



Animals in the Third Reich

Boria Sax

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Scholars have approached the Third Reich, its history, ideology, and activities from any number of approaches: analyzing the "German character," the rise of modernity, psychologically and sociologically; from the viewpoints of institutions, gender, religious clashes, and economic developments and class struggle. Boria Sax takes an entirely novel approach. He examines the Nazi "relationship" to and with the animal world. This involved, among other things, Darwinism (especially Herbert Spencer's "survival of the fittest"), German Romanticism and *volkisch* beliefs.

In *Animals in the Third Reich*, Boria Sax grapples with an amazing contradiction: a country responsible for the systematic death, maiming, and torture of millions of human beings had, at the same time, the most stringent legislation in the world concerning (non-human) animals. Sax draws fascinating connections among several fields including mythology, anthropology, social Darwinism. His analysis starts with the Nazi concept of nature, animals and the relationship of people and animals. Nature is not harmonious, but rough and brutal; central to this view is the relationship of hunter and hunted, predator and prey. There is a hierarchy in the animal world, including humans: "inferior" humans necessarily rest on a lower rung, and may indeed not be conceived of as humans at all.

Sax discusses the Nazi view of particular animals in the hierarchy, including the honored deer, dogs and wolves. He also points out that the Nazis demonized Others by comparing, identifying, or referring to them as rodents, insects, parasites, etc. (p. 9). The Nazis, of course, did not monopolize this particular practice: consider how the Japanese were depicted in wartime American propaganda. (in a wartime movies John Wayne snarls "ya yella monkeys!"). Under Fidel Castro, Communist Cuba referred to counterrevolutionaries, reactionaries, or anyone else critical of the regime as *gusanos* (worms). Sax very deftly compares Jewish, Christian and pagan attitudes toward blood – and how the Nazis inverted these beliefs. Julius Streicher, editor of *Der Sturmer*, maintained ". . . that a single instance of sex with a Jewish man was enough to contaminate the progeny of an Aryan woman forever." (p. 52); the American "one drop rule" similarly defined whether a person was defined as white or African-American.

Sax devotes considerable time and attention to the work, life and wartime activities of Nobel Prize winner and researcher into animal psychology, Konrad Lorenz (1973). Not only was Lorenz a member of the Nazi Party and the Office for Race Policy, his work – research into German-Polish intermarried families – led to him send many to their death because they

were of "asocial or inferior genetic value" (pp. 120-121). Lorenz maintained that animal behavior could be applied to human beings. Lorenz and his confreres "... expressed fear that the mixture of races would lead to the confusion or destruction of genetically programmed patterns of behavior that were the basis of harmonious life in society." (p. 115). He never deviated from the ideas animating his work before and during the Hitler era.

One of the more interesting short sections of Sax's book, "Esoteric Nazism," part of Appendix I ("Nazi Totemism"), concern Savatri Devi (born Maximiani Portas), who melded Nazism with Hinduism. "According to Savatri Devi, Nazism was a doctrine of universal love, exemplified above all in the concern of Hitler, whom she considered the greatest man in Western history, and his followers for the suffering of animals." (p. 174). Though hardly a major force in Nazi ideology, her work inspired both George Lincoln Rockwell of the American Nazi Party and Colin Jordan of the British Union of Fascists.

This reviewer does have one complaint: the constant use of the concept of "anticipation," in the sense of " x " anticipating " y ," writing long before y 's existence. Further, what has been "anticipated" is usually something not contemplated at the time of x , and voiced in terms unfamiliar to x . Historian Quentin Skinner refers to this as "the mythology of doctrines." While certainly x can influence y , influence cannot

take on a retroactive character; the future cannot influence the past.

Whether most people view the world around them in terms of the four ontologies discussed in Appendix I (animism, totemism, naturalism, analogism) is questionable. While interesting, this is not vital to the author's arguments. However, in the opinion of this reviewer Boria Sax has written an important book, one that goes beyond the Third Reich, and which challenges readers to think in many new dimensions. With that in mind, this is a "must read" volume.

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Shelby Shapiro is an Independent Scholar who obtained his Ph.D. in American Studies with a dissertation on the Yiddish press and how various publications of differing political and religious viewpoints sought to construct different identities for Jewish immigrant women. He has written about Jazz, Anarchism, and the labour movement, and presently is Associate Editor of Records of the State of Connecticut.