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Uwe Gerrens. *Medizinisches Ethos und theologische Ethik. Karl und Dietrich Bonhoeffer in der Auseinandersetzung um Zwangssterilisation und "Euthanasie" in Nationalsozialismus*. Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996. 222 pp. DM 35 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-486-64573-6.

Reviewed by Richard Weikart (California State University at Stanislaus)
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Uwe Gerrens's work is an interesting contribution to the rapidly expanding body of literature on eugenics and "euthanasia" in the Nazi period. Though it originated as a dissertation in theology, it is more historical than theological in flavor. Gerrens's use of archival and other primary sources, for example, is impressive, though his command of the English-language historiography on his topic is a little limited.

While most works on eugenics and "euthanasia" focus on the perpetrators, this one analyzes the activities and ideas of two prominent opponents of Nazi eugenics policies. Karl Bonhoeffer, professor at the University of Berlin, was one of the leading psychiatrists in Germany in the early twentieth century. His son, Dietrich, became a leading theologian of the Confessing Church during the Nazi period. Despite their common opposition to Nazi policies and their love for each other, Karl and Dietrich were miles apart in their world views and interests. Karl was a careful scientist uninterested in religious matters, while Dietrich's whole life revolved around religion. Karl rarely discussed philosophy or ethics publicly, while Dietrich considered work on ethics his life's task. Thus Gerrens is obliged to reconstruct the father's medical ethics from his actions, while Dietrich's writings reveal his views on medical ethics.

Other significant differences between the two emerge from this study. Karl was so steeped in eugenics, which permeated the psychiatric profession in early twentieth-century Germany, that he did not hesitate to refer to the mentally ill as *Minderwertigen* (inferior ones) in his writings. An essay he wrote after the Nazi period attempted to rescue eugenics from its disreputable association with Nazi policies. The influence of eugenics thinking on Dietrich, on the other hand, was negligible.

Despite these differences, Gerrens discovers significant common elements in their medical ethics. Both opposed the Nazi Law for Hereditary Health, because it called for compulsory sterilization of those with hereditary illnesses, and both were vigorous opponents of the Nazi "euthanasia" program. Most of their criticism was surreptitious, of course, but Gerrens effectively documents how they vainly tried to stymie Nazi policies. Many scholars already know how Dietrich tried to halt Nazi encroachments on the church, but Gerrens interestingly shows how his father unsuccessfully tried to ward off the Nazi takeover of the psychiatric profession. Gerrens believes that Karl and Dietrich opposed Nazi eugenics policies on similar grounds. They both upheld a view of human rights that rejected the state's violation of individual prerogatives, including the right to marry and reproduce.

Gerrens's stress on the commonalities tend to obscure some fundamental differences that he recognizes but nonetheless deemphasizes. Karl objected to compulsory eugenics measures partly because he did not believe eugenics laws could accomplish as much as proponents promised. Skeptical scientist that he was, he did not think eugenics had proven itself sufficiently to warrant legislation. Thus his opposition to eugenics proposals was pragmatic and flexible, and he clearly endorsed voluntary eugenics. Dietrich's theological opposition to eugenics measures was more principled and permanent, being grounded in the traditional Judeo-Christian doctrine of the sanctity of human life.

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