

Gerhard Paul. *Die Täter der Shoah: Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002. 276 S. EUR 20.00, broschiert, ISBN 978-3-89244-503-6.



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My first reaction to seeing this volume was, "Not *another* perpetrator anthology." The subtitle, with its promise to deliver absolute either/or clarity, deepened my misgivings. Both apprehensions turned out to be misplaced. The high quality of the essays and the authors' rejection of simplistic generalizations make *Die Täter der Shoah* a valuable contribution to the burgeoning sub-field of "perpetrator research" (p. 44).

Gerhard Paul's introduction is a small masterpiece in itself. Rather than summarizing the articles that follow, he evaluates fifty years of scholarship on perpetrators. Although he identifies five interpretative stages, actually they collapse into the threefold typology that his title suggests: "Psychopaths, technocrats of terror, and 'completely ordinary' Germans." After demolishing the underpinnings of the first two, Paul praises younger historians (as well as their underappreciated predecessors like Ernst Klee, Helmut Krausnick, and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm). These scholars locate agency not in central command structures (Hitler and comrades), but among the *Direktführer* on the periphery (pp. 60, 65). They discover not de-

personalized "cogs," "marionettes" or "robots" (pp. 46, 52, 64, 112, 126), but active historical agents going about their lethal business "voluntarily, spontaneously, and enthusiastically" (p. 65). This "new perpetrator discourse" (p. 43) produces fresh insights into questions about causality, periodization, decision-making, and rationale.

Die Täter der Shoah provides condensed versions of nine respected scholars' research, which has previously appeared in monograph form. In contrast to the hyperrealism of many recent local studies, or "regionale Tiefenbohrung," the authors explore the historiographical ramifications of their respective topics (p. 109). Thus, the volume introduces neophytes to the methods and findings of superb recent work and also provides specialists with condensed versions of much longer works with which they are already familiar. Despite Paul's encyclopedic review of their historiographical context, however, the essays seem to have been haphazardly assembled—an impression that could have been ameliorated by small editorial revisions. For example, Paul might have imposed a standard word length on contri-

contributions that range from sixteen to thirty pages (and perhaps on his own, which clocks in at sixty-seven pages of text and twenty-four of notes). He might also have asked authors to follow a single format in their titles, for example, by beginning with a quotation by a perpetrator, as Mallmann and Monoschek did. Although the contributions share a revisionist stance, their conclusions lack a unifying perspective.

Given Paul's criticism of overarching interpretative models, perhaps the randomness of the topics makes sense. A summary of the subjects covered illustrates their diversity: the social formation of a functional elite that supervised the concentration camps (Karin Orth); a study of the Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*) in the district of Cracow, the very "epicenter of extermination" (Klaus-Michael Mallmann); the mental training of the Order Policemen who committed face-to-face mass murder (Jürgen Matthäus); the attitudes cultivated by the Wehrmacht that facilitated average soldiers' collaboration in mass murder (Walter Manoschek); civil servants as problem solvers in the extermination process in the *Generalgouvernement* (Bogdan Musil); Ukrainian auxiliary forces in the Baltic and Byelorussia (Dieter Pohl); a historical survey of psychologists' analyses of perpetrators (Harald Welzer); and an essay on the media-generated heroic narratives that frame memories of the Holocaust (Hanno Loewy). Even if the ensemble of articles does not quite cohere, each essay is a scholarly gem.

In his introduction, Paul classifies perpetrators according to motivation: the ideological, the pragmatic, the criminal, and the obedient. But the contributors deny the possibility of ascertaining a single motive, and they do not apply Paul's taxonomy. Instead they write of "diffuse" responsibility and a multifaceted "Bündnis" of motives, groups, and mentalities (pp. 157, 128). In examining Ukrainian volunteers, Pohl comments on the paradoxical combination of antisemitism and anti-Germanism that drew them to serve in killing

squads (pp. 220-221). Mallmann points out the impossibility of distinguishing *Rassemord* (murder based on racial conviction) from *Raubmord* (murder based on greed for plunder) in particular cases (p. 122). While some historians generalize about perpetrators' shared generational or social backgrounds, Paul insists, "Gemeinsam war ihnen allen der Verlust der Verwurzelung in einem verbindlichen humanitären Wertesystem" (p. 62). Criticizing two generations of meta-theorizing, he endorses a fresh empiricism directed at focused areas of research about which solid documentation exists (pp. 66-67).

Emphasizing individuals and specific groups acting in particular contexts, the authors eschew explanations that locate agency in institutions. As Mallmann succinctly put it, "Structures do not kill; people do" (p. 125). Welzer adds, "[T]here are no murderers, but only humans who commit murder" (p. 238). What, then, produced those humans? The authors refer to the key role of specifically National Socialist values in preparing men and some women to slaughter helpless human beings, apparently with little mental anguish. They also explore how daily life in the caserne or camp as well as formal indoctrination shaped men's outlook and how both functioned in tandem in "praxisverankerter Konditionierung" (pp. 113, 158).

As many scholars note, genocide has never been implemented by institutions created for that purpose or carried out by perpetrators for mass slaughter. Circumstances, combined with ingrained habits of thinking in particular military and political cultures, transform the ordinary into the catastrophic. Understanding the transformative processes at work in Nazi camps and killing fields is crucial. Although the authors miss the opportunity of synthesizing their findings, they document the centrality of two constitutive elements in the production of their subjects' genocidal mentality: ethnic arrogance and strident masculinity.

To a greater extent than most perpetrator studies, the authors include women in the "Fußvolk der Shoah" as participants in "the monstrosity of the collective" (pp. 50, 15). I wish only that they or Paul had integrated the scattered references to ethnicity and gender within a broader framework. To illustrate the way gender is embedded within their work, I will cite some examples. When appropriate, authors talk about *Täterinnen* as well as *Täter* and the complicity of particular women, such as office workers, as well as men (p. 148). Many mention the role of cultural assumptions about men and women. Musil and Paul, for example, hypothesize that the presence of women made extermination operations seem like ordinary workplaces (p. 55, 189). Several authors describe various *Denkmuster* permeated by assumptions about gender and ethnicity (p. 177). Orth depicts the attraction of a subculture, with its own "Sippengemeinschaft" of males and females, unified by shared ideals and coded insiders' language (pp. 95-97, 105). Precisely because of the continuity between SS values and particular cultural traditions, Orth notes, the extermination of "undesirable" populations came to seem like "common sense" (p. 105). But, quoting Goebbels in 1933, Matthias reminds us that supposedly intuitive "common sense" had to be fashioned according to National Socialist assumptions (p. 143). Mallmann describes the suspension of curbs against rape and the bonds created among men by shared criminality (pp. 122-124). Matthias and Manoschek identify Barbarossa as a turning point because it enabled the fusion of Bolsheviks, partisans, and Jews into a powerful *Feindbild* (pp. 152, 172), and Manoschek itemizes the ways that racial fear reinforced masculine ethnic honor (p. 178). In this setting, as Matthias notes, refusing to kill became not only shameful, but also effeminate (pp. 155-158). Welzer, in discussing instrumental reason, describes a cold, ruthless self-image that has been culturally coded as masculine (pp. 238-239). Images of a heroic Aryan self threatened by a racial enemy formed

the constitutive elements of what Paul calls a "grotesque construction of respectability" (pp. 48-49). Without commenting on the masculinity in the texts he examines, Loewy examines "Faustian" memories of the Shoah that produced an "irrational fatalism" and "heroic realism" (pp. 262-263). Ideology, after being excluded from earlier perpetrator research, pervades *Die Täter der Shoah*, in the form of the values, belief systems, and mentality that constructed perpetrators' gendered Aryan subjectivity. As this collection makes clear, recent research has unearthed a staggering amount of knowledge about particular regions and institutions. The data for fresh interpretative approaches is available.

The contributors dare to raise troubling questions. How, Mallmann asks, can we comprehend "Verstöße gegen Normen, die man ja in Deutschland selbst in aller Regel einhielt" (p. 128)? How can we explain the "climate of impunity (*Rechtslosigkeit*) that eased the slippage between 'Du sollst' and 'Du darfst'" (pp. 125, 118)? Although we think of a moral sense as innate, no curbs restrained ordinary Germans' criminality once they realized that "Es ist schon alles Scheisse, mach was du willst" (p. 156). Of what value is the "Verwurzelung in einem verbindlichen humanitären Wertesystem," quoting Paul, if, as these essays suggest, its bonds are so fragile (p. 62)? Loewy scoffs at the very notion of an unwavering conscience (p. 260). But perhaps conventional morality was not so much abandoned as reformulated. With scarcely a second thought, Matthias observes, perpetrators adapted the Categorical Imperative and the Golden Rule to vindicate cruelty and greed (p. 144). Manoschek writes about a massive Nietzschean "Umwertung aller bisherigen Werte" (p. 179).

To explore the meaning of these searing insights, third generation perpetrator researchers may consider expanding their horizons beyond local studies, and destabilize earlier static paradigms. As in the work of Benno Müller-Hill,

Robert J. Lifton, and other scholars who have examined the failure of ethics in medicine and endeavor to identify what went wrong, *Täterforschung* could become a site for history as moral autopsy.

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