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Celebration on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Learning and Memorial Site at Hartheim Castle (Lern- und Gedenkortes Schloss Hartheim)
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The future of remembrance. History as an argument?

I am delighted every time I am here. For me, Hartheim is one of the most successful places of learning and remembering at a site where euthanasia was undertaken by National Socialists (NS). Initially, the team of highly committed makers of this memorial faced almost unsolvable challenges. How could the restoration of this wonderful, some say the most beautiful, Renaissance castle north of the Alps be combined with establishing an informative and serious memorial to the Nazi mass murder of mentally ill or disabled people? How could the idea of having a critical discussion about the consequences for today be implemented here, of all places? As an outsider, I am taking the liberty to say: it has succeeded.

There are memorial sites, very good memorial sites, at other sites where euthanasia took place: in former detention centres such as Brandenburg, in psychiatric hospitals such as Hadamar or Bernburg, or even in or next to less prestigious castle complexes such as in Pirna or Grafeneck. But nowhere was there the challenge of creating a site for remembering and reflecting in such a beautiful and significant place, both in terms of history as well as art history.

Every time I approach the castle, I am pleased that this impression is formed quickly: beautiful, but something is not right here. This is due to the rusty steel plates at the site of the former bus shed. The effect is continued as one enters the courtyard: once again, one looks at view-distorting steel plates, then, turning upward, one looks into the uniquely beautiful arcade court. So the two therefore go together: the breathtakingly, beautiful - although showcasing dominion - Renaissance architecture and the shocking memory of what took place here in the 1940s.

And then, of course, the bold development of the killing rooms with the visitor's walkway through the brutely cut walls. It allows a distanced view of the surviving evidence of the gas chamber, the mortuary and the crematorium, which has only been sparsely preserved due to the covering of traces by the perpetrators, overbuilding and 50 years of other use. But the emptiness of the spaces is actually an advantage - one could see them as the creation of unintentional empty spaces or voids. It throws the viewer back on himself.

There is no manual for remembering or commemorating. One must find one's own relationship to what one sees.

Of course, this is staging and has therefore often been criticised, and of course, purely documentary preservation, which is otherwise seen as the measure of all things, is thus abandoned. However, the learning and memorial site Hartheim appears to me to be a successful and necessary staging.

How can we approach what has happened here? How else can this be made possible, if not through places that provide information while touching one emotionally, that makes one pause and step back, make one reflect and look again, by staging it like it is here?

Hartheim is an "uncomfortable" memorial, as was already emphasised at the opening. Uncomfortable in every respect. Hartheim, in its present form, poses the question of how to deal with the past and yet think into the future.

Hartheim creates the connection

- between the "preservation" of the site and
- the "perception" of the beautiful building and the only vaguely visible testimony of the murder institution and
- the "manifestation" of the knowledge of what happened here and what can be learnt from this regarding the value of human beings today.

And yet questions remain unanswered: First of all, there is the question: Why so late? Why only in 2003 - nearly 60 years after the mass murder?

And of course, there is also the question: How can we ever understand that physicians and nurses did not only participate in the selection to kill but supported and promoted it? A professional group that is bound to the Hippocratic Oath and the principle of Nihil Nocere, i.e. "do no harm"? How can we ever understand how physicians and nurses, or anyone at all, could view other people - people with disabilities or psychological illnesses - as so unworthy, superfluous, and harmful that they could do what was done here. Here, more than 100 people a day were often taken off the buses, forced into undressing rooms, brought naked to the final medical examination, then forced into the gas chamber and, as closely intertwined bodies, taken out again and burnt.

Jürgen Habermas spoke of a "breach of civilisation". How does one deal with such a breach of civilisation, where so many were involved but thought that what they were doing was justified?

Let's get to the question of the delayed remembrance of how the history of the past has been dealt with since 1945. This breach of civilisation was actively kept quiet for a long

time, pushed aside and glossed over. It is not the history of remembrance but a history of forgetting. In Germany, this phase lasted until the 1980s, and in Austria for about another 20 years until there was a broader acknowledgement of this part of Nazi history. The historian Norbert Frei developed a recognised model of the phases in which Nazi history was dealt with after 1945[11], which can, with a time delay, also be applied to Austria.

He calls the period immediately after 1945 the "period of political cleansing" during which the internment and legal persecution of the Nazi functional elite under the Allies' direction and the so-called denazification and re-education of the followers and subordinate accomplices took place. The medical crimes during national socialism, the medical experiments in the concentration camps and the mass killings of inmates in institutions were also openly talked about during this time, as demonstrated at the Nuremberg physician's trial and other early trials, even if only a fraction of those involved were prosecuted. The phase was short and ended in Germany as well as in Austria, with the respective dissolution of the occupation zones.

The way compensation would be granted was also determined early on: in Germany as well as in Austria, compensation for war invalids and survivors was given priority over the compensation for those who were persecuted. They received higher monetary benefits, and the process was faster. What is significant, however, is that the German Federal Compensation Act and the Austrian Victims' Welfare Act only affected Jewish and politically persecuted people. The many other persecuted people, the Roma and the Sinti, homosexuals, the so-called antisocials and the victims of forced sterilisation and euthanasia were excluded and thus became the "forgotten victims".

This remained so in the following decades. Although National Socialism was condemned, and the condemnation was coupled with a commitment to a free democratic order, previous supporters of the Nazi regime received amnesty or were integrated. In this way, personal continuity, and thereby the basis for intergenerational loyalties, was created, which prevented laying bare the crimes and processing them for so many years. Norbert Frei calls this phase the "period of the politics of the past".

A particularly striking example of this is the career of the Viennese psychiatrist Heinrich Gross, who took part in the mass murder in the „Kinderfachabteilung Am Spiegelgrund" (special children's clinic at Am Spiegelgrund), who was never convicted, but to the contrary, was able to work again at his old place of work as a psychiatrist from 1955

[1] Norbert Frei, Deutsche Lernprozesse, NS-Vergangenheit und Generationenfolge seit 1945, in: the same., 1945 und wir. Das Dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen, Munich 2009, p. 38-55.

onwards, and who submitted numerous publications in the 1950s and 1960s on brain anatomy based on examinations of the brains taken from the victims at Spiegelgrund. Gross is only one example, although a very striking one. Gross died in 2005. After this, and only many years later, missing files were found in his office which describe the murder of individual children in the Spiegelgrund. By then, even the surviving relatives had often passed away.

In the 1960s, the preoccupation with National Socialism became the topic of public discussion time and again due to some scandals and trials (one of them being the Auschwitz trial initiated by Fritz Bauer). The departure from 1968 onwards, connected to the student movement, led to fierce disputes across society with accusations by the sons and daughters and their parents' justifications in turn. Soon however, as a reaction to the rebellion, a mentality of wanting to draw a line under it and also the need for an apology and reconciliation aimed at closure became apparent - motives which still emerge from time to time today. Frei speaks of the phase of "coming to terms with the past".

In Germany, dealing with the crimes of forced sterilisation and euthanasia began only at the end of the 1970s. Until then, university historiography had ignored this topic and dealt mainly with the structural and systemic contexts of the Nazi state and less with the people and the specific connections between the institutional system, psychiatry and euthanasia. This began at the end of the 1970s, with the radical self-examination of questioning psychiatrists, nurses and psychologists working in psychiatric institutions or in institutions for the disabled.[2] They asked themselves what had happened before 1945 in the place where they were now again practising psychiatry or care for the disabled. Countless, mostly regional, history projects followed, as well as biographical projects, also driven by those left behind and survivors. Professional historical research only slowly started dealing with the topic.

[2] See also Dörner, Klaus et al, Der Krieg gegen die psychisch Kranken. Nach „Holocaust" Erkennen, Trauern, Begegnen, Rehburg-Loccum: 1980.

The first general and systematic studies about the history of the crimes of forced sterilisation and euthanasia were published in the 1980s: books by Ernst Klee[3], Hans-Walter Schmuhl[4], Gerhard Baader[5] , Gisela Bock[6] and others.

Norbert Frei speaks about this phase which has lasted until today, as the "phase of the preservation of the past"; it would have perhaps been better described as dealing with the past, as this phase is associated with many battles regarding the uncovering of connections that had been kept secret, releasing files, identifying names and dealing with the anatomical specimens of the victims up to today.

The burial of the almost 800 brain specimens from the Steinhof, which were taken from the murdered children from the Spiegelgrund and which served as research objects for Mr Gross in the 1950s and the 1960s, finally took place at Vienna's central cemetery in 2002, is an eloquent example of this.

The delayed reflection of the crime of euthanasia can, however, not only be explained by how society dealt with the Nazi past but also by the specific challenges that go with dealing with the complex topic of euthanasia today.

First, there is the realisation that it has to do with medicine as a successful science. It was doctors, especially psychiatrists and nurses, a great number of doctors and nurses, not individual Nazi henchmen, who became perpetrators of euthanasia in the exercise of their profession and out of inner conviction.[7] The thought pattern of selection and eradication could obviously be combined well with the medical ethos of healing, with a radical will for healing. The leading physician of the previous Alsterdorfer institutes in Hamburg saw the institution for people with disabilities as a

"specialised hospital" in which all kinds of defective states, as he called them, should be treated with the most modern means of medicine. The aim was to "completely eradicate these terrible hereditary diseases". In today's research, this is known as the paradigm of

[3] „Euthanasie" im NS-Staat. Die „Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens". Frankfurt am Main 1983; New edition: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2010.

[4] Rassenhygiene, Nationalsozialismus, Euthanasie. Von der Verhütung zur Vernichtung „lebensunwerten Lebens", 1890–1945 (= Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft.

[5] Menschenversuche im Nationalsozialismus. in: Hanfried Helmchen, Rolf Winau (Publ.): Versuche mit Menschen in Medizin, Humanwissenschaft und Politik. Berlin / New York 1986, p. 41–82.

[6] Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986. Reprint 2010.

[7] „Zwangssterilisationen, Krankenmorde und verbrecherische Humanexperimente waren kein Ausfluss einer kruden Pseudowissenschaft, sie waren tief im wissenschaftlichen, genauer im eugenischen, erbpathologischen, sozialmedizinischen und rassenanthropologischen Denken verankert und in manchen Forschungs- und Anstaltspraktiken ihrer Zeit angelegt", Sachse, Carola, Was bedeutet »Entschuldigung«? Die Überlebenden medizinischer NS-Verbrechen und die Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, in: Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte 34 (2011) 3, p. 224-241, 236.

“healing and destroying”, which does not only refer to ill individuals or those who have been declared ill, but to the gigantic hubris of the medicine of healing society, the „Volksgemeinschaft“ (people’s community).
Such realisations about one's own discipline are tinged with shame - even today - and they are painful.
Of course, many contextual factors are part of the reason why physicians and medicine were able to develop in that way:

- Social Darwinism, which transferred the biological laws of higher evolution through the survival of the best-adapted plants and animals to society,
- eugenics, with its view of the superiority and inferiority of certain human beings, and
- the debate about the right to death and the “eradication of unworthy life” which was broadly discussed by the German medical profession in the 1920s.

If one looks at the book by Binding and Hoche[8], which was so popular then and to which the National Socialists explicitly referred to, one can identify a second reason why processing the past was so difficult, why it was delayed for so long and why even today’s remembrance work is hesitant to draw a conclusion for today. It is the topicality of the underlying thoughts.
The criminal lawyer Binding identifies three groups to whom the “unpunished act of providing relief” applies:

- those, who “due to their illness or being wounded are irretrievably lost, who ... make their urgent wish for relief known"[9] - this is also today's discussion on active euthanasia and assisted suicide
- for “mentally healthy persons who through some or other event ... became unconscious ... and would awaken to a nameless misery”[10] - this is today’s discussion around ending life-preserving measures in patients in a persistent vegetative state, and
- for the “incurable imbecile, ... who form the terrible antithesis of real people and inspire horror in almost everyone who encounters them"[11] – this is the

[8] Binding K, Hoche A: Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens. Ihr Maß und ihre Form, Leipzig 1920.
[9] ebenda, 29.
[10] ebenda, 33.
[11] ebenda, 31 f.

> reverse side of the debate today, which brings up the question of whether active euthanasia which has already been made legal in some European countries based on personal consent, can actually be had without non-consensual active euthanasia, for example in children or dementia patients.

I believe that this is the reason why coming to terms with euthanasia crimes started so late and is so slow, and is repeatedly met with so much resistance. And it is for this reason also that the "remembrance for the future" for medical crimes is so difficult, so doubtful and so contested.

So, what future does remembrance have? and: Is history an argument?

It is easy to turn away from the crimes of National Socialism and condemn them. It is easy to call Nazi euthanasia and forced sterilisation a crime. And it is also easy to lay wreaths at memorials and to describe democracy as a lesson from history.

But it is not so easy to ask for forgiveness. Again and again, Jewish representatives demand international apologies. They are also offered, they are also accepted, but also rejected. Apology means leaving guilt behind, freeing oneself from guilt and then being able to freely address today's supposedly totally new tasks. The English word "apology" which is often used in this debate nowadays, means, apart from asking for forgiveness, also justification and defense.[12]

That hurts, as the guilt for this is far too great, and history has become an argument for washing one's hands of it. The historian Carola Sachse, who teaches in Vienna, has described processing Nazi history and rituals of penance and their connection with today's interests in science and politics. She speaks of a clear dividing line which has to be drawn "between the past entanglement in doom on the one hand and, on the other hand, existing political imperatives."[13] The author and theatre producer Max Czollek pointedly called processing history and asking for forgiveness in order to be free in the present "reconciliation theatre" and "becoming well again".[14] History thereby often

[12] To be distinguished from this is the making of atonement as an active bearing of guilt, which is part of how the Hartheim Institute understood itself when it was founded, the institution for the disabled which opened in 1968 next to Hartheim Castle, see Weixlbauer, Günther, Zur gegenwärtigen Situation von Institutionen am Beispiel des Instituts Hartheim, in Kepplinger, Brigitte (ed.), Wert des Lebens, Linz: 2003 / 249-252.

[13] Sachse, 226; so also the American economics historian Gerald D. Feldman and the philosopher Hermann Lübbe, who taught in Zurich for an extended time.

[14] Czollek, Max (2023): Versöhnungstheater, Hanser-Verlag, München.

becomes thin on knowledge and isolated from its respective context, and thus an easily transparent argument.[15]

If history and remembrance are used as an instrument for critical reflection, questioning and productive uncertainty, as here in Hartheim at the exhibition "The value of life", history becomes an argument in a different way.

In this sense, history as an argument requires the inclusion of the prehistory of the Nazi crimes. From here - and not from the crimes of medicine at Auschwitz or in Hadamer or Hartheim - the way to today's debates of reproductive medicine, euthanasia, and genetic improvement of the human being can be traced. History, in this sense, requires the inclusion of the post-history, which does not only comprise the non-prosecution of the perpetrators but also the "secondary guilt", which has emerged from the decades-long denial, not speaking about what happened and not listening to the victims, which resulted in their exclusion from acknowledgement and compensation.

An important conclusion from history for how one deals with minorities today, with the "others", particularly mentally ill people and those with disabilities, is the commitment to inclusion. This seems to be the most comprehensive answer to the disassociation from the weak, from those that look different, from those that think, feel and believe differently, as it was practised during National Socialism.

Inclusion is a term that has many prerequisites. Inclusion means unconditional inclusion and the belonging of each and everyone with no further conditions as a prerequisite for active participation in society attached. The fundamental thought is the community of all, which is internally differentiated and multi-layered and therefore characterised by variety, diversity, and acceptance of otherness.

A truly grand claim, more of a vision than a state of affairs, goes far beyond the concept of integration, forming a claim of social law. We are still far removed from lived inclusion: one can only see how our society deals with migrants and that there is not even consensus about the fact that we are immigration countries.

Inclusion as a vision for future society thus always has to be thought of as broader than only the inclusion of people with mental or physical disabilities, people with mental illness, or people in old age. Inclusion also concerns the diversity of our origins, our religion, sexual orientation, personal convictions and world views.

[15] Vgl. Roelcke, Volker, Trauma or Responsibility? Memories and Historiographies of Nazi Psychiatry in Postwar Germany, in: Austin Sarat, Nadav Davidovich and Michal Alb-erstein (eds.), Trauma and Memory. Reading, Healing, and Making Law, Stanford California 2007, 225- 242, here: 229-232.

Theodor W. Adorno can be seen as the pioneer of inclusion. In his reflections about Auschwitz, he argues that the “togetherness of those who are different” is the real lesson from history. In contrast, the emphasis on the equality of people (except those before the law) resonates with a subliminal idea of totality.[16] History is thus also an argument in Adorno's work. The concept of inclusion can be seen as a historical legacy and as a lesson from the national-socialist view of people and society.

This is not about charitable affection, but about human rights and fundamental appreciation. “We all need each other” is the lesson, and “community would be poor without the respective others.” If we read history in this way and still use it for critical reflection on our actions today, I believe remembrance has a future.

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[16] Adorno, Theodor (1969): Minimalia Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben, Frankfurt/Main.