

Book Review

Pieper, Werner & the Grüne Kraft (Eds.) *Nazis on Speed: Drogen im 3. Reich*. [In German] (Löhrbach, Germany: Edition Rauschkunde, 2002) 2 volumes, 350 & 328 pages; 20 Euros.

Reviewed by Ralph Metzner, Ph.D.*

This is a fascinating compilation of essays and historical documents on the role of drugs and intoxicants in Germany up to the end of WWII; it sheds new light on the psychology and sociology of Nazism as well as on the historical origins of the now-worldwide war on drugs (hint: the Nazis started it). The contributions are mostly in German, though it contains a couple of English language essays by Scott J. Thompson, who has published in the *Journal of Cognitive Liberty*; but because of their unique historical importance, it is to be hoped that an American publisher will bring out a translation. Editor/publisher Werner Pieper is an ex-drug dealer, maverick activist, writer-critic, publisher on the politics and culture of drugs, popular music and progressive resistance movements of all kinds. He and his team, working with gleeful Germanic thoroughness, have assembled an amazing array of original essays and commentaries as well as published documents, including such arcana as official memoranda dealing with drugs from the German army and navy, or prescription notes from medical doctors treating Nazi party functionaries. Everything is documented, unfounded rumors are identified as such.

Among the topics discussed:

- The pioneering studies on mescaline and peyote conducted in the 1920s by a progressive group of self-experimenting physicians and psychiatrists at the University of Heidelberg, led by Dr. Kurt Beringer.
- At the other end of the moral spectrum, the sordid and inhuman experiments with drugs carried out by doctors on the inmates of concentration camps.
- Early twentieth century literary discussions (pro and con) of psychoactive drugs by German writers such as Ernst Jünger, Klaus Mann, Gottfried Benn, Walter Benjamin and others.

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- The fact that German chemical/pharmaceutical companies were responsible for the development of many of the twentieth century's main narcotics and stimulants, including morphine, heroin, methadone, cocaine, amphetamine, methamphetamine, and MDMA (now known as Ecstasy). To this day the German chemical industry are usually the primary producers of the vast quantities of precursor chemicals used by the legal and illegal drug trade worldwide.
- What we call psychoactive drugs (including alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, cocaine, opium) were originally classified in the early twentieth century as *Genussmittel* (lit. "pleasure means" or "euphoricants"); distinguishing them from *Lebensmittel* (lit. "life means," food, nutrients). The Nazi party doctrine, emanating from Hitler, who was a nonsmoking vegetarian opposed to all drunkenness (though he had his own addictions), was that all such drugs, including alcohol, were to be fought against as *Rauschgifte* ("inebriant poisons") that sapped and diluted the strength and vitality of the Aryan race. This militaristic prohibitionist policy was adopted more or less intact by the post-war German government (at first under American occupation) and facilitated, no doubt, by the massive transfer of Nazi German scientific and medical personnel and research data via the OSS/CIA conversion to the American military-industrial-pharmaceutical complex.
- Alcohol and alcoholism were rampant in all layers of German society, including the Nazi party.
- Methamphetamine, which was produced under the name *Pervitin*, was the main drug fuel of the German military machine, and was handed out liberally, by command, to all units of the army, navy and airforce. (Similar widespread use of amphetamines in the wartime militaries of Japan, Britain and the U.S. has been documented elsewhere. Earlier this year, trigger-happy American flyers who mistakenly fired on a Canadian ground unit in Iraq, killing four soldiers, were said to be on speed). As the war effort began to fail, commands

were issued to increase the amounts of Pervitin given to soldiers so they could endure and perform under increased conditions of stress. The mind-narrowing, energizing effect of amphetamine fit naturally with the Nazis' emphasis on obedience, endurance and high performance (*Höchstleistung*). But, as we know, the price of this stimulation is a contraction of awareness, loss of empathy, anxiety, aggressiveness, and with continued use, physiological collapse ("crash").

- On the question of Hitler's own drug use, Pieper dismisses as unfounded the assertions by Trevor Ravenscroft (in *The Spear of Destiny*) that Hitler once took mescaline and had a transcendent vision of his destiny as a world ruler, based on obtaining the legendary spear of Longinus. (This is, in any case, an unlikely story for anyone familiar with the effects of mescaline and peyote, which are humbling rather than aggrandizing). What is documented is that Hitler suffered from multiple, life-long, painful physical symptoms, and that his personal physician Dr. Theodor Morell (whom Goebbels dubbed the *Reichsspritzenmeister*) provided him a huge variety of medications, both as pills and by injection, which he took on a daily basis—sometimes several shots a day. His drug regimen regularly

included synthetic opiates for pain as well as pervitin and cocaine. He does not appear to have treated the underlying illnesses or withdrawals, but simply provided more narcotics and stimulants. Pieper concludes, as had Albert Speer, that Hitler probably suffered from both opiate and amphetamine overdosing alternating with withdrawal, making him increasingly dependent on the swinish Dr. Morell. Both Goering and Goebbels were addicted to morphine, acquired from pain treatment, and were similarly provided for by Dr. Morell.

The core message of this book is in the title: *Nazis on Speed*. I find this a much more convincing explanation for the psychological dynamics of the Nazi military and political program than speculations about involvement in occult societies and beliefs, or purely racial ideological obsessions. Although antisemitism and beliefs of racial superiority were of course rampant in Germany (and elsewhere), we still have to explain how this ideology was able to be expressed into a war of mass genocide and conquest. "Speed Kills" was the warning motto that appeared on the streets in the 1960s. The narrow-minded, aggressive, paranoid mind-state that results from chronic amphetamine and stimulant abuse is equivalent to the fanatical ruthlessness of the militaristic control-freak, bent on domination in whatever area of life they operate—personal, economic or political.