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MICHAEL BURLEIGH, *Death and Deliverance. 'Euthanasia' in Germany, c. 1900 to 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xvii + 382 pp. ISBN 0 521 47769 7 (paperback) £14.95. US \$18.95. ISBN 0 521 41613 2 (hardback) £35.00. US \$59.95

The murders of sick and handicapped people perpetrated by the Nazis between 1939 and 1945 were largely ignored for several decades, but in the last ten years historians' interest in this topic has been steadily growing. Now the London historian Michael Burleigh has produced the first monograph in English on 'euthanasia' in Germany. He outlines the debate on the 'annihilation of those unworthy of life' since the turn of the century and slots the discussion into its place amongst the changes in psychiatry during the Weimar Republic. He shows that the steps towards reform of psychiatric practice in the 1920s increasingly converged with a eugenic attitude towards the handicapped (p. 34). Although progress could be anticipated for 'treatable' patients, in particular by means of occupational therapy, 'untreatable' patients came to be defined more and more as 'superfluous ballast'.

Burleigh shows how 'child euthanasia' developed into a centrally-organized murder programme. Linking up with his discussion of occupational therapy, Burleigh argues that where the murder of sick people was concerned, the ability or non-ability to work constituted a decisive selection criterion (p. 138). In his description of these murders, Burleigh directs attention less to those in charge at the control centre in Berlin, than to the actual perpetrators in the institutions, who have hitherto been largely disregarded by historians. These were often recruited from amongst the friends and relatives of those already involved in the murder programme. Burleigh convincingly contradicts the thesis that those who did the deeds in the gas chambers suffered from split personalities. In the main, they were not people who vacillated between a role as loving father and husband and that of sadistic murderer. Rather they were political fanatics, essentially brutal by nature. Participation in murdering the sick gave these men, often from the working class, a moderate degree of social mobility (p. 127).

The centrally-organized programme for murdering the handicapped was not halted in 1941 because of protests from individual critics, but because the T4 staff were urgently needed for the annihilation programme in the East (p. 180). Burleigh confirms the continuities in personnel and organization between the murder of sick people and the

mass murder of the Jewish population, already established by historians over the past ten years. When the T4 programme stopped, this by no means meant that the sick and handicapped were no longer murdered, simply that the programme was continued on a decentralized basis. These murders, according to Burleigh's thesis in the third part of the book, had nothing to do with a shortage of hospital beds caused by the war. Rather they were the product of a mentality already prevalent in institutions for the handicapped long before 1939 (p. 238). In the fourth section, Burleigh describes what happened to the perpetrators after 1945. He shows that several of those responsible carried on living quite freely in the Federal Republic for a long time and were not called to account until very late in the day.

Burleigh's book is solidly researched and very readable. It turns the perspective of historiography on euthanasia firmly towards the sufferings and feelings of the handicapped victims. Up to now the dominant focus has been on the details of the 'euthanasia programme', while for a long time the sick and handicapped were just presented as nameless victims of Nazi atrocities. Despite problems with inadequate source material, Burleigh tries to convey the life and death of individual patients in short case studies. This is certainly the direction in which historiography on 'euthanasia' should develop.

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