

Book Review

***Kulturwissenschaften und Nationalsozialismus*. Edited by Jürgen Elvert and Jürgen Nielsen-Sikora. 'Historische Mitteilungen im Auftrage der Ranke-Gesellschaft', 72. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner. 2008. 922 pp. €89 (hardback).**

At the collapse of the Nazi State, some Germans committed suicide, unwilling to face a world without their *Führer*; some Germans were brought to Nuremberg, where they were placed on trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity; and most Germans began to act as if they had never been attracted to Adolf Hitler, despite sometimes copious evidence to the contrary. As early as 1946, Max Weinreich wrote *Hitler's Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes against the Jewish People*; but most professors managed to cultivate the idea, common to a large portion of their German fellows, that they had played no role in Nazi crimes and had merely been caught under the boot of a totalitarian regime. This postwar denial endured largely intact for a generation or more. In the past two or three decades, however, it has been overturned by scholarship which shows that 'good Germans' of every sort succumbed to the attractions of Hitler and worked willingly within and for the Nazi State. Such an assessment clearly includes German professors and their universities. Despite purges of Jewish faculty, despite the burning of books, despite violations of academic freedom, the Nazi goal of *Gleichschaltung* (coordination) within the universities is now widely thought to have been *Selbstgleichschaltung*. It was professors who helped burn the books and professors who competed for preferment after their Jewish and left-wing colleagues had been removed.

Kulturwissenschaften und Nationalsozialismus is one of several recent attempts to focus on scholars in the humanities as one aspect of this problem. The plan for the book, formulated in 2000, involved thirty-five disciplines. Participants hoped to create a foundation for future scholarship, showing where research on each of these disciplines stood at the time and creating a sort of grid by which interdisciplinary comparisons could be made. Jürgen Elvert somewhat disarmingly admits that the goals of the project were not achieved (p. 17). No contributor could be found for some areas, some contributors agreed to produce a chapter but failed to deliver, and some contributors produced work unworthy of being printed. Nonetheless, this 'failed' project resulted in twenty-eight chapters plus an introduction, filling some 922 pages. It is a very useful work, though hardly a quick read and somewhat uneven in quality and thoroughness. Individual contributions vary from a low of thirteen pages to a high of sixty on standard topics such as history, sociology, literature and political science, with much attention to philology, and to fields as diverse as classical archaeology and modern theatre.

Hans-Joachim Dahms, one of the contributors, was an early player in the uncovering of academic complicity. In 1987 he co-edited *Die Universität Göttingen unter dem Nationalsozialismus* and he has since written extensively on philosophy during the Nazi era. Here he gives a very useful assessment of that discipline, arguing that no actual 'National Socialist philosophy' emerged during the Third Reich, nothing to equal, for example, the anti-Jewish, anti-Einstein 'German Physics' pushed by two Nobel laureates, Philipp Lenard and Johannes Stark. He blames this upon the quarrelsomeness of German philosophers and their ongoing arguments over neo-Kantianism, logical positivism, and other branches within their field. Many important philosophers, however, did endorse the Nazi state, most famously Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's supporters later argued that his famous pro-Nazi address in 1933 as *Rektor* at Freiburg had nothing to do with his philosophical ideas and represented merely an early, mistaken assessment. Dahms cuts him no such slack: 'It has long been clear that his NS enthusiasm during the Third Reich never stopped and that even after 1945 he never distanced himself from National Socialism in general or from his own actions during that time' (p. 43). Dahms sketches the careers of other pro-Nazi philosophers, such as Alfred Baeumlner of Berlin, who said at the time of

the book burning in 1933: 'What we remove today are poisonous materials which were collected during a time of false tolerance. It is our task to let the German spirit within us become so powerful that such materials can no longer be collected' (p. 48).

Horst Junginger, taking on the discipline of *Religionswissenschaft*, illustrates some of the irony and complexity of the Nazi era. As a student of comparative religion, Junginger cannot approve the old tendency to study religion only from the perspective of orthodox Christian belief. He mentions Adolf von Harnack, for example, arguing a century ago for the primacy of the Christian point of view (p. 52). Junginger then bemoans the postwar influence of Karl Barth, whose Christology rejected all non-Christian faiths as false attempts to find the true God (p. 85). Comparative religion of the sort practised today expects a more modern approach, more objective, based upon empirical evidence and similar to anthropology in its method. Ironically, Junginger finds that just that sort of open modernity produced a strange variety of racist and *völkisch* religious movements during the Nazi period. Many of the individuals he describes began as Protestants. They studied theology and then often spent time in a mission field, perhaps in India, as in the case of Jakob Wilhelm Hauer. Back in Germany their linguistic skills and openness to non-Christian religions allowed them to fill newly created university positions in comparative religion. Within the nationalistic and racist atmosphere of their day, however, they were likely to use their freedom from Christian orthodoxy to endorse syncretistic beliefs closely related to the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. Some, such as Hauer with his German Faith Movement, tried to return to a purer, pagan past. Others, such as the *Deutsche Christen* within the official Protestant Church, used comparative religion to reach the unlikely conclusion that Christianity had no actual connection to Judaism, but had always been entirely and inherently anti-Jewish. Walter Grundmann, professor of theology at the University of Jena and founding director of the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life, worked at de-judaizing the Christian tradition and even Jesus himself (as described recently by Susannah Heschel in *The Aryan Jesus: Christians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*). Dozens of professors attended conferences at Grundmann's institute and contributed to its work. No scholar today would consider the work of Grundmann or the ideas of Hauer objective attempts to study and learn from religious traditions, yet many professors made that claim in the Nazi era and achieved success.

Every chapter in this book acknowledges the affinity of German scholarship for the ideas of the Nazi state, though authors differ in their assessment of culpability and in the breadth of their critique. Most academics never cooperated with the regime quite as much as the regime would have liked; most retained some loyalty to the ideals of their profession. Yet the story remains grim and much closer to the one told by Max Weinreich in 1946 than defenders of academia might like to think. This book is an important source for insight into the phenomenon. As is often the case, these German authors could have paid more attention to scholarship produced in Britain and America. However, most made good use of archival records, correspondence and other forms of primary documents. *Kulturwissenschaft und Nationalsozialismus* thus takes its place beside similar volumes, such as *Nationalsozialismus in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Hartmut Lehmann and Otto Gerhard Oexle, eds, 2004) and *Die Rolle der Geisteswissenschaften im Dritten Reich, 1933–1945* (Frank-Rutger Hausmann, ed., 2002), in helping us understand the failure of humanities scholars in Nazi Germany to be humane.

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