

Nazi cancer research we find very different ways that science can express politics, and vice versa. Scientists were boosting fascism, while fascists were boosting science. Fascists were arguing over what kinds of science should be supported, and scientists were arguing over what kinds of fascism should be supported. The boundary between science and politics was not (and can never be) a fast or formal one.

I should reassure the reader that I have no desire to efface the brute and simple facts—the complicity in crime or the sinister stupidities of Nazi ideology; I am also aware that complexity and nuance are sometimes the historian's cheap shot, an easy retreat from clear-line moral judgment. What I would maintain, however, is that we too often construct a scarecrow image of Nazi doctors—of monstrous and sadistic demons hell-bent on genocide and murderous experimentation. There were, of course, such men, but there were also fertile, creative faces of fascism, as perverse as this may sound.

COMPLICATING QUACKERY

To repeat, most people when they think about Nazi medicine think about the more bizarre, cruel, or murderous parts: Mengele's injection of dyes into eyes to see if they could be changed from brown to blue, or the horrific high-pressure, freezing, and transplant experiments exposed at Nuremberg.⁴ This is consistent with a larger view of science which holds that inquiries driven by ideologies are invariably corrupted in some fundamental sense. This conception of ideology as distortion (or worse) ignores the fact that passions are often involved in the pushing of science in one direction rather than another—for better or for worse. With such a puritanical conception of science, it becomes too easy for us to dismiss a body of widely held medical knowledge or practice as "quackery."

Cancer in the 1930s was a mysterious disease—as it still is today to a great extent. The failure of orthodox physicians to come up with a cure or even a satisfactory set of palliatives made it easy for countless quacks and charlatans to sell their wares, and even for

orthodox physicians to try out therapies that today sound somewhat flaky: Fritz Lickint X-rayed the spleens of cancer patients to stimulate the production of "cancer-fighting hormones";⁵ Karl Heinrich Bauer treated cancer patients with benzpyrene, the theory being that if something possessed the power to cause cancer, it could perhaps also cure it.⁶

After publishing his first cancer book in 1932, Erwin Liek received more than three hundred letters from people claiming to have discovered a cure for cancer: most claimed to have been ignored by moneygrubbing doctors, some declared themselves willing to divulge their secret for a very high price, several magnanimously declared themselves "ready to share the Nobel Prize" with the Danzig surgeon. Germans were not alone in their desperate enthusiasm: in 1931, a New York City Cancer Commission had announced a prize for anyone offering an effective remedy; some 3,500 entries were submitted, though none, according to Liek's account, was judged promising enough to warrant a follow-up.⁷

Nazi leaders were ambivalent about many of these "alternative," organic, or otherwise heterodox theories and therapies. On the one hand, there was a decided willingness to open up medical therapeutics, consistent with the ambient critique of myopic medical orthodoxy. The Reich Anticancer Committee in 1934, for example, set up a subcommittee to evaluate folk cancer remedies and eventually tested more than a hundred different kinds of cures. On the other hand, there was worry that charlatans would profit from untested methods, distracting attention from proven therapies while robbing sufferers of their hard-earned cash. Tensions of this sort persisted throughout the Nazi period, as they do to a certain extent even today. Doctors in the Nazi era were not unlike doctors of other times and places in wanting to establish standards to routinize practice and protect the public. The crackdown on quackery⁸ was part of this process.

We often hear that Nazi medicine was quack medicine,⁹ but what I find interesting is how the question of quackery becomes confused—in the eyes of some postwar observers—with the question of resistance. Quackery has been celebrated as a form of resistance, but then so has orthodoxy. Neither oversimplification holds