

Another lesson of the Brehmer affair is that support from Nazi ideologues was not always enough to guarantee the survival of a theory or a therapy. That is also clear in the curious case of "earth rays"—a popular theory according to which diverse human ills were supposed to derive from exposure to invisible, underground "rays" or "currents" (*Erdstrahlen*) purportedly flowing through the earth. Devotees throughout Germany earned sizable fees for "dowsing" a piece of ground—to determine its suitability as a building site, for example—and installing "shields" of one sort or another to protect against the purported rays. The idea was already a hoary one in occult literature (it shares a certain kinship with geomancy), but its popularity must also have piggybacked on evidence emerging at this time that radon, X-rays, and even cosmic rays could cause cancer. In March of 1934, Baden's Anticancer Committee had supported a survey to test the theory; the prestigious homeopathic journal *Hippokrates* was publishing open-minded investigations into the question as late as 1937.¹⁷

Campaigns against quackery are as old as medicine itself, but the Nazi-era push for uniformity and "standards" does seem to have given courts a freer hand to quash unproven therapies. In 1937, the Reich Ministry of Justice declared there was no foundation for the view that "earth rays" (*Erdstrahlen*) could affect health, and no evidence even that such rays existed.¹⁸ In 1939, a man was convicted of selling thousands of "earth-ray shields" to protect against cancer and other maladies caused by the rays. The designer, a master mason from Potsdam, was asked to demonstrate his dowsing technique in court and, after failing the test, was declared a "dangerous chronic criminal" and sentenced to three years in prison.¹⁹

What is interesting about this "earth ray" business is that dowsing was suppressed despite its popularity among a number of high-ranking Nazi leaders. Hitler had had his Reichskanzlei dowsed in 1934, and several others in his entourage took similar precautions. Hess was probably the oddest of the lot: he was known to have suspended powerful magnets above his bed to draw out "negative magnetic forces" from his body—which bothered more down-to-earth Nazis like Joseph Goebbels, who used

Hess's May 1941 flight to England as an excuse to begin a clamp-down on occult medicine (see again chapter 2). Within days of Hess's flight, the propaganda minister wrote in his diary: "Anti-cancer film checked [the reference is to Auler's *Jeder Achte*]. Sharp attack on quackery. Now that that crazy Hess is gone, we can set this ball rolling."²⁰ Two months later, on July 16, naturopathic healers were barred from using "occult methods" (e.g., dowsing rods, "pendula," or shields against earth rays) to diagnose or treat diseases. Chiropractors were also barred from treating cancer.²¹ Natural healers were still allowed to treat cancer using "recognized practices" like homeopathy, natural herbs, and physical therapy (massage); they could also use "magnetism" and "biochemistry" in combination with these. Some local medical societies took a harsher view, condemning all treatment of cancer by non-physicians.²²

How should we understand the Nazi campaign against quackery? The most commonly expressed concern was that people would squander their money or their health on useless remedies, but the campaign must also be understood as a move by medical professionals to consolidate their monopoly over the healing arts. (Danzig's famous Cancer Law, for example, barred anyone except physicians from treating cancer patients.) The suppression of quacks was part of a larger quest for standards, a primary goal of which was to maximize medical efficacy. Quack medicine was (by definition) ineffective medicine, and ineffective medicine was regarded as a drag on German economic and fighting power.

What we cannot say, though, is that the medicine and medical research moved by "Nazi ideology" at this time was invariably "quack" or "bogus"—by the standards of the time or even by today's standards (since there is obvious disagreement even today over what is genuine and what is fraudulent in many spheres). That is the irony—and the complexity—of Nazi medicine: Nazi-inspired research was often idiotic, but not always.

Let me close this section with one last irony: the Nazi campaign to establish "truth in advertising." Nazi officials strengthened Weimar-era advertising laws, passing new measures designed to curb exaggerated claims for the potency of drugs or medical