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The Nazi Conscience

Claudia Koonz

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Claudia Koonz : The Nazi Conscience before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Nazi Conscience:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating but Chilling Study of Nazi Psychosocial Methods By H. F. Gibbard This book is an interesting sociological study of "soft" or "persuasive" power exerted by the Third Reich over the German populace. It provides a look at how the Nazi party, which never won a majority of the German

electorate, attempted to infiltrate German public opinion and to advance its bizarre and extreme social and racial policies. Koonz suggests that the Nazis tried to meet the average German on common ground and to coax him or her into accepting the Nazi world-view by appealing to existing prejudices and fears. The Nazis not only monopolized social interaction by eliminating all rival forms of organization and information, but also by emphasizing the more benign and socially desirable aspects of their program and its consistency with traditional values. This strategy operated with surprising flexibility, and it often involved retreat and compromise. When it became clear that the German people disliked public displays of violence against Jews, for example, the Nazis reined these in and focused instead on more orderly and legalistic forms of persecution. Thus, the Nazis could actually pose as a "reasonable" and "law-abiding" party that sought to curb extremists within their own ranks and to solve the "Jewish problem" in a rational manner. Hitler also downplayed anti-Semitic remarks in his speeches. Nazi propaganda focused instead on improving the German Volk or race and played to a form of "polite" anti-Semitism that allowed non-Jewish Germans to feel socially superior to the Jews among them. Nazis emphasized the duty carried by Germans to keep their bloodlines "pure," thus casting their program in terms of a hygienic model. In the end, Germans could actually be made to feel guilty for tolerance expressed toward Jews. Koonz also shows how the Nazis differed from their Stalinist enemies. Though both were totalitarians, Nazi party officials were free to disagree and debate details of the Nazi program without risk of reprisals. Often these debates were so severe as to paralyze party initiatives, at least in the short run. This is a far cry from the monolithic system of oppression one might have expected. One thing I really appreciated about this book was the impressive illustrations that appear throughout. There are photos of many actual posters, magazines, brochures and cartoons that were in wide circulation during the Third Reich. These help the reader to see how the Nazis used imagery and loaded language to subvert resistance to their policies. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Thorough, interesting study

By Chris Claudia Koonz did a fantastic job with this eye-opening book. She looked at Nazi Germany from 1933-39, and while Hitler was an important part of her study, she gave ample space to other key figures and rank-and-file Nazis. The book is perfectly organized so that each chapter is distinct from the others. Koonz looks at the way youngsters were indoctrinated and the way the Nazis used "science" to "prove" many of their racist views and justify their policies. Yes, the Nazis believed that they were doing important work and that the German Volk needed to be purified, but they also knew that what they were doing would not fly with most people. That's why they were so careful about what information was released and to whom. The book is a fairly easy read, especially for a scholarly study. There are a few chapters that drag a bit toward the end, but if you're interested in this period of history, you'll learn some things here that go beyond the concentration camps and Hitler's aggressive military strategies. It's an interesting book and it includes many photos and other images that help the reader get a better feel for pre-war Nazi Germany. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. a chilling image of the unchecked results of a disastrous combination of hate, power, authority

By NS Hutto Overall, Claudia Koonz proves an incredibly apt researcher of Nazi Germany. She delivers in *The Nazi Conscience* a raw, unabashed look into an evil empire; one that ostensibly preached an emphasis on Volk and Vaterland yet subtly increased the euphoria of comfortably numb. This enabled the German people to ignore or embrace absolute and undisguised racism. The anti-Semitic Nazi principles of racism and hate were slowly accepted as normal German values. The Germans began believing that in order to support the Volk and thus, the Vaterland, they must embrace Nazism, and through a process of self-Nazification (*Selbstgleichschaltung*), Koonz shows that the citizens of the Third Reich were shaped by a public culture so compelling that [they] . . . came to accept the existence of a hierarchy of racially based human worth, the cult of the Führer, and the desirability of territorial conquest (p. 273). As a parting thought, Koonz argues that the racist ideology and political strategy of the Nazis quest for an exclusive community of us without them (p. 274) has not ended with the defeat of the Third Reich. In the 1930s, Many Europeans looked on from neighboring countries with envy even if they deplored the Nazi state (p. 163). Today, the currents of racial hatred and ethnic purity once espoused by the Nazis continue their manifestation in our global society. One needs only to read the headlines emerging from the Middle East describing the horrendous conduct of the Islamic State to see the warning within *The Nazi Conscience*. Koonz provides a chilling image of the unchecked results of a disastrous combination of hate, power, authority, and the psychological vulnerability of a defeated people. (I actually wrote a full book review for Koonz's work here: [...])

The Nazi conscience is not an oxymoron. In fact, the perpetrators of genocide had a powerful sense of right and wrong, based on civic values that exalted the moral righteousness of the ethnic community and denounced outsiders. Claudia Koonz's latest work reveals how racial popularizers developed the infrastructure and rationale for genocide during the so-called normal years before World War II. Her careful reading of the voluminous Nazi writings on race traces the transformation of longtime Nazis' vulgar anti-Semitism into a racial ideology that seemed credible to the vast majority of ordinary Germans who never joined the Nazi Party. Challenging conventional assumptions about Hitler, Koonz locates the source of his charisma not in his summons to hate, but in his appeal to the collective virtue of his people, the Volk. From 1933 to 1939, Nazi public culture was saturated with a blend of racial fear and ethnic pride that Koonz calls ethnic fundamentalism. Ordinary Germans were prepared for wartime atrocities by racial concepts widely disseminated in media not perceived as political: academic research, documentary films, mass-market

magazines, racial hygiene and art exhibits, slide lectures, textbooks, and humor. By showing how Germans learned to countenance the everyday persecution of fellow citizens labeled as alien, Koonz makes a major contribution to our understanding of the Holocaust. The Nazi Conscience chronicles the chilling saga of a modern state so powerful that it extinguished neighborliness, respect, and, ultimately, compassion for all those banished from the ethnic majority.

From Publishers Weekly "Not every being with a human face is human." According to Duke University historian Koonz, this statement by Nazi political theorist Carl Schmitt sums up the Nazi idea of "morality." To speak of a Nazi conscience "is not an oxymoron," she states. The party had a philosophy and an ethic—an idea of right and wrong—however repugnant today's readers may find it. It was a relativist morality, valuing the well-being of the Volk over that of outsiders. Hitler, Koonz says, understood the German people's need for a sense of coherence in the wake of what many saw as the degeneracy of the Weimar Republic—and "he promised to rescue old-fashioned values of honor and dignity" by offering a secular faith to replace lost religious certainties. Koonz explores the promotion of these beliefs in German culture and law, and how they led to the catastrophe of the Holocaust, adding much to our understanding of how a civilized society could reach such infamous levels of violence. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. Faced with the German degradation and murder of the Jews from 1933 to 1945, historians and, indeed, so many thoughtful men and women have posed no question more insistently than, 'How could it happen?' Claudia Koonz's powerfully written study of the inculcation of a Nazi racialist ethos in the years before extermination answers this question as persuasively as any other to date. (Charles S. Maier, author of *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*) In this valuable and original book, Claudia Koonz analyzes how the Nazis legitimized the Third Reich and facilitated Hitler's consensual dictatorship and genocidal policies. This daring reinterpretation of the relationship between the Nazi leadership, its middle- and low-ranking cadres, and other sectors of the German population shows the gradual shift in public opinion toward the regime's worldview. Ultimately, Nazism created a positive, moral image of itself just as it sanctioned the annihilation of enemies perceived as unethical and immoral. (Omer Bartov, author of *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories*) Claudia Koonz's arresting new book makes the case that between 1933 and 1939, before the Second World War and the Holocaust, the Nazis built a perverse ethical consensus in Germany. Preaching fears of racial weakness along with pride and commitment to a new moral order, self-righteous opinion leaders created an ethnic fundamentalism—of which we have not, she suggests in a closing reflection, seen the last. (Michael R. Marrus, author of *The Holocaust In History*) This is an artfully written book, with engaging asides and a captivating sense of detail and touching comment that is rare for a volume on Nazism. I don't know where else I've learned so much about everyday life and culture under Nazism. (Robert N. Proctor, author of *The Nazi War on Cancer*) Hitler, Koonz says, understood the German people's need for a sense of coherence in the wake of what many saw as the degeneracy of the Weimar Republic—and 'he promised to rescue old-fashioned values of honor and dignity' by offering a secular faith to replace lost religious certainties. Koonz explores the promotion of these beliefs in German culture and law, and how they led to the catastrophe of the Holocaust, adding much to our understanding of how a civilized society could reach such infamous levels of violence. (Publishers Weekly) Claudia Koonz...explains in her insightful new book how Germans, who were among Europe's least anti-Semitic people, came to support a leadership that sought to annihilate European Jewry...The readiness of many Germans to acquiesce evolved as a consequence of their internalization of the knowledge that was disseminated apparently by legitimate institutions of the state. As Koonz notes, the indoctrination was successful because there was little reason to question the facts conveyed by experts, documentary films, educational materials, and popular science. The German public was reeducated to support the elimination of Jews, Gypsies, the chronically ill, and other categories of the 'unfit'—all as a moral good, consistent with the dictates of conscience. Koonz's prodigious work is a major contribution to our understanding of the social and ideological history of the Third Reich. (Jack Fischel *Weekly Standard* 2004-01-12) Koonz does not deny the existence of extremist and violent anti-Semites in the Nazi leadership. But her stress on the moderate way their ultimately genocidal plans were presented as necessary cruelties adds an important dimension in our understanding of the Nazi regime and its crime. (Antony Polonsky *Boston Globe* 2003-12-21) Trudl Junge, former personal secretary to Adolf Hitler, once noted that the Führer's success came with his ability to manipulate other people's conscience. On a vast scale, the German people no longer knew right from wrong. Koonz presents a compelling argument to suggest that Junge was in some degree right. The Germans did not surrender their conscience but submitted to its transformation away from conventional Western notions of right and wrong to a radical, racial nationalism that established criteria for assessing moral actions and outcomes. (J. Kleiman *Choice* 2004-06-01) Koonz displays the gradual transformation of the traditional idea of conscience into something that was utterly shaped by the subordination of one's own self to that of the Volk. (Aharon ben Anshel *Jewish Press* 2004-03-26) [Koonz] documents in exemplary fashion what the historical actors actually thought, felt, advocated, planned, and organized before they acted...impressively researched, lucidly organized, disturbing, yet eminently readable. (Michael Meyer *American Historical* 2007-04-01) Faced with the German degradation and murder of the Jews from 1933 to 1945, historians and, indeed, so many thoughtful men and women have posed no question more insistently than, 'How could it happen?' Claudia Koonz's powerfully written study of the inculcation of a Nazi racialist ethos in the years

before extermination answers this question as persuasively as any other to date. (Charles S. Maier, author of *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*)