

Racial Hygiene, Medicine under the Nazis,

By I. Robert N. Proctor, 1988

II. Book summary:

Proctor's main focus of the book was to show the role of physicians, those with medical degrees, in the development of Racial Hygiene and the Nazis policies toward racial science. Racial hygiene was a priority to the scientific community and was later transformed into a medical practice. The main thesis of the book dealt with the shaping of the nation's policies and how they can shape the structure and priorities of the science community.

III. Chapter-by-chapter summary:

Introduction:

The introduction basically gives an oversight as to how Robert Proctor is approaching the subject of racial hygiene. The introduction reveals the fact that this book largely is in response to Alan Beyeche's book *Scientists Under Hitler*. Proctor is taking a different angle than Beyeche in that Proctor sees the scientific world as largely responsible for racial hygiene rather than the Nazis forcing racial hygiene on the scientists. Proctor addresses the realization that much political coercion came from within the scientific community and not from outside forces.

Chapter 1: Origins of Racial Hygiene

This chapter gives a foundation of when and how racial hygiene started. Proctor says that the idea of racism and purification of races dates back to John Locke and David Hume. In the second half of the 19th Century, racial hygiene began to receive detailed attention. Proctor says that the racial hygiene movement was spurred by a fear that the poor and misfits were beginning to multiply faster than the fit and talented. Racial hygienists were opposed to health care for the weak stating that it prolonged the life of those who would never have survived by natural selection. Much of racial hygiene was centered around Lamarckian inheritance in which particular characteristics of a particular race are inherited. By 1932-33, racial hygiene was taught in 26 separate courses in German universities setting the trend of what was to come.

Chapter 2: "Neutral Racism": The Case of Fritz Lenz

This chapter basically looked at the concept of race as espoused by Fritz Lenz. Fritz Lenz, the grandfather of racial hygiene, led the racial movement in the latter 1920s. Lenz sought to eliminate those with genetic defects and imprison those who knowingly infected others with disease. Lenz developed a system to determine the quality of men based on their appearance wherein those men with large chests and long noses were of higher standard and possessed great potential. Lenz stated that Jews can be recognized at once due to their appearance and are purely a mental race. Lenz maintained that he was not an anti-semiter and stated that Jews have played a constructive role in history. Lenz said that there were no pure races in the world but still joined the Nazi Party in 1937 continuing to disagree with anti-semitism.

Chapter 3: Political Biology: Doctors in the Nazi Cause

This chapter is concerned with the medical profession becoming the biggest supporter of National Socialism. The

formation of the National Physicians Social League. This was the first step in forcing the Jews out of the medical profession. It has been estimated that most of the younger doctors supported the Nazi party and about 45% of doctors joined the party. Medical press was also affected. Medical journals were merged from almost 200 to 1. These journals reported the technical and medical traditions. Education also shifted from medicine to racial hygiene. Racial training became part of the curriculum for future doctors to remain in school. One of the most recognized schools for racial training was at Alt-rehse. It was to supplement traditional forms of medical schools not to replace what was already in place. The SS was not the only group to have schools designed specifically for racial education the SA (Schutz Abteilung, or Storm Troopers) did as well. An office of racial policy was established in 1934. The duties of the office were to construct racial programs. The main idea was to eliminate the Jewish segment of physicians by making them ineligible by racial standards to enroll in medical school and other practices.

Chapter 4: The Sterilization Law

The idea presented here was to prevent the production of unfit human beings. Hitler wanted to keep the population pure and if people were just allowed to reproduce then the population would not be pure. Sterilization was the only solution. He had feeble-minded, insanity, and manic depressives etc. sterilized because these were genetic illnesses. This practice was illegal until 1933. The Nazi party likes to make the connection to the United States in both sterilization and immigration laws. The number of people sterilized is unknown, but it is estimated to be about 400,000. Doctors would even compete to see who could fill the quotas fastest. The main concern of the government was to find a technique to sterilize men and women fast and efficiently, low cost.

Chapter 5: The Control of Women

The Nazi regime was not only understood in the elimination of the weak and unproductive, but also in the control of women. They wanted women to stay at home and raise a family. Rewards were given to those who would have so many children. The Honor Cross of German Motherhood was one of the rewards a mother would receive based on the number of children she had. A bronze cross was awarded for four children, silver for six, and gold for eight. Women were there to populate the country. The government prohibited abortions and the use of birth control, and if you were caught using either one a severe punishment would be applied. Abortion was only permitted in the case of the woman's life being at risk. Like many cultures of the past women were put in a class lower than that of a man, and some would say a class comparable to that of the Jews.

Chapter 6: Anti-Semitism in the German Medical Community

In 1933 Bavarian Health Inspector Walter Schultze announced "...that Germany's Sterilization Law would not be sufficient to stop the horde of psychopaths, feeble-minded, and other 'inferior types' threatening the German race...stronger measures could and would be taken..." Little did he know those stronger measures he was referring to were coming and in a big way. In 1935 Hitler signed into law three measures called the Nuremberg Laws to purify the population from further unwanted traits.

The first of these measures was the Reich Citizenship Law which distinguished between citizens and residents. Citizens, those of German descent, were allowed the rights and privileges while residents, such as Jews and single women, were excluded.

The second measure passed was the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor. This law prohibited the marriage and sexual relationship between Jews and non-Jews, but was later extended to all non-Aryans. It also stipulated that Jews could not employ German servants in their households that were under the age of forty-five nor could they fly the national colors.

The third measure was the Law for the Protection of the Genetic Health of the German People. It required couples to have a medical examination for "racial damage" before they could marry. It also prohibited the marriage between those suffering from venereal diseases, feeble-mindedness, epilepsy, or any other "genetic infirmities". The genetically ill were permitted to marry other genetically ill after being sterilized to ensure that no offspring would be born. The creation of marital laws led to the creation of marital counseling. Couples would have to attend counseling before they could obtain a "fit to marry" certificate. After receiving the certificate the couple would have to apply for engagement and then for marriage, and would only be given consent after submitting to a medical examination, counseling, and having a genealogical map drawn. Punishment for failing to comply to the laws was prison.

These laws were not only viewed as being anti-semitic, but as new public health measures. The ball was now rolling and Jews were being labeled as inferior and would soon lose the benefits of German medicine. Jews were forced from the medical professions and not allowed to even participate in any form of quality health measures. They were the perfect scapegoat for the problems of the early twentieth century. Nazis argued that Jewish medicine was one-sided, misguided, or dangerous and was just different from socialist medicine.

Chapter 7: The Destruction of "Lives Not Worth Living"

The idea of euthanasia had been discussed in legal and medical literature long before the Nazi rise to power. Euthanasia simply means "an easy or gentle death" and the use of the word dates back to the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century, defenders of euthanasia defended the right to choose the manner and time of one's death with minimum pain and suffering. Twentieth century advocates defended it as a means of cutting costs or ridding society of "useless eaters". To Hitler and others of the Nazi party it was a chance to rid Germany of the feeble-minded, the sick, and eventually the Jews that acted as parasites on the German economy.

The first to experience the wave of euthanasia were children. Child murdering was kept secret and covered up well. Children were injected with poisons over a long period of time, some were exposed to the elements, others were starved to death, and some were gassed with cyanide or chemical warfare agents. It did not matter how they died just as long as it looked like a natural death. Parents would then receive an official letter stating when their child had died suddenly and that the body had to be cremated immediately to prevent an epidemic. Adult euthanasia soon followed and was carried out by physicians in the beginning. Adults were "disinfected", as the Germans termed it, in gas (carbon monoxide) chambers that resembled showers, and this was done in secret in mental asylums. Adult mental patients were the first to be "disinfected", but the standards were soon lowered. Jews, homosexuals, and any other individual or group that was a threat to the Nazi regime or the state were added to the death list. In both cases those involved were told they were very ill and had to be quarantined to prevent an epidemic. Death came without warning.

Euthanasia moved into the concentration camps along with medical experiments. Experiments were done on the prisoners to find out how the body would react in certain situations. Some experiments were done to see what would happen to a pilot if he was shot down in the ocean, and had to survive until he could be rescued. Other experiments were done to see how the body would respond to different diseases, chemical weapons, tolerance to pain, and anything that would be valuable for a soldier's or a society's survival during warfare. Once the genocide began there was no stopping it until racial purification was achieved.

Chapter 8: The "Organic Vision" of Nazi Racial Science

Central to the coming of the Nazi revolution was the thrust to return to the "organic" vision of science and medicine, and to replace the mechanistic thinking of recent medicine. They were trying to achieve a new holistic view of the world by returning "to the earth." This was a premodern or rural way of life that was free of the troubles and complexities of modern civilization. In the nineteenth century folk traditions were replaced by "regular medicine", but folk practitioners began to organize alternative forms of practice. Natural medicine was not invented by the Nazis, but they encouraged it because it was a way to restore more natural ways of living to the German people. The Nazis provided support for these areas that are considered alternative, holistic, and organic by today's standards. Midwifery

returned during this period, and was lead by Nanna Conti, the mother of Reich Health Führer Leonardo Conti. German physicians realized that birthing by midwifery was safer than hospital births. The Nazis supported "organic" medicines when it suited their purposes, and the same for orthodox or regular medicine.

Chapter 9: Medical Resistance: The Association of Socialist Physicians

There are two kinds of lessons to be learned from the experience of medicine under the Nazis. First, scientists or physicians were not impervious to the political movements of the times. They participated fully and actively in movements, and some were leaders in the Nazi vanguard. Second, not all Germans were Nazis. Many resisted the Nazi movement and some of that appears in the form of medical opposition. The rise of the National Socialism disturbed many in the German medical community and many of the "Aryan" noncommunist physicians not subject to racial or political persecution. Socialist medicine demanded improvements in the areas of housing and food, and wanted voters to decide if large feudal estates of east Germany should be redistributed to the people. The Nazi revolution succeeded in driving socialist medicine underground or into concentration camps. Many socialist physicians had to leave Germany to escape persecution and those who stayed did not survive the war years, and if they did survive it was hard for them to practice medicine again. The damage done to German medicine during Hitler's reign still has not been undone.

Chapter 10: The Politics of Knowledge

The Nazi regime was not an anti-intellectual movement although it is often said to be. New studies were being done and new schools were being established. Many new things were happening along with the persecution of a race of people. The racial hygienists were very well educated men in their fields. The medical and racial policies were allowed to go on because they were made very public and legal.

Epilogue:

The epilogue basically cited various acts that occurred after the war and the break down of the German government. Nazi organizations were outlawed after the war and many Nazi members were convicted of war crimes, most of which were prominent scientists. Some former German scientists were hired by the US In order to learn more about racial hygiene. After the collapse of German government, the topic of racial hygiene was no longer discussed in journals and publications in Germany. Many Russian publications called for stiffer penalties for those convicted of war crimes. Presently, East German scholars have begun to examine racial hygiene and its medicine from a standpoint of "why" rather than "why not".

IV. Book Review

Proctor's book is very insightful and astounding at times. It is quite interesting to learn that racial hygiene was actually initiated by German scientists rather than Nazi activists that supported it. Their control of women and the elimination of Jews from the medical community is astounding. It shows just how much power the Nazi party control and how much influence they had over the people. Well educated men were the drive behind the movements in Germany. Their quick thinking and knowledge of public reactions allowed for euthanasia and sterilization to be carried on in total secrecy until the end of the war. The world had no idea what Germany was doing behind closed doors until it was too late. What is even more ironic was the world allowed many of the scientists to continue their endeavors after the war. One thing that Proctor should have added to his book to make his points stick in one's mind was actual personal accounts of racial hygiene. Let a victim of Nazi Germany's racial policies speak out through their emotions. Their words would have been more moving and long lasting, but instead all he gives the reader is brief accounts of what

occurred. These brief accounts do touch one's soul, but nothing like the true emotion of a victim's words.