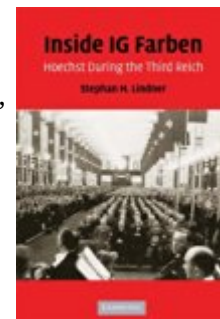


**Stephan H. Lindner.** *Inside IG Farben: Hoechst During the Third Reich*. Translated by Helen Schoop. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xx + 388 pp. \$60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-88766-3.



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Stephan H. Lindner's work is a micro-history of the Hoechst factories and laboratories during the National Socialist years. Hoechst, which became part of IG Farben in 1926, retained sufficient autonomy that its history deserves individual attention both as a component of the conglomerate's history and as a player in Nazi-era German business. Within the IG, Hoechst was neither a "strong pillar" nor a "stepchild" (p. 261). Given the historical attention already devoted to IG Farben, Lindner is able to examine Hoechst in its larger corporate context. In doing so, he challenges Gottfried Plumpe's previous work on this topic, which had asserted the separation of business from political control, to maintain that "the market had become deeply politicized" (p. 262). What is more, he finds that research and development at Hoechst were not solely dictated by calls for autarchy, a conclusion that corroborates Peter Hayes's work. They took into account short-, middle-, and long-term goals. Even so, understanding Hoechst's operations within IG Farben is not Lindner's primary goal. The essential question he

seeks to answer is: "[h]ow far was Hoechst linked to the Nazi regime, its representatives and organizations, and to what extent was it entangled or even actively involved in their crimes?" (p. 7). This question has inspired research on big business in the Third Reich for many years, and Lindner's micro-history undoubtedly contributes to a growing body of historical works on business's political history in that state. While an absence of documentation limited Lindner's investigation, he located a significant collection of documents regarding personnel issues at Hoechst, which he supplemented with document groups from IG Farben and its companies, the Bundesarchiv, state archives, and private collections. Lindner's study will be essential reading for historians of the Third Reich, especially those interested in state-business relations, although it is somewhat less revealing on the topic of the morality (or lack of it) of the company's managers.

Lindner's study is most useful in his efforts to understand the relations between Hoechst management and the Nazi regime. To determine

whether Hoechst was Nazified, Lindner provides an extensive analysis of employee relations and the company's involvement with medical testing. He divides the Hoechst experience chronologically into three sections: the founding years of the Nazi era (1933-34), prewar, and wartime. Although it is not an explicit theme of the work, this logical division demonstrates that via incremental steps, Hoechst adapted itself to the Nazi regime quite handily. Lindner provides extensive analysis of the Labor Laws of 1934 and 1939 and corroborates the prevailing interpretation among historians that they made management "masters in their own houses." Lindner offers several convincing examples to show how this relationship facilitated the spread of Nazi influence. For example, he convinces readers that the Alizarin Laboratory, managed by Georg Kränzlein, had an intensely National Socialistic atmosphere through his examination of the complex employee relations in that department. To demonstrate further the degree of nazification, he examines in detail the fate of employees who were dismissed or forced to retire early for political reasons. Yet the possibility of making generalizations in this regard is limited by the sources; records are more plentiful with respect to managers and white-collar employees than unskilled laborers. To make up for the absence of documentation on the fate of unskilled laborers, Lindner infers from secondary sources, especially the work of Robert Gellately and Michael Schneider,[1] that the proceedings that he uncovered silenced many people, making it "difficult to distinguish between compulsion and consent" (pp. 149, 151). With respect to employees labeled "Jewish" by the Nazi state, Lindner offers several examples to make plausible his thesis that the plant embraced no regular policy for dealing with this difficulty, but that expediency and company interests prevailed and these employees were dismissed or forced to retire.

Drawing upon secondary literature by Avraham Barkai and Gellately, Lindner also addresses

the problem of ethical dilemmas faced by businessmen. He mentions Barkai's ideas about "minimum of compassion" or "active and acquiescent aides" and Gellately's notion of "coercion and consent." He demonstrates it is difficult to distinguish between degrees of "coercion and consent" experienced by Hoechst managers and researchers in individual cases. While Gellately's concepts of "coercion and consent" are frequently revisited in the text of Lindner's study, however, he never returns to Barkai's ideas to interpret the behavior of major players. Overall, Lindner acknowledges that identifying personal motives is problematic; he finds through his study of actions taken by individuals, however, that Hoechst's adaptability to the regime was quite remarkable.

Lindner's willingness to pass judgment on Hoechst managers and laboratory researchers makes his history relatively lively; this effect is quite a feat given how dry business history can be. His judgments may appear harsh, but they are largely plausible due to his painstaking research into the personnel files and personal papers of the major actors. The case of plant director Ludwig Hermann exemplifies the challenge that Lindner faced in determining motives and intentions. Lindner does not hesitate to label Hermann a Nazi, because the director embraced notions of *Volksgemeinschaft* and endorsed Hitler's foreign policy, even though he may have criticized some aspects of Nazism. With less convincing results, Lindner attempts to determine whether Hermann was antisemitic, surmising that Hermann's aid to individual Jews whom he knew personally meant that he was not. This aid only proves that among his circle of acquaintances, Hermann may not have prejudged; it does not prove that he wholeheartedly rejected antisemitism or the larger racial goals of the Nazi state. In contrast, Lindner concludes that Carl Ludwig Lautenschläger, who succeeded Hermann as plant director, was a convinced Nazi and antisemite, as evidenced by his postwar reminiscences. Still, the issue in determining the level of adherence to Nazism is not

simply whether or not the management or its employees were antisemitic, but whether or not they believed in the *Volksgemeinschaft*, which the Nazis defined in racial terms and led to the persecution of several groups, the Jews among them.

The two "criminal" activities in which Hoechst had engaged, at least as defined by the Nuremberg tribunals, were exploitation of forced laborers and providing drugs for testing on concentration camp inmates. Lindner finds that cold-hearted "entrepreneurial logic" explains Hoechst's use of foreign and forced laborers--an interpretation increasingly found in historical studies of business in the Third Reich. Understandably horrified by unethical drug testing on human beings, Lindner assigns moral responsibility for this activity to Hoechst management. Occasionally, evidence presented suggests that the answers to Lindner's questions may be more complex than his assertions allow. For instance, Lindner provides an in-depth, informative description of the clinical tests of "Preparation 3582," developed to treat typhus, that were conducted on subjects who did not volunteer freely. In the context of the times, did Hoechst, or specifically Lautenschläger and Dr. Julius Weber, believe that they were engaging in unethical practices? Lindner concludes that they did, because of the "strictly confidential" style with which they handled the paperwork and because Weber felt guilt after the war. Lindner's inference that the men understood that they had engaged in unethical testing is not wholly convincing, however, given the context in which Hoechst stopped the delivery of "Preparation 3582" to SS Dr. Erwin Schuler-Ding, who was infecting his "patients" with typhus at Buchenwald from 1942 to 1944.

It also would have been analytically helpful for Lindner to have placed his work in the broader context provided by recent studies on racial ideology in the Third Reich and perpetrator behavior.[2] Lindner reports that in the 1920s and again starting in 1935, Hoechst tested pharmaceu-

ticals on mentally ill patients, who most likely did not give their consent. Therefore, Hoechst researchers had been involved in unethical drug tests even before the Nazi era--probably because they already believed that not all human life was equally worthy of protection. The Nazi state later encouraged this belief, which had been gathering adherents in the atmosphere of the 1920s and 30s, through a variety of propaganda campaigns. Lindner does point out that "Hoechst had never had any problems with experiments being carried out on people who had not given their consent ... it was no great step to regard concentration camp inmates as 'patient material'" (p. 333). In short, he tacitly acknowledges that incremental steps were taken that made it easier to turn "patients" into objects, but all in all, by neglecting a deeper discussion of the pre-1933 climate on these topics, he misses an opportunity for a more fine-grained analysis of the essential question that drives his research. Instead, he ultimately concludes that ideological orientation "was [not] responsible for the darkest chapter in the plant's history.... Naked ambition [to beat its competitor] made Hoechst complicit in the crimes committed" (p. 336). The problem with Lindner's observation is not a failure to be critical of Hoechst. Rather, he mistakenly portrays ideological orientation as incompatible with naked ambition. They are compatible, and indeed, his research suggests as much.

Claudia Koonz has pointed out on numerous occasions in her study of Nazi technocrats in the 1930s that the eugenics movement in Germany divided humans into two categories, worthy and unworthy; Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann have demonstrated that the Nazis created a racial state that encouraged binary thinking. Clearly, scientists at Hoechst had accepted these beliefs even before the Nazis came to power, as evidenced by Lindner's discussion of their willingness to test drugs on patients at the Clinic for Emotionally Disturbed Persons in Frankfurt in the 1920s. The Nazis made racial thinking a central pillar of the state; their message was disseminated

by the medical profession, educators, mothers, and others through the Office of Racial Politics. So can ideology be distinguished from naked ambition? The Nazis made virtuous a belief that predated their seizure of power, which had been popularized by the eugenics movement: the notion that some human beings, such as institutionalized mental health patients, were less worthy than others. During the Nazi era, Hoechst management "simply" extended its testing to larger groups of individuals labeled "unworthy" by the state.

The extent to which Weber and others threw morality overboard in conducting the sort of experiments Lindner describes is also questionable; it assumes that individual conscience is unmal-leable. Psychological and sociological studies of perpetrator behavior in numerous settings have revealed the very real possibility of "moral disengagement." For instance, Philip Zimbardo has suggested that good and evil exist within all humans and that situational factors determine our choices.[3] Consider Lindner's analysis of Weber's motives. Lindner believes that because Weber participated in the Catholic resistance to Nazism and covertly supplied medicine to a friend imprisoned in Dachau that he must have been "well-informed about conditions in the camp" (p. 332). This activity, taken in combination with Weber's postwar breakdown, demonstrates for Lindner that Weber knew supplying "Preparation 3582" was unethical. Yet, Lindner offers little evidence to suggest that Weber found the experiments to be "deeply abhorrent" (p. 333) at the time, and Weber's breakdown only occurred after the war, when the Nazi world view, including its division of people into the categories of worthy and unworthy, was questioned. Is it possible that in the narrow context of the time, Weber did not believe that testing drugs on concentration camp inmates was wrong if they were not members of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and hence "unworthy"? It is equally plausible that when Lautenschläger ended his contact with Ding, he clearly was not motivated by ethical con-

siderations regarding human testing on unwilling subjects, but by concerns that Ding was an inept scientist, and hence that any results he obtained would not be reliable. The fact that Hoechst, with Lautenschläger's knowledge, continued to supply pharmaceutical samples to SS-Obersturmführer Hellmuth Vetter, who was running clinical trials on Auschwitz inmates, suggests that ideology and ambition were compatible.

The biographical sketches of Hoechst management and employees that Lindner includes are a welcome attempt to put a human face on the company. Even so, although Lindner's findings are significant, his analysis is limited by the assumption that Hoechst's managers were good men caught in bad times; instead, their behavior needs to be analyzed in the larger context of the Nazi racial state, not simply business history, and in the context of understanding evil and perpetrator behavior.

#### Notes

[1]. Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001; and Schneider, *Unterm Hakenkreuz: Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung 1933 bis 1939* (Bonn: Dietz, 1999).

[2]. For example, see Claudia Koonz, "Genocide and Eugenics: The Language of Power," in *Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World*, ed. Peter Hayes (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1991); Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Fred E. Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil: A Report on the Beguiling of Evil* (New York: State University of New York, 1993).

[3]. Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect* (New York: Random House, 2007), 1-19.

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