

Afterword and Acknowledgments

History must be told.

—Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy

This novel has a history and I believe it is worth telling, if only briefly. It grew out of my determination to understand the participation of physicians in the Nazi regime. As a professor of history at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, I focused on Germany's intellectual, social, and cultural energies, especially in the last two centuries. During this period, philosophy, literature, law, music and the visual arts, the social sciences and the natural sciences, especially medical science all flourished in Germany. Its citizens' achievements were remarkable in all these domains. In many ways, they embodied the essence of Western Civilization before Hitler came to power. How could such a state give rise to Nazism? How could its educated elites lend themselves to its vicious policies and practices? In particular, how could so many of its physicians, having sworn the Hippocratic Oath to "do no harm," become so enmeshed in the state's cruelties?

History provides us with a mirror of what is possible. Studying it reveals the best and the worst in all of us. What was possible in Germany, especially the Germany of the early twentieth century, is, I believe, possible anywhere. What happened there, given comparable situations, could happen wherever compassion and humility are outweighed by arrogance, ambition, greed, pride, hatred, or fear. Events since the Holocaust, alas, prove this true.

My original intention was to research and write a history of medical ethics and practices in Nazi Germany. Privileged to receive a Senior Fulbright Scholar/Teacher Award for the 1985-

1986 academic year to study medical ethics in Germany between 1880 and 1945 and with a generous invitation from Professor Manfred Heinemann, I was appointed as a visiting guest professor in his unique *Zentrum für Zeitgeschichte von Bildung und Wissenschaft* ('Center for the Contemporary History of Education and Scholarly Studies') at the *Universität Hannover*. While based there, I worked in twelve major archives in the Federal Republic of Germany and in the German Democratic Republic; I also explored the rich holdings of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine in London, England. During the year, I interviewed medical personnel from the Nazi era and others with first-hand knowledge of my topic and had frequent conversations with German historians of medicine. I presented some of my preliminary research to seminars at the universities in Hannover and Bochum, West Germany, and, with the generous invitation of Paul Weindling, at St. Antony's College, Oxford University.

A flurry of psychological and historical works in English on the history of medicine in Germany began to appear even while I was still doing archival research, beginning with Robert Jay Lifton's widely praised study, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (Basic Books: New York, 1986). Other excellent books by Robert Proctor, Michael Kater, Paul Weindling, Michael Burleigh, and Henry Friedlander soon followed. Henry Friedlander's later study, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995) and, two books by Ulf Schmidt—*Justice at Nuremberg; Leo Alexander and the Nazi Doctor's Trial* (Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2004) and *Karl Brandt: The Nazi Doctor; Medicine and Power in the Third Reich* (Continuum Books: London, 2007)—became especially important to me; both scholars treat their subject with the clarity, thoroughness and sensitivity that I hoped to achieve. And many outstanding German historians and researchers—for example, Götz Aly, Angelika Ebbinghaus, Heidrun Kaupen-

Haas, Claudia Huerkamp, Ernst Klee, Fridolf Kudlien, Stefan Liebfried, Benno Müller-Hill, Christian Pross, Karl-Heinz Roth, Reinhard Spree, and Florian Tennstedt, to name only the ones whose works I consulted the most—provide compelling descriptions and analyses of the public lives, careers and impact of academics, physicians and nurses in the years before and during the Nazi regime. In particular, Ernst Klee, the prize-winning journalist of *Die Zeit*, has done pioneering, indefatigable research on the “euthanasia program” and other Nazi medical atrocities; it is most regrettable that Klee’s many excellent books have not been translated into English.

I soon saw that any historical account I could offer would neither be as detailed and comprehensive, nor as analytically incisive as any these scholars had written. I lacked the intellectual stamina and self-confidence one must have to confront these atrocities as they had. I also saw that archival research alone was not going to provide me with answers to my questions.

Generally, historical attention has tended to focus on the most prominent, most notorious Nazi doctors. They were at the pinnacle of the bureaucratic and medical apparatus and as such, left a historical trail. Essential as it is to document and analyze the conduct and motives of the chief perpetrators, I wanted to know more about the “ordinary” Nazi doctors—not the apparent psychopaths like Josef Mengele, or the self-righteous opportunists like Carl Clauberg, or others, whether sadists or delusional fanatics. What about the “ordinary” idealistic doctors, acting with at least some measure of “good will,” who volunteered their services for the “euthanasia program,” or participated in the sterilizations and experiments, or joined in the “selections” in the concentration camps? Driven by idealism, ambition, personal experience, arrogance, pride, fear, and whatever other emotions, they slid slowly, deeply into these horrors. To some degree, they were encouraged by Westernized medical philosophy and practices, to say nothing of the

prevailing cultural arrogance and prejudices, nor of the militarism and xenophobia to be found in industrializing nations world-wide; anti-Semitism was, of course, not unique to Germany.

I saw signatures on documents authorizing sterilizations; I read trial transcripts that reflected career-choices and deeds. This, however, did not “open windows into the souls” of the lower rung of Nazi doctors? Why had they done such harm while thinking they were doing such good?

Even more importantly, why are there still such doctors today, still willing to serve in situations where they violate the Hippocratic Oath? And not just doctors, of course. What leads men and women of good to violate fundamental ethical principles? How do they justify their behavior? Are we all capable of such acts? And if so, how can we guard ourselves from making these choices? These are the questions at the heart of my endeavor.

In 1990, when I realized that I could not add anything significant to the formal scholarship on medical ethics in Nazi Germany, I decided to write a firmly grounded historical novel. There I could more creatively explore, could try to imagine, if you will, the mind and motives of what I believed to be an “ordinary” Nazi doctor. My novel describes such a doctor, able, for a while, to justify his actions and believe he was still fulfilling his sworn responsibilities to “do no harm.” It tells the story of his descent into this abyss. And it allows me to raise two questions: first, what, if anything, can a perpetrator do to redeem himself? and second, what should society do if it becomes aware of his deeds?

I have tried to make Johann Brenner plausible as an ordinary human being. Although he is fictitious, he has many of the characteristics of typical German physicians in this era, indeed of physicians wherever Western medicine was practiced. These men—the vast majority were men—believed in racial categories and hierarchies, in the benefits of positive and negative

eugenics, and in the inevitable benefits of medical science. Johann Brenner and others like him in German-speaking Europe, of course, went even further in welding their medical views onto their submissive loyalty to Adolf Hitler and Nazi ideology. Philipp Stein is fictitious, too, representative of countless German physicians deemed by the Nazis to be a “non-Aryan.” Except for that seal on Philipp’s fate, the fate of nearly all the Jewish doctors who could not escape the Nazi maw, he and Johann are more alike than they are different.

It is important to note that the typical Nazi doctor did not demonstrate Johann Brenner’s sense of shame or remorse. Most escaped punishment, often resuming their practice and dying in their beds long after the end of the war. Some achieved fame and praise for their work from an unaware or unconcerned public. Relatively few of the most nefarious or influential were apprehended, brought to trial, found guilty and executed—Karl Brandt is the most prominent example. Others received prison sentences of varying lengths, but these were often commuted. Still, I fervently want to believe that at least one had a “change of heart” and came to see that his arrogant self-confidence in his medical skills, his unequivocal devotion to his *Vaterland*, and his hate-filled acceptance of racial ideology inexorably led him to do evil.

I have tried to be as faithful and attentive to historical events as I can be. Still, a novel is a contrivance, a creation of characters placed within settings, all according to the will and inclinations given them by the author. Its coincidences might be rare in real life, but in fiction, they give a story its dynamics, its tensions and twists that propel it toward its ending. My novel is no different. Everything in it either did happen or, I believe, could have happened. I want it to evoke an historical reality—from the experiences Johann Brenner and Philipp Stein might have had in their childhood, to their involvement in the First World War and its chaotic aftermath during the fourteen years that “Germany tried democracy,” to the impact of the Nazi regime on

their lives and choices. These are crucial *public* events, affecting everyone who lived through them. The novel's more incidental facts, too—from the color of the American automobiles in Nuremberg in the immediate aftermath of World War II, to the improbable herd of goats in the streets of war-ravaged Berlin, to the slaughterhouse next to the train station in Freiburg—are drawn from my study of the sources, from reading other historical accounts, and from my personal experiences. With regards to chronology, though, I should note that the Nazi Doctors' Trial actually began on December 9, 1946; my narrative has it beginning a week earlier, allowing for the nineteen days before Johann decides to leave Nuremberg to be in Karlsruhe at Christmas.

The novel's *private* events, of course, are my own imagining. While many of the characters in the novel are factual, its main characters are fictional. In addition to Johann Brenner and Philipp Stein, I have imagined their wives, families, colleagues, neighbors and friends, including Luise Seligman, Pelcher, Schetzeler, Scharff, the Semmelberg family, the “green-eyed boy” and his mother, Aronsohn, Meier and others who appear through the story.

In two instances, I have quoted actual dialogue. The first is the witness testimony quoted in Chapter One, taken from the official English translation of the transcript of the Nazi Doctor's Trial in Nuremberg, Doc. NO. 819, which can be found on-line, thanks to the *Harvard Law School Library Nuremberg Trials Project; A Digital Document Collection* at http://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/php/pflip.php?caseid=HLSL_NMT01&docnum=120&numpages=12&startpage=1&title=Affidavit.&color_setting=C accessed most recently on September 7, 2010.

The second instance of actual dialogue is Johann's comment to a terrified woman on the ramp—“Madam, do you think we are barbarians?” In “Genocide,” one of the programs in the “World at War” documentary by Thames Television (1974), Rudolf Vrba tells of having heard

this dialogue spoken by an SS officer at Auschwitz; see Vrba's memoir, *Escape from Auschwitz*, New York: Grove Press, 1988, for the powerful story of his experiences at the hands of the Nazis and his daring flight.

In order to flesh out some of the historical reality of the novel, I offer brief descriptions of some of its actual individuals, places, circumstances and events, in most cases with a reference to recent scholarship on a website designed for this purpose:

<www. >

It will help interested readers learn more and provides a reference or two for further reading.

Here is a list of this website's entries:

<i>Aktion T-4</i>	Himmler, Heinrich
Auschwitz-Birkenau	Hitler, Adolf
Abel, Wolfgang	<i>Hitler Jugend</i> (“Hitler Youth”)
Bouhler, Philipp	Hoche, Alfred
Brack, Viktor	“Hyperinflation”
Brandt, Karl	Jews in Germany
<i>Charité</i>	<i>Kapo</i>
Clauberg, Carl	Kaup, Ignaz Anton
Conti, Leonardo	<i>Kempinski Haus Vaterland</i>
Denazification Process	<i>Kristallnacht</i>
<i>Deutsches Reich</i>	Lenz, Fritz A.
Eisner, Kurt	Liebel, Willy
Emmendingen’s <i>Heil- und Pflgeanstalt</i>	Lustig, Walter
Frankenthal, Käte	Ludendorff, Erich Friedrich Wilhelm
<i>Freikorps</i>	<i>Mein Kampf</i>
<i>Gestapo</i>	Mengele, Josef
Göbel, Johannes	<i>Muselman</i>
Goebbels, Joseph	“Nazi Doctors’ Trial”
Grafeneck	Nazi Party (<i>NSDAP</i>)
Grotjahn, Alfred	Nazi Physicians’ League
<i>Gymnasium</i>	Nyiszli, Miklos
Havenstein, Rudolf	Palace of Justice, Nuremberg
Hefelmann, Hans	<i>Policlinic</i>

Rathenau, Walther

Reichsgesundheitsamt (Reich's Ministry of

Health)

“*Reichstag* Fire”

“*Rhineland* bastards”

“*Rosenstraße* Protest

SA

SS

Sauerbruch, Ferdinand

Schumann, Horst

Sievers, Wolfram

Sonderkommando

Sozialistischer Ärzte Verein (League of

Socialist Physicians)

Streicher, Julius

Third Reich

Treaty of Versailles

Wassermann, Jakob

Wassermann and Kolle's *Handbook*

Weimar Republic

“Zero Hour”

The website also includes a select bibliography of additional scholarly studies that helped me provide background and context for my story. Most of these have bibliographies for those interested in further reading in English or German.

* * * * *

Every author's book is a special experience in his or her life, a span of time, usually spent apart and alone with one's self. More than I ever imagined when I began it, over twenty years ago, this book has shaped me, forced me to learn about myself, as much or more than I have shaped it. Whatever merit it might have derives from the inspiring confidence and patience of so many who have helped me conceive it, persist in writing in, and now decide, after fourteen earlier drafts, that I must declare it finally done to the best of my ability. With a sincere hope for my reader's indulgence, I welcome this opportunity in print, at last, to express my gratitude to so many of my teachers, colleagues, students, friends and family members. Many of you will see your names below, but even if you don't, please know that I appreciate you all for the love you have shown me.

Robert and Ann O'Brien were like loving parents to me. Through them, I was privileged to meet and learn from Professor Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy after his retirement from teaching at Dartmouth College; he set me on my life's course of trying to understand the past in order to learn our responsibility to the present and the future. With Rosenstock-Huessy's guidance, I went to Germany and lived in the family home of Franz and Bertha Schürholz, whose extraordinary kindness resonates in me to this day.

I have had many professors—especially Fred Berthold, William Ruddick, T.S.K. Scott-Craig, and John Williams at Dartmouth; F. Edward Cranz and Hannah Hafkesbrink at Connecticut College; and Norman Rich, my doctoral dissertation advisor, at Brown University—

who encouraged me and helped me to see how fulfilling a teacher's life could be. I have tried to be for my students what they and so many others have been for me.

Four members of SUNY Plattsburgh's History Department and their spouses became my mentors and friends: Allan and Elsie Everest, Hans and Vera Hirsch, Eugene and Beulah Link, and George and Elizabeth Pasti. They always found a way to guide and cheer me on. Even now, George still does, with every sunrise.

I am grateful to the Fulbright Commission for the opportunity to begin the research in Germany that underpins my novel. Manfred and Gerda Heinemann were my gracious hosts in Hannover. Klaus Wiese and Ilona Wiese-Zeuch generously welcomed me into their home in Berlin. It gives me great pleasure to express to you, Manfred and Gerda, and to you, Klaus and Ilona, my heartfelt appreciation for your lasting friendship. During that year I also received huge doses of tender, loving care from my beloved mother-in-law, Rosalie Schaudt, and from my wife's and my dear friend, Rosemarie Wild. Their inspiring lives in the face of great hardship reminded me daily of the good that is in the world. And I was privileged to join the countless admirers and benefactors of the scholarly achievements and generosity of Georg and Wilma Iggers; thank you for your continuing interest in my work.

Shortly after I began to conceive the novel, Margaret Gibson and David McKain listened to my rambling plans with such palpable enthusiasm that I was propelled beyond just thinking about it. And Hobart and Jean Mitchell, our "spiritual parents," continue to inspire Margaret, David, my wife and me with our memories of their steadfast devotion to each other, so I cannot express my gratitude to you, Margaret and David, without thinking of the spiritual gifts that Hobart and Jean have given all four of us.

More than anyone else, Tom Moran, Founding Director of the Institute for Ethics in Public Life at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, with his constant good humor, patience and thoughtfulness, has encouraged and stimulated my endeavors, and renewed my self-confidence on countless occasions. It is a great privilege and an honor to thank you especially, Tom, for your belief in me and in the importance of my work.

Margaret Lavinia Anderson, with characteristic devotion and thoroughness, offered me a detailed, penetrating critique of an earlier draft. Her suggestions forced me to re-write substantial portions and pushed me to a greater awareness of my purpose in writing. Peggy and her husband, James Sheehan, have helped me, as they have helped countless colleagues, scholars and students perceive the nuances of Germany's history. It is a great privilege to be counted among your friends.

Nick Woodin, despite many more important things that he would have rather done, helped me make the novel clearer and smoother by reading several drafts. I can't expect you to read it again, Nick, but if you do, I hope you will see how I have followed so many of your suggestions. To you and to Dau, my deepest gratitude for your support and friendship.

Over the past fifteen or more years, our "First Sunday Evening Writers' Group" in Plattsburgh has suffered through my innumerable efforts to get the novel "right." Ann Tracy, our energizing founder, Mary Dossin, Tim Myers, Laura Palkovic, and Vera Vivante, as well as others, listed below, and some less-frequent participants all listened to my concerns with patience and wise advice. Your own fine writings have helped me raise my standards for mine.

Suzanne Moore continually inspires me with her sensitive, evocative writing. Thank you for pushing me toward a stronger understanding of my subject and how to convey it to others, and for your constant support.

Herbert Savel, using photographs as his guide, has carved hundreds of powerful *bas relief* portraits in wood of victims of Nazi brutality. With plans to do hundreds, if not thousands more, his website shows and tells about his work and where it can be seen:

<<http://www.holocaustcarvings.com/>> You, Herb, and Isabel, your wife and helpmate in the most beautiful sense of the word, have a rare combination of determination and genius that has often pulled me back to my writing with renewed zeal.

Beth Cederstrom's capacity to see and create beauty has helped me preserve and nurture my hopefulness. And when I encouraged Ingeborg Sapp to tell her own poignant stories of her life in Germany under Nazi rule and then under Soviet domination, which she has done brilliantly, I knew I had to follow my own advice and persevere. Thank you both for your inspiration.

Many of my past or present colleagues in SUNY Plattsburgh's Department of History have had good reason to doubt the progress of the novel, having heard many times that "it's done" when it still wasn't. In particular, "Chuck" Bashaw, Vincent Carey, Kevin Dann, Gary Kroll, Ben Morreale, Jessamyn Neuhaus, Richard Schaefer, Connie Shemo and Stuart Voss indulged me in extensive conversations about the issues I was attempting to understand and/or read portions of various drafts. Many others—in some cases long before I began this project—have inspired me with their devotion to teaching and research: Adnan Abu-Ghazaleh, Amy Bass, Sylvie Beaudreau, David Glaser, Wendy Gordon, Jeff Hornibrook, Ed Judge, Carol Leonard, James Lindgren, "Jack" Myers, "Corky" Reinhart, James Rice and Altina Waller. It has been a privilege to know you all, both as colleagues and as friends.

David Mowry, Founding Director of SUNY Plattsburgh's Honor's Program, has provided my colleagues and me with a wonderful setting to teach small groups of energizing students,

many of whom, mentioned below, read earlier versions of my novel and gave me thoughtful criticism; my colleagues and I are in your debt, David. Two more treasures of SUNY Plattsburgh's faculty, Richard Robbins and J.W. Wiley, have shared their enthusiasm, insights and wisdom with me over the years. Another dear colleague, Lary Shaffer, has given me a life-long model of excellence and creativity. James Armstrong and Mark Cohen, two members of SUNY Plattsburgh's outstanding Anthropology Department, have enlivened me with their passion for learning and teaching. Two successive Deans of Arts and Sciences, H.Z. Liu and Kathleen Lavoie, and College Provost Robert Golden tried in vain to protect me from distractions of my own making; and, Bob, your reading of early chapters helped me immeasurably. And thank you, Norman Taber, for your skill and patience in designing the book's cover. I appreciate and admire you all.

Being with Tom Moran over the past twelve years in the "guided inquiry" seminars and lunchtime discussions of SUNY Plattsburgh's Institute for Ethics in Public Life has allowed me to share my thoughts with each semester's triad of Fellows; not only have you all listened to my struggles, you generously offered constructive criticism and kind encouragement. I particularly want to thank Beth Dixon, whose perennial question, "What do you mean by that?" forced me to find the most appropriate language to express my thoughts. Jürgen Kleist gave me valuable advice and encouragement in structuring the novel. Lauren Eastwood's close reading of an earlier version gave me a renewed burst of energy at a particularly difficult time. Jean Ann Hunt and David Stone cannot know how much they have sustained me with their compassion and interest in my well-being. Anna Battigelli and Paul Johnston inspired me with their profound devotion to literature and its highest goals. Susan Mody generously engaged my thoughts and greatly enhanced them with hers. Mark Beatham, Tracie Church-Guzzio, Monica Ciobanu, Mark

Holden, Jin Kim, Ray Johnson, Stewart Denenberg, and Jonathan Slater stimulated me with their insights and interest in my work. And John Yordan faithfully listened to all of us and gave generously of his own; I know I am not alone in missing him each Wednesday. I thank you and all the other Fellows and participants in our weekly seminars who indulged my questions and challenged my responses; some have already been mentioned above: Deborah Altamirano, Anne Bongiorno, Robert Cabin, Rodney Cavenaugh, Peter Conrad, Jose deOndarza, Helen Deresky, Ellen Fitzpatrick, Lonnie Fairchild, Diane Fine, Jon Gottschall, Kurtis Hagen, Bob Harsh, Kim Hartshorn, Holly Heller-Ross, Bryan Higgins, Hiroshi Itoh, Kate Joyce, Thomas Konda, Daphne Kutzer, Martin Lubin, Steve Mansfield, Thomas Morrissey, Margaret Morrow, Amy Mountcastle, Faten Moussa, Priscilla Myers, Connie Oxford, Tim Palkovic, Douglas Perez, Bill Pfaff, Shakuntala Rao, Jennifer Scanlon, Lynn Schlesinger, Heidi Schnackenberg, Richard Schnell, Doug Selwyn, Charles Simpson, Laurence Soroka, William Tooke, and William Teter. Exploring ideas about ethics and civic responsibility with all of you in the Institute has been an invaluable, invigorating tonic for me. What a blessing the Institute is for our College!

How can I possibly mention every student who has had to hear me hold forth about the novel's reflection of sorrow and allowed me to describe why I believe the issues it raises are important? Inevitably, some stand out in my mind: Christopher Davies, Kevin Days, Brian Didier, Andrea Downing, Charlene Dubuque, William Duffany, Shaun Errichiello, Brad Fahsel, Jana Fitzpatrick, Daniel Galimidi, Woody Groves, Greer Hamilton, Alonna Haseltine, Zachary Hoffman, Briana Holland, Sarah Jensen, Avram Kaufman, Monique Kirenga, Jessica Levine, Krystal Lugo, Marie Mitchell, Joy Morgan, Kate Morris, Yeshe Richman, Sandra Ortsman, Tim Sarrantonio, Owen Smith, Ed Svec, and Carrie Woodward. My indelible memories of Carl Kegel, who shared his intense energies and extraordinary talents so enthusiastically with

everyone who knew him, remind me of the fragility of our lives and our responsibilities to each other. Two more outstanding, former students—Blake Harrison and Douglas Sloan, and their respective families—continue to inspire me and bring me great joy long after my teaching career has concluded. All of you, and so many others whom I cannot name here, embody my fervent hope for a kinder, more compassionate world.

I also am grateful for dear high-school friends—Frances Brown, Tom Coroneos, Steve Day, George Hessenthaler, Erin Silva, June Totten, and Chris Trumbo—who have helped me with the novel’s form and ideas. After more than fifty years, we still sail the Argo.

Two of my college classmates and life-long friends, DeWitt Beall and Bruce MacPhail, gave me advice and much appreciated encouragement just when I needed it. DeWitt, I hope you would be proud of your first “roomie”; and Bruce, I hope this is a worthy addition to your marvelous library.

Finally, my grandparents and my mother sheltered me as best they could from the hardships they endured; my father’s turbulent life constantly reminds me of the blessings of my own. Their love for me has helped to teach me how to treasure every day for the gift it is. My son and my wife, although they have been thoroughly mystified from start to finish by my determination to devote so much time and energy to this project, unquestioningly have given me the strength and courage that only loved ones can give. I have no words that fully express my gratitude and love, Andrew and Evelyne.
