

WILLIAM E. SEIDELMAN

***FROM THE DANUBE TO THE SPREE:
DECEPTION, TRUTH AND MORALITY IN MEDICINE***

Aus: Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (Hrsg.), Jahrbuch 1999,
Wien 1999.

From the Danube to the Spree

Over a century ago, thousands of physicians from English-speaking countries journeyed to Vienna and Berlin to study with the great leaders and pioneers of medical science. One of those visitors was a Canadian, Dr. William Osler, who was to become one of the most distinguished physicians of his time. In 1874 Osler wrote a letter to a Canadian journal from „Allgemeines Krankenhaus“ in which he gave an enthusiastic account of his attendance at lectures and clinics of the „Vienna School“ including the seventieth birthday celebration of Professor Carl Rokitansky. In Osler’s words, „Americans swarm here, there are fifty or sixty of them at least, and Great Britain is represented by five or six Edinburgh men and a couple of Londoners.“

Ten years later, Osler attended lectures and clinics in Berlin including those of Rudolf Virchow. While in Berlin he was present at a dinner honoring Robert Koch that celebrated the pride of the German people „at the fresh honours to German science which had resulted from Koch’s labours.“ Osler extolled the benefits of „the strong Semitic Element“ in the Berlin medical community, but at the same time commented on the burgeoning anti-Semitism and wrote with pre-scient foreboding of the potential impact of „a Semitic exodus from Germany.“

Returning to Vienna in 1908, Osler was struck by the wonderful new buildings including those of the university, and the Rathaus which, together „with the parliament house, the courts of justice, the twin museums of art and natural history and the new Burg Theatre, form a group of buildings unrivalled in any city.“ In describing medicine in Vienna thirty years after his first visit he attributed Vienna’s influence on American medicine to a „group of brilliant specialists — Hebra, Sigmund and Neumann in dermatology; Arlt and Jaegar in ophthalmology; Schnitzler and von Schrötter in laryngology; Gruber and Politzer in otology.“ Reflecting on his own attempts to enhance academic medicine in North America, Osler observed that, „the Aesculapian centre has moved from the Danube to the Spree.“ Berlin had supplanted Vienna. Osler wistfully hoped that the Aesculapian centre would eventually shift from Berlin to America.¹

¹ Cushing H. *The Life of Sir William Osler* (2 vols.). Oxford: 1925.

SEIDELMAN: FROM THE DANUBE TO THE SPREE

Despite his remarkable prescience, and the loss of his only child in World War I, it is unlikely that Osler could have foretold the tragedy that would later consume Europe during the Hitler period, let alone the part that the Austrian and German medical profession was to play in that tragedy. Not even William Osler could have foreseen the critical role that the esteemed citadels of medical science on the Danube and the Spree would play in the evolution of programs of racial discrimination and genocide resulting in the most massive campaign of organized human destruction in the history of humankind. Osler could not have imagined that the Aesculapian centre would shift to North America because of the destruction of Austrian and German medicine by the academic leaders not just on the banks of the Danube and the Spree but throughout Austria and Germany. Osler could not have imagined how three of the great Vienna institutions he admired in 1908 — the university, the courts of justice and the museum of natural history — would become critical players in the destruction of not only the Jewish presence in Vienna but also of the very essence of humanity.

Even now, five decades after the end of the war, this story is just beginning to be told.

Medical Science during the Hitler Period

Physicians of the 19th and early 20th centuries came to Vienna and Berlin in search of new truths in medical science; the medical profession of Austria and Germany today has difficulty facing the reality and revealing the truth about their role during the Third Reich. Instead of honesty, there has been deceit. This deceit is not a parochial issue of relevance only to Germany and Austria, but rather involves the medical profession worldwide. This deceit has continued for over 5 decades after the war and has involved the leadership of the professions in both countries.

Much more is known today about events in Germany than in Austria. Research on some aspects of this subject is well developed in Germany and much has been published in the past 15 years. University institutes of the history of medicine in the former West Germany have supported scholarship in some areas related to medicine in the Third Reich. By comparison, however, research and scholarship in the history of medicine in Austria during the Hitler period has been minimal. The recent disclosures concerning child euthanasia at the Vienna Psychiatric Hospital and the role of the Institute of Anatomy at the University of Vienna emphasize the dearth of knowledge in this field in Austria. This deficiency in Austrian scholarship underscores the deception surrounding the involvement of the Austrian medical profession in the crimes of the Third Reich.²

² Neugebauer W. Rassenhygiene in Wien 1938. *Wiener Klinische Wochenschrift* (1998) 110:128–134.

Before 1938, many Austrians, including doctors and professors, were supporters of the Fascist cause. After 1938 any pretenses to separation between the countries of Germany and Austria disappeared and the Austrian and German medical professions became one and their criminal conduct synonymous. The Austrian medical profession in fulfilling the ideal of the Austrian people became a part of the German people led by their Austrian-born Führer, the „great healer“ Adolf Hitler. In the words of the dean of medicine at the University of Vienna: „What was the dream of our youth, what we dared not hope for, has become reality: we are one people, one Reich, one leader [*Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*], Adolf Hitler; he strides before us and we follow³.“

The medical profession of Germany and Austria, including academic medicine, played a critical role in the evolution of the Nazi programs of human destruction culminating in genocide and in the exploitation of the dead. Almost 50 percent of German doctors were members of the Nazi party. Of these, many joined early. Of all of the occupational groups in Germany, physicians had the highest proportion of members of the Nazi Party. Physicians were over-represented amongst the membership of the SS by a factor of 7 to 1. The only occupational group to exceed physicians in terms of proportional representation in the SS was the legal profession. During the Third Reich the faculties of medicine became the preeminent academic disciplines in all colleges and universities. Kater has documented that between 1933 and 1945, 59 percent of all university and college rectors in the Third Reich were physicians: University rectors were appointed by the Nazis and membership in the SS helped ensure an academic appointment⁴.

The unity of the Austrian and German medical professions under Nazi rule is exemplified by the Austrian-born and trained psychiatrist, and SS member, Professor Max de Crinis. De Crinis' medical career began in Austria and reached its height in Germany where he was appointed full professor at the University of Cologne. In addition to being a key figure in Hitler's euthanasia campaign, de Crinis was also the Nazi functionary responsible for medical appointments in the university faculties throughout the Reich⁵.

The medical profession of the Reich, led by professors and scientists like de Crinis, defined the victims on the basis of „scientifically“ determined characteristics of inferiority; characteristics that had been „scientifically“ derived from the application of eugenics and racial hygiene. Victims so defined were selected for enforced sterilization, medical killing in the so-called euthanasia operations,

³ Weissmann G. *They All Laughed at Christopher Columbus: Tales of Medicine and the Art of Discovery*. New York: 1987

⁴ Kater M. *Doctors Under Hitler*. The University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill: 1989.

⁵ Ibid.

SEIDELMAN: FROM THE DANUBE TO THE SPREE

and mass killing in the death camps. Killing by gas chamber was perfected in the T-4 euthanasia action that served as the precursor of „The Final Solution“⁶. Academic medicine not only provided the „scientific“ rationale that legitimized eugenic and racial selection, but also exploited the victims as research specimens. Defining some humans as „subhuman“, allowed medical science to place them in the category of scientific specimen; thus denying them the protection from German law that defended animals such as dogs and cats against the same fate⁷. Medical science also plundered the remains of murdered victims to acquire specimens for university institutes of anatomy and pathology and neuropathology, prestigious research institutes such as those of the Kaiser Wilhelm (now Max Planck) Society and in one documented instance a prestigious museum⁸. The revelations continue.

Every human captive of the Nazi state was considered to be a potential subject for research. As helpless victims, the inmates of psychiatric hospitals and concentration camps were available to the academic enterprise for exploitation while alive. Leading scientists and professors took an active part in this ruthless exploitation. Every university anatomical institute in Germany and probably Austria was a recipient of the cadavers of victims of Nazi terror. Other academic and research institutes exploited the bodies of victims including psychiatric patients murdered in the euthanasia campaigns and Jews killed in concentration camps.

The End of the War and the Beginning of the Deception

Early revelations of the medical crimes of the Hitler period resulted in the trial of 23 persons accused of crimes against humanity; this is also known as the „medical trial“⁹. The judgement of that tribunal established ten principles for the conduct of human experimentation which are known collectively as the *Nurem-*

⁶ Ibid. Mitscherlich A. Mielke F. *Doctors of Infamy: The Story of the Nazi Medical Crimes*. 1949. Lifton R. J. *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*. New York: 1986. Proctor R. *Racial Hygiene*. Harvard: 1988. Friedlander H. *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*. Univ. of N. Carolina: 1995. Müller-Hill B. *Murderous Science: Elimination by Scientific Selection of Jews, Gypsies, and Others in Germany, 1933–1945*. Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press: 1998.

⁷ Seidelman W. E. Animal Experiments in Nazi Germany. *The Lancet*: 1986. 1:1214.

⁸ Seidelman W. E. In Memoriam: Medicine's Confrontation with Evil *Hastings Center Report*. (19) 6. November/December 1989. 5–6. Elon A. Death for Sale. *New York Review of Books*. November 22, 1997.

⁹ Of the 23 accused, 20 were physicians.

berg Code that has become the benchmark against which ethical guidelines are measured¹⁰.

A year before the judgement of the Nuremberg medical tribunal, representatives of 32 national medical associations from around the world had met in London at the invitation of the British Medical Association to establish the World Medical Association (WMA) in response to the horrors of Nazi medical crimes. The WMA was the first international organization to address medical ethics and has since become the supposed torchbearer, post Nuremberg, for international standards in medical ethics. The WMA itself has been unwittingly contaminated by the unrequited legacy of the Hitler period.

The moral challenges raised by medical practices during the Hitler period were recognized by the WMA. At its 1948 General Assembly the WMA challenged the German medical profession to issue a declaration in the hope that it would „provide the German profession with an opportunity of giving a promise of their future good behavior.“ That same year the WMA was informed that the German doctors’ organization had taken positive initiatives to restore its international credibility including:

1. instituting the requirement that every German doctor obtaining his license take the revised Hippocratic Oath,
2. the adoption of a resolution condemning all crimes against humanity and all German physicians who had participated in such crimes and
3. the reinstatement of all those physicians persecuted by the Nazis¹¹.

Every German doctor had reportedly been issued a copy of a report on the Nuremberg medical trial that had been prepared by German physicians designated as official observers on behalf of the Federal Chamber of Physicians of Germany (Bundesärztekammer)¹². However, the German doctors’ chamber asserted that only a very small number of members of the profession were involved in the crimes. Blame was laid with a „criminal minority [...] entrusted with power over life and death¹³.“

In 1951 the WMA accepted the Bundesärztekammer as a member organization.

¹⁰ Perley S. Fluss S. Bankowski Z. Simon F. The Nuremberg Code: An International Overview. In Annas G. and Grodin M. *The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code: Human Rights in Human Experimentation*. Oxford: New York: 1992.

¹¹ *World Medical Association Bulletin*. April, 1949; 1(1): 1–20.

¹² There is considerable doubt as to whether copies of the report on the Nuremberg medical trial were ever distributed to any party other than the one copy sent to the World Medical Association. According to one of the authors of the report, Dr. Mitscherlich, „It was as if the book had never been written.“ See Pross C. *Nazi Doctors, German Medicine, and Historical Truth*. In: Annas and Grodin

¹³ *World Medical Association Bulletin*. April, 1949; 1(1): 1–20.

SEIDELMAN: FROM THE DANUBE TO THE SPREE

For the Bundesärztekammer the narrowly focussed Nuremberg medical tribunal provided a scapegoat that enabled the profession as a whole to escape moral accountability. The Nuremberg tribunal was seen as a vindication of the mainstream majority. Acceptance into the world community of professional medical associations freed the Bundesärztekammer of any moral shackles arising out of the Hitler period. Morally unencumbered, the Federal Chamber was able to choose as its first postwar leaders three doctors with strong links to the Nazi era. The first, Dr. Karl Haedekamp, was an alumnus of both the Nazi Party and SA brownshirts who had worked as a party functionary in implementing racial policy. The second, Dr. Ernst Fromm, had been a member of both the SA and the SS. Fromm's successor, Prof. Dr. Hans Joachim Sewering, had been a member of the Nazi Party and the SS and was directly linked with the death of a child, Babette Fröwis, murdered in the child euthanasia program¹⁴.

Having been accepted as members of the world body, the representatives of the German chamber asserted their influence, politically and financially. The office of treasurer of the world organization rested with the German representative. The WMA bank was that of the Bundesärztekammer. The WMA journal was edited and published by officials and organizations associated with the German doctors' organization. Dr. Ernst Fromm, the SA and SS alumnus, became the world organization's president for 1973–74¹⁵.

The Nazi presence on the WMA may have compromised the ethical judgement and decisions of that organization. These include judgements and decisions that have an impact on the internationally accepted ethical standards in medicine in particular experimentation on humans. In the *Nuremberg Code* the principle of informed consent is supreme. In the WMA Declarations of Helsinki that have succeeded above *Code* as the internationally accepted code for the conduct of human experimentation, the principle of informed consent was relegated from the first to the ninth position¹⁶. One explanation of this change was that the *Nuremberg Code* applied principally to Nazi crimes and the revised WMA dec-

¹⁴ Kater M. *Doctors under Hitler*. Ibid. The Burden of the Past: Problems of a Modern Historiography of Physicians and Medicine in Nazi Germany. *German Studies Review*. 1987; X(1):31–56.

¹⁵ The 27th World Medical Assembly. *World Medical Journal*. 1973; 21(1): 4–9. Seidelman W. E. Whither Nuremberg?: Medicine's Continuing Nazi Heritage. *Medicine and Global Survival*. September 1995. <http://www2.healthnet.org/MGS/Seidelman1995.html>

¹⁶ Katz J. The Consent Principle of the Nuremberg Code: Its Significance Then and Now. In: Annas and Grodin.

larations corrected that „error“¹⁷. Another explanation is that the WMA itself had been contaminated by the unrequited legacy of the Nazi period¹⁸.

The Sewering Affair

The scandalous extent of that infiltration became evident in October of 1992 when the WMA selected as its president-elect for 1993–94 Professor Dr. Hans Joachim Sewering of Dachau, Germany. Sewering was a past president of both the Bavarian state medical chamber and the Federal Chamber of Physicians. *The Deutsches Ärzteblatt* announcement of Prof. Sewering’s WMA appointment omitted any mention of his membership in the SS terror organization (#143,000) and the Nazi party (#1,858,805)¹⁹. The statement also overlooked the fact, reported in Germany in a national publication in 1978, that Sewering had been linked to the death of a 14 year old mentally handicapped girl killed in the child euthanasia program. That child, Babette Fröwis, was sent on Sewering’s order from the Schönbrunn institution for handicapped children where Sewering practiced, to the killing center at Eglfing–Haar where children were being killed by starvation, neglect and poisoning. Schönbrunn is a Catholic institution for handicapped children near Dachau. In the transfer order dated October 26, 1943, Sewering wrote that he considered Fröwis to be „no longer suitable for Schönbrunn; she will be sent to Eglfing–Haar, the healing institution responsible for her.“ Babette Fröwis died three weeks later. The cause of her death was murder probably by purposeful starvation and poisoning with an overdose of barbiturate²⁰.

While Sewering’s tarnished history was well known in Germany, it did not become widely known elsewhere until January of 1993, following his appointment as president-elect of the WMA²¹.

¹⁷ Fatturoso V. (Ed.) *Biomedical Science and the Dilemma of Human Experimentation, CIOMOS Round Table Conference*, CIOMOS, Paris: 1967; 9. as cited in: Refsaug W. The Place for International Standards in Conducting Research on Humans. *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Role of the Individual and the Community in the Research, Development, and Use of Biologicals*. 1977. Supplement 2 to Vol. 55 of the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*; 133–139.

¹⁸ Beck W. The World Medical Association and South Africa. *The Lancet*. June 24, 1989. 1441–2. Beck W. The World Medical Association Serves Apartheid. *Int. J. Hlth. Services* 20 (1) 1990. 185–191. Richards T. The World Medical Association: *Can hope triumph over experience?* *BMJ* 1994; 308: 262–6.

¹⁹ *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*. 1992;89 c-2072 October 30, 1992. Beck W. The World Medical Association and South Africa.

²⁰ *Der Spiegel*. June 19, 1978. 84–88.

²¹ Whitney C. R. Top German Doctor Admits SS Past. *New York Times*. January 16, 1993. 3.

The first and, for a while, only German physician to publicly protest the outrage of Sewering's WMA appointment was Professor Michael Kochen of the University of Göttingen. Kochen was one of the few (if not the only) Jewish physician to hold a professorship in a German medical school at the time. On January 22, 1993, a group of German physicians publicly joined Kochen by publishing a protest against Sewering's appointment in 3 leading German newspapers. Signed by about hundred German doctors, the statement included documentation proving Sewering's nefarious past²².

Sewering's denials²³ were refuted by officials of the Schönbrunn institution. The refutation of Sewering was contained in a statement published with the authorization of the Archbishop of Munich. The facts as revealed by the Schönbrunn officials were:

- ❑ Between January, 1943 and June, 1945, 444 patients were starved to death in „hunger houses“ at Eglfing–Haar.
- ❑ Between 1940 and 1944 there was a planned transfer out of patients from Schönbrunn and the sisters knew that the children were to be destroyed as „unworthy life“ as part of the euthanasia killings.
- ❑ Between 1940 and 1944, 909 children from Schönbrunn were „transferred out“.
- ❑ In 1943, 203 children from Schönbrunn were sent to Eglfing–Haar, 179 three days before Christmas²⁴.

The following day the Bundesärztekammer issued a press release announcing that Dr. Sewering was stepping aside from the World Medical Association office. According to this statement Sewering said „After I spent 25 years building up this world organization of doctors, including 20 years as its treasurer, it is now my duty to protect the World Medical Association from severe damage that could result from the threats of the Jewish World Congress.“ In the same press release, the president of the German Physicians' Chamber, Dr. Karsten Vilmar, issued a statement of support for Dr. Sewering²⁵. No mention was made of the allegations against Sewering or the murdered children of Schönbrunn and Eglfing–Haar.

In April of 1993, the Council of the World Medical Association met in Turkey at the Istanbul Hilton. At that meeting Dr. Vilmar issued an official statement of support for Dr. Sewering. The WMA Council was addressed by a close

²² „Deutsche Ärzte protestieren“. *Die Zeit*. January 22, 1993. 22.

²³ *The Washington Post*. Sunday, January 24, 1993. A20.

²⁴ *Die Pressestelle des Ordinariates München meldet: Stellungnahme der Leitung der Behinderteneinrichtung Schönbrunn zu Äußerungen von Professor Sewering in einem Interview mit den Lokalnachrichten der „Süddeutschen Zeitung“ für den Landkreis Dachau*. Schönbrunn (Dachau). January 22, 1993.

²⁵ *Pressestelle der deutschen Ärzteschaft*. Cologne. January 23, 1993.

friend of Sewering, the WMA Executive Treasurer, Adolf Hällmayr. In defending his friend, Hällmayr made the following statement:

„With regard to the papers (Sewering) signed transferring a 14-year-old, epileptic girl to a Nazi euthanasia clinic near Dachau, the policy was that when disabled people became aggressive, they became dangerous and were no longer allowed to live in the convent²⁶.“

Hällmayr’s outrageous statement was published in the official organ of the world body responsible for safeguarding ethical standards in medicine!

While the fourth and current president of the Bundesärztekammer, Dr. Karsten Vilmar, is too young to have been implicated in any way in the Nazi era he has nevertheless been a staunch defender of physicians tainted by a Nazi past including involvement in programs of medical murder. The Federal Chamber permitted doctors associated with the euthanasia programs to continue to practice medicine while facing accusations of having murdered thousands of patients. In 1987, a German medical student criticized the Bundesärztekammer for permitting the euthanasia doctors to continue to practice. Responding to the student, Dr. Karsten Vilmar stated, „your letter and the questions and conclusions contained therein give rise to the suspicion that the history and knowledge of the chief principles of our democracy have escaped you since you, too, are calling for the persecution of those doctors without due recourse to the law²⁷.“

Dr. Vilmar was head of the German doctors’ organization responsible for the notorious press release of January 23, 1993; a press release to which Vilmar himself contributed and which not only disregarded Sewering’s role in the death of Babette Fröwis but also implied that Sewering’s resignation was a consequence of an international Jewish conspiracy!

The World Medical Association at its April 1993 meeting did introduce new guidelines concerning the ethical qualifications of candidates for the office of president of that organization. At that meeting the WMA elected Dr. Vilmar to be Sewering’s successor as Treasurer of the organization. The Bavarian authorities have refused to consider prosecution of Dr. Sewering. He continued to practice respirology in the town of Dachau. His professional standing in Germany has been untarnished by the scandal²⁸.

²⁶ „Professor Sewering’s Resignation from WMA President-Elect.“ *World Medical Journal*. 1993; 39(2): 22–23.

²⁷ Klee E. „Turning the tap on was no big deal.“ — The gassing doctors during the Nazi period and afterwards. In: Benz W. Distel B. (eds.) *Dachau Review 2*. History of Nazi Concentration Camps. Studies, Reports, Documents. Vol. 2. Comité International de Dachau, Brussels. 1990. 4.

²⁸ For the definitive account of the Sewering/WMA affair see: Kater M. The Sewering Scandal of 1993 and the German Medical Establishment. In: Berg M. & Cocks G. (eds.) *Medicine and Modernity: Public Health and Medical Care in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Germany*. Washington D.C; German Historical Institute and Cambridge Univ. Press. 1997.

Doctor Heinrich Gross and Vienna

The analogous example in Austria is that of Dr. Heinrich Gross whose involvement in the child euthanasia at Am Spiegelgrund is only now receiving serious consideration by legal authorities. Like Sewering, Gross was permitted to continue his professional career into the ninth decade of his life. The travesty of Gross is the fact that, despite the well documented suspicions against him, not only was he permitted to work in a senior administrative position at the scene of the crime (namely, the Vienna Psychiatric Hospital) but also retained a privileged (and paid) position as an expert before the Vienna High Court until only recently. Gross, like Sewering, was given high honors by both the profession and the state²⁹.

Anatomy and Terror in the Third Reich

Another example of deceit involves anatomy during the Third Reich and the exploitation of Nazi tyranny. During the Third Reich anatomy and execution again became inexorably linked, with the university institutes of anatomy becoming the benefactors of Nazi butchery. The execution chambers of regional jails throughout the Reich became slaughterhouses with the remains delivered to the university institutes of anatomy. Many of the anatomized victims were Polish and Russian slave laborers executed for crimes such as socialising with German women³⁰. Whereas German law gave an executed prisoner's family the right to reclaim the cadaver, under the Nazi regime this right was disregarded and eventually suspended. According to Richard Evans, in 1942 the Ministry of Justice declared that the corpses of executed Poles and Jews would „not be released for burial by the relatives³¹.“ The destination would be a university anatomical institute. Institute morgues were sometime filled to overflowing with the remains of prisoners executed in Gestapo prisons. The record books of anatomical institutes faithfully recorded the names of the deceased, the cause of death, the place of death and the specimens prepared from the cadaver.

Professor Hermann Voss

The anatomist, Professor Hermann Voss (1894–1987) of the Reichsuniversität of Poznań in German-occupied Poland, was fully aware of the origins of his anatomo-

²⁹ Silvers J. Hagler T. In the Name of the Fuhrer. *The Sunday Times Magazine* (London). September 14, 1997: 32–41

³⁰ Peiffer J. Neuropathology in the Third Reich: Memorial to those Victims of National-Socialist Atrocities in Germany who were Used by Medical Science. *Brain Pathology* 1: 125–131 (1991).

³¹ Evans R. J. *Rituals of Retribution: Capital Punishment in Germany 1600–1987*. Oxford: 1996.

mized subjects who were young Polish freedom fighters executed by the Gestapo. Voss's personal diary reveals he delighted in the death of Poles who were either cremated in the oven of his anatomical institute or dissected in his anatomy lab. Voss used the bodies of the executed prisoners for the preparation of skeletal remains which he then sold for profit. Some of the remains he used as prizes awarded to the winners of an anatomy guessing game held at a medical students' party. According to Voss's diary, „The first prize was a very nice skull, the tenth was two small sesamoid bones³².“

It is now known that a major purchaser of Voss's nefarious preparations was the Vienna Museum of Natural History³³.

The Federal Republic of Germany: 1988–1991

In 1988 it was revealed that a number of institutions in the former West Germany continued to have such specimens in their collections including specimens derived from victims of the euthanasia campaigns in particular the neuropathological collection of Prof. Julius Hallervorden at the Max Planck Institute of Brain Research as well as the brains of victims of the child euthanasia in the collection of the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry in Munich. Following the 1988 revelations the Government of Israel made a formal complaint to the Federal Government of Germany. In response to the Israeli request, inquiries were made through the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Culture and Education of the Länder. The initial inquiries focussed on institutions in the former Federal Republic of West Germany³⁴. A subsequent report included institutions from the former German Democratic Republic³⁵. No German institution other than the University of Tübingen has conducted a formal investigation into its current collection of human remains from the Hitler period with a report in the public domain.

Since then, there have been two documented requests for formal investigation into collections by two German universities; the University of Heidelberg and the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. The University of Heidel-

³² Aly G. The Posen Diaries of the Anatomist Hermann Voss. In: Aly G. Chroust P. and Pross C. (eds.) *Cleansing the Fatherland: Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene*. Johns Hopkins: 1994.

³³ Seidelman W. E. In *Memoriam: Medicine's Confrontation with Evil*.

³⁴ Report of the Secretary-General of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany. Bonn, July 19, 1989 and supplemental report of February, 1991 (English translation).

³⁵ Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. IIIA – 4630/2. Abschlußbericht. „Präparate von Opfern des Nationalsozialismus in anatomischen und pathologischen Sammlungen deutscher Ausbildungs- und Forschungseinrichtungen“. Bonn, 25. 1. 1994.

berg was requested to undertake a formal inquiry into the matter of the brains of murdered children collected by the Heidelberg psychiatrist and euthanasia expert Professor Carl Schneider. The Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich was requested to conduct a formal inquiry into allegations that the university's Institute of Anatomy included cadavers of circumcised males identified as „prisoners from wartime.“ Of a total of 29 male cadavers directly observed over a period in 1988, 17 had been circumcised. The Munich allegations included identifying numbers for some of observed specimens. Both institutions demurred³⁶.

While the Max Planck organization did remove specimens from its collection in the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research in Frankfurt and the Max Planck Institute for Psychiatry in Munich, no formal investigation was conducted by that organization. In 1990, the Max Planck Society buried the entire collection of Hallervorden specimens from the Frankfurt institute and specimens from the Munich institute in the Forest Cemetery in Munich³⁷. The specimens from the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry had been derived principally from children murdered at Eglfing-Haar as part of the child euthanasia³⁸.

Specimens from institutions in the German state of Hessen (other than the Max Planck organization), principally the University of Frankfurt, were buried in the main cemetery of the city of Frankfurt and a commemorative ceremony was held in December of 1990³⁹.

There has been no investigation by Humboldt University or the Berlin Charité Hospital into the research or the anatomical collection of that university's former dean, Professor Hermann Stieve. Stieve was a leading anatomist at the University of Berlin and the Berlin Charité Hospital who performed experiments on the female reproductive system. When a woman of reproductive age was to be executed by the Gestapo, Stieve was informed, a date of execution decided upon and the doomed woman told of the scheduled date of her death.

³⁶ Confidential report to Ambassador Dr. Bartold Witte, Foreign Office, Federal Republic of Germany from W. E. Seidelman. April 29, 1991. Author's personal files. Correspondence between W. E. Seidelman, Amb. Dr. Barthold Witte (Leiter der Kulturabteilung Auswärtiges Amt, FRG), Dr. Wiprecht von Treskow (successor to Amb. Witte), and Prof. Dr. Peter Ulmer, Rector, Universität Heidelberg. 1991–1992. Author's personal files. Correspondence between W. E. Seidelman, Amb. Dr. Barthold Witte, Dr. Wiprecht von Treskow, Dr. Vincenz C. Frank-Steiner (Basel, Switzerland), and Prof. Reinhard Putz (Anatomische Anstalt; Ludwig-Maximilian-Universität München). 1991–1993. Author's personal files.

³⁷ Dickman S. Memorial ceremony to be held. *Nature* 345; May 17, 1990:192.

³⁸ Kreuzberg G. Verwicklung, Aufdeckung und Bestattung: Über den Umgang mit einem Erbe. In: Kerstig F. Teppel K. Walter B (eds.) *Nach Hadamar: Zum Verhältnis von Psychiatrie und Gesellschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*. Paderborn: 1993.

³⁹ Report of the Secretary-General of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany. Bonn, July 19, 1989, and supplemental report of February, 1991 (English translation).

Stieve then studied the effect of the psychic trauma of the woman's anticipated execution on her menstrual pattern. Upon the woman's execution in the Gestapo execution chamber in Plötzensee Prison her pelvic organs were removed for histological examination⁴⁰. Other victims were subjected to sexual intercourse with beheading scheduled to take place a precisely designated number of days after coitus. Upon the woman's decapitation her uterus and fallopian tubes were examined for sperm⁴¹. Stieve's experiments on female prisoners may represent some of the worst examples of evil perpetrated on women in the name of science.

Anatomy in Austria: Professor Eduard Pernkopf

Another anatomist who was aware of the origins of subjects anatomized in his institute was Professor Eduard Pernkopf of the University of Vienna. Until recently, Pernkopf's name was principally associated with a major anatomical text of which he was the founding editor and on which he continued to work until his death in 1955. The original Pernkopf anatomical work comprised seven books with over 800 paintings by Viennese artists. Writing in 1988, Prof. David Williams of Purdue University described the Pernkopf opus as a „masterpiece“ and the „standard by which all other illustrated anatomic works are measured.“ It is the first textbook of anatomy to utilize the then recently developed four color separation printing technique. The original publisher was, and continues to be, Urban & Schwarzenberg, who employed the artists and who still own the paintings.⁴²

Eduard Pernkopf was a leading Austro-Fascist who, after the Nazi takeover of Austria, was appointed dean of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Vienna. From that position he led the purge of Jewish faculty⁴³. Pernkopf also became an editor of the prestigious Viennese Medical Weekly (*Wiener Klinische Wochenschrift*) in which he espoused his racist views⁴⁴. In 1943 Pernkopf was appointed Rector Magnificus of the University of Vienna; a position he held until the end of the war.

Graphic evidence suggestive of the ignobility of that period can be found in the original Pernkopf work in which the artists expressed their Nazi sympathies

⁴⁰ Kreutzberg G. Verwicklung, Aufdeckung und Bestattung: Über den Umgang mit einem Erbe.

⁴¹ Letter from Prof. Friedrich Vogel of Heidelberg to Prof. Jürgen Peiffer of Tübingen. September 12, 1997 quoted (with the stated permission of Prof. Vogel) in a letter from Prof. Peiffer to W. E. Seidelman. December 3, 1997. Author's personal files.

⁴² Williams D. J. The History of Eduard Pernkopf's Topographische Anatomie des Menschen. *Journal of Biomedical Communication*. Spring 1988.

⁴³ Ernst E. A Leading Medical School Seriously Damaged: Vienna 1938. *Ann. Int. Med.* 1995;122:789-92

⁴⁴ Weissmann G. *They All Laughed at Christopher Columbus*.

in their paintings. The artist Eric Lepier incorporated a swastika into many of his signatures. The artists Karl Entresser and Franz Batke incorporated the SS symbol into some of their signatures⁴⁵. While the signatures with Nazi icons are provocative and suggestive symbols of political sympathies, more serious questions concern the origins of the subjects portrayed in those paintings.

In 1994, Professor Howard Israel, an oral surgeon at Columbia University in New York, began investigating the question of the Pernkopf atlas. Professor Israel had used *Pernkopf's Anatomy* constantly since his student days. A casual remark of a colleague about the atlas stimulated Howard Israel's inquiry. Upon discovering the swastikas in the Lepier paintings Professor Israel conducted a more detailed examination of the paintings. He was particularly concerned about the origins and cause of death of a cachectic appearing young man who is portrayed in the 1952 edition. The undated painting signed by Lepier shows the man's crudely, closely shaven hair in considerable detail⁴⁶. The haircut, together with the man's relative youth and cachectic appearance, could lead one to suspect that the subject may have been a prisoner from wartime. Other questions concern paintings of a dissection of the femoral region of an apparently circumcised male subject published in the 1943 volume⁴⁷. Circumcised males in Europe at the time of the paintings were probably Jews.

Current editions of *Pernkopf's Anatomy* include paintings from the original editions but, with two exceptions, the swastikas and SS symbols have been air-brushed out or eliminated. The two exceptions are paintings of the apparently circumcised male subject with the double „S“ in the form of an „SS“ symbol in the signature of Karl Endtresser⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ Pernkopf E. *Topographische Anatomie des Menschen: Lehrbuch und Atlas der regionär-stratigraphischen Präparation*. Urban & Schwarzenberg: Berlin und Wien: 1943.

For the signature of Erich Lepier with swastika see:

II. Band: Erste Hälfte: Tafel 2 Abb. 13, Tafel 33 Abb. 14, Tafel 14 Abb. 25, Tafel 15 Abb. 26, Tafel 16 Abb. 27, Tafel 17 Abb. 28, Tafel 18 Abb. 29, Tafel 32 Abb. 43, Page 351 Abb. 108, and Tafel 65 Abb. 4.

For the signature of Karl Endtresser with „SS“ symbol see:

II. Band: Zweite Hälfte: Tafel 102 Abb. 188, Tafel 103 Abb. 189.

Pernkopf E. *Topographische Anatomie des Menschen: Lehrbuch und Atlas der regionär-stratigraphischen Präparation*. Urban & Schwarzenberg: Wien und Innsbruck: 1952.

For the signature of Franz Bratke with „SS“ symbol see:

III. Band: Tafel 9 Abb. 14, and Tafel 10 Abb. 15.

⁴⁶ Pernkopf E. *Topographische Anatomie des Menschen*. Wien und Innsbruck: 1952. Tafel 43 Abb. 50.

⁴⁷ Pernkopf E. *Topographische Anatomie des Menschen*. Berlin und Wien: 1943.

II. Band: Zweite Hälfte: Tafel 102 Abb. 188, Tafel 103 Abb. 189.

⁴⁸ Platzer W. (ed.) *Pernkopf Anatomy: Atlas of Topographic and Applied Human Anatomy*. Vols. I & II. Urban & Schwarzenberg: Baltimore–Munich; 1989.

For the Endtresser signatures see vol. 2: Figure 336 Page 338, Figure 337 Page 339.

Professor Israel made a number of inquiries which eventually resulted in my involvement. Our cooperative effort culminated in a request for assistance to The Israel Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, Yad Vashem⁴⁹.

In March of 1995 Yad Vashem, formally petitioned the universities of Vienna and Innsbruck requesting that the universities undertake an inquiry in order to determine the origins of the subjects portrayed in *Pernkopf's Anatomy*. The suggested model for the proposed investigation of the specimens in Austria is that of the University of Tübingen⁵⁰. A request was made of the University of Innsbruck because Williams, in his 1988 paper noted, with specific reference to the Pernkopf dissections: „Many of these dissections have survived and may be seen in the University of Innsbruck's Anatomy Institute.“⁵¹

The initial response from officials with the universities of Vienna and Innsbruck was denial. In general, the answers of the universities' officials were:

- The hair of all cadavers was shaven for hygienic reasons; therefore the person portrayed in the 1952 volume should not be construed as a Nazi victim because of the fact that his hair was shorn.
- All the subjects portrayed in the 1952 volume were from after 1945 and not from wartime.
- The Vienna institute was bombed during the war and no specimens from wartime are still in existence⁵².

Sadly, the responses were false and deceiving for the following reasons:

- The illustration of the man with the closely shaven head in the 1952 volume is the only one in either the 1943 or 1952 volumes in which the subject's head had been so closely and coarsely shaven. Some subjects portrayed in the 1943 volume are actually shown with a full head of hair. Some of the people portrayed in the 1952 volume had been shaven pre-mortem allowing some for re-growth before death.

⁴⁹ Letter from Prof. Michael Kater of York University (Toronto) to Prof. Robert Lifton. July 21, 1994. Author's personal files. Letter from Prof. Howard Israel to W. E. Seidelman. September 18, 1994. Author's personal files.

⁵⁰ Letter from Amb. R. Dafni, Vice-Chairman of *Yad Vashem* to Univ. Prof. Dr. Alfred Ebenbauer: Rector, University of Vienna. March 23, 1995. Letter from Amb. R. Dafni, Vice-Chairman of *Yad Vashem* to Univ. Prof. Dr. Hans Moser: Rector, University of Innsbruck. March 23, 1995.

⁵¹ Williams D. J. The History of Eduard Pernkopf's *Topographische Anatomie des Menschen*.

⁵² Prof. W. Platzer. Report to Univ. Prof. Dr. Hans Moser. Rector, University of Innsbruck: April 3, 1995. Prof. Dr. A. Gisel. Report to Univ. Prof. Dr. Alfred Ebenbauer, Rector, University of Vienna. April 26, 1995. Prof. Dr. W. Firbas of the Anatomical Institute of the University of Vienna. Report to Univ. Prof. Ebenbauer. March 30, 1995. Dr. K. Mühlberger, Director of the Archives of the University of Vienna. Report to Univ. Prof. Ebenbauer. May 18, 1995. Prof. Dr. med. W. Krause. Report to Univ. Prof. Ebenauer. April 13, 1995.

- ❑ The assertion that all subjects portrayed in the 1952 volume came from after 1945 was false. A number of the paintings in that volume were signed by the artist Franz Batke for the years 1943 and 1944⁵³.
- ❑ With respect to the assertion that specimens from after 1938 had been destroyed in a bombing, it was reported that some subjects had been identified after the war⁵⁴.

As to the possibility that Pernkopf specimens were to be found at the University of Innsbruck, Williams stated in 1988 that *many* of the Pernkopf specimens were to be found at that university, not Vienna⁵⁵. International attention was brought to the matter as a result of the publication of articles and letters in the Israeli and American press and the *Journal of the American Medical Association*⁵⁶.

In February of 1997, the Rector of the University of Vienna, Professor Alfred Ebenbauer, struck a committee of investigation chaired by Dr. Gustav Spann of the Institute for Contemporary History of the University of Vienna. An interim report of the investigative committee was published in late 1997⁵⁷ with the final report released on October 1st, 1998.⁵⁸ Given the fact that the records of the anatomical institute had been destroyed in a wartime bombing there was insufficient evidence to determine whether or not the subjects portrayed in the Pernkopf atlas may have been victims of Nazi terror. However, it was established that the institute did receive the cadavers of almost 1.400 persons executed in the Gestapo execution chamber at the Vienna regional court (Landesgericht). The investiga-

⁵³ Pernkopf E. *Topographische Anatomie des Menschen*. Wien und Innsbruck: 1952.

For the paintings signed for 1943 see:

Tafel 3 Abb. 8, Tafel 4 Abb. 9, Tafel 5 Abb. 10, Tafel 7 Abb. 12, Tafel 8 Abb. 13

For the paintings signed for 1944 see:

Tafel 9 Abb. 14, Tafel 10 Abb. 15, Tafel 14 Abb. 19.

⁵⁴ Lehner M. *Medizinische Fakultät der Universität in den Jahren 1938–1945* (Dissertation). University of Vienna. 1990.

⁵⁵ Williams D. J. The History of Eduard Pernkopf's *Topographische Anatomie des Menschen*.

⁵⁶ Broder J. The corpses that won't die. *Jerusalem Report*. February 22, 1996. 24–25. Israel H. Seidelman W. E. Nazi Origins of an Anatomy Text: The Pernkopf Atlas. *JAMA* 1997. 276 (20) 1633. Wade N. Doctors question use of Nazi's medical atlas. *The New York Times*. November 26, 1996. C1. Israel H. The Nazi Origins of Eduard Pernkopf's *Topographische Anatomie des Menschen*: The Biomedical Ethical Issues. *The Reference Librarian* 61/62. 1998. 131–146.

⁵⁷ Malina P. Eduard Pernkopf's atlas of anatomy or: the fiction of „pure science.“ *Wiener Klinische Wochenschrift* (1998) 110: 193–201. (English translation of an interim report of the „Pernkopf Commission“ which was published in *Wiener Klinische Wochenschrift* (1997) 109: 935–943.)

⁵⁸ Untersuchungen zur anatomischen Wissenschaft in Wien 1938–1945. Senatsprojekt der Universität Wien, Hrsg. Akademischer Senat der Universität Wien, Wien 1998.

tions also revealed the existence of almost 200 specimens from victims of Nazi terror at other institutes of the University of Vienna. It was also established that scientists at the University of Vienna had been involved in Dr. Heinrich Gross's research on the brains of children murdered in the euthanasia killings at Am Spiegelgrund. The investigations documented a linkage between the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Graz and an SS medical research institute in Graz that received cadavers and body parts of victims murdered at the concentration camps of Mauthausen and Gusen. The report included documentation on the Vienna Museum of Natural History and human specimens and death masks purchased from the Institute of Anatomy of the Reichsuniversität of Poznań headed by Professor Hermann Voss.

The University of Innsbruck did not agree to undertake any investigation. The Institute of Anatomy of the University of Innsbruck has been headed by the recent editor of Pernkopf's *Anatomy*, Professor Werner Platzer. Insofar as the University of Innsbruck is concerned, it would appear that the deception continues.

Despite the initial denials and prevarication on the part of some of its officials the University of Vienna eschewed the path of deceit. In so doing, the university committee charged with investigating the Pernkopf matter established a model for future investigations of its type; investigations that will have to be undertaken at every institution in countries that once were part of the Third Reich and that have collections of human remains. Those institutions include institutes of anatomy and pathology and museums of natural history and anthropology. There is every possibility that misbegotten specimens are to be found in private collections as well.

The Moral Challenge

In undertaking the Pernkopf investigations the University of Vienna under its former rector, Professor Alfred Ebenbauer, has established a new example of moral leadership for academic institutions throughout the world. With the completion of the University of Vienna investigations and the publication of the report of the investigative committee, the nation, the state, the City of Vienna, the University of Vienna, the Vienna Museum of Natural History, the Vienna regional court, the Vienna Psychiatric Hospital and the communities of physicians and researchers in medicine and anthropology face the challenge of remembrance. Not remembrance through cemeteries and monuments but through living reminders within the respective histories and cultures of the nation, the state, the city, the institutions and the professions. Will future students of medicine, genetics, anthropology and law ever learn of the history of what happened to their respective professions during the Hitler period and the implications of those

SEIDELMAN: FROM THE DANUBE TO THE SPREE

events for humankind? In this age of molecular biology, information technology and ethnic cleansing how will the professors and scientists capture the tragic lessons of the Hitler era. How will professors and scientists sensitize their colleagues in other countries and cultures on the vulnerability of the relationship between science, medicine and humanity and the perils of power and discrimination? The challenge now will be an ongoing remembrance embodied in the textbooks, the curriculum, the lecture halls, the laboratories and exhibit halls of these institutions.

A century ago physicians like William Osler visited Vienna in search of new truths arising from the discoveries and innovations and teachings of great scientists and physicians of the „Vienna School.“ The challenge of the forthcoming century is for Vienna to set a new example to the world: that of a morality which can arise from the devastation begotten when scientific „truth“ and political evil conspired to select and to destroy human beings and in so doing undermined the foundations of humanity itself.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ I wish to acknowledge the contributions of some of those people who have been of assistance in this work.

Professor Howard Israel of Columbia University is responsible for first raising the questions concerning the Pernkopf atlas that resulted in the Vienna investigations. I am pleased to have been able to join with him in this effort.

Professor Michael Kater, the Distinguished Research Professor of History at York University (Toronto) has been an important partner and assistant in this effort for almost 15 years.

It is unlikely that the Vienna investigations would have occurred if it had not been for the effort of Yad Vashem in particular Ambassador Reuven Dafni and Ambassador Johanan Bein who served as successive vice-chairs of Yad Vashem.

My daughter, Aviva Dayan, served as a critical editor of this paper.