

period were augmented police and legislative powers to implement broad preventive measures, and the much-touted “political will” to deploy those powers to strengthen the health of the nation.

ERWIN LIEK AND THE IDEOLOGY OF PREVENTION

The Danzig surgeon Erwin Liek (1878–1935) was one of the more vocal heralds of the Nazi approach to cancer. Liek is a complex and fascinating person whom we shall reencounter in our discussion of Nazi food fashions (see chapter 5). He is widely reviled today as the “father of Nazi medicine”; yet he was also a cosmopolitan world traveler who managed to publish kind words of praise for Freud as late as 1934.⁴⁴ In his thirty-year professional career he produced writings on a broad range of topics—including a stirring attack on overzealous human experimentation⁴⁵—but he was best known for his critique of the “spiritual crisis” of modern medicine, medicine enervated by specialization, bureaucratization, and scientization, warped by greed and myopia but also by its failure to appreciate the natural capacity of the body to heal itself. Liek was a hands-on practitioner but also something of a romantic, yearning after simpler times when science was not the be-all and end-all of medicine, when the doctor-patient relationship was (purportedly) intimate and sacred. As founding editor of *Hippokrates*, a magazine of general health interest with strong ties to homeopathy and the natural foods movement, he helped to usher in a broader and more holistic medicine of the sort embraced by many Nazi leaders—medical men like Kurt Klare, Karl Kötschau, Walter Schultze, and Ernst Günther Schenck, but also high-placed politicians like Heinrich Himmler, Julius Streicher, Rudolf Hess, and even Hitler himself.⁴⁶

Liek is difficult to pigeonhole, however, and his attitude toward Nazism was, at least for a time, ambivalent. He never joined the party but was nonetheless apparently offered—prior to 1933 and by Hitler himself—the position of Reich Physicians’ Führer (eventually assumed by his admirer, Gerhard Wagner; Liek’s failing

health precluded his appointment).⁴⁷ By 1933 he was clearer in his praise for the Nazi movement. In an essay that year titled *The World of the Physician*, he applauded Hitler for “destroying Marxism, rejecting the delusions of equality (*Gleichheitswahn*), defeating the party system, silencing the do-nothing chitchat parliament (*Schwatzparlament*), unifying the German people, reducing unemployment,” and much else. Nazism represented the “dawn of freedom” (*Aufbruch zur Freiheit*) and the cleansing of Germany’s “Augean stables.”⁴⁸

There is little evidence of overt antisemitism in Liek’s many published works, but there are oblique insinuations that are hard to misinterpret—his assault on analytic laboratory methods, for example. Even his attack on human experimentation has an antisemitic resonance, given the degree to which “Jewish excesses” in this area had been publicized. (In the most notorious case, the dermatologist Albert Neisser in 1895 had injected young prostitutes—the youngest being only ten—with a syphilis serum, hoping to confer immunity; many instead contracted a full-blown case of the disease, prompting a widespread debate on the ethics of human experimentation and the world’s stiffest restrictions against experimental abuse—Prussia’s famous 1900 Code.)⁴⁹ We know that he privately lamented the “Jewification” (*Verjüdung*) of German medicine—in letters to his close friend and publisher, Julius F. Lehmann, for example—blaming Jews for overvaluing exactitude and for bringing a certain superficiality and “showmanship” into science. Liek became friends with the Munich-based Lehmann, Germany’s leading medical publisher and an ardent Nazi,⁵⁰ after Lehmann printed his first and most successful book, *Der Arzt und seine Sendung* (1926), which went through many editions and sold more than a hundred thousand copies (mostly after 1933). Liek professed to sympathize with the publisher’s concern for “the frightening influence of the Jews” in medicine; he agreed that the “Jewish-dominated Weimar Republic” was an era of “spiritual poverty,” and hoped that the nation’s new leaders would resurrect German honor, morality, and selflessness. Liek’s wife later praised him as an “early struggler for Nazi ideals.”⁵¹ He might more properly be described as a kind of medical Nietzsche, Germany’s