

Unfree Associations: Disability, Antisemitism, Sexual Sin

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I.

In the autumn of 2021, I was in Germany, about to return to the United States the next day, and intent on visiting the Kalmenhof, in the town of Idstein, half an hour northwest of Frankfurt/Main. The Kalmenhof was a highly-regarded charity institution for children with intellectual disabilities founded in the late nineteenth century. During World War II, it had also become a site of Nazi terror and murder. On the top floor of the Kalmenhof's hospital, in one of the approximately thirty "special children's wards" established by the National Socialists as a core part of the "euthanasia" killing program that ultimately claimed over 200,000 lives within the German Reich and another 80,000 in the occupied Eastern territories of Poland and the Soviet Union, hundreds of children were murdered by medication overdose or poison injection.¹ The main perpetrator, as it happens, was a female doctor, Mathilde Weber (1909-1996), incidentally much loved in the surrounding community, which after the war pleaded in large numbers for her amnesty—a salient sign not least of the potent emotional

¹ The Kalmenhof additionally served as a so-called "intermediate institution" (*Zwischenanstalt*) to which children with disabilities from other charity homes who had been targeted for death were temporarily "re-located" (so as to veil the murder plans) before being deported to gas chambers or other killing sites. Christoph Schneider, *Der Kalmenhof in Idstein: NS-"Euthanasie" und ihre Nachgeschichte* (Paderborn, forthcoming 2024); and Lutz Kaelber, "Child Murder in Nazi Germany: The Memory of Nazi Medical Crimes and Commemoration of 'Children's Euthanasia' Victims at Two

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Facilities (Eichberg, Kalmenhof),” *Societies* 2 (2012), 157–194.

2 See the petition signature list and photo of Mathilde Weber Muthig (after the war, she married the former concentration camp doctor Julius Muthig) in Christian Schrappner and Dieter Sengling, “Sozialpädagogik im Nationalsozialismus – Die Heilerziehungsanstalt Kalmenhof/Idstein 1888–1988: Ein Beispiel,” in Christina Vanja and Martin Vogt, eds., *Euthanasie in Hadamar: Die nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik in hessischen Anstalten* (Kassel, 1991), 113–122, here 119; as well as the powerful exposé by Rudolf Müller, “Das Heim des Todes,” *Stern* 45 (1987), IIIa/2.

3 Their guide, Jurek Skrzypek – survivor of Auschwitz, Dachau, and Flossenbürg – had read about the Kalmenhof in Alexander Mitscherlich and Fred Mielke’s eyewitness report on the Nuremberg Doctors’ Trial of 1946–1948, *Medizin ohne Menschlichkeit* (Heidelberg, 1960). In the town of Idstein, the book reports, there had been, in the Nazi era, an “extermination-institution for deformed and brain-damaged children” (211).

efficacy of venomous Nazi antidisability propaganda.² But the striking durability of Dr. Weber’s popularity into the 1950s was hardly the only postfascist drama swirling around the Kalmenhof; there have been several others. One of these involved the only very belated acknowledgment that the Kalmenhof had been a site of deliberate death. Stunningly, the ignorance locally was only rectified via a quite winding and indirect knowledge-path. A well-meaning Protestant pastor from Idstein arriving in Auschwitz in 1981 with a group of teenagers sponsored by *Aktion Sühnezeichen* (Action Reconciliation Service, a peace organization working for Jewish-Christian understanding in the aftermath of Nazism) was led through the camp landscape by a Warsaw-born survivor-docent who, inquiring of the youths about their town of origin, suggested they might want to look for a mass murder location in their very own backyard.³ Upon his return home, the pastor then set in motion the processes which led, finally, to the awakening of municipal engagement and the inauguration of a dignified and affecting memorial at the Kalmenhof in 1987.⁴

Yet, at the moment of my visit in late 2021, a fresh passionate memory-political conflict was simmering, this time between local activists and the regional healthcare administrators to whom the Kalmenhof’s property presently belongs, over both the exact scope of the mass graves of murdered children and the proper handling of the memorial site in general.⁵ Only in the summer of 2022 would this latter conflict be

4 Ekkehard Maass, “Verschweigen – Vergessen – Erinnern: Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Idstein,” in Christian Schrappner and Dieter Sengling, eds., *Die Idee der Bildbarkeit: 100 Jahre sozialpädagogische Praxis in der Heilerziehungsanstalt Kalmenhof* (Weinheim, 1988), 337–356, here 352–356.

5 Ursula Oestreich, “Auf ein Wort ... Frau Hartmann-Menz, Historikerin,” *Unabhängige Liste Idstein*, March 19, 2017, <https://ul-idstein.de/auf-ein-wort-frau-hartmann-menz-historikerin-teil-1/> (accessed December 12, 2022); “Mit Georadar weitere Gräber entdeckt,” *Rhein-Main Zeitung*,

July 20, 2019; “27 weitere Gräber im Kalmenhof,” *Wiesbadener Kurier*, March 23, 2021.



satisfactorily resolved. The Kalmenhof hospital, rather than being put on the real estate market as had been feared, will itself now become a “euthanasia” memorial and a setting for serious research and teaching about all the Nazi crimes against people with disabilities.⁶

On that particular November day, however, I was drawn to the site most of all because of the events that unfolded there *before* the Third Reich. For the Kalmenhof had been established in 1888 as an extraordinary, unique experiment in ecumenical optimism: Jews and Christians together building a residential school for children who were, in the language of the time, “feeble-minded and imbeciles.”⁷ The main founders were a philanthropic Jewish banker, a lawyer also of Jewish heritage (though his parents had converted to Protestantism), and a

⁶ “Konzept für Gedenk- und Lernort Kalmenhof” (Pressemittteilung), July 7, 2022, <https://www.idstein.de/artikel/pressemittteilungen/2022/konzept-fuer-gedenk-und-lernort-kalmenhof/> (accessed December 12, 2022).

⁷ Jahresbericht Kalmenhof 1890, quoted in Martina Schrapper, “... 100 Anfragen zum Teil dringlichster Art ...’ Die Gründer der ‘Idioten-Anstalt’ Kalmenhof in Idstein,” in Schrapper and Sengling, *Die Idee der*

Bildbarkeit, 61–126, here 66.

Figure 1. Memorial landscape at the Kalmenhof, inaugurated on May 24, 1987. The Auschwitz survivor-docent that the pastor and his students had encountered in 1981 attended the ceremony. The inscription on the semicircle of stone in the foreground reads: “In memory of the victims of the violent regime. More than 600 children and adults from the Kalmenhof were murdered in the years 1941-1945. For the National Socialists, their life was unworthy of life. Many of the victims lie buried here. The number and location of the individual graves are unknown.” Memorial activism is ongoing; a *Stolperschwelle* to honor the victims is being placed near the entrance to the Kalmenhof on June 26, 2024. © Gedenkort Kalmenhof e.V. Reproduced by permission.

8 Christel Lentz, "Die Kalmenhofbauten als Spiegel der Unternehmensentwicklung," *125 Jahre Kalmenhof: Facetten seiner Geschichte* (Hochheim, 2013), 38–67.

Protestant pastor who himself had a daughter with cognitive disability. A broader social welfare component informed the entire enterprise, as the substantial correlation between a childhood in poverty and diagnoses of intellectual disability was no secret to contemporaries, and both the banker and the lawyer had extensive prior experience in benevolent projects to improve the lives of the working class. The Kalmenhof became a priority project for them. All the buildings were designed by notable local architects in keeping with the latest technological innovations, and expert pedagogues were hired to provide a combination of classroom instruction with training in practical work skills. The classrooms, dormitories, and gymnasium were supplemented with hands-on workshops, where children and adolescents developed aptitude in cooking, woodworking, shoemaking, and other crafts.⁸

I arrived early, walking the grounds while I waited to meet up with the administrator who would give me a tour, trying to match the topography in the present with the maps and old photographs I had studied. I asked an elderly woman passing by which building was the one named after the founding pastor. She pointed it out and then identified the cluster of original buildings as well as the unevenly grassy lawn where the former workshops once stood. I thanked her, commenting courteously that she knew the place well. She explained that she frequently visited people in the nursing home now on site. She asked what I was doing and I said I was a historian. And to avoid potential conflict with this friendly and forthcoming stranger by not mentioning either the Nazi killings or the still-ongoing memory wars, I neutrally (I thought) said that I was especially moved and interested by the Jewish-Christian cooperation in founding the Kalmenhof in the late nineteenth century.

Suddenly, the woman began to regale me with her opinion that "yes, because the Jews have so much incest and marriage among relatives, that is why they have so many mentally disabled children" ("ja, weil die Juden so viel Inzest und Verwandtenehen haben,

darum haben sie so viele geistig behinderte Kinder”). And: “The first contingent of children here were all Jews, a hundred of them, all from Frankfurt, all those bankers’ children [*Bankierskinder*].” I couldn’t believe she was serious.⁹ I responded: “No—the great majority of the residents were Christian, never more than a quarter of the disabled pupils were Jewish. It was two of the *founders* who were Jewish; it’s the *Christian pastor* who had the disabled child.” Although I thought she would realize that she’d said something inappropriate, she was unstoppable: “No, no, it’s a Jewish thing, I’ve read all about it in the Bible. Jacob is in love with Rachel, his cousin, but he is told he can’t marry her, he has to marry her sister Leah first, and only then he is allowed also to marry Rachel. So he marries them both. He must have felt sooo great as a man”—at this point she did a little smug swivel-dance with her hips—“having two women at once.”¹⁰ I asked where she had gleaned her information but, demonstrably irritated by my obvious discomfort, she was already walking away.

My own reaction to this awkward encounter has evolved recursively, in intermittent fits and starts. Its most immediate echo was with taboo-rupturing rhetoric around disability of the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), which entered the Bundestag in 2017 and has since become a powerfully disruptive force in German politics. Although the party’s most notorious obsession has been with immigration, sly and cruel complaints about advances in disability rights have additionally been recurrent features of AfD campaigns and policy debates.¹¹ In March 2018, the party fused these themes, famously presenting a public “inquiry” (*Anfrage*) to the

⁹ Never more than a quarter of the residents were Jewish; over the years the proportion hovered closer to one-tenth. From 1924 on, the Kalmenhof provided a kosher kitchen as well as Jewish religious instruction, and – due to a contractual arrangement that year with the Jewish Welfare Association – as a result, as of 1929–1930, 152 of the 647 residents were Jewish (only 14 of them from Frankfurt/Main, the others from all over the German lands and from places as far away as Greece, Palestine, Egypt, North America, and Russia). “Jüdische Pfleglinge in der Heilanstalt Calmenhof in Idstein i. T.,” *Jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege und Sozialpolitik* 1 (1930), 482–483. The only other major residential school in Germany for Jewish “educable feeble-minded” was Samuel (“Sally”) Bein’s school in Beelitz in Brandenburg, but it did not have the therapeutic teaching workshops that the Kalmenhof boasted. See Andreas Paetz and Tatjana Matanya Ruge, *Die israelitische Erziehungsanstalt in Beelitz und ihr Leiter Sally Bein* (Berlin, 2022).

¹⁰ November 1, 2021, conversation in Idstein. Cf. Genesis 29.

¹¹ Already in its 2016 party platform, the AfD railed against the “ideologically motivated inclusion” of children with learning difficulties into mainstream classrooms (claiming it would “hamper other children in their learning

successes”). Oliver Georgi, “So radikal will die AfD Deutschland umbauen,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 2, 2016. This remains a persistent AfD theme: Ann-Katrin Müller and Maik Baumgärtner, “Höcke sorgt mit Äußerungen

zu Schülern mit Behinderungen für Entsetzen,” *Der Spiegel*, August 9, 2023; Dagmar Herzog, “Time Together,” in Talia Kwartler and Susanne Pfeffer, eds., *Crip Time* (Köln, forthcoming 2024).

12 Bundestag-Drucksachen, 19. WP, Drucksache 19/1444, Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Nicole Höchst, Franziska Gminder, Jürgen Pohl, Verena Hartmann und der Fraktion der AfD, 22 March 2018, 1, <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/014/1901444.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2022).

13 These included not merely the enduring belief long confirmed by geneticists – though the empirical evidence remains inconsistent – that consanguineous marriages heighten chances of producing progeny with cognitive impairments, but also a welter of (mutually contradicting) theories striving to explain why (purportedly) a proportionately higher number of Jews were diagnosed with intellectual disability and/or psychiatric problems, even as Jews represented less than 1 percent of the German population. All through the 1910s–1920s, the arguments were all over the place, but inevitably the very existence of “debate” conferred a sense of legitimacy to the question. See (tendentiously antisemitic) Alexander Pilcz, *Beitrag zur vergleichenden Rassen-Psychiatrie*

federal government demanding answers with regard to the (phantasmagoric) issue of migrant families producing disproportionately more children with cognitive difficulties because of the (alleged) prevalence of incestuous marriages between blood relatives among the recent refugees.¹² Somehow, I first thought, this woman had transposed elements of that more contemporary scandal-controversy around present-day *Muslims* onto late-nineteenth-century Jews. It was only upon further reflection and research that I came to realize that the AfD must have itself grafted its noxious aspersion-casting accusations against present-day Muslims onto older tropes rooted in antisemitic and antidisability “folk wisdom.”¹³ (A classic version of their conjunction is in a much-discussed book of 1924 by the notorious antisemite and self-styled Nietzsche acolyte Ernst Mann, who averred that while evidently a Jewish elite of intellectually superior people existed—and they were out for world power—the vast majority of Jews were of a much lower sort, and here incest was to blame: “Contributing to the emergence of this inferior type of human was excessive inbreeding in Jewish circles [*die übertriebene Inzucht in jüdischen Kreisen*].”)¹⁴ Although in the gratifyingly robust rebukes to the AfD for its “inquiry” that instantly ensued in 2018 from secular disability rights organizations as well as both Christian churches, no one mentioned those older tropes, in hindsight it was surely their lingering presence still circulating in the

(Leipzig and Vienna, 1906), esp. iii–iv, 1–24; and (anxiously balanced) Max Sichel, “Die psychischen Erkrankungen der Juden in Kriegs- und Friedenszeiten,” *Monatsschrift für Psychiatrie und Neurologie* 55 (1924): 207–228, here 207, cf. 223.

14 Ernst Mann [Gerhard Hoffmann], *Die Wohltätigkeit als aristokratische und rassenhygienische Forderung* (Weimar, 1924), 116. In the rest of the book, reflections on animal rights, artistic genius, and the dangers of com-

munist jostle with rage at the Weimar Republic and fond hopes that commissions of doctors might soon be permitted to comb through asylums to choose those who would be “consigned to painless annihilation” (164).

culture that contributed to the “inquiry’s” joltingly explosive cultural potency.¹⁵

A further thing had struck me right away: how quickly different timescales can collapse into each other when the subject is Jews. I had disputed the woman’s claims about the 1880s; she promptly invoked the Book of Genesis. Not least, however, and perhaps most tellingly: I had mentioned Jews, and had said not a single word about sex. Within two minutes, she had performed her little dance to convey the pleasure of a man enjoying two wives. How did our original conversation about the location of the disability care workshop buildings devolve so suddenly?

Psychoanalysts who are good at their craft will tell you that there is nothing so *unfree* as associations. Free is the last thing that associations are. Our minds slip-slide metonymically; this is one of the main ways that meaning-making works.¹⁶ For this woman, in this place, at this particular juncture in German history, the mere word “Jewish” had triggered thoughts first of repellent incest and then of delightful bigamy.

The incident stayed with me, not least because it is highly relevant to the conference theme of “Antisemitism and Sexuality Reconsidered.” The various weird dimensions of the exchange, brief as it was, also raise important questions for historians of Germany, of Jewishness, and of sexuality, among them three that are particularly pertinent as I respond to Stefanie Schüler-Springorum’s keynote address.¹⁷ First: How can we best periodize key shifts in the entwined histories of antisemitism and sexuality? Second: What are we missing if we do not

15 “Es geht uns alle an: Wachsam sein für Menschlichkeit,” <https://www.der-paritaetische.de/schwerpunkte/vielfalt-ohne-alternative/es-geht-uns-alle-an-wachsam-sein-fuer-menschlichkeit/> (accessed December 12, 2022); “Outrage of AfD ‘Incest’ Query,” Deutsche Welle, April 13, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/afd-disability-query-slammed-by-churches-ethics-council/a-43382621> (accessed December 12, 2022).

16 On Freud’s original conceptualization, see “Association,” in Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (London, 1973), 41–42. For different takes on the significance of sequentiality in associations and on the slipping of meaning via contiguity, compare Fritz Morgenthaler, *On the Dialectics of Psychoanalytic Practice* (London and New York, 2020); Dylan Evans, “Metonymy,” in *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*

(London and New York, 1996), 116–117; and Kirsten Campbell, “The Slide in the Sign: Lacan’s *Glissement*

and the Registers of Meaning,” *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 4.3 (1999), 135–143.

17 Published as “The Dark Side of Modernity? Rethinking Antisemitism and Sexuality” in this issue.

18 Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (New York, 1991); David Engel, "Away from a Definition of Antisemitism: An Essay in the Semantics of Historical Description," in Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman, eds., *Rethinking European Jewish History* (Liverpool, 2008); David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 1996); David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York, 2013).

include the category of disability among the intersectional factors that—by however roundabout paths—recurrently connect anti-Jewish animus with the history of sex? Third: How might we reconsider which aspects of psychoanalysis could be valuable conceptual resources for historians when we try to grapple with this nexus of topics?

At each moment of retrospective contemplation over the past year, I have had my own further unfree associations. The old woman gave me a clue, though it took me a while to follow the trail. I will come back to it.

II.

In the standoff to which Schüler-Springorum alludes at the beginning of her essay between those scholars of antisemitism who are "eternalists" (i.e., they are convinced that Judeophobia is "the oldest hatred" and also an ineradicable one) and those we might call "specifiers," insistent on paying attention to the particulars of place and time, taking seriously not just the distinct historical *contexts* but also the changing *contents* of negative emotions, ideas, and actions against those human beings construed by themselves or others as Jews, I most certainly incline toward the "specifiers."¹⁸ And yet, I do continue to remain struck by what Schüler-Springorum observes is antisemitism's astonishing flexibility, along with its bonding (or fusion) capacity, the way it can annex and entangle with so many other efforts to imagine and manage human difference. More generally, I find it significant to register the fundamental *irresolvability* of motivations for antisemitic speech or action. Whether antisemitism is best understood as racism, religious prejudice, an expression of competitive envy, or a cynical excuse for an unleashing of cruelty, and whether Nazism's ideological formations were sincerely believed (perhaps even anchored, as Schüler-Springorum notes, in corporeal reflexes) or simply opportunistically, strategically deployed: these questions cannot

be conclusively settled.¹⁹ For antisemitism is all of these, and more.²⁰

Yet I do want to reflect further on the question of periodization. In her lecture, Schüler-Springorum made the interesting proposal to understand the unprecedented constellation of gendered and ethnic relations being developed in the German lands around 1800 as marking a “Sexual Turn” in the evolution of antisemitism (and in particular she linked this turn with a strong polarization of “clear-cut” male and female gender roles). While I would insist that what counted as “sexual” around 1800 was not yet “sexual” in a twentieth-century sense, I can confirm, from my work on the rise of a religious right in the 1840s led by ultramontane Catholics, that this religious right zealously utilized *both* sexual innuendo *and* antisemitic rhetoric so insidiously and successfully that it utterly destabilized gentile liberals and prompted them to become the defenders of Jewish rights and of the separation of church and state they would not have otherwise been. However, in that historical instance, the aspersions of sexual misbehavior were directed *against other Christians*; Jews were neither sexually deviant themselves, nor were they the cause of Christian deviance.²¹ Notably, then, just as Schüler-Springorum indicated, the two rhetorical strategies were not yet merged, not yet fused.

How different the discourse becomes once we arrive at the 1930s. The twentieth century was indisputably “the century of sex,” and already by the early 1900s, German culture was arguably the most sex-liberal in the world.²² What would be new about the dynamics in Weimar was twofold: Jews were suddenly perceived to be in charge of the nation’s sexual culture (via their roles both in medicine and in print media), and the ideal of sexual happiness was very widely yearned for, also

19 On cynicism, consider Slavoj Žižek, “Cynicism as a Form of Ideology,” in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York, 1989), 28–30. For compelling evidence on envy, see Paul Lerner, *The Consuming Temple: Jews, Department Stores, and the Consumer Revolution in Germany, 1880–1940* (Ithaca, NY, 2015); Götz Aly, *Why the Germans? Why the Jews? Envy, Race Hatred, and the Prehistory of the Holocaust* (New York, 2014).

20 See also the powerful reflections on transgression and revolt against the moral rules for which Judaism stands in Alon Confino, “Why Did the Nazis Burn the Hebrew Bible? Nazi Germany, Representations of the Past, and the Holocaust,” *Journal of Modern History* 84 (2012): 369–400; and Ilka Quindeau, “Psychoanalyse des Antisemitismus,” in Peter Ullrich et al., eds., *Was ist Antisemitismus? Begriffe und Definitionen von Judenfeindschaft* (Göttingen, 2024), 110–114.

21 Dagmar Herzog, *Intimacy and Exclusion: Religious Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Baden*

(Princeton, NJ, 1996), e.g. 66–68. Note here too the inclusion of references to Turks.

22 Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, UK, 2011).

23 In affirming all of these values and desires – although he was by no means the only Jewish sex rights activist – Magnus Hirschfeld became a special target for conservative and right-wing animus. Kirsten Leng, “Magnus Hirschfeld’s Meanings: Analyzing Biography and the Politics of Representation,” *German History* 35 (2017), 96–116; Dagmar Herzog, “Liebe und Gerechtigkeit: Magnus Hirschfeld in Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft,” in Bundesstiftung Magnus Hirschfeld, ed., *Liebe und Gerechtigkeit: Magnus Hirschfeld in Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft* (Göttingen, 2020), 75–97. For recent critical studies on Hirschfeld, see Laurie Marhoefer, *Racism and the Making of Gay Rights: A Sexologist, His Student, and the Empire of Queer Love* (Toronto and London, 2022); Rainer Herrn, *Der Liebe und dem Leid: Das Institut für Sexualwissenschaft 1919–1933* (Berlin, 2022).

24 Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, 2005).

by millions of gentiles, who eagerly sought the information that Jewish sex advice writers were providing. Conservative Christians, Catholic and Protestant alike, fretted constantly that their control over their flocks was eroding, while Jews were associated with a generous and affirmative attitude toward consent and pleasure, toward a diversity of orientations and preferences, and toward female enjoyment separated from the fear of unwanted reproduction.²³

Antisemitic imagery and rhetoric would come to saturate the sexual politics of the Third Reich, in a cacophonous combination of *incitement and disavowal*. The Nazis quickly positioned *themselves* as the pleasure-givers, in place of the Jewish sex rights activists they had driven into exile, urging sexual fulfillment for nondisabled, heterosexual “Aryans” while persistently denying that they were doing anything of the sort, by constantly contrasting “natural,” racially approved nudity and pre- and extramarital and marital sexual activity with purportedly dirty and disgusting Jewish sex. Taken aback, Christian spokesmen, in a continually recalibrated triangular relationship with Nazis and Jews, kept trying to promote their own conservative values as a contrast to *both* “antisemitic” and “semitic” mores. To no avail. It was the combination of shrill indignation at the sex coded as dirty and Jewish (albeit accompanied by titillating images of naked full-bosomed blondes, innocent about-to-be-violated gentile maidens, and pornographically detailed narratives of sexual crimes) with the robust injunctions to shake off inherited bourgeois values and religious distrust of sexual joy that was *the* distinctive innovation of Nazism.²⁴ The seeming contradiction—accusing Jews of undermining proper mores while railing against church-induced “unmanly prudery”—proved highly functional for the regime.²⁵ It also offered moral legitimation (so brilliantly interpreted by Schüler-Springorum in her

25 See on this point also Sophinette Becker, “Zur Funktion der Sexualität im

Nationalsozialismus,” in *Leidenschaftlich Psychoanalytisch: Texte zu Sexualität, Geschlecht*

und *Psychoanalyse* (Giessen, 2021), 143–163.

analysis of the “race defiler” shaming rituals) for the *pleasure in cruelty* taken by those who violently humiliated individuals caught pursuing love or sex across the newly vehemently insisted-upon Jewish-gentile divide.

Yet in addition, a striking amount of Nazi commentary obsessed over what was thought to be the Jew *within* the German. Jews had managed, so the complaint went, to “saturate the personality” of Germans through to the “erotic deep structure” (*erotische Tiefenschicht*).²⁶ It was Jewish “glorification of adultery and sexual uninhibitedness” that had “eaten ... more deeply” into the German *Volk* than any “purely political teachings” from the Weimar era.²⁷ A Berlin urologist blamed the pressure on men to please women sexually as having been put in the heads of German men by Jewish doctors.²⁸ A theologian complained about the “Jewification” (*Verjudung*) of non-Jews influenced by sex-obsessed Jewish psychoanalysts.²⁹ A military officer both urged his men to choose “squeaky-clean” brides and warned that any German man still attached to a sexual double standard needed to expel the “poisonous substances of the Jewish moral perspective ... sitting in his bones. Out with them!”³⁰ A leading women’s magazine lamented, surveying the welter of seductive photographs in other Nazi regime-approved periodicals—it was 1940, seven years into the Third Reich—that those other (Nazi) periodicals were being “Jewish—all too Jewish.” The only explanation? “How deeply the Jewish contamination has worked specifically in this area.”³¹

All this was, of course, grafted onto centuries-old associations of Christians with spirituality and Jews with carnality. Nonetheless—and maybe the short version of what I am doing is shifting Schüler-Springorum’s periodization of the “Sexual Turn” from 1800 to 1900—I think it is clear that the particular *contents* of Nazism’s sexualized antisemitism were specific to the *context* of a German society in deep turmoil over the conjunction of a devastating military trouncing in World War I, economic-existential instability, Jewish prominence in

26 Ferdinand Hoffmann, *Sittliche Entartung und Geburtenchwund*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1938).

27 Paul Danzer, “Die Haltung zum anderen Geschlecht,” in *Streiflichter ins Völkische* (Berlin, 1936), 5–6; Hans F. K. Günther quoted in Walter Hermanssen and Karl Blome, *Warum hat man uns das nicht früher gesagt?*, 4th ed. (Munich, 1943), 120.

28 P. Orłowski, “Zur Frage der Pathogenese und der modernen Therapie der sexuellen Störungen beim Manne,” *Zeitschrift für Urologie* 31 (1937), 380.

29 Heinz Hunger, “Jüdische Psychoanalyse und deutsche Seelsorge,” in Walter Grundmann, ed., *Germanentum, Judentum und Christentum*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1943), 323.

30 Maj. Dr. Ellenbeck, “Der deutsche Unteroffizier und das Thema ‘Frauen und Mädchen,’” *Die Zivilversorgung* (October 15, 1942), 281–282.

31 “Sie meinen: Apart und lustig,” *NS-Frauenwarte* 8.16 (February 1940).

32 Herzog, "Reconceiving Sexuality 1900–1914," in *Sexuality in Europe*, 6–44.

33 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York, 1980), 6–9.

34 Theodor W. Adorno, "Sexual Taboos and Law Today," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York, 2005), 71–88.

35 Laplanche and Pontalis, "Condensation," "Displacement," and "Substitute-Formation (or Substitutive Formation)," in *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 82–83, 121–124, 434.

the realm of culture, and a growing popular preoccupation with sexual happiness. In the first decades of the twentieth-century, across all of Europe, sexuality had become politicized in new ways.³²

We can be as skeptical as Michel Foucault has taught us to be about the new pressures to conform to a narrow notion of what "sex" even is, or can or should be, fostered by that historic twentieth-century promise of sexual happiness.³³ And with Theodor Adorno we can be alert to the deficits in all normative notions of a "healthy sex life" and the allergic discomfort with refinements and kinks (associated in the early 1960s, when Adorno was writing, above all with homosexuals and prostitutes) that continually re-stirs *punitive affect towards the sexual freedoms of others*.³⁴ This dynamic is blatantly evident in the present day once again—in many nations—in the resurgent backlash against LGBTQ+ rights and against women's sexual freedoms in particular. Here too we see Schüler-Springorum's point about the sexual realm as one that almost invariably brings together desire *and* anxiety, fascination *and* loathing. And still: We can see clearly the historic specificity of the sexualized antisemitism promoted in the Third Reich.

III.

Let me return to the woman at the Kalmenhof, and the hint she inadvertently gave me. Psychoanalysis can not only help us think, as Schüler-Springorum urges us to do, about the emotional work accomplished by "counter-images" (the abjected homosexual, the Jew, the woman) in fortifying the sense of self of the person striving to be the purported ideal (heterosexual, Aryan-German, man). It can help us think about *how complexly meaning-making works*, including: by condensation, substitution, and displacement.³⁵

Because what strikes me now, looking back, is the way the woman condensed and substituted a (fantasized) one

hundred cognitively disabled Jewish children for the historical reality of multiple hundreds of cognitively disabled *Christian* children. What does this substitution—this displacement and disavowal of the prevalence of intellectual disability among *non-Jewish* Germans—reveal? Although there were middle-class exceptions (like the pastor’s child), for over-determined reasons the vast majority of individuals diagnosed with cognitive deficits were gentiles from the poorest strata of society. And apparently, they were an *embarrassment* for the nation, given the intensity of narcissistic longings to be a *Volk* that was healthy, beautiful, smart, and strong.³⁶

Christian commentators in the early twentieth century were alarmed and overwhelmed *both* by the exponentially rising numbers in their own charity institutions for the “feeble-minded” *and* the fact that they were increasingly being accused by rightwing nationalist eugenicists of being *themselves responsible* for the looming death of the German *Volk* precisely because of their nurturing care for these biologically deficient beings. Already by 1910, 226 residential institutions were home to 34,400 citizens of all ages.³⁷ Ten years later, in the wake of the humiliating defeat in World War I, an infamous, if immensely influential, little pamphlet authored by the lawyer Karl Binding and the psychiatrist Alfred Hoche called openly for the murder of the “total idiots” among these.³⁸ All through the 1910s and 1920s, experts debated frenetically what percentage of Germans was subpar biologically and should be prevented from procreating; the estimates ranged widely, from 1 percent to 20 percent or more, while the statistical controversy itself concretized the notion that this repulsive infirmity within the nation was both enormous and real.³⁹ In their (largely fumbling and unsuccessful) efforts to explain why murder of the disabled was wrong and simultaneously to counter the charges that in their provision of care for the purportedly defective they were damaging the health of the nation as a whole, Protestant charity spokespersons repeatedly took the occasion to vent their (only seemingly unrelated) frustrations about the rising

36 For the full argument, see Dagmar Herzog, *The Question of Unworthy Life: Eugenics and Germany’s Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 2024).

37 Max Kirmsse, “Die deutschen Anstalten für Geistesschwache und Epileptische am 1. Januar 1911 nebst Rückblick,” *Zeitschrift für die Behandlung Schwachsinniger* 31.3 (1911), 62-66 and 31.4 (1911), 81-84.

38 Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche, *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens: Ihr Maß und ihre Form* (Leipzig, 1920), 53.

39 Benno Laquer, *Eugenik und Dysgenik: Ein Versuch* (Wiesbaden, 1914), 22, 35-36; Fritz Lenz, *Menschliche Auslese und Rassenhygiene*, 3rd ed. (Munich, 1931), 272-273.

40 Hermann Büchsel, "Euthanasie," *Aufwärts* 280 (30 November 1926), reissued 1927 as an offprint (and warmly recommended for education of deaconesses), Hauptarchiv der v. Bodelschwingsche Stiftungen Bethel Kl. Erwerb. 189, 1-4, here 2-3. For further examples and analysis of this line of argument, see Dagmar Herzog, "On Being Adjacent to the Nazi Disability Murder Project," in Irene Kacandes, ed., *On Being Adjacent to Historical Violence* (Berlin, 2022), 69-88, here 78-82.

41 "Frage der Entschädigung für Zwangssterilisierte; Anhörung von Sachverständigen," *Deutscher Bundestag*, Protokoll No. 34, April 13, 1961, available at: <https://www.euthanasiegeschaedigte-zwangssterilisierte.de/dokumente/bt-protokoll-13-04-1961.pdf> (accessed December 28, 2022).

42 Gerhard Schmidt, *Selektion in der Heilanstalt 1939-1945* (Stuttgart, 1965), 30, 35. The book was originally written in 1947, but Schmidt's physician peers worked to suppress it and prevent publication.

liberalization in sexual values and practices. In keeping with the broader Protestant and Catholic chorus of complaint that Jews were at fault for the sexual disorder and licentiousness of Weimar, "the media-Jews" (*die Pressejuden*) were blamed for encouraging loosening mores among the masses, as Christian commentators developed elaborate theo-biopolitical theories that sexual immorality was the direct cause of so much intellectual disability. There was a "connection," indeed "a tight one," "between idiocy and sin"; the apparently burgeoning numbers of citizens with cognitive impairments were, or so it was argued, above all the product of an "overabundance of lust" and "submersion in vice."⁴⁰ This interpretive framing, in turn, greatly eased Protestant acceptance of—and subsequently enthusiastic participation in enforcement of—the Nazis' 1933 coercive sterilization law.

In the aftermath of the second crushing German military defeat in 1945, it would take another forty years for the harm that was done to those nearly 400,000 non-Jewish Germans who were coercively sterilized to be acknowledged as a crime. Ex-Nazi psychiatrists and the West German government adamantly stressed that there was *no comparability* between what had been done to Jews and what had been done to the handicapped—*not* because of any investment in Holocaust uniqueness, but to evade having to accept sterilization survivors under the reparations law as human beings persecuted on grounds of "race."⁴¹ Only one early postwar analyst of (what he named) Nazism's "racial insanity," physician Gerhard Schmidt, pointed out the intimate imbrication, in the Third Reich, of "racial hatred" (toward Jews) and "racial fear" (toward the disabled among German gentiles).⁴² It would not be until feminist historian Gisela Bock in the 1980s emphasized the phantasmatic anxiety-*cum*-arrogance driving the Nazi sterilization project that the argument was finally convincing also to politicians. After all, Bock noted pointedly and perceptively: "The promised 'race,' the 'master-Volk,' was not a given, it was not the real-existing German Volk, rather [the master race] had yet

to be produced.” (“Die gelobte ‘Rasse,’ das ‘Herrenvolk’ war nicht gegeben, war nicht das real existierende deutsche Volk, sondern sollte überhaupt erst hervorgebracht werden.”)⁴³ The heterosexual German male ideal, in short, was not only organized against the counter-images of the homosexual, Jew, or female; it was no less organized *against the potential deficiency and inferiority lurking within*.⁴⁴

In conclusion: A few years ago, in the *American Historical Review* (Schüler-Springorum was part of the same roundtable) Jonathan Judaken called for better historicization of antisemitism. The desiderata he highlighted included: more refined periodization; more careful thinking about comparability with other “phobias”; better contextualization; and less naïve empiricism and more openness to theory.⁴⁵ Precisely in their focus on the most diverse possible entanglements of sexual politics and antisemitism, the conference contributors gathered in this issue go far toward advancing that agenda of improved historicizing of antisemitism. Yet there is still more we need collectively to reflect on with regard to what it is about *sex* that has recurrently made it such a privileged site for processing so many other forms of politics.

One standard answer has long been Foucault’s: Sex is an “especially dense transfer point,” he memorably noted, for other relations of power.⁴⁶ All kinds of *other* things are being worked through in talk about sex. That is not just true for post-Holocaust memory politics in Germany but—as scholars in the last fifteen years have repeatedly shown—also true for the aftermath of other extremely violent systems, many of them lasting centuries and not just a dozen years: from European colonialism to US slavery.⁴⁷ But a further reason it has proven so easy to make politics out of sex is because (as the

43 Gisela Bock, “Gutachten speziell zur Frage der Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus,” printed in *Wiedergutmachung und Entschädigung für nationalsozialistisches Unrecht: öffentliche Anhörung des Innenausschusses des Deutschen Bundestages am 24. Juni 1987, Zur Sache 3/87* (Bonn, 1987), 258–265, here 260. See also: Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen, 1986).

44 There are strong echoes here with white middle-class anxieties about less-than-ideal IQ scores among whites – with the ensuing proliferation of Ritalin and Adderall prescriptions, and/or the purchase of doctors’ notes attesting to a white child’s special “giftedness” – analyzed in Michael E. Staub, *The Mismeasure of Minds: Debating Race and Intelligence between Brown and The Bell Curve* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2018).

45 Jonathan Judaken, “Introduction,” *American Historical Review* 123 (2018): 1123–38.

46 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1:103.

47 Todd Shepard, *Sex, France, and Arab Men, 1962–1979* (Chicago, 2017); Chelsea Shields and Dagmar

Herzog, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Sexuality and Colonialism* (New York, 2021); Jennifer L. Morgan,

Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic (Durham, NC, 2021).

48 Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS, and the Media*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, 1993), xi.

49 Adorno, "Sexual Taboos"; Cristina Beltrán, *Cruelty as Citizenship: How Migrant Suffering Sustains White Democracy* (Minneapolis, 2020); Adam Serwer, *The Cruelty Is the Point: The Past, Present, and Future of Trump's America* (New York, 2021); Alexis McGill Johnson quoted in Krissi Reeves, "'The Cruelty is the Point,' Planned Parenthood leader Says in SXSW keynote targeting Texas abortion law," *Reporting Texas*, March 11, 2022, <https://www.reportingtexas.com/the-cruelty-is-the-point-planned-parenthood-leader-says-in-sxsw-keynote-targeting-texas-abortion-law/> (accessed December 24, 2022).

50 Profound reflections on the connections can be found in James Bernauer, S.J., "An Ethic and Moral Formation That Are Repentant: Catholicism's Emerging Post-Shoah Tradition" (paper presented at the conference "Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in the Age of Genocide," Oxford and London, July 16-23, 2000).

British homosexual rights activist Simon Watney put it in the midst of the HIV-AIDS epidemic of the 1980s) sex is, for human beings, apparently "much of a muchness."⁴⁸ Not a banality or triviality at all, but rather a site of intensity—sometimes great joy, sometimes great vulnerability. And, frighteningly, it is that vulnerability, and the extraordinary *opportunity for cruelties* it provides, that is yet another source of sex's exceptional functionality for politics.⁴⁹ This, I think, brings a further distinctive element to the multifaceted historical interconnections between antisemitism and sex.⁵⁰

Furthermore, we need to extend the concept of intersectionality. A shout-out must go here to Sander Gilman, who has done phenomenal original work on the mergers of antidisability animus with antisemitism, particularly around the theme of madness or other forms of psychic illness, but also with regard to such physiological matters as obesity, slouchy posture, and the purported flatness of Jewish feet.⁵¹ My hope is that there will be in the future a great deal more research around the question of cognitive disability, with attention to the evident uncertainties *within* "Aryan" superiority.⁵² Yet it is imperative here to register that engagement with the question

51 Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York, 1991); Sander L. Gilman, "Zwetschenbaum's Competence: Madness and the Discourse of the Jews," in *Love + Marriage = Death: And Other Essays on Representing Difference* (Stanford, 1998), 91-112, here 105-109; Sander L. Gilman, "Fat as Disability: The Case of the Jews," *Literature and Medicine* 23.1 (Spring 2004), 46-60; Sander L. Gilman, *Stand Up Straight! A History of Posture* (London, 2018).

52 Such research will complement pioneering work done on the tensions and contradictions, as well as the conjunctions, between queer history and the history of disability. See, e.g., Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," *GLQ* 1.3 (June 1994), 237-254; Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price, "Deleuzian Connections and Queer Corporealities: Shrinking Global Disability," *Rhizomes*

11.1 (Fall 2005-Spring 2006); Regina Kunzel, *In the Shadow of Diagnosis: Psychiatric Power and Queer Life* (Chicago, 2024).

of cognitive disability more generally poses a provocation to our often limited understanding of the myriad ways that intersectionalities can function.

For the intersectionalities of ableism and antisemitism in pre-Nazi and Nazi Germany came in multiple forms, and not only because there was direct *coincidence* between Jewishness and disability among an estimated 4000 victims of the “euthanasia” program—indeed, the murder of Jewish individuals with disabilities in the carbon monoxide gas chambers of the T4 program turns out to be the first installment of that enormous crime we now call the Holocaust—as well as *continuity* in the sense of a direct transfer in personnel and killing technology from among the perpetrators of “euthanasia” to the Holocaust of European Jewry.⁵³ There was also, as noted, the peculiar form of connection by circuitous *causation* as Christian charity men—stumbling as they tried to explain why people with disabilities should not be killed and why sterilization was the proper moral compromise formation, took the occasion to argue that it was the Jewishly encouraged libertinism of Weimar that was producing so much cognitive impairment among the gentiles. And, perhaps most significantly—although it took several decades to recognize its virulence—there was the connection by *complementarity*: The insight from Gisela Bock (and before her Gerhard Schmidt) that “racial hatred” of Jews and “racial fear” of imperfections *within* the would-be master race were twin manifestations of one and the same “racial insanity.” Yet in the end, it is the jaunty Kalmenhof lady’s unashamed, unfiltered articulation of her chain of unfree associations—as she doubled down in reaction to my objections to her version of the national past and my incredulity at her confident assertions that a millennia-old Bible story might have any pertinence whatsoever to the causes of disability in the nineteenth century—that taught me the most about how indelibly, intrinsically, and profoundly, antisemitism and sex remain historically entwined.

53 Annette Hinz-Wessels, “Antisemitismus und Krankenmord: Zum Umgang mit jüdischen Anstaltspatienten im Nationalsozialismus,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 61.1 (2013), 65-92; Sara Berger, *Experten der Vernichtung: Das T4-Reinhardt-Netzwerk in den Lagern Belzec, Sobibor und Treblinka* (Hamburg, 2013).

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