

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Paediatrics in the Reichsuniversität Strassburg: Children's Medicine at a Bastion of Nazi Ideology** *by Aisling Shalvey*

Hardback and Digital formats. 228 pages  
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For most of the last five hundred years Strasbourg has been a distinguished centre of higher education. The worst period of painful exception came from 1941 to 1944 when, under Nazi occupation, the city became the base for a Reich University that was Germanized in title and spirit alike. Its most infamous feature was an Anatomical Institute displaying the skeletons of Jews who had previously been prisoners at Auschwitz.

In her monograph Dr Shalvey has chosen to dwell neither on this particular horror nor on such other Nazi forms of medicalized criminality as compulsory mass sterilization, involuntary euthanasia, and unethical experimentation. Instead, she has risen to the challenge of investigating how far, at least in the specific case of the university's paediatrics, something approximating to 'normal' patient care may have survived even in a period of such dangerously charged ideological pressures. Her work has at its archival core a selection of 2,000 files from a recently recovered cache of paediatric records, generated not only by the children's clinic but also by the departments of psychiatry and internal medicine. This material provides insight not only into doctors' attitudes but also into much of the everyday life and experience of those treated. From her research Dr Shalvey concludes that: "although these children were not killed if they had disabilities as was the case in other hospitals, they were still described in insulting and demeaning terms, indicating that the medical professionals...did adhere to and believe in the central idea that certain children are 'worth more' than others." Most fundamental to such differential evaluations were broadly eugenic judgments about who had most, and also least, to offer in terms of their 'usefulness' towards fully integrating a new generation of Alsatians into the Nazis' racist vision of a resurgent Germany.

Overall, Dr Shalvey provides a study that is crisply written, scrupulously detailed, and convincing in its conclusions. While some of the pictorial illustrations accompanying her text would have benefitted from clearer reproduction, she and her publishers are to be congratulated on including a set of helpfully detailed appendices together with a rich display of end-notes that place her valuable microhistory firmly within the wider framework of scholarly research into medical practice under the Nazis.

**Michael Biddiss**  
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