GOETHEANUM COMMUNICATIONS

Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland, 31 October 2024

**Exploited in building up the Nazi state**

**Study of anthroposophic physicians during the Nazi period**

**Anthroposophic physicians largely resisted Nazi ideology, particularly in terms of content, but some individuals accepted the system in the hope of gaining advantages for Anthroposophic Medicine. These are the findings of the study ‘Anthroposophy and National Socialism. The Anthroposophical Physicians’ by Peter Selg, Susanne H. Gross and Matthias Mochner.**

In Nazi Germany, the anthroposophic medical profession also had to find a way of relating to the regime. Peter Selg, professor of Medical Anthropology and Ethics and member of the Goetheanum Leadership, and the historians Susanne H. Gross and Matthias Mochner have investigated their institutional and personal proximity. Since the designation ‘anthroposophic physician’ did not yet exist, the study team investigated who belonged to the anthroposophic medical profession at the time and to what extent each of these individuals was connected to the Nazi regime.

They evaluated documents from more than 250 public and private archives, including official records, estates and articles in (specialist) journals, explored previously unknown sources and compiled biographical microstudies of selected anthroposophic physicians.

The study team arrived at the conclusion that no one adapted to “the ways of thinking and terminologies of Nazi politics and medicine”. Compared to the average population in Germany, anthroposophic physicians were less involved in National Socialist structures. The leading anthroposophic physician Ita Wegman recognized the dangers of National Socialism very early on; she was committed to preserving all forms of life and helped Jewish children and youngsters as well as medical colleagues to flee Germany. According to the available documents, Jewish colleagues “did not experience marginalization within the anthroposophic medical profession but experienced mostly support and solidarity.” Other anthroposophic physicians and medical students “also took part in medical and political resistance.”

Among the anthroposophic physicians were some, including Wilhelm zur Linden, who hoped to gain advantages for Anthroposophic Medicine by connecting with the Nazis. Friedrich Husemann initially strove to establish “an organization of anthroposophic physicians that was integrated in the Nazi state” and that would become part of the Reich working group for a New German Medicine, but the organization played no “noticeable role in the short period of its existence from May 1935 to January 1937.” At the Goetheanum, the then treasurer Guenther Wachsmuth thought it possible “for anthroposophical institutions and initiatives to gain recognition within the Nazi regime” although he was himself not an avowed National Socialist. Other than that, there were people like Hanns Rascher, who was a National Socialist and a member of the security service and acted as a ‘mediator’, exerting influence on both sides.

The Nazi state was itself interested in aspects of anthroposophy. Otto Ohlendorf from the Reich Security Head Office, for instance, campaigned among other things until 1941 “for the preservation of homes for special needs education, Waldorf schools, biodynamic farms and possibly also Weleda.” His support, as well as that of Alfred Baeumler and others, was however viewed as “controversial by the Nazi elite.” The study team also emphasizes that “Sigmund Rascher’s human experiments in the Dachau concentration camp had no anthroposophical background or motivation,” even though he was a member of the Anthroposophical Society and “one of the best-known anthroposophical representatives of early cancer diagnosis.”

On the other hand, even Alfred Baeumler and Otto Ohlendorf were, as the study team points out, “never interested in the recognition of anthroposophic medicine, Waldorf education or biodynamic agriculture” but “in exploiting them for building up the Nazi state.” All Security Service reports stated “that [Rudolf] Steiner and the anthroposophists with their rejection of racial-biological and anti-Semitic thinking and actions were entirely incompatible with National Socialism.”

The study was commissioned in 2016 by the Academy of the Society of Anthroposophic Physicians in Germany and accompanied by a scientific committee with Thomas Beddies and Heinz-Peter Schmiedebach from the Institute for the History of Medicine and Ethics in Medicine at the Charité in Berlin, Germany. The study is published in three volumes: Anthroposophic Medicine in National Socialism, the attitude of Weleda and Wala and anthroposophic psychiatry and special needs institutions.

Funding was provided by the Mahle Foundation, the Software Foundation, the Christophorus Foundation, the Hauschka Foundation, the Rudolf Steiner Fund for Scientific Research and by Gabriele Christine Gomille-Dömling (1925–2018).

(692 words, 4792 characters/Sebastian Jüngel; English by Margot M. Saar)

**Book (in German)** Peter Selg, Susanne H. Gross and Matthias Mochner, Anthroposophie und Nationalsozialismus. Die anthroposophische Ärzteschaft, Schwabe-Verlag 2024

**Contact person** Peter Selg, allgemeinesektion@goetheanum.ch