



Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis

By Robert N. Proctor

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Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis By Robert N. Proctor

Scholars exploring the history of science under the Nazis have generally concentrated on the Nazi destruction of science or the corruption of intellectual and liberal values. *Racial Hygiene* focuses on how scientists themselves participated in the construction of Nazi racial policy. Robert Proctor demonstrates that the common picture of a passive scientific community coerced into cooperation with the Nazis fails to grasp the reality of what actually happened--namely, that many of the political initiatives of the Nazis arose from within the scientific community, and that medical scientists actively designed and administered key elements of National Socialist policy.

The book presents the most comprehensive account to date of German medical involvement in the sterilization and castration laws, the laws banning marriage between Jews and non-Jews, and the massive program to destroy "lives not worth living." The study traces attempts on the part of doctors to conceive of the "Jewish problem" as a "medical problem," and how medical journals openly discussed the need to find a "final solution" to Germany's Jewish and gypsy "problems."

Proctor makes us aware that such thinking was not unique to Germany. The social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century in America and Europe gave rise to theories of racial hygiene that were embraced by enthusiasts of various nationalities in the hope of breeding a better, healthier, stronger race of people. Proctor also presents an account of the "organic" health movement that flourished under the Nazis, including campaigns to reduce smoking and drinking, and efforts to require bakeries to produce whole-grain bread. A separate chapter is devoted to the emergence of a resistance movement among doctors in the Association of Socialist Physicians. The book is based on a close analysis of contemporary documents, including German state archives and more than two hundred medical journals published during the period.

Proctor has set out not merely to tell a story but also to urge reflection on what might be called the "political philosophy of science"--how movements that shape the policies of nations can also shape the structure and priorities of science. The broad implications of this book make it of consequence not only to historians, physicians, and people concerned with the history and philosophy of science, but

also to those interested in science policy and medical ethics.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Despite a significant body of writing on medical science and dogma under National Socialism (e.g., Alan Beyerchen's *Scientists Under Hitler*, LJ 10/1/77, and Robert Jay Lifton's *The Nazi Doctors*, LJ 9/15/86), this book provides depth and perspective on a historical period that still must be studied. Proctor (New School for Social Research) gives a rich explanation of the interaction of culture, politics, and science that engages and alerts the reader. Though Proctor is too good a historian to indulge in moralistic judgments, his careful research seduces the reader into doing so. If one accepted Aryan supremacy, Proctor shows how decisions, such as the Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935, became eminently rational. Proctor reveals a superb knowledge of the proliferation of medical literature under National Socialism. A work of stature and significance belonging in all academic libraries. Frances Groen, McGill Univ. Medical Lib., Montreal

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Review

Proctor's carefully argued book not only forces us to reassess the dynamics of Nazism but also challenges pervasive notions about the political neutrality and objective value of science and the moral innocence of scientists...[A] provocative study. (Mary Nolan *New York Times Book Review*)

A chilling indictment of the pre-war German scientific community which legitimized Nazi racial theories. (*Jewish Chronicle*)

It is a deeply disturbing book, concerned as it is with how fine scientific minds, many of which were at least formally committed to the practice of healing, not only "sold themselves to the devil" but, through their own theoretical musings and prejudice-tinctured social concerns, anticipated his arrival. It is an at times passionate exegesis on how "value-free" science is a disingenuous contradiction in terms and, more important, on how people who believe in so chimerical an enterprise could and can contribute to social pathology...The lessons for our own age are baldly obvious. (Robert A. Pois *Science*)

A valuable, disturbing treatise on the darkest chapter of modern medicine. (*Kirkus Reviews*)

The best that has been written...A well-crafted, seminal work. (Burton C. Einspruch, M.D., *Journal of the American Medical Association*)

From the Back Cover

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Santos Conrad:

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