

**Murderous Science:  
Elimination by Scientific Selection of Jews, Gypsies, and Others in  
Germany, 1933-1945**

**Benno Müller-Hill**

Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press 1998

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*Murderous Science* describes the role played by German scientists — and in particular by psychiatrists and anthropologists — in supporting and enabling the murder of Jews, mental patients, and Gypsies by the Nazis. Müller-Hill begins with a fifteen page chronology of the key events, then describes the ostracism and maltreatment of Jews and mental patients in the pre-war period. He focuses on the role of the Kaiser-Wilhelm Gesellschaft and its institutes (especially those for Psychiatry and Anthropology), covering such things as the dismissal of Jewish scientists, the competition between disciplines and institutes for jurisdiction over different categories of people, the role of psychiatrists in the compulsory sterilisation of the "unfit", and the provision by scientists of expert opinions in court cases involving racial status.

The outbreak of war brought a move towards killing. Müller-Hill describes the elimination of mental patients, through planned euthanasia and through simple hunger and illness, the role played by racial scientists and doctors in the extermination of the Jews, the role of army psychiatrists and the use of electric shock "therapy" on shell-shocked soldiers, debates over the fate of quarter-Jews and proposals for the resettlement of Germans in Russia, the classification of the population of the occupied territories, the training of SS doctors in racial testing, and so forth.

Müller-Hill also describes the use of the victims *for* scientific research, both directly, as in Dr Mengele's operations at Auschwitz, and indirectly, with scientists benefiting from the ready supply of skulls, brains, eyes, and other body parts provided by the killing. And he considers the self-image of the scientists involved: their maintenance of an independence from the state in relatively minor matters and the reasons for their silence after the war.

All this material is heavily referenced and much of it is direct quotation from official documents, correspondence, and scientific literature of the period. In a more interpretative section, Müller-Hill sketches answers to some general questions. Why did German psychiatrists and anthropologists participate in the Holocaust? Why were doctors especially liable to become involved in the destruction? Why was the extermination of Jews and mental patients kept a secret? What can we learn about anthropology and psychiatry from the "experiment" of National Socialism? Was there any resistance within the scientific community?

The second part of *Murderous Science* consists of interviews with some of the scientists involved, or with their surviving relatives and assistants. These graphically illustrate the refusal of individuals to accept the truth about what happened and the failure of German science to confront the full extent of its involvement.

*Murderous Science* appeared in German in 1984 and was translated into English in 1988. This 1998 edition contains as additions an account by James D. Watson of his experiences visiting Berlin in 1997, presenting an address on "Genes and Politics" to a German Congress of Molecular Medicine, and an update by Müller-Hill, "The Specter of Kakogenics". The latter highlights the danger of a revival of eugenics and argues that, while science produces truth rather than values, scientists are responsible if they provide information to those who use it to murder. The bibliography has also been updated to include works written since 1984.

The churches can make symbolic acknowledgement of their role in the Holocaust, but science works not with symbols but with the analysis of detail and the open sharing of knowledge. It is incumbent on scientific disciplines, therefore, to uncover and expose to the full light of day the darker parts of their own history. To this end *Murderous Science* is a valuable contribution.

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