chancellery, pp. 194, 100.
³ C. S. Lorinser, Zum Schutz der Gesundheit in den Schulen (reprint ed.,
NEWED COMPLAINTS ABOUT OVERBURDenING AROSE BRIEFLy IN THE EARLY 1850s AND LED TO AN OFFICIAL DECREe IN WHICH TEACHERs WERE WARNED AGAINST ASSIGNING EXCESSIVE AMOUNTs OF HOMEWORK, A WARNING THAT WAS REPEATED IN RESPONSE TO NEW COMPLAINTs IN 1875. IN EXTENT AND DURATION, HOWEVER, THE WIDESPREAD AGITATION ABOUT OVERBURDENED GYMNASIUM PUPILs THAT BEGAN AROUND 1880 FAR SURPASSED ALL THAT HAD GONE BEFORE. ALTHOUGH SOME OF THE EVIDENCE ADVANCED TO DEMONSTRATE THE EXISTENCE OF OVERBURDENING WAS Vague OR FAULTy, THE FEARS AROISED BY THE APPARENT THREAT IT POSED TO THE NATIONAL HEALTH WERE GENUINE: AS ONE SKEPTIC COMMENTED AS EARLY AS 1883, "THESE COMPLAINTs ARE ALREADY TOO GENERAL AND TOO WIDESPREAD TO BE CALMED BY THE DISCOVERY OF FALLACIES IN THEM."20

THE FIRST BLOST OF THE TRUMPET IN THIS NEW CAMPAIGN WAS DELIVERED BY THE NATIONAL LIBERAL POLITICIAN JOHANNES MIQUEL, WHO SPOKE TO THE PRUSSIAN HOUSE OF DEPUTIES IN 1877 ABOUT THE "EXCESSIVE ACCUMULATION AND EXPANSION OF MATERIAL TAUGHT IN THE GYMNASIUM." OF GREATER INFLUENCE WAS A SPEECH BY DR. PAUL HASSE AT A CONVENTION OF THE DIRECTORS OF GERMANY'S MENTAL HOSPITALS IN 1880, WHICH REACHED A WIDE AUDIENCE THROUGH A SUMMARY PUBLISHED IN THE POPULAR PERIODICAL, DIE GARTENLAUBE. HASSE CHARGED THAT IN SOME CASES HE HAD TREATED, OVERBURDENING WITH SCHOOL WORK HAD PRODUCED MENTAL ILLNESS; IN ADDITION, HE INSISTED THAT "THE COLOSSAL SACRIFICE OF EFFORT AND TIME" THAT A GYMNASIUM EDUCATION DEMANDED GENERATED "FOR THE MOST PART QUITE SUPERFICIAL KNOWLEDGE." SHORTLY AFTER HASSE'S ADDRESS, EMIL HARTWICH, A DISTRICT JUDGE FROM DÜSSELDORF, GAVE ANOTHER BOOST TO THE FEARS ENGENDERED BY OVERBURDENING IN A SPEECH DELIVERED TO THE FOUNDRING MEETING OF THE CENTRAL ASSOCIATION FOR PHYSICAL FITNESS. HARTWICH BEQUEAHTED THE COMPLETE DOMINANCE OF INTELLECTUAL OVER PHYSICAL


*CENTRALBLATT,* 1873, PP. 619-641.

*NJ* 128 (1883): 264.

EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOLS; IN HIS VIEW, "ETERNAL WRITING AND READING" RESULTED IN "ANAEMIA, SCROFULA, CONSUMPTION, AND TUBERCULOSIS."11

IN THE WAKE OF THESE THREE ASSAULTS ON THE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE OF THE GYMNASIUM, PAMPHLETS AND ARTICLES DISCUSSING THE "OVERBURDENING QUESTION" BECAME SO NUMEROUS THAT THE CATHOLIC POLITICIAN AUGUST REICHENSPERGER REMARKED THAT KEEPING UP WITH THE LITERATURE COULD ITSELF CREATE OVERBURDENING.12 SEVERAL "SYMPTOMS" OF OVERBURDENING APPEARED MOST FREQUENTLY IN THESE WORKS. TOPPING THE LIST WAS THE HIGH PERCENTAGE OF ONE-YEAR VOLUNTEERS WHO WERE DECLARED UNFIT FOR MILITARY SERVICE WHEN THE TIME CAME FOR THEM TO ENLIST, A PERCENTAGE MUCH HIGHER THAN THAT FOR REGULAR CONSCRIPTS, WHICH WAS ITSELF DISTURBINGLY HIGH. HARTWICH MISTAKENLY CLAIMED THAT OVER 80 PERCENT OF THE VOLUNTEERS WERE UNFIT; IN FACT, BETWEEN 1877 AND 1881, ONLY 21,000 OUT OF 47,000, OR 45 PERCENT, OF THE VOLUNTEERS ACTUALLY SERVED THEIR TERM OF DUTY, COMPARED TO 62 PERCENT OF THREE-YEAR CONSCRIPTS.13 THE CRITICS ASSUMED THAT THESE FIGURES REPRESENTED ONLY THE DEBILITATING EFFECTS OF LONG YEARS SPENT IN STUFFY SCHOOL ROOMS; NO ONE ASKED IF BOYS WHOSE PARENTS COULD AFFORD TO SEND THEM TO A SECONDARY SCHOOL MIGHT NOT HAVE EASIER ACCESS TO PHYSICIANS WHO COULD CERTIFY ILLNESSES OR INFIRMITIES THAT WOULD FREE THEM FROM SERVING, AS HAPPENED WITH THOMAS MANN.14

ANOTHER PROOF ADDED TO SHOW THAT GYMNASIUM PUPILS SUFFERED PHYSICAL DAMAGE AS A RESULT OF THEIR SCHOOLING WAS 11 SB, XIII, 2, P. 180 (28 NOVEMBER 1877); PAUL HASSE, *DIE UEBEREBRÜDUNG UNSERER JUGEND* (BRAUNSCHWEIG, 1880), P. 36; IDEN., "SCHULE UND NERVOSITÄT"; EMIL HARTWICH, *WORAN WIR LEIDEN* (DÜSSELDORF, 1882), P. 12.

12 SB, XV, 11, P. 913 (26 FEBRUARY 1883).


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the high incidence of nearsightedness among them. The pioneer in studying the vision of German school children was Dr. Hermann "Eyes" Cohn of Breslau, who in 1867 published the results of his examinations of over 10,000 pupils. Cohn found that whereas only 5 percent of children in rural elementary schools were nearsighted, 32 percent in Gymnasien were; in the secondary schools, the percentage rose from class to class, so that half of the Primaner needed glasses. Cohn attacked neither the amount nor the type of material studied in the schools; he wanted only to improve the physical conditions under which boys did their studying, both at home and at school. In the more "nervous" atmosphere of the 1880s, however, others were not so circumspect: Hasse, for example, attributed the high incidence of nearsightedness to the "damaging effect of overburdening on the brain," while another physician saw it as the result not of bad lighting and improper desks, but of school instruction itself. Complicating the discussion of this issue was a debate within the medical profession over whether nearsightedness should be considered a disease or merely a healthy adaptation by the eye to its conditions of use. In any case, the fact that even 25 percent of the one-year volunteers who were fit for military service had poor vision sufficed for one university professor to label this "result" of overburdening "a national calamity."

Dr. Hasse's charges about the role of the schools in producing mental illness in its students found few supporters: when Minister of Education von Puttkamer asked the directors of Prussia's other mental hospitals if their experiences confirmed Hasse's assertions, most replied that this was not the case. Yet many observers, both physicians and laymen, believed that overburdening sometimes caused the ultimate disorder, suicide. A study of suicide as a "mass phenomenon of modern civilization," published in 1883, argued that although the suicide rate was rising in all civilized countries, the situation was worst in Germany, where there existed "the greatest divergence between the school and everyday life." Schoolboy suicides did occur with some regularity in these years, but the numbers involved were small and the rate did not exceed that for boys the same age who did not attend secondary schools. In Prussia, the numbers of suicides for the years from 1883 to 1890 were seventeen, fourteen, ten, eight, eighteen, eleven, twenty, and eleven; similar figures persisted until at least 1903. In many cases, the schools did not bear any direct responsibility: disappointment in love, quarrels with parents, and other causes often triggered the boys' actions. Yet the daily press, which often covered individual cases in great detail, did not make such fine distinctions: if a Gymnasiast took his life, it was described as "another schoolboy suicide." The frequency of about one suicide per month in Prussia throughout the 1880s kept the problem in the public eye; that most of the dead came from the "better families" disturbed the critics of this apparent degeneracy all the more. A few newspapers tended to blame the parents for the moral failings of their sons, some pointed to the general nervousness of modern life, but most directed sharp criticism at the secondary schools. Following a triple suicide in Berlin in 1889, the worst year for suicides, the Berliner Tageblatt editorial-

11 Hermann Cohn, Untersuchungen der Augen 10,060 Schülkinder (Leipzig, 1867), p. 23, 34-35. See the portrait of "Augen Cohn" by his son, Emil Ludwig, in the latter's Gifts of Life, chapter 1.
12 Hasse, Ueberbundung, p. 49; Dr. von Zehender, Ueber den Einfluss des Schulunterrichts auf Entstehung von Kurzsichtigkeit (Stuttgart, 1880), p. 8; Hubert Windearth, Kurzsichtigkeit und Schule (Berlin, 1890); Hegar, Spezialismus und allgemeine Bildung, p. 59.
13 SB, XIV:2, pp. 685-688 (13 December 1880).
14 Thomas G. Masaryk, Der Selbstmord als sociale Massenerscheinung der modernen Civilisation (Vienna, 1881), pp. v, 70. See also Hartwich, Woran wir leiden, p. 26.

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The campaign against overburdening received both its fullest expression and its greatest prestige in a speech that Wilhelm Preyer, professor of physiology at the University of Jena and a pioneer in the study of child psychology, delivered before the Scientists' and Physicians' Convention in 1887. Preyer rehearsed for this august assembly all the charges that others had raised about the damage done by the classical schools, adding that there was "much too much teaching and much too little exercise in the Gymnasia," a situation that promoted "obesity and nervousness." By this time, however, the conviction that, as one reformer put it, "overburdening [was] an established fact" had conquered most of those willing to believe in the guilt of the schools; Preyer's remarks, therefore, only confirmed previously held opinions. Unbelievers labeled his speech "a demagogic mockery of all scholarly method" and "a singular mixture of thoughts illogically strung together," giving the impression of "the greatest one-sidedness, obstinacy, and superficiality."

These attacks on Preyer epitomize much of the response to the charges about overburdening by Gymnasia teachers and directors. Many simply said that they had experienced no overburdening during their own school days or among their pupils; the fact that it was usually the better teachers from the better schools who affirmed this may have colored such perceptions. Oskar Jaeger of Cologne deflected the major thrust of the criticism of the excessive demands made on pupils by arguing on several occasions that it was not the classics that produced overburdening, as the reformers insisted, but the numerous less important subjects in the Gymnasia—modern languages, geography, science, drawing. A substantial number of the teachers who admitted that a problem existed placed...

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the blame for it on parents: boys who smoked and drank at home and attended parties and the theater at night could not be expected to do their homework as well and still maintain good health. Several educators argued that it was just the "ballast" who suffered from overburdening: boys who could not do the work demanded of them in a Gymnasium should be attending a higher Bürgerschule or learning a trade. However, no one ever attempted to establish a direct correlation between the socially inferior and the mentally overstrained at the classical schools; indeed, the demands for an easier Gymnasium may well have stemmed in part from fears by upper-class parents that their less intelligent sons would flunk out of the Gymnasium and be forced into less prestigious careers.

To the educational conservatives, easing requirements in the Gymnasium in order to lessen a spurious overburdening appeared as another step on the descent into superficiality initiated by the new curriculum of 1882. For those Germans convinced of the reality of overburdening, however, the fears it aroused made the need for urgent remedial action obvious. These fears went beyond the understandable concerns with the unpleasantness of nearsightedness, general unfitness, or suicide; even the threat to the national defense posed by the large numbers of unfit volunteers, the reserve officers of the future, was not the heart of the problem for most people. At its deepest level, the worries about overburdening formed part of the more comprehensive but less precise fears and pessimism of the fin-de-siècle, with its overwhelming sense of decline and degeneration. Social fears on the part of the upper classes did not play the dominant role in this aspect of the


"Die Gartenlaube (1890):229.

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 pessimism of the 1880s; more important was the belief, nurtured by vulgarized Darwinism, that modern civilization was putting demands on human capacities that would cause physical damage capable of being passed on to future generations. An article published in the Gardenlaube shortly before the school conference of 1890 exemplified this vague apprehension: "Our age suffers from nervous debility, the sickness of the nineteenth century, which results from the changing lifestyle brought about by the progress of our culture, which strains the mind and neglects the body. . . . The basis for this situation is laid in youth by a perverse education. The facts are indisputable: our youth lacks the lively disposition that characterized earlier generations."^{46}

What could be done to counteract this trend toward degeneracy? In most cases, identifying the causes of the excessive strain on pupils meant pointing out the cures. If classrooms were poorly lit, ventilated, and heated, or if boys sat on benches that hurt their posture, such conditions must be improved. With the advice of men such as Hermann Cohn and Rudolf Virchow, the German states accomplished much in this area in the late nineteenth century, building what fiscal conservatives often called "school palaces." As previously mentioned, however, most critics located the sources of overburdening in the curricula and teaching methods, not in the physical conditions of the schools. Noting the long hours that pupils spent in class and doing their homework, one anonymous author asked rhetorically, "What factory owner would the law allow to employ his young workers for so long?" The spreading practice of using specialists to teach each subject became a major target for these school reformers, who believed that it led to excessive homework assignments because no teacher had the pupil's entire load in view. Many reformers also joined the conservative Jaeger in condemning the variety of subjects that boys had to learn, a criticism even more applicable to
the Realgymnasien than to the Gymnasien. Their conclusion that a greater concentration on a few major subjects was needed ran directly counter to the "demands of the present" for less Latin and Greek and more time for sciences and modern languages in the Gymnasium; so did their desire for a reduction in classroom hours and homework to levels more commensurate with pupils' abilities.

Many reformers interested in easing the strain on German schoolboys asserted, as so many pupils did later in their memoirs, that the majority of secondary school teachers did not know how to teach. The reason for this was simple: no one ever taught them how. During most of the nineteenth century, the influence of pedagogical theorists such as Pestalozzi, Herbart, and Fröbel remained confined to the elementary schools; in 1873, Ludwig Wiese of the Prussian Ministry of Education lamented, "True pedagogical interest, the awareness that teaching is an art to be learned, appears to have diminished." 18

In the 1860s and 1870s, before the overcrowding of the teaching profession developed, the rapid expansion of the secondary schools made the "practice year" adopted in 1826—a few hours per week of teaching combined with pedagogical studies—into a farce by forcing most beginners to carry a full teaching load.

In the 1880s, however, a significant flowering of interest in better training for secondary school teachers coincided with the rising fears about overburdening. Friedrich Paulsen delivered his first lectures on pedagogics at the University of Berlin in 1877; by 1882, he attracted 268 students, a very large number at the time. In the 1880s also, the topics chosen by teachers for the essays published annually with the program of each secondary school began a marked swing away from

17 Die Grenzbote 49 (1890):467; SB, XIV:3, p. 926 (17 March 1882); Ludwig Kotelnmann, "Die heutige Jugend der höheren Lehranstalten mit Schularbeit überbürdet" (Hamburg, 1881), p. 22; Hasemann, Überburdung, p. 34; COIR 3 (1875):705.

18 Ibid., p. 706; Falch, Gedanken über eine Reform, p. 17; Wiese in Zentralblatt, 1874, p. 6.

The classical philology toward methods of instruction. Several periodicals were founded that advocated the adoption of various forms of Herbartianism for instruction in the secondary schools; their differences were less important than the interest in improved teaching that they exhibited. Two groups quarreled over where teacher training should take place: one group, led by Hermann Schiller of Giessen and Otto Frick of the Francke's Foundations in Halle, believed in small seminars attached to Gymnasien, whereas the other group, under the tutelage of Wilhelm Rein at the University of Jena, wanted this training integrated with the future teachers' scholarly pursuits at the university. 10

Most of these pedagogical reformers concentrated their criticism of existing conditions on instruction in foreign languages. In a seminal essay published in 1873, a Gymnasium teacher named Hermann Perthes argued against the deductive method of teaching Latin grammar to ten-year-old boys, advocating instead an inductive approach based on graded readers. Another influential pamphlet, published under a pseudonym in 1882 by Wilhelm Viétor, professor of English at Marburg, extended Perthes's thoughts a step further, blaming much of the problem of overburdening on the drilling of Latin grammar into young minds through the repetition of senseless written exercises and disconnected examples. Viétor asked, "Who will seriously deny that the fruits of such reading can
be little else than mental confusion, frivolity, absent-mindedness, superficiality, and lack of interest?” He believed that languages were best learned through speaking and reading, and that modern tongues should precede Latin in the Gymnasium; he was thus a supporter of a common foundation for all secondary schools. Another reformer calling for new teaching methods viewed the existing sequence of languages as the “most completely wrongheaded [sequence] conceivable from the psychological viewpoint”; a fourth said that the current teaching of Latin in Sexta produced “habituation to mechanical, unthinking mental exercise, minimal development of reason, complete neglect of the fantasy and the heart, overburdening of the memory, and—last not least—a deeply rooted aversion to Latin as the ultimate result.” As one of Viétor’s followers explained to an American audience, these men “made their first appearance as accusers. They would be heard far and wide, hence [they] used strong language.”

This movement to reform the traditional instruction in grammar received a powerful boost from no less a lover of classical antiquity than Heinrich Schliemann, the self-educated discoverer of Troy, who wrote:

Of the Greek grammar, I learned only the declensions and the verbs, and never lost my precious time in studying its rules; for as I saw that boys, after being troubled and tormented for eight years and more in schools with tedious rules of grammar, can nevertheless . . . [not] write a letter in ancient Greek without making hundreds of atrocious blunders, I thought the method pursued by the schoolmasters must be altogether wrong, and that a thorough knowledge of the Greek grammar could only be obtained by prac-

31 Hermann Perthes, Zur Reform des lateinischen Unterrichts auf Gymnasien und Realschulen (Berlin, 1876); Quoquse Tandem [Wilhelm Viétor], Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren (2d ed.; Berlin, 1886), p. 23.
32 Falch, Gedanken über eine Reform, p. 29; L. Viewerge, Das Einheitsgymnasium als psychologisches Problem behandelt (Danzig, 1887), p. 11; Leo Bahlsen, “New Methods of Teaching Modern Languages,” Teachers College Record 4 (1903): 172–173.
34 Preyer, Biologische Zeitfragen, pp. 23, 64.
speech on mental illness among schoolboys, the Philologists’ and Schoolmasters’ Convention devoted a session to the role of gymnastics in the schools for the first time in many years. Between 1880 and 1886, seven of the nine Prussian provinces that held triennial congresses of school directors had discussions of the same topic. In these years, several school reformers fought for the adoption of competitive sports on the model of the English public schools, but in general even those who saw a need for training the body as well as the mind preferred the traditional German gymnastics. The movement for improved physical education even attracted a number of educators who were skeptical of the existence of overburdening; as one defender of the Gymnasium said, “Just because little attention was paid to such things in the past, it does not follow that we should not trouble ourselves with them now.”

One of the leading figures in this movement for more physical activity in the schools was the National Liberal deputy Emil von Schenkendorff, an unlanded noble from Görlitz. With the support of the director of the local Gymnasium, Gustav Eitner, Schenkendorff helped make this school a model of what could be achieved in physical education, one that was displayed to the Philologists’ and Schoolmasters’ Convention held in Görlitz in 1889. In 1890, Schenkendorff instituted a survey of the facilities for athletics, inside and outside the schools, in all German towns with populations over 8,000, with the purpose of encouraging their expansion. The next year, he was instrumental in the founding of the Central Committee for the Furthering of Popular and Youth Games. Although Schenkendorff did hope to improve Germany’s military preparedness through physical fitness, after the turn of the century he resisted the efforts of others to turn physical education in the schools into premilitary drill.

Influenced by Scandinavian examples, Schenkendorff also advocated another remedy for the overburdening of pupils with mental work: the introduction of industrial arts, or handicrafts, into the schools. In the elementary schools, such instruction had the explicitly antipsychiatrist aim of inculcating the belief that working with one’s hands was an honorable occupation; even in the secondary schools, Schenkendorff hoped to break down the prejudices of the Gebildeten against “practicality.” For the secondary schools, however, he conceived of handicrafts primarily as a corrective for the one-sided education offered in the Gymnasium. The study of handicrafts, he believed, would lead to a more harmonious development of all faculties through training of the eye and hand and recuperation for the overworked brain. In 1881, Schenkendorff founded a Central Committee for Boys’ Handicrafts, which in 1886 became the German Association for Boys’ Handicraft Instruction. Yet in its early years this organization had little success in penetrating the secondary schools: in 1891, only nine secondary schools had shops.

Emil Hambach summarized the wishes of Germans upset by the overburdening of secondary school pupils when he

demanded, "Cultivation of the body and the feelings must regain equal status with that of the mind." The ideal of Bildung on which the Gymnasium was based had aimed at such a harmonious development of all the individual's talents, but in practice, as these critics pointed out, the classical schools of the 1880s suffered from a one-sidedness so serious that it threatened the national health. The remedies they proposed—better school buildings, fewer hours in class, less homework, delay or elimination of the ancient languages, better teaching methods, sports, and handicrafts—appear from today's perspective to be as disparate a conglomeration as the symptoms they cited to prove that pupils were overworked. Yet for contemporaries, the symptoms, causes, and cures did form a single constellation, as can be seen from the pages of the Zeitschrift für Schulgesundheitspflege, founded in 1888, which contain articles dealing with every aspect of the overburdening question. The prospectus for this journal echoed Hartwich in arguing that "any program of education that neglects the claims of the body must be labeled inadequate, even dangerous."

Whether or not the inadequacies of the Gymnasium could be corrected without severe disruption of the curriculum, especially when other reformers were clamoring for more time for sciences and modern languages, was doubtful. For men such as Hartwich and Preyer, creating the "robust generation" that the Kaiser and so many others desired meant plainly the end of the old classical Gymnasium.

No more than had the "demands of the present" did the overburdening question lead to major changes in the Prussian secondary school system in the 1880s. The arch-conservative Puttkamer preferred to place the blame for whatever overburdening did exist on immoral youths rather than on the schools: even before Dr. Hasse's charges about mental illness among schoolboys, Puttkamer had ordered a crackdown on the flourishing secret clubs that pupils founded in imitation of university fraternities. He later told the House of Deputies, "The great percentage of the so-called overburdening can be traced back to nocturnal pub-crawling by these reprehensible clubs." The explanatory decree accompanying the new curricula of 1882, which appeared shortly after Puttkamer's replacement by Gustav von Gossler, gave some cognizance to the complaints about overburdening, but did not recommend any remedies. At the Realgymnasium, total credit hours dropped only minimally in 1882; at the Gymnasium, they actually rose by two.4

During his first year in office, Gossler voiced similar sentiments about the role of secret clubs in creating overburdening, but being himself a life-long Turner, he recognized more clearly than his predecessors the responsibility of the schools to care for the physical as well as the mental training of pupils. On 27 October 1882, he issued a circular outlining the need for greater attention to exercise and games in the schools. Pointing to the existence of an urban society in which "the possibility of giving youngsters the time and space to play often disappears," he saw it as the duty of the schools to assume this educative function. Gossler believed that if more people realized the connection between bodily health and an alert, eager mind, "many of the complaints about overburdening and overstress of our youth would not have arisen." Despite his continued attention to the problem, however, progress in breaking old habits and prejudices was very slow in the 1880s. Although most schools had Turnhalle for gym-

4 Hartwich, Woan wir leiden, p. 24; Zt. für Schulgesundheitspflege 1 (1888): 2. This journal was published in Vienna and contained articles dealing with all European countries, but Germany supplied most of the material and the authors.

44 Centralblatt, 1880, pp. 572-578; SB, XIV: 1, p. 7, 777 (9 February 1880); SB, XIV: 4, p. 689 (13 December 1880). For a good example of the dismay aroused in some circles by these clubs, see Robert Pilger, Uber das Verbindungs- wesen auf dem norddeutschen Gymnasium (Berlin, 1880).


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nastics, few had or built athletic fields for games; the number of rowing clubs among schoolboys grew only from ten in 1885 to thirteen in 1895. Foreign observers in the late 1890s still found little interest in sport and fitness among teachers and pupils.45

Three months after his decree on exercise in the schools, Gossler commissioned the Royal Scientific Deputation for Medical Affairs to investigate the reality behind the public clamor about overburdening; in his instructions he commented perceptively that this issue, “broadly conceived, is nothing less than a challenge to the validity of our entire system of secondary education.” In its report, the Deputation tried to define what constituted overburdening, but lacking as yet any valid means of measuring capacity or fatigue, it ended up dealing mostly with the symptoms then agitating the general public. The report disputed most of the extravagant claims about unfit one-year volunteers and mental illness among schoolboys, and argued that the rate of increase in schoolboy suicides did not exceed the rate in society as a whole. The Deputation did not deny the rising incidence of nearsightedness from the lower to the higher grades, but it believed that to remedy this would require changing the whole conception of learning through reading and writing. The report did admit, however, that “simple observation teaches that the school exerts a clearly visible debilitating influence on a great number of pupils, especially in the lower grades”; it recommended smaller classes, longer recesses, more time for exercise, and tighter control on the amount of homework. The Deputation also suggested that the advantages of spending three years at a private Vorschule rather than four at a public elementary school might be outweighed by the disadvantages of arriving at the Gymnasium at age nine instead of ten.46

45 Neundorff, Leibesübungen, 4:349; Russell, German Higher Schools, pp. 146–147; Bolton, Secondary School System, pp. 52–53.
46 “Gutachten der Kgl. Wissenschaftliche Deputation für das Medicinalwesen betr. die Überburdung der Schüler in den höheren Lehranstalten.”

Gossler did not even implement all of these modest proposals. On 10 November 1884, he did send a circular to the Provincial School Authorities that repeated earlier reminders about existing guidelines on homework and pauses between classes. In order to refute some of the extreme charges leveled at the schools, he also requested that reports be filed on all cases of mental illness and attempted suicide among schoolboys, with special attention to the extent to which the schools could be considered responsible.47 Some of the material gathered was later used when Gossler took the very unusual step of ordering the official journal of the Prussian Ministry of Education to publish a point by point refutation of Wilhelm Preyer’s speech on overburdening.48 Despite his concern with improving physical education in the schools, Gossler refused to believe that the Gymnasium demanded too much of its pupils. Although he never said so publicly, he may well have shared the conservatives’ belief that the only boys who were overworked were those who should not be in the Gymnasium, the “ballast” he tried so hard to divert into the higher Bürgerschulen. Whether or not this was the case, Gossler’s modest steps to ease the problem did little to quiet the public agitation for a relief from overburdening; as with the “demands of the present,” this issue would still be on the agenda in 1890.

47 Centralblatt, 1885, p. 188; Gossler to Provinzialschulkollegien, 30 June 1884, in ZStA-II, KM, Rep. 76 VI, Sekt. 1, Gen. b, no. 11, vol. I. See also n. 79 in this chapter.
48 Centralblatt, 1888, pp. 460–470.