



## Research article

# Wolfgang Bargmann (1906–1978) and Heinrich von Hayek (1900–1969): Careers in anatomy continuing through German National Socialism to postwar leadership

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## SUMMARY

None of the existing studies on the history of anatomy in National Socialism (NS) has yet explored the careers of those younger anatomists, whose professional development continued through NS times and who attained prominence in postwar German and Austrian anatomy. As they became modern anatomists' teachers and role models, the revelation that men like Wolfgang Bargmann and Heinrich von Hayek had used bodies of the executed for research in their early careers has recently led to some consternation. This study contributes to the analysis of the moral challenges inherent to a science that relies on work with "material" from human bodies and its interaction with its political environment. The results reveal that Bargmann and Hayek behaved like most other anatomists at the time, in that they used bodies of the executed for research and in that they joined the NS party or other NS political groups. As ambitious and successful young anatomists they may have felt that an early joining of NS affiliations was inevitable for the advancement of their careers. They and most of their colleagues became in some measure complicit with the NS regime. The complicated biographical realities of such luminous postwar figures as Bargmann and Hayek should lead modern anatomists to the questioning of their own ethical and political decisions in politically less demanding times.

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I realized [...] that there was a sharp distinction between what was remembered, what was told, and what was true.

Kevin Powers, *The Yellow Birds*, 2012

## 1. Introduction

Research on the history of anatomy in the Third Reich started late after the second world war due to anatomists' reluctance to acknowledge their own or their teacher's involvement in National Socialist (NS) policies. Meanwhile investigations of the history of several anatomical departments have been published since the late 1980s and some are currently under way (Hildebrandt and Redies, 2012). An overview of existing information shows that anatomists were both, supporters of the new regime as well as its victims, and that all anatomical departments used the bodies of NS-victims, including bodies of the executed, for anatomical purposes (Hildebrandt, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). None of the existing studies has yet explored the careers of those younger anatomists, whose professional development continued through NS times and who attained prominence in postwar German and Austrian

anatomy. They became modern anatomists' teachers and role models. The revelation that these revered anatomists had used bodies of the executed for research in their early careers has recently led to some consternation among anatomists as well as the public (Aumüller and Grundmann, 2002; Redies and Hildebrandt, 2012). It is important to investigate these persons' careers in order to better understand anatomists' perceptions of their own work and behavior during the Third Reich and the development of postwar anatomy.

The current study focuses on the lives of Wolfgang Bargmann and Heinrich von Hayek, two anatomists whose work continued through and partly profited from the conditions provided by National Socialism, namely the ready availability of bodies of the executed. Both men rose to important positions of leadership after the war. Heinrich von Hayek became director of anatomy in Vienna, and Bargmann was recruited as director of anatomy in Kiel and in this role re-invigorated international relationships for German anatomy. Despite their prominence no accurate accounts of their early careers exist. Bargmann's and Hayek's postwar achievements will here be analyzed on the background of their activities during the Third Reich and in the light of the eyes of their contemporaries (Hildebrandt, 2012a, 2012b). This double portrait will contribute to the analysis of the moral challenges inherent to a science that relies on work with "material" from human bodies and the potential pitfalls waiting not only for active researchers working under criminal and unjust regimes but also for modern anatomy.

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## 2. Methods

Starting with biographical information from obituaries, the stations of Bargmann's and von Hayek's lives were identified, and archives of the universities at which they had worked were contacted. Archival information on Bargmann was available from the universities of Frankfurt, Kiel, Leipzig and Göttingen, and for Hayek from Munich, Würzburg, Rostock and Vienna. In addition, material on Bargmann was located at the Federal Archives of Germany (*Bundesarchiv*).

Archival material Wolfgang Bargmann:

- *Universitätsarchiv Leipzig, Signatur UAL, PA 1255: Personalakte Wolfgang Bargmann*
- *Universitätsarchiv Frankfurt am Main UAF Abt. 14, Nr. 2237 and Abt. 604, Nr. 521, Personalhauptakte Wolfgang Bargmann, and UAF Abt. 604, Nr. 521 Studentenakte Wolfgang Bargmann*
- *Universitätsarchiv Göttingen, Personalvorgang des Rektors, Brief des Rektors vom 16. Oktober 1945 an den Kurator der Universität*
- Federal archives:
  - membership card NSDAP  
*Mitgliederkarteikarte der NSDAP-Gaukartei (BArch (ehem. BDC), NSDAP-Gaukartei, Bargmann, Dr. Wolfgang, 27.1.06.)*
  - file card physicians' association  
*Karteikarte der Reichsärztekammer (BArch (ehem. BDC), RÄK, Bargmann, Wolfgang Friedr., Dr. med. habil., 27.1.06.)*
  - file card research council  
*Karteikarte des Reichsforschungsrates (BArch (ehem. BDC), RFR, Bargmann, Dr. habil.)*
  - file card ministry of science and education  
*Karteikarte des Reichsministeriums für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung (BArch (ehem. BDC), REM, Bargmann, Wolfgang, Prof.)*
  - file card physicians register for health insurance  
*Karteikarte des Reichsarztregisters der Kassenärztlichen Vereinigung Deutschlands (BArch, R 9347, Bargmann, Wolfgang F., Prof.)*
  - file of the commissioner of the Führer for the observation of all ideological training and education of the NSDAP  
*Akte des Beauftragten des Führers für die Überwachung der gesamten geistigen und weltanschaulichen Schulung und Erziehung der NSDAP mit 1 Blatt zu Herrn Bargmann (BArch, NS 15/122, Bl. 40)*
  - party correspondence  
*Parteikorrespondenz, 6 Blatt (BArch (ehem. BDC), PK, Bargmann, Wolfgang, Prof., 27.1.06.) UBS1/1000041204*
  - files on support by the German research foundation  
*Beihilfeakte der Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft bzw. der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft, ca. 10 Blatt (BArch, R 73/10160.)*
- *Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein (LA Schl-H):*
  - *Abt. 811, Nr. 12388*
  - *Abt. 460, Nr. 4392*
  - *Abt. Acc 59/11, Nr. 265*
  - *Abt. 605, Nr. 14386*
  - *Abt. 811, Nr. 12240*

Archival material Heinrich von Hayek:

- *Archiv der Universität Wien, Signatur PH RA 10184 Hayek, Heinrich, 1929; Signatur MED PA 189 Hayek, Heinrich, 1947–1969*
- *Universitätsarchiv Rostock, Personalakte Heinrich von Hayek, 1929–1938*
- *Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Signatur MK 43720: Akten des Staatsministeriums für Unterricht und Kultus, Dr. von Hayek*

- *Archiv der Universität Würzburg, Personalakte Heinrich von Hayek: UWÜ PA272*

In addition to obituaries, autobiographical writings by Bargmann as well as original publications by the anatomists and secondary literature on Hayek and Bargmann were studied for further information. The papers of Alfred Benninghoff, bequeathed to the University Archives of Marburg (*Nachlass Benninghoff, Universitätsarchiv Marburg*), also held information on the anatomists. Communication with Wolfgang Bargmann's family revealed some information on his early life and the fact that no bequest of his papers (*Nachlass*) exists.

Explanations for putting the term 'material' in quotation marks when referring to human "material" as well as a definition of the term 'NS-victim' are given in [Hildebrandt \(2013c\)](#).

## 3. Wolfgang Bargmann

### 3.1. Childhood and education (1906–1932)

Wolfgang Bargmann was born as Wolfgang Friedrich Wilhelm Bardel on January 27, 1906 in Nuremberg. According to Bargmann's *Fragebogen* for the university of Leipzig from October 20, 1938 (personal information for the university administration) his parents were Friedrich Bardel (1876–1929), a bookseller, and his wife Henriette, née Eisenbeis (*Universitätsarchiv Leipzig, UAL, PA 1255, Fragebogen f. 3*). A 1958 copy of Bargmann's birth certificate refers to two changes of the original birth document: on February 4, 1913 Wolfgang Bardel received permission to carry the surname "Krauss", and on June 15, 1925 the name was changed to Bargmann. The businessman Wilhelm Fritz Bargmann, resident of Hankow, China, adopted Bargmann on November 2, 1926 (*LA Schl-H, Abt.811, Nr. 12388, Geburtsurkunde*). Kurt Fleischhauer's comprehensive obituary on Bargmann gave the name of Bargmann's father as Ludwig Krauss, also a bookseller, who was killed in action during the First World War, and whose widow then married Fritz Bargmann ([Fleischhauer, 1979](#)). Taking all this and corroboration from Bargmann's family into account, his biological father was Friedrich Bardel, his first stepfather Ludwig Krauss, who was killed in WWI, and his second stepfather Fritz Bargmann. As a child he staid with his grandmother in Frankfurt while his mother and Fritz Bargmann lived abroad. Otherwise very little documentation is available concerning Bargmann's early years. He went to school in Kiel, Lübeck, Cologne, and graduated from high school in Frankfurt/Main in 1926 (*UAL, PA 1255, Fragebogen f. 3 and Lebenslauf f. 21*).

Bargmann's fascination with morphology developed as a schoolboy, when he found himself attracted by the esthetics of the structure and function of living organisms. He pursued microscopic studies and experiments in a laboratory that he established in his own bedroom and which he financed by writing articles for journals ([Bargmann, 1967, 1975](#)). Bargmann followed his interest in zoology at the university of Frankfurt, but switched to the study of human medicine to learn more about the human body ([Bargmann, 1967](#)). He continued his studies in Munich, Vienna and Berlin, and received his medical degree in Frankfurt in 1932 (*UAL, PA 1255, f. 21; Fleischhauer, 1979*). In Frankfurt his foremost teachers were Karl Zeiger, who mentored his doctoral thesis ([Fleischhauer, 1979; Bargmann, 1931](#)), Franz Weidenreich and Hans Bluntschli ([Bargmann, 1975](#)). Under Zeiger's guidance he studied the histology of the renal glomerulus in animals and humans.

Among Bargmann's publications from this time period is his doctoral thesis on the comparative anatomy of the glomerulus, published in 1931. He described his human "material" as consisting of 14 kidneys, which had been "kindly provided by" Prof. Heidenhain

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