

THE PERSECUTION OF HOMOSEXUALS IN NAZI GERMANY

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On May 6, 1933, a group of students from the College of Physical Education in Berlin arrived early in the morning to raid the office headquarters of the Institute for Sexual Research in Berlin. According to a contemporary anonymous report, the invading students “took up a military-style position in front of the house and then forced their way inside, with musical accompaniment... [and then] they smashed down the doors.”¹ Once inside, the same group commenced to ransack the place: they “emptied inkwells, pouring ink onto various papers and carpets, and then set about the private bookcases” and then “took with them what struck them as suspicious, keeping mainly to the so-called black list.”² Later that day, after the students had left “large piles of ruined pictures and broken glass” in their wake, a contingent of Storm Troopers arrived to complete the operation by confiscating nearly ten thousand books that they subsequently burned three days later.³ This raid was part of an overall campaign to purge “books with an un-German spirit from Berlin libraries,” undertaken early in the regime of the Third Reich. Their target, the Institute for Sexual Research founded by the pioneering German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, was one of the premier centers of progressive thought concerning human sexuality – most notably homosexuality – in the world.⁴ This episode raises a number of questions, including why Nazi leaders deemed this organization to possess “an un-German spirit” that thus warranted a thorough purge so early in the regime.⁵ The fact that Hirschfeld, like many other leading sexologists in Germany, was Jewish and that many Nazis thus regarded the burgeoning field of “*Sexualwissenschaft*, or the science of sex,” as “Jewish science” likely

¹ “How Magnus Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sexual Science Was Demolished and Destroyed,” (1933) in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 367.

² *Ibid.*, 368.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁵ *Ibid.*

contributed to the Institute's selection as a target.⁶ However, Nazi officials initially left the offices of other sexology researchers undisturbed despite censuring the publication of their work. Albert Moll, a fellow German sexologist and also a Jew, was among Hirschfeld's colleagues initially spared from Nazi violence. The distinguishing factor between Hirschfeld and many of his colleagues thus appears to have been his own open homosexual orientation as well as the dedication of his Institute's research and advocacy to issues affecting homosexuals; Hirschfeld even drew criticism from his colleagues on this account.⁷ Ultimately, the selective targeting of a prominent public figure who had dedicated his career to advancing the rights of homosexuals and increasing the public's understanding of this community reveals an often neglected but central component of Nazi racial and social ideology: the persecution of German homosexuals. Related efforts to promote a higher birthrate among alleged ethnically pure Germans by idealizing the image of the fertile domestic woman in addition to the associated campaign against abortion among ethnic Germans represent one side of Nazi policy aimed at realizing their vaunted goal of propagating the German race. The campaign against homosexuality in Germany was a complementary manifestation of these population policies stemming from a social ideology that employed contemporary scientific understandings of human sexuality in its service. This campaign led to the destruction of a burgeoning, progressive, and strikingly modern culture of sexuality that is often associated with the era of the Weimar Republic. In fact, this culture had roots reaching much farther back into German history, including many of the pioneers of modern sexual research and reform, causing the Nazi campaign to stand in yet starker relief. Ultimately, this little-known episode of persecution culminated in the deaths of thousands of suspected

⁶ Erwin J. Haeberle, "Swastika, Pink Triangle and Yellow Star – The Destruction of Sexology and the Persecution of Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," *The Journal of Sex Research* 17, no. 3 (1981): 276.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 271-276.

homosexuals in concentration camps where inmates from this population often experienced some of the most ruthless treatment alongside other social groups similarly circumscribed by Nazi ideology.

Given the brutal treatment attested to by homosexual survivors of the Third Reich, Germany's status as home to perhaps the most progressive homosexual subculture in the Western world prior to the Nazi regime seems somewhat discordant. However, the historical record supports the notion that, in many respects, Germany was the birthplace of the modern homosexual liberation movement. The German-Hungarian writer Károly Mária Kertbeny invented the very term "homosexuality" in 1868 as part of his argument against Prussia's legal code that criminalized homosexual relations between men. Another early German reformer, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, also campaigned against legal sanctions penalizing homosexual activity during the 1860s and argued that such behavior constituted a "third sex" that was "a natural alternative to the two sexes of male and female" rather than a social pathology.⁸ Other reformers and researchers then took up this concept and argued that homosexuality was best understood as a biological phenomenon. Hirschfeld was prominent within this community; he founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, the first of its kind, in 1897, to advocate for the recognition of the civil rights of homosexuals, and subsequently founded the Institute for Sexual Science in 1919 to advance research in this area. Given these developments, it should be noted, imperial Germany was far from manifesting a uniform tolerance of homosexuality. The Prussian criminal code, for example, which became the basis of the German penal code after unification in 1871, made homosexual relations between men a punishable offense, and a major scandal in 1906 indicted several high-ranking members of the imperial government on the basis of their alleged

⁸ Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman, "Healthy and Unhealthy Sexuality," in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 351.

homosexuality.⁹ Nonetheless, strikingly progressive movements around the issue of homosexuality developed in Germany during this period, bearing the potential for greater fulfilment in a more liberal political and cultural context.

The period of the Weimar Republic provided the necessary environment for these progressive trends within German culture to come to fruition. A forceful campaign to repeal the notorious Paragraph 175 of the German penal code that criminalized male homosexuality succeeded on October 16, 1929, in a Reichstag committee vote.¹⁰ This achievement was the result of a long campaign against the legal punishment of homosexual relations. Building on earlier arguments by reformers like Kertbeny and Ulrichs, reformers during the Weimar Republic argued that homosexuality was an innate orientation with a biological basis – a remarkably modern claim – and that therefore the law should not punish individuals who demonstrated this orientation as criminals. Kurt Hiller, an influential journalist and essayist in Weimar Germany, exemplified this line of reasoning in his argument in 1921 against “the scourge” of Paragraph 175: he wrote that, “the basic fact is that there are typical variations between people not only in regard to somatic-racial and characterological features, but also in regard to sexuality.”¹¹ He further developed his argument by affirming a classically liberal view of the state’s role in regulating individual behavior, arguing that the state should not “interfere with the individuals within its compass in the expression of their particularity” unless “the activity of the individual collides with the interests of another individual, the grouping of other individuals, or perhaps of the whole, the society.”¹² Based upon these two premises, Hiller

⁹ Ibid., 351-353.

¹⁰ Laurie Marhoefer, “Among Abnormals: The Queer Sexual Politics of Germany’s Weimar Republic 1918-1933” (doctoral dissertation, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2008), 7.

¹¹ Kurt Hiller, “The Law and Sexual Minorities,” (1921) in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 696.

¹² Ibid.

concluded that the “decontrol” of homosexuality by the state was warranted because, “for the sake of an act, by which only individual pleasure is produced and not a fly in the cosmos is harmed, the state martyrs productive citizens.”¹³ Although painfully ironic in hindsight, Hiller underscored the gravity of the issue as he even went so far as to ask, “When in Germany were the Jews ever so persecuted as the homosexuals?”¹⁴ Furthermore, although much of the reform effort focused on homosexual men, homosexual women were also recognized and involved in the liberation movement. At the end of the decade, for example, an “Appeal to All Homosexual Women” by the German League for Human Rights in September of 1929 implored “all of you women who love the same sex” to support the campaign on the grounds that lesbians suffered from the same “injustice and humiliation” as homosexual men that enshrined Paragraph 175 in national law.¹⁵

Reformers like Hiller developed their views of homosexuality and its legal status during the Weimar era within the broader context of an atmosphere of sexual revolution that affected all aspects of life. Hugo Bettauer, an Austrian writer, captured the spirit of the new sexual culture in his essay, “The Erotic Revolution,” published in *Er und Sie* in 1924, when he declared that, “the erotic revolution...wants to create free, happy people. For it is simply the case, and no one can change it, that *everything existing is based on eroticism*, everything that is beautiful, good, and lovely on earth is bound up inseparably with eroticism.”¹⁶ The novelist Alfred Döblin, a leader in Germany’s literary modernism movement, echoed Bettauer’s sentiment in an essay titled “Sexuality as Sport,” which argued that, “one cannot possibly overestimate sexuality. It is...the

¹³ Ibid., 697.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ League for Human Rights, “Appeal to All Homosexual Women,” (1929) in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 704.

¹⁶ Hugo Bettauer, “The Erotic Revolution,” (1924) in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 700.

second axis about which our existence turns” and “maintains the drive of the world.”¹⁷ Other reformers emphasized women’s liberation from constricting social roles; the popular Dutch physician and lecturer throughout Germany, Theodor Hendrik van de Velde, argued in this regard in *Ideal Marriage* that modern marriages must attend to the sexual needs of women as well as those of men in “equal mutual partnership[s],” rather than serving the needs of men alone.¹⁸ More generally, the historian Eric Weitz summarizes the new spirit of the Weimar era:

The revolution and the foundation of the republic also marked a grand new departure, a leap, so it seemed, into democracy and the modern world. Germans would leave behind the stuffy, rigid, and authoritarian society of imperial Germany dominated by royalty, nobility, and the military, and a constrained and hypocritical sexual morality. To be modern meant to be democratic, and it also meant a freer, more open attitude toward bodies and sex.¹⁹

While there were many progressive movements in social attitudes towards sexuality during the Weimar Republic, this liberal trajectory provoked a conservative reaction that drew upon traditional morality and expressed alarm at the perceived degeneration of society. The German churches were prominent among the sector of society that found itself deeply troubled by the new sexual culture. In their eyes, “all the sex talk and the public display of lightly clad bodies...was the most blatant sign of the spiritual crisis of the age – a crisis, they believed, actively fostered by the republic.”²⁰ German Lutherans and Catholics argued that the acceptance of new and diverse forms of sexual expression, including homosexuality, undermined the family that they viewed as “the ‘living foundation’ of church and state.”²¹ Especially troubling to social conservatives was the decline in the birthrate and “the scandalous number of abortions” during

¹⁷ Alfred Döblin, “Sexuality as Sport,” (1931) in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 712-713.

¹⁸ Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 2007), 299.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 298.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 323.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 324.

the Weimar period that threatened the traditional order of society and the future health of the German state.²² Commentators on the Right laid the blame for this social degeneracy squarely on the prevalence of “radical socialism and radical individualism, both encapsulated in the republic.”²³ In response, one Protestant leader argued that “the recovery of the German people can occur only if there is a strengthening and renewal of marriage and family life.”²⁴

At the same time that traditional factions in German society were protesting the perceived anti-German liberalism of the Weimar Republic, the gradual rise of the National Socialist German Worker’s Party on the political far Right began to tap into popular fears and discontent surrounding the rapidly changing society. With regard to the cultural sphere of sexuality, as with others, the Nazi Party adopted the rhetoric of traditional conservatives that “resonated with large segments of the population because of the series of crises that battered the republic.”²⁵

According to Weitz, “the words and phrases” that the Nazis used in their appeals “were by no means Hitler’s private invention. They constituted the common language of the Right, established and radical, of the Weimar period.”²⁶ In addition to their rhetoric, the party’s developing ideology drew upon allegedly ancient Germanic tradition that condemned homosexuality as a form of un-masculine cowardice. For example, SS *Untersturmführer* Karl Eckhardt argued in 1935 that, “in southern and northern ancient Germanic sources of justice alike, homosexuality and cowardliness are seen in the same light and assigned equal value.”²⁷ The unifying theme of Eckhardt’s disdain for homosexuality, connected in his commentary to

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 325

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 334.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Karl Eckhardt, “Sexually Indecent Abominations against Nature Are Punishable by Death,” (1935) in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 377.

other examples of perceived racial degeneracy, was an overarching ideology of the purity and superiority of the “Nordic-German” people. Eckhardt cast interracial marriage and the emancipation of European Jewry after the French Revolution in the same light as “the scourge of racial annihilation presented by the degenerate profile of the homosexual.”²⁸ His remarks are representative of elements within the Nazi party that drew upon this dubious body of folklore and culture to create a cult dedicated to Germanic purity and superiority – a notion fundamental to the central Nazi concept of the German *Volk*.

The perceived threat of homosexuality to this idealized German *Volk* is evident in the statements of several leading Nazis. In a 1937 speech to leaders of the *Schutzstaffe* (SS), SS director Himmler expressed alarm at the fact that state investigations suggested that “there may be between two and four million homosexuals in Germany.”²⁹ The significance of these figures for Himmler was that with a substantial minority of the population of ethnic German men engaging in intercourse with other men rather than in procreative intercourse with ethnic German women, over the long term the *Volk* would “fall to ruin.”³⁰ He further argued on this point that “no nation can sustain this degree of disruption of its sexual economy and equilibrium.”³¹ One year earlier, in 1936, Himmler’s concern over the future viability of the German population manifested itself in the creation of a special office within the SS named the “Reich Office for the Curtailment of Homosexuality and Abortion” to combat

the substantial endangerment of population policy and public health represented by the relatively high number of abortions still being performed today that are a major violation

²⁸ Ibid., 380.

²⁹ Heinrich Himmler, “Speech to SS Group Leaders,” (1937) in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 376.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

of the ideological tenets of the National Socialist worldview as well as homosexual activities on the part of a not insignificant segment of the population.³²

Another SS official, *Untersturmführer* Josef Meisinger, exposed similar aspects of Nazi thought surrounding homosexuality in a 1937 speech with the revealing title, “Combating Abortion and Homosexuality as a Political Task.”³³ In his remarks, Meisinger expressed a view of homosexuality that characterized it as a pathological gateway to a life of crime and a potential contagion that threatened to spread through the population. Homosexuality was “now so enormously widespread, it has actually developed into a phenomenon of the most far-reaching consequence for the survival of the nation and state.”³⁴ Meisinger also rejected a “scientific” approach to combatting the problem and argued instead, contra sexologists like Hirschfeld, that “only a vanishingly small number of homosexuals have a truly homosexual inclination” while the great majority of homosexuals were actually heterosexuals seduced into that perverted lifestyle.³⁵ Furthermore, contrary to opinions expressed by reformers in the Weimar era, Meisinger believed that the state could treat homosexuality with “firm education and order, and regulated labor” and thereby homosexuals would “become useful members of the national community.”³⁶ Finally, he expressed the view that lesbianism, in contrast to male homosexuality, was not as significant a problem due to the surplus of females relative to males in the German population; many of these females would, in Meisinger’s opinion, turn to “assume the purpose given them by nature” in more normal social circumstances.³⁷ The connection made between

³² Heinrich Himmler, “Secret Directive on the Curtailment of Homosexuality and Abortion,” (1936) in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 376.

³³ Joseph Meisinger, “Combating Abortion and Homosexuality as a Political Task,” (1937) in *Nazi Germany, (1933-1945)*, ed. Richard Breitman, volume 7, *German History in Documents and Images*, German Historical Institute, Washington, DC (accessed March 26, 2017).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

abortion and homosexuality in Himmler's comments and the pathological view of homosexuality expressed in Meisinger's speech clearly highlight the central concern in Nazi ideology that condemned homosexuality: same-sex relations between ethnic German men were seen primarily as a threat to the strength and future of the *Volk* that the Nazis sought to create through their broader racial and social policies that affected numerous social groups that fell outside of that *Volk*. The moral standards that traditional conservatives such as those in the German churches upheld in condemning German's homosexual subculture only played an accompanying role in Nazi condemnation of homosexuality.

The practical effects of Nazi ideology surrounding homosexuality manifested themselves after Adolf Hitler's ascension to power in 1933 when elements in the Third Reich swiftly began to persecute members of the homosexual community. It bears mentioning in this regard, however, that compared to the Nazi leaders discussed earlier, Hitler himself was relatively ambivalent on the subject. Longtime acquaintance and head of the paramilitary Storm Troopers, Ernst Röhm, was openly homosexual, much to the consternation of individuals like Himmler. This fact seems not have concerned Hitler until, in the summer of 1934, Hitler used Röhm's well-known homosexual reputation as a pretext for his violent elimination from the ranks of the Nazi leadership in what is often referred to as "the night of the long knives."³⁸ Political motivations rather than ideological considerations were paramount in Hitler's mind with regard to this operation:

It [homosexuality] was a useful card for the party to play, because it allowed Hitler to be seen to deal resolutely with several of the issues that he wished the regime to highlight. A central item on the political agenda at this time was the need to placate Germany's conservative forces, who were horrified at the crude brutality of the Stormtroopers' presence in the streets of Germany. A significant wing of the conservative forces was the

³⁸ Geoffrey J. Giles, "The Institutionalization of Homosexual Panic in the Third Reich," in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, ed. Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 233-237.

“Moral Right,” with whom the Nazi Party had already allied itself during the Weimar Republic...³⁹

Thus, much like the party rhetoric, one of the regime’s first anti-homosexual actions coopted conservative outrage over the perceived sexual excesses of the Weimar years to achieve an essentially political end. However, highlighting the often incongruous nature of policy and leadership in the Third Reich, some elements in the new administration had already started at this point to implement a policy of pursuing suspected homosexuals.

Richard Plant, a homosexual Jew living in Frankfurt at the time, recounted his memories of the mounting persecution of the homosexual community and his flight from Germany to Switzerland in one of the earliest English studies of the topic, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals*. Plant avoided the Nazi violence in the relative safety of Basel, but many of his friends were not so fortunate. One acquaintance, Robbi, was arrested in 1935 along with his father (a prominent Social Democrat and trade unionist) by the Gestapo on charges of “homosexual indecencies.”⁴⁰ After receiving summary justice, the Gestapo held Robbi in prison until a bribe secured his release; Robbi then fled to Switzerland in 1936 to take refuge with Plant where Plant was appalled at Robbi’s condition:

He had lost so much weight that his face had shriveled. His blond hair had been clipped convict-style. As he climbed the narrow stairs, he appeared old and numb...he showed me all the still-visible bruises and burns on his body. Because he would not rat on someone else, a guard had rammed an iron bar into his rectum, damaging his sphincter.⁴¹

Robbi’s case highlights key aspects of the Nazi strategy for persecuting Germany’s homosexual population. Unlike ethnicity, homosexuality is not a characteristic immediately obvious to an observer, and therefore the Gestapo and other Nazi agencies frequently relied upon

³⁹ Ibid., 237.

⁴⁰ Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals* (New York, NY: Henry Hold and Company, Inc., 1986), 9-10.

⁴¹ Ibid.

denunciations received from informers who often possessed a personal grudge against the accused person; Robbi told Plant that he suspected that this was true in his case.⁴² Such summary justice was enabled by changes to Germany's penal code in 1935 that broadened the scope of Paragraph 175 to facilitate the indictment of as many suspected homosexuals as possible. Previously, the courts had required a relatively high burden of proof: only observed anal intercourse between men was considered a violation of the statute.⁴³ After the Nazi revision, however, "very minor sexual intimacies were landing men in concentration camps... In fact, in some cases it was, as a legal commentator of 1944 put it, 'not necessary that a physical contact has taken place or is even just intended.'"⁴⁴ The experience of a young gay soldier on leave in Breslau illustrates the Nazi strategy well:

One evening I met up with a nice civilian. At least he made a nice impression. The ritual game began. He kept circling round me, I brushed against him lightly, and suddenly he bellowed at me: 'You're under arrest!' Out came his ID card, and he turned out to be an SS agent. 'I am arresting you under Paragraph 175. You made an indecent assault upon me.' I said: 'All I did was to brush against you.' 'The fact that you are here is sufficient proof,' was his reply.⁴⁵

As a result of this legal strategy, the number of convictions for violations of Paragraph 175 increased from 2,319 in the period from 1931 to 1933 to 24,450 during the period from 1937 to 1939 when the persecution reached its zenith. The official legal punishment for a conviction of this kind was a six month prison sentence, but many convicted homosexuals were transferred from prisons to concentration camps at the end of their sentences.⁴⁶ This was the experience of an anonymous young Austrian homosexual who was arrested and imprisoned in 1938 and then

⁴² Ibid., 9.

⁴³ Geoffrey J. Giles, "Legislating Homophobia in the Third Reich: The Radicalization of Prosecution Against Homosexuality by the Legal Profession," *German History* 23, no. 3 (2005): 339.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 351.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle* (Boston, MA: Alyson Publications, Inc., 1980), 12.

transferred to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in 1940; he wrote in this regard that, “on the day that my six months were up, and I should have been released, I was informed that the Central Security Department had demanded that I remain in custody. I was again transferred to the ‘Liesl’, for transit to a concentration camp.”⁴⁷ In the concentration camps, homosexual inmates received a pink triangle which was, reportedly, “about 2 or 3 centimeters larger than the others, so that we could be clearly recognized from a distance.”⁴⁸ According to this same anonymous victim, homosexual inmates often received the worst treatment, both from concentration camp guards and fellow prisoners. While he stated that “Jews, homosexuals, and gypsies,” were described as “the scum of humanity,” the “lowest of the low in this ‘scum’ were we, the men with the pink triangle.”⁴⁹ Inside the concentration camps, homosexuals were generally segregated into their own section and reserved for some of the harshest punishment and work assignments; the young Austrian was assigned, along with other gay inmates, to a granite quarry where “only Jews and homosexuals were assigned.”⁵⁰ Plant confirms the young Austrian’s testimony about the particularly arduous work assignments received by homosexual inmates and adds that “perhaps the most feared assignments were to a detachment marked ‘Medical Experiments.’”⁵¹ Such experiments attempted to treat homosexuals on “the premise that homosexuals could become heterosexuals by hormone treatments.”⁵² The underlying motivation for these experiments was the hope that, “if successful, such treatments would aid Himmler’s unending efforts to produce more offspring, in conjunction with his directives to send homosexuals to bordellos for ‘conversion.’”⁵³ As a result of these practices, the estimated

⁴⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 32-33.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁵¹ Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 173-175.

⁵² Ibid., 176.

⁵³ Ibid.

mortality rate for homosexuals in the concentration camp was higher than that for other groups, ultimately leading to tens of thousands of deaths, although an exact figure is uncertain.⁵⁴

Homosexuals in Nazi Germany clearly fell victim to the ideology of creating a pure *Volksgemeinschaft* along with other groups that fell outside of the racially-biologically defined People's Community. While most of these homosexual men were "pure" ethnic Germans, members of the Nazi regime viewed their orientation as a biological disorder that threatened the future of the German race and thereby warranted efforts to purge it from society. In this way, the Nazi regime justified the extermination of thousands of ethnic German homosexuals on premises similar to those employed in their early euthanasia campaign against the population of disabled Germans. Furthermore, the Nazi regime, as with other aspects of their 'racial science,' coopted the same school of thought that during the Weimar period and before was used to advocate for legal reform and greater social tolerance for homosexuality. The efforts of reformers like Magnus Hirschfeld and others to define homosexuality as an innate, natural "third sex," that therefore did not warrant classification as a form of social pathology thus paradoxically allowed the Third Reich to classify homosexuality as a biological condition that could, in their view, potentially be inherited or transmitted throughout society. Heinrich Himmler's alarm at the perceived homosexual problem in Germany, his special commitment to rooting out homosexual men through the Reich Office for the Curtailment of Homosexuality and Abortion, and his desire to "cure" them by other means demonstrates this line of thinking. In this regard, one historian offers insight by cautioning modern observers to avoid the pitfall of attributing Nazi violence against homosexuals and other marginalized groups solely to "a regression into barbarism."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid., 180; Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 14.

⁵⁵ Richard J. Evans, "Social Outsiders in German History: From the Sixteenth Century to 1933," in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, ed. Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 40.

While these Nazi policies rightfully invite moral indignation, “instating barbarism as the central conceptual tool for understanding the Third Reich is to mistake moral condemnation for thought.”⁵⁶ The racial notions promulgated by Nazi ideologues like Karl Eckhardt clearly appealed to pre-modern notions of “blood and soil” and drew upon an intense hatred for perceived “social outsiders.”⁵⁷ However, Nazi appropriation of the same contemporary scientific theories that prompted Hirschfeld and others to advocate for the homosexual community in order to justify exterminating thousands of its members also represents the aptly termed “Janus-faced phenomenon of modernity” that contributed to the staggering atrocities of the Third Reich.⁵⁸ In short, the Nazi regime effectively utilized contemporary science and technology, although officially neutral according to the standards of scientific objectivity, in the service of highly ideological ends – highlighting the often ambiguous nature of modernity’s contributions to civilization when placed in human hands. Thus, while the Third Reich was certainly not the first nor the only government to apply theories of racial hygiene to its population, the pre-existing popularity of such theories in Germany combined with the Nazis’ radical racial ideology contributes to an explanation of why homosexuals, and many less well-known social groups, were included in its population policies to tragic effect.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

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