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Racial Hygiene in Vienna 1938

(published in: wiener klinische wochenschrift, Sonderheft, März 1998)

Introduction

During the time of the National Socialist regime, racialism – and especially antisemitism – led to the greatest crimes in the history of humanity: the genocide of the Jews, Roma (gypsies), Soviet POWs, mentally and physically handicapped people, “Asoziale” (Nazi term denoting so-called “enemies of the people”; the term was used haphazardly to label singular persons or groups of people that were put into concentration camps) and other people, sections of the population or ethnic groups that were deemed “inferior”. While several studies have been conducted in Germany and the English-speaking region regarding racism, racial hygiene, the crimes of Nazi medicine, Nazi “euthanasia”, coercive sterilisation etc.¹ there is still a considerable deficit concerning research of such topics in Austria.² Especially “Täterforschung” (research concerning the

- 1 See inter al. the works of Klee, E. (1985), “Euthanasie” im NS-Staat. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main; Schmuhl, H. W. (1987), Rassenhygiene, Nationalsozialismus, Euthanasie. Von der Verhütung zur Vernichtung “lebensunwerten Lebens” 1890–1945. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen; Aly, G. (1995), Aktion T4 1939–1945. Die “Euthanasie”-Zentrale in der Tiergartenstraße 4. Edition Hentrich, Berlin; Weingart, P., Kroll, J., Bayertz, K. (1988), Geschichte der Eugenik und Rassenhygiene in Deutschland. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main; Proctor, R. (1988), Racial Hygiene. Medicine under the Nazis. Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) London; Burleigh, M. (1994), Death and Deliverance. “Euthanasia” in Germany c. 1900–1945. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) New York Melbourne; Friedlander, H. (1995), The Origins of Nazi Genocide. From Euthanasia to the Final Solution. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill (NC) London; Seidelman W E, Power, Responsibility, and Abuse in Medicine: Lessons from Germany. In: Millen R L, New Perspectives on the Holocaust. New York University Press, New York London, 319–343.
- 2 The most important Austrian studies are: Seidler, H., Rett, A. (1982), Das Reichssippenamt entscheidet. Rassenbiologie im Nationalsozialismus. Jugend und Volk, Wien München; Seidler, H., Rett, A. (1988), Rassenhygiene. Ein Weg in den Nationalsozialismus. Jugend und Volk, Wien München; Hubenstorf, M. (1995), Die Wiener Medizin und der Nationalsozialismus – 50 Jahre danach. Wiener Arzt. Mitteilungen der Ärztekammer für Wien, 5, 14–27, 6, 16–28; Neugebauer, W. (1983), Zur Psychiatrie in Österreich 1938–1945:

perpetrators), the recovery of Austrians' contribution to ideas and practice of Nazi racial hygiene and inhuman practice in medicine and science have been neglected. This due to medical history's, affected university departments' and hospitals' lack of interest therein. Not least owing to criticism by the media, increased interest from abroad and international discussions and controversies in the cases Pernkopf (the possibility of Holocaust victims having been used for the Anatomieatlas and the possible storage of specimens) and Gross (the post-war career of a doctor performing "euthanasia" and the failure to bury brain specimens of "euthanasia" victims) have led to intensified efforts in recovering the Nazi past and post-war problems that have resulted therefrom.³

This article gives an overview of several important areas and aspects of racial hygiene in Austria – the Wiener Gesellschaft für Rassenpflege (Viennese Society for Racial Hygiene), departments and institutes of the University of Vienna as well as relevant institutions of the Reichsgauverwaltung Wien –, of ideas and activities of Austrian racial hygienists and of the functions and meaning of "scientific" racial hygiene to the criminal measures starting in 1939/40.

The intellectual roots of racism and racial hygiene date back to the nineteenth century, when Rassentheorien und -lehren (racial theory and doctrine) were being developed into ideological legitimation of colonialism and imperialism. Several theorists, further whom I cannot go into at this point, developed ideas of the "Aufartung" (racial improvement) of the people or race through active or passive selection. Ideas of the superiority of a "Nordic", "Germanic", or "Aryan" race, however silly they may seem nowadays, were disseminated in many "scientific" publications, specific journals and innumerable popularized scientific works. These ideas were very influential. Racial theorists transferred scientific knowledge concerning heredity and breeding, Charles Darwin's theories about the fight for existence, natural selection and the "survival of the fittest" from plant and animal life unto humans (Social Darwinism). Disguised as "Erb- und Rassenkunde" (racial hygiene), racialism became a scientific discipline and penetrated several other disciplines, like Psychiatry and Anthropol-

"Euthanasie" und Sterilisierung. In: Weinzierl, E. Stadler, K. (Eds.), *Justiz und Zeitgeschichte*. Bundesministerium für Justiz, Wien, 197–285.

3 Owing to Yad Vashem's initiative at the University of Vienna in 1997 a commission with the objective to clarify the accusations in connection with the Pernkopf-Atlas and a scientific project covering the same topic had been started (see: Malina, P., *Eduard Pernkopfs Anatomie oder: Die Fiktion einer "reinen" Wissenschaft*. In: *Wien Klin Wochenschr*, 1997, 109/24, 935–943.) The City of Vienna has decided to bury the remaining 417 brain specimens in an honorary grave, to promote relevant research and conduct an international Symposium on Nazi euthanasia in January 1998.

ogy, as well. Social Darwinism in connection with its utopias of human breeding and its selectory tendencies to wipe out the supposedly inferior or “erblich belastet” (hereditarily burdened) was not merely a gross abuse of science, but it was also made into a constitutive ingredient of National Socialist ideology and thus it became the basis of the Nazi regime. The National Socialists radicalized existing concepts of “Ausmerzung der Minderwertigen” (“wiping out the inferior”) and realized them with consequences unprecedented in history.

The Wiener Gesellschaft für Rassenpflege (Viennese Society for Racial Hygiene)

Even though the immediate ideological forerunners of racial hygienic measures, coercive sterilization and “euthanasia” were embedded in the “Altreich” (the original expanse of the German Reich) and these activities had been administered by head quarters in Berlin⁴, there were protagonists of “racial hygiene” in Austria as well. Biologicistic and racialist theories were not less common in Austria than in Germany. Founded in 1924, the Wiener Gesellschaft für Rassenpflege, which right from the beginning was sponsored by the German society (founded 1905 by Prof. Dr. Alfred Ploetz, ancestor of “racial hygiene”), acted as an intellectual and political pioneer. Significantly the founding meeting of the Viennese society took place at the University of Vienna on March 18, 1925. Dr. Alois Scholz, who later became chairman of the society, explained the term “Rassenpflege”, Germanization of “Rassenhygiene” (racial hygiene), as follows: “Just as the term implies, it deals with...the care for the gen-pool of the people. ...Only if we promote the strong and that which is able to live and wipe out that which is unable to live, as demanded by nature, are we promoting that hygiene, which is useful to the whole.”⁵ In 1925, the first chairman of this organization, Univ. Prof. Dr. Otto Reche, director of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Vienna, stated that “Rassenpflege must be the basis of all domestic policy and at least a part of foreign policy as well.”⁶

4 The Ordinarius für Psychologie und Neurologie Prof. Dr. Maximilian de Crinis, who had fled Austria in 1934, was an influential protagonist of the “extermination” (ausmerzend) measures of racial hygiene in Berlin, also functioned as ministry advisor (for medical affairs) in the Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung. See: Jasper, H. (1991) Maximilian de Crinis (1889–1945). Eine Studie zur Psychiatrie im Nationalsozialismus. Matthiesen Verlag, Husum.

5 Nachrichten der Wiener Gesellschaft für Rassenpflege. Jg. 1, F. 2, 9.

6 Veröffentlichungen der Wiener Gesellschaft für Rassenpflege (1925). Heft 1, 6.

“This society”, write Seidler and Rett, “campaigns extensively for Nordic reliefs and may very well be deemed the forerunner of National Socialism in Austria.”⁷ Its close connection to the National Socialist movement was admitted with pride in March 1938: “Already before the prohibition of the party, several members of our committee were active in the Rassenpolitischen Referat (Racialist Department) of the party. These connections were expanded extensively during the prohibition and enlarged to cover all divisions of the party. Courses and lectures were the result of lively activity. Even the directors of the N.S.-Juristenbund (Nazi lawyers’ union) and the N.S.-Ärztebund (Nazi doctors’ union) could continue their work at the time of dissolution [of the NSDAP 1933] by admission to our committees of experts.”⁸ Significantly the society univocally refused to join the Vaterländische Front (Austro-fascist party) in 1935 and joined the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene as Ortsgruppe Wien (Vienna chapter). Despite the barely obscured National Socialist alignment of the society, the professors, lecturers and assistants working there could spread their racialist doctrines amongst the student-body unhindered, for “strict scholarliness” was maintained on the surface. The lecturers were, among others, Dr. Heinrich Reichel, professor of hygiene in Graz and at the same time the second chairman of the society, and Eduard Pernkopf, professor of anatomy and later principal of the University of Vienna. There were “volksaufklärende Veranstaltungen” (“enlightening events for the people”) as well, for instance in connection with the director of the Rassenpolitisches Amt of the NSDAP in Berlin, Dr. Walter Gross, that attracted an attendance of 600.⁹ During the 1920s and 1930s racialist ideas entered social and health policy more and more. Even progressive political forces could not evade the attractiveness of eugenic measures, like the lecture (and the pamphlet *Gefahren der Minderwertigkeit* | “Dangers of Inferiority” |) of the actually humanist-minded alderman responsible for welfare in the city of Vienna (Stadtrat für das Wohlfahrtswesen der Stadt Wien) Univ. Prof. Dr. Julius Tandler, as his talk to the Österreichischen Bund für Volksaufklärung und Erbkunde on February 13, 1929 has shown.¹⁰ Tandler calculated, that the approximately 5000 patients of the psychiatric clinics of

7 Seidler, H.; Rett, A. (1988), 54.

8 Nachrichten der Wiener Gesellschaft für Rassenpflege (Rassenhygiene). (1938), F. 3, 19.

9 Kienreich, W. (1980), Die Wiener Gesellschaft für Rassenpflege im Lichte ihrer Nachrichten. In: *Psychologie und Gesellschaftskritik*, 4. Jg., 13/14, 63–64.

10 Tandler, J. (1929), *Gefahren der Minderwertigkeit*. In: *Jahrbuch 1928 des Wiener Jugendhilfswerks*, Sonderabdruck, 11, 16; see criticism thereof: Byer, D. (1988), *Rassenhygiene und Wohlfahrtspflege. Zur Entstehung eines sozialdemokratischen Machtdispositivs in Österreich*. Campus, Frankfurt am Main/New York.

the city of Vienna incur costs of 11 million Schillings annually and suggested “making the inferior barren – naturally with all cautions of science and humanity and under the full guaranty of the law – an unrejectable demand.” Julius Tandler’s ideas, who was a social democrat of Jewish descent and himself later a victim of political persecution, did not enter into the chain of events that led to genocide. However they are an expression of the racial hygienic paradigms of the time.

After the “Anschluß” in March, 1938, racial hygiene entered into all governmental and societal spheres, and the existing Wiener Gesellschaft played an important role as a forerunner. The “Ortsgruppe Wien” expanded its activities – now covering all of the “Ostmark” – and became one of the largest and most active groups within the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene. Subsequently the number of members rose from 200 to 700. Within the framework of a seminar lectures and other events were held covering the following topics: The Meaning of Rassenpflege, Introduction to Racialism, Basics of Heredity, Is Racial Mixing detrimental?, Hereditary Diseases, Heredity and Crime, Racial Hygienic Marital Counseling. A special course for schools, “Racial Hygiene and Education”, covered the subject “Rassenkundliche Erhebung von Schulkindern” (“Racial Survey of Pupils”). Leading German race theorists were invited to Austria to give lectures. The first speaker “after the upheaval (Umbruch)” was Dr. Othmar Freiherr von Verschuer, professor at the university of Frankfurt and later the director of the Kaiser Wilhelm-Institut für Anthropologie in Berlin, who spoke about “Volksgesundheit und Vererbung” (“The People’s Health and Heredity”) at the Auditorium Maximum of the University of Vienna in April, 1938. Dr. Falk Ruttke and Univ. Prof. Dr. Ernst Rüdin, the chairman of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene, lectured on the Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses (Law for the Prevention of Progeny Suffering from a Hereditary Disease), which was designed substantially by the two of them.¹¹ Dr. Hans Vellguth, medical director of the Health Department of the city of Vienna, who was responsible for “Erb- und Rassenpflege”, was also a lecturer on relevant topics. The climax of the activities of the Gesellschaft für Rassenpflege was the “4th International Congress for Racial Hygiene (Eugenics)” in Vienna in August, 1940. The importance of the Viennese Society was that, right from the beginning, personnel was available to do the work necessary for racial hygiene. “All positions in the “Ostmark” that had to do with racial hygiene in any way”, writes W. Kienreich, “were staffed with long-time members of the Viennese Society for Racial Hygiene. Among these were the Amt

11 Nachrichten der Wiener Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene (1939), F. 1, 21–22.

für Volksgesundheit (Office of the People's Health) of the NSDAP, the leading doctors of the SS and SA, the NS Ärztebund, NS Lehrerbund (Nazi teachers' union) and NS Studentenbund (Nazi union of university students)."¹²

The University of Vienna

After March, 1938, the “erb- und rassenbiologischen” theories were reinforced in particular at the University of Vienna and at this time officially integrated into teaching and research.¹³ The provisional dean of the Viennese medical faculty, Univ. Prof. Dr. Eduard Pernkopf, showed the way in his first lecture after the reopening of the University on April 6, 1938. In his lecture, Pernkopf placed the commitment to the “racial hygienic” theories of National Socialism (and their practical consequences) in the centre of interest.¹⁴ After glorifying Hitler as “the greatest son of our home country” and affirming “joyful devotion and loyalty”, Pernkopf proclaimed the total subordination of intellectual life under the National Socialist world view and the renunciation of scientific freedom. He made it utterly clear to all students present, that they would be “trained as National Socialist doctors, who are to put the medical profession at the service of National Socialism.” He described race as very “important to medicine”. Rassenforschung (“race research”) should not merely be conducted anatomically” and he demanded “that the other medical disciplines, too, devote their attention to the racial problem in a more extensive way than they have done so far.” Pernkopf, who ended his lecture with a triple “Sieg Heil!” to Adolf Hitler, announced a “uniform curriculum” and “the reconstruction of teaching”, while acknowledging the results of “Rassenforschung” and of erbbiologische Forschung (“hereditarily-biological research”). The keynote speech of the National Socialist dean, who served as rector of the University of Vienna from 1943 to 1945, was realized with the determination characteristic of National Socialism. The importance of racial theories to National Socialist research is expressed by the foundation of an office of “Erb- und Rassenbiologie” at the medical

12 Kienreich, W. (1980), 64.

13 On the Nazi history of the Medical Faculty of the University of Vienna, see: Hubenstorf, M. (1988), *Medizinische Fakultät 1938–1945*. In: Heiß, G., Mattl, S., Saurer, E., Stuhlpfarrer, K., (Eds.), *Willfähige Wissenschaft. Die Universität Wien 1938 bis 1945*. Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, Wien, 233–282; Lehner, M. (1990), *Die Medizinische Fakultät der Universität Wien 1938–1945*. Diplomarbeit an der geisteswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Wien.

14 Pernkopf, E. (1938), *Nationalsozialismus und Wissenschaft*. *Wien Klin Wochenschr.* 20 (special edition).

school of the University of Vienna and a corresponding Department that was implemented by decree of the Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung of October 3, 1938. In a report July 20, 1938 on the foundation of the department of Dean Pernkopf affirmed the importance and necessity of such an institution due to the special connection between this field and the National Socialist world view, and announced cooperation with the political leadership of the NSDAP, in order to make feasible “an accurate demographic realization of the department’s work”.¹⁵ The “Rassenbiologisches Institut der Universität Wien” – one million RM were allocated for its foundation – was to go into service on November 1, 1939; however, negotiations with Univ. Prof. Dr. Lothar Löffler, director of the Institut für Erb- und Rassenbiologie at the University of Königsberg, who had been recommended by Rust, Minister of Education, in June, 1938, took four years due to his wide-ranging demands. Löffler wanted to seize control of anthropology at the philosophical faculty as well. He wanted to have his foot in the door at both the medical faculty and the philosophical faculty, which met with much resistance from the Viennese anthropologists and the dean of the philosophical faculty, Prof. Viktor Christian. Finally, however, after many assents (17 assistants) Löffler was appointed director on October 1, 1942 and officially took over the administration of the Rassenbiologisches Institut on November 6, 1942. It was situated in the rooms of the Department of Hygiene in Kinderspitalgasse in the ninth district of Vienna.¹⁶

Next to relevant “teachings” and “research”, the main purpose of this institute was the clarification of genealogical questions. In a report Löffler mentions cooperation between his institute and the “Reichsausschuß für die Erforschung erb- und anlagebedingter schwerer Leiden”. This lets us conclude that there must have been a connection to “euthanasia” activity; however, a closer survey on the “Rassenbiologisches Institut” is overdue.

As of the summer term, 1939, a new curriculum was in place, which involved an increase in the required hours in the field of Rassenbiologie. One was required to take a three-hour course in “Vererbungslehre und Rassenkunde” (Genetics and Racial Science) during the second semester, another three-hour course on “Menschliche Erblehre als Grundlage der Rassenhygiene” (Human Heredity as Basis of Racial Hygiene) during the ninth semester and a two-hour course in “Racial Hygiene” during the tenth semester. Until the winter term 1942/43 the course “Rassenkunde” was announced simultaneously with “History of Medicine and Biology”. It was held by the anthropologists Doz. [Do-

15 Archiv der Universität Wien, Dekanatsakt Medizinische Fakultät 1323 ex 1937/38.

16 Saurer, E. (1988), Institutsneugründungen 1938–1945. In: Heiß, G., *ibid.*

zent; the title denotes a lecturer who has certification to teach at university] E. Geyer and Doz. K. Tuppa. Courses in “Racial Hygiene” and “Hygiene” were merged and taught by Doz. R. Stigler. Starting with Prof. Löffler’s teaching assignment at the university in the summer term 1943, a far greater amount of courses in “Rassenbiologie” was offered.¹⁷

Due to the delays during the formation of the Rassenbiologisches Institut, the Department of Anthropology played an important role in the implementation and execution of Nazi racial hygiene in the Viennese university system. After March, 1938, Doz. Dr. Eberhard Geyer, second chairman of the Ortsgruppe Wien of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene, served as director of the institute. During the winter term 1938/39, Geyer had already organized a comprehensive, inter-disciplinary course titled “Naturwissenschaftliche, historische und rechtliche Grundzüge der Sippenforschung und deren Bedeutung im nationalsozialistischen Staat” (Scientific, historic and legal outlines of genealogical research and their importance to the National Socialist state). Such “racial hygienic” courses were taught by anthropologists on a regular basis until 1945. In addition the Department of Anthropology conducted “erb- und rassenkundliche Untersuchungen” (racial surveys) for the Reichsstelle für Sippenforschung in Berlin and for the Amt für Sippenforschung der Gauleitung Wien of the NSDAP. The most important concern of these surveys were “certifications” (Gutachten) of “racial” affiliation. Andreas Rett and Horst Seidler have presented profound investigations concerning this.¹⁸ Psychiatrists much more than any other professional group were involved in Nazi genocide, as scientific and ideological forerunners, as political advisors, consultants, institutional directors, responsible health-policy makers and health officials, or as exclusive operators of the gas valves in the euthanasia institutions. Nevertheless, the Viennese Chair of Psychiatry Dr. Otto Pötzl, did not play a leading role in Nazi racial hygiene. As Viktor Frankl, who was director of the Neurological Department of the Jewish hospital in Vienna from 1938 until 1942, told me in an interview, Pötzl behaved very decently towards Frankl and Jewish patients. He did not transfer Jews to the Steinhof sanatorium, where they might have become victims of “euthanasia” activity, but sent them to Frankl to the Jewish hospital.¹⁹ Adolf Schärf, later the Federal President of Austria, stated that Prof. Pötzl, who in April 1938, had been suspended, was a “Muß-Nazi”, forced to

17 See: Vorlesungsverzeichnisse der Universität Wien 1938–1945.

18 Seidler, H., Rett, A. (1982, 1988), *ibid.*

19 Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW), Sammlung “Erzählte Geschichte”, Nr. 823, Interview with Univ. Prof. DDr. Viktor E. Frankl, February 1, 1993.

join the party. However this is called into question by Pötzl's self-confessed membership of the NSDAP between 1930 and 1933.²⁰

M. Hubenstorf shows that, on the basis of a positive reference given by Pötzl, Doz. Dr. Hans Bertha was appointed as supernumerary professor in 1944/45 (this had been demanded by Prof. de Crinis). This despite professional scepticism of the Heidelberg psychiatry professor Carl Schneider. Bertha was one of the main perpetrators of Nazi "euthanasia" in Austria.²¹ A member of the NSDAP since 1933 and a member of the SS since 1937, Bertha was provisional director of the psychiatric clinic of the University of Graz during April 1938. In 1939 he habilitated in Graz and recommended himself as an expert consultant to the "euthanasia" headquarters in Berlin by way of racial hygienic writings and courses. He moved to Vienna in 1940. Between January 1, 1944, and 1945 he was director of the Wagner von Jauregg Heil- und Pfllegeanstalt ("Am Steinhof"-sanatorium) and thus was responsible for the "mercy killings" committed in that period.²² The fact that some advocates of Nazi racial hygiene after 1945 became renowned scientists and have distanced themselves from their former opinions, may not lead to total silence regarding Nazi medicine. For instance, Prof. Plötzl's assistant at the university psychiatric clinic at that time, Dr. Walter Birkmayer, himself a member of the NSDAP since 1932 and a member of the SS since 1936, said the following at evening seminars of the doctors of the SS-Oberabschnitt "Donau" about "Vererbung von Nervenkrankheiten" (Heredity of neurological diseases):

"Wenn wir nun in allen Fällen, wo wir für die Substanz unseres Volkes eine Gefahr sehen, die Sterilisation fordern müssen, so ist das keineswegs eine dem ärztlichen Geist widersprechende Handlung. Denn Arzt sein heißt nicht nur die Gesundheit des einzelnen möglichst zu fördern, sondern insbesondere den Blick für die Erfordernisse der Gesamtheit nicht aus den Augen zu lassen. Wir sahen alle klar, daß in der Nachkriegszeit der Geschmack der breiten Massen nur Gefallen am Degenerierten, Unrechten, Schmutzigen und Verfallenen fand. Solche Zeiten des Verfalls hat die Geschichte oft erlebt, sie wurden überwunden durch Bluttaffrischung und Zustrom von außen. Unserem Volke blieb es vor-

20 Bundesarchiv, formerly Berlin Document Center (BDC), Personalakten Dr. Otto Pötzl. Pötzl applied again for membership to the NSDAP on November 2, 1943. He was admitted on September 21, 1944.

21 Hubenstorf (1988), 251.

22 BDC, Personalakt Dr. Hans Bertha. After he had been "denazified", Bertha became full professor of psychiatry in Graz.

behalten, ein Genie zu gebären, das instinktiv erkannte und forderte, daß nur die Reinheit der Rasse und die erbbiologische Gesundheit das Volk vor dem Verfall retten kann. Und wir müssen als fanatische Jünger alles Krankhafte, Unreine und Verderbbringende aus unserem Volke ausrotten, damit es nach Generationen durch diese Läuterung befähigt ist, die ihm zugedachte Sendung zu erfüllen.”²³

Dr. Birkmayer’s Nazi career, that had involved his promotion to Hauptstellenleiter of the Rassenpolitisches Amt of the Viennese NSDAP, ended early in 1939, when his “nichtarische Abstammung” (“non-aryan origin”) became known and he was dismissed from the SS by Reichsführer SS Himmler himself. He was allowed to stay at the clinic, but was not appointed as Dozent.²⁴

Even the Privatdozent [the term denotes a lecturer who does not receive a salary] of zoology at the University of Vienna, Dr. Konrad Lorenz, who was transferred to Königsberg in 1940 as professor of comparative psychology, had radical racial hygienic ideas at the time. This is evident in the pamphlet issued in 1940 titled, “Durch Domestikation verursachte Störungen arteigenen Verhaltens”:

“So wie beim Krebs – von einigen unwesentlichen Teilerfolgen der Strahlungsbehandlung abgesehen – der leidenden Menschheit nichts anderes geraten werden kann als möglichst frühzeitiges Erkennen und Ausmerzen des Übels, so beschränkt sich auch die rassenhhygienische Abwehr gegen die mit Ausfallserscheinungen behafteten Elemente auf die gleichen recht primitiven Maßnahmen. ...

Der rassische Gedanke als Grundlage unserer Staatsform hat schon unendlich viel in dieser Richtung geleistet. Die nordische Bewegung ist seit jeher gefühlsmäßig gegen die “Verhaustierung” des Menschen gerichtet gewesen, alle ihre Ideale sind solche, die durch die hier dargelegten biologischen Folgen der Zivilisation und Domestikation zerstört werden würden, sie kämpft für eine Entwicklungsrichtung,

23 Birkmayer, W. (1938), Über die Vererbung von Nervenkrankheiten. Wien Klin. Wochenschr., Nr. 42, Sonderdruck. In a letter to the resistance fighter Dr. Eduard Rabofsky of June 29, 1964 Univ. Prof. Birkmayer admitted to have made a “mistake”, however still advocated the demand for “Sterilisation von Erbkranken” (Sterilization of people with hereditary diseases) – on a voluntary basis.

24 BDC, Personalakt Dr. Walter Birkmayer; Archiv der Republik, Staatsamt für Unterricht und Erziehung, Geschäftszahl 893/III-4b/45.

die derjenigen, in der sich die heutige zivilisierte Großstadtmenschheit bewegt, gerade entgegengesetzt ist. ...

Die wirksamste rassenspfliegerische Maßnahme ist daher wenigstens vorläufig sicher die möglichste Unterstützung der natürlichen Abwehrkräfte, wir müssen – und dürfen – uns hier auf die gesunden Gefühle unserer Besten verlassen und ihnen die Gedeihen oder Verderben unseres Volkes bestimmende Auslese anvertrauen.”²⁵

Rassenspflieger interpreted in this way would have gone way beyond “people of different races” (Fremdrassige) and people with mental diseases to include degenerate city-dwellers and persons with a weak character. Such extensive intentions were not alien to Nazi health policy, regardless whether they could have been realized or not.

Institutions and Measures of the Reichsgau Wien

The doctrine proclaimed by “scientific” racial hygiene was diffused extensively among the population by propaganda. Several movies served this purpose, for instance the documentary “Erbkrank” and the motion picture “Ich klage an” (1941) that was filmed in cooperation with the “euthanasia” headquarters in Berlin. Renowned actors like Heidemarie Hatheyer and Paul Hartmann played the leading roles and were directed by Wolfgang Liebeneiner. In the words of Berlin’s Bishop Preysing, the movie offered “unobtrusive propaganda for euthanasia and the destruction of life not worthy of life”.²⁶ Especially children and youth were indoctrinated into the world view of racial hygiene. School curricula and text books dealt with National Socialist racial hygiene in great detail. In addition, there were innumerable books, pamphlets, magazines, leaflets etc. that propagated racial hygiene as the ideological basis of the Nazi state. Two important propaganda themes were the enormous costs that the “ill-inclined”

25 Lorenz, K. (1940), Durch Domestikation verursachte Störungen arteigenen Verhaltens. Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie und Charakterkunde 59, 2–79. Prof. Konrad Lorenz distanced himself from his earlier views in a letter to the DÖW in 1972 and protested against all claims concerning his person by the extreme Right. Mitteilungen (1972), DÖW, F. 12. See also: Wuketits, F. M. (1990), Konrad Lorenz. Leben und Werk eines großen Naturforschers. Piper, München Zürich, 105–114.

26 Rost, K. L. (1987), Sterilisation und Euthanasie im Film des “Dritten Reiches”. Matthiesen Verlag, Husum, 59–83, 151–218.

(“krankhaft Veranlagte”) were said to incur and the supposed “overgrowth” of the healthy by “undermen” (criminals, pupils that have learning difficulties or are disabled [”Hilfsschüler”], persons with hereditary diseases) on account of their greater fertility. This clever propaganda was supposed to prepare a certain psychological reception among the population for the criminal intentions and practices yet to come from the government.²⁷ By demanding that everyone should produce an “Ariernachweis” (certification of Aryan origin) and an “Ahnenpass” (genealogical document), National Socialist racial hygiene interfered into the lives of all people. Everyone had to prove that they were of “German or related blood” or face ostracism as “Nichtarier” (non-Aryan) and not part of the “Volksgemeinschaft” (people) and be prone to be persecuted and possibly murdered. After March 12, 1938, the inhabitants of the “Ostmark”, too, had to obtain such documents, and the parish offices administering the registrations played an important role. Again and again the NSDAP complained about incorrect information from priests who obscured “non-Aryan” origin, warning against these occurrences and threatening penalties. Especially concerning the “Ariernachweis”, the untenable nature of Nazi Rassenbiologie became evident: the crucial criterion of “racial” affiliation was not based on biological factors, but on the religious affiliation of one’s parents, grand-parents etc.²⁸ The competent party department was the “Reichsstelle für Sippenforschung” (active since 1934/35). This department already operated a branch office in Vienna as of April 2, 1938, under the auspices of Reichskommissar Bürckel. It was directed by the 29-year-old Reichsdeutscher Dr. Schultze-Naumburg, NSDAP- member since 1930 and an employee of the Reichsinnenministerium (interior ministry). A debate about who was competent for the job developed between Reichskommissar Bürckel and the Viennese Gauleiter, for the Viennese NSDAP also operated an “Amt für Sippenforschung”. Finally, it was decided by the Reichsinnenministerium that both departments be concerned with “questions of origin” considering the “Anzahl der Juden und Judenmischlinge im Gau Wien” (number of Jews and Jewish half-breeds). The Reichsstelle should work on the more difficult cases. Sentences in judicial trials concerning origin were passed by the Landgericht Wien (court) but the expertise necessary for the sentence was supplied by “Sippenforscher”, or anthropologists and biologists who had

27 Nowak, Kurt (1984), “Euthanasie” und Sterilisierung im “Dritten Reich”, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 68–77.

28 Neugebauer, W. (1988), Von der Rassenhygiene zum Massenmord. In: Wien 1938, Österreichischer Bundesverlag, Jugend und Volk, Wien, 269–271.

been appointed by them. The experts had the power of life or death – according to the classification of the person as “Aryan” or “Jew” or “half-breed”.²⁹ The most important institutions in the field of “Erb- und Rassenpflege” were the “Hauptgesundheitsamt der Gemeindeverwaltung des Reichsgaues Wien” (later to be renamed) and the health departments and doctors answerable to it. These institutions were responsible for the administration of coercive sterilisation and the “erbbiologische Bestandsaufnahme” (genetic survey) and partly involved in the euthanasia-activity. The special department for “Erb- und Rassenpflege”, created within the health administration of the city of Vienna, was divided into the following sub-departments:

1. Marital counselling.
2. Supportive measures (for instance, child welfare that was granted on “racial” criteria).
3. Extermination measures.
4. Hereditary survey (Erbbestandsaufnahme)
5. Rassenpflege.

The main perpetrators were the Berlin doctors Prof. Dr. Max Gundel (alderman) and Dr. Hans Vellguth (medical director). Both were fanatical advocates of Nazi racial hygiene.

The nationwide “genetic survey” was the basis for far-reaching plans in the “Ausmerzung minderwertigen Erbguts” (destruction of inferior genetic make-up). It occurred in the form of a “Sippenregistratur” (registry of families). This central registry that was equipped generously with capital and personnel (July 1939: 70 employees!), recorded all “vom erbpflegerischen Standpunkt negativen Sippen” (“families with negative genetic make-up”; “Sippe” denotes family including all living ancestors and progeny). District youth welfare offices, health centers and welfare workers acted as informants. According to an intermediate report of July 28, 1939, the following groups of persons had been “verkartet” (“index-carded”):

1. Polizei-Sanitats-Department (about 60,000 mentally ill people and psychopaths).
2. Trinkerkataster (registry of alcoholics, 40,000).
3. Prostituiertenkataster (registry of prostitutes, about 60,000).

29 Ibid.

4. Zentral-Kinderübernahmestelle (mainly 40,000 problem children and psychopathic children from asozialen families).
5. Steinhof (120,000 individual cases).³⁰

The entire registry encompassed 320,000 persons, i.e. 15% of the population of the greater metropolitan area of Vienna. Considering that the registry of “racially inferior” parts of the population was only the first stage in the persecution of the Jews and mentally-disabled people, one can only sense what far-reaching plans of eradication would have been realized upon the basis of the recorded data after the “Endsieg” of the Nazi regime. And these genocidal practices and plans were not carried out by the SS and police, but by the “ordinary” administrative apparatus! Some researchers (G. Aly, K. H. Roth, K. Dörner, D. Peukert) suggest that a kind of “final solution of the social question”, the eradication of the entire “inferior”-labelled lower classes of society, had been planed.³¹

Criminal Consequences of Racial Hygiene

In 1939/40 Nazi racial hygiene in Austria passed the threshold of program and propaganda to practice. As of January 1, 1940 the Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses of July 14, 1933 was made active, the first criminal measure of the Nazi regime concerning “Erb- und Rassenpflege”. This led to the coercive sterilization of more than 300,000 people labelled as “Erbkranke”, and to about 5,000 deaths (the consequences of operations) in the German Reich.³²

Coercive sterilization (between 6,000 and 10,000 victims) did not reach the same dimensions in Austria as it did in the “Altreich” because at the time of its introduction the far more extensive measure of “euthanasia” was being practiced. The following were considered hereditary diseases: angeborener Schwachsinn (innate mental deficiency; the German term has a more brutal ring), schizophränie, zirkuläres (manic-depressive) Irresein (insanity), erbliche Fallsucht (hereditary epilepsy), hereditary St. Vitus’s dance, hereditary blind-

30 Ibid.

31 See criticism thereto: Ayaß, W. (1995), “Asoziale” im Nationalsozialismus. Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 217–225.

32 Bock, G. (1986), Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus. Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik. Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen.

ness and hearing impairment, grave hereditary deformity and grave alcoholism. Sterilization was decided by a special court concerned with hereditary health issues (Erbgesundheitsgericht) in a pseudo-legal trial. The verdict was carried out in a public institution. If the patient objected force was used.³³ However, coercive sterilization was not enough for the Nazi racial hygienist, since they expected results only after many generations (today we know from modern human genetics that one cannot eradicate hereditary diseases this way³⁴). It was no coincidence that the decision to kill all mentally and physically-disabled people was made in 1939, the year of the outbreak of World War II. The reason was the necessity to make space for wounded soldiers in hospitals, to free hospital personnel to tend wounded war victims, and to save medicine and food. Social expenses were reduced for the good of war time economy. There was no room in Nazi Germany for “unnecessary eaters” and “deadwood lives”. Human life was sacrificed on the basis of a merciless cost-benefit ratio. In Austria at least 25,000 people became victims of the various activities of Nazi “euthanasia” (children’s “euthanasia”, adult “euthanasia”, decentralized killings in various institutions etc.) between 1940 and 1945.³⁵

33 Neugebauer, W. (1992), Zwangsterilisierung und “Euthanasie” in Österreich 1938–1945. In: Zeitgeschichte, 19. J., H. 1/2, 17–20; on the contemporary situation see: Berger, E., Michel, B. (1997), Zwangssterilierung bei geistiger Behinderung. In: Wien Klin Wochenschr, 109/23, 925–931.

34 See: Kattmann, U., Seidler, H. (1989), Rassenkunde und Rassenhygiene. Ein Weg in den Nationalsozialismus. Materialien zur Ausstellung. Friedrich Verlag, Veiber, 5.

35 Neugebauer, W. (1992), *ibid.*

Translator’s note:

This article deals with concepts of National Socialist racialist ideology. Various technical terms therefrom, that were invented in the German language at that time, cannot be translated into English. The same is the case concerning Nazi administrative terms. Thus the German wording was used in this translation and – where necessary – accompanied by an approximate English definition. (James R. Moser)