

Martin Mattulat. *Medizinethik in historischer Perspektive: Zum Wandel ärztlicher Moralkonzepte im Werk von Georg Benno Gruber (1884-1977)*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007. 187 pp. ISBN 978-3-515-08863-3.

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## A Medical Professor's Contribution to Nazi Medical Ethics

This book is a fascinating study of an internationally respected pathology professor at the University of Göttingen who wrote and lectured extensively on medical ethics before, during, and after the National Socialist period. It not only makes a significant contribution to our understanding of medical ethics under Nazism, but it also, and perhaps even more importantly, explains how (some) intellectuals adapted to the National Socialist worldview.

Although Georg Gruber did not support the National Socialist German Workers' Party before Hitler came to power, he became a member of the SA in 1933. There, he rose to a high rank, since his superiors considered him a reliable Nazi comrade. After the war, Gruber was forced to retire. However, in subsequent de-Nazification procedures, he deftly extricated himself from his Nazi ties, and was able to continue lecturing as an emeritus professor.

Gruber's engagement with Nazi ideology, especially in relation to medical ethics, is instructive. During his medical studies in Munich, he studied eugenics with the prominent hygiene professor, Max von Gruber (not a relative). Before and during the National Socialist period, Georg Gruber enthusiastically supported eugenics and the collectivist ethic underlying it. After the war, he continued to support eugenics, but he came to stress individual rights over collectivism.

Martin Mattulat claims that Gruber's views regarding euthanasia changed somewhat during the Nazi period,

most likely in response to the Nazi T-4 "euthanasia" program. In books and articles written before 1939, Gruber was unequivocal in supporting the continued validity of the Hippocratic Oath and he rejected both abortion and physician-assisted suicide. However, in a published lecture in 1941, he abandoned this position, stating that the state had the right "to extinguish an ill life" that had no value and placed a burden on the community (p. 125). Mattulat is likely correct that Gruber changed his position in response to the T-4 program, which circumstantial evidence suggests he must have known about.

Although Gruber's thinking shared some other tenets of Nazi ideology, Mattulat reports several episodes from Gruber's life that seem to suggest that Gruber was not antisemitic. Growing up, he had close friends who were Jews, and when the National Socialists came to power, he defended and protected Jews whom he knew (although never by publicly criticizing the regime). In postwar correspondence with a Jewish colleague who had emigrated, he blamed the Nazis for their racial policies.

After the Nazi period, Gruber never came to grips with his own involvement in the Nazi apparatus. It did not seem to occur to him that his actions had given the regime respectability and support. He tried to atone for his involvement by helping Jews. Paradoxically, however, he also stirred controversy in 1962 by helping a former SS physician obtain teaching credentials at his university.

Despite Mattulat's excellent scholarship, the book might have offered more analysis on a few key points. Mattulat does not consider Gruber's worldview, for instance, as a means of exploring how his religious and/or philosophical perspectives might have shaped his medical ethics. Mattulat also never explicitly discusses the nature of Gruber's own racial ideology or race-thinking.

This solid study provides insight into the way that a prominent medical professor grappled with Nazism and its aftermath. It shows how Nazism was able to benefit from ideological currents already extant in the medical profession, and, in turn, how Nazism influenced medical ethics.

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