



Between fiction and reality: Herwig Hamperl (1899–1976) and the Third Reich as reflected in his autobiography[☆]

Dominik Gross*, Stephanie Kaiser, Christina Gräf, Hendrik Uhlendahl, Mathias Schmidt

Institute for History, Theory and Ethics of Medicine, Medical Faculty, RWTH Aachen University, Wendlingweg 2, 52074 Aachen, Germany

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ABSTRACT

Herwig Hamperl is undoubtedly one of the most influential and prominent representatives of German pathology in the 20th century. Interestingly, he left behind an autobiography (1972) which provides information not only about pathology in the Third Reich and in post-war Germany, but above all about his own life and work. His memoirs primarily served the purpose of recording his life's work for posterity and of retaining it in collective memory.

This article focuses specifically on Hamperl's description of the Third Reich. The overriding aim of the paper is to elaborate on his political role and his relationship to National Socialism, which has hardly been investigated to date. Hamperl's autobiographical statements on this very question are therefore compared with the historical facts and – where necessary – contrasted and corrected. The same applies to the image that Hamperl draws of those pathologists who were part of his professional and personal network.

The study is partly based on previously unevaluated archive sources and on a reanalysis of the relevant research literature.

The paper concludes that Hamperl practised pronounced "self-fashioning": His memoirs give the impression of being formally and linguistically smoothed out and are clearly misleading in terms of content. They are characterised by omissions, ornamentation, and embellishments. Thus Hamperl makes false statements on the question of his NSDAP membership and depicts himself as a politically uninvolved university teacher. Furthermore, even in retrospect, he makes hardly any critical remarks on Nazi ideology and Nazi crimes.

1. Life and work of Herwig Hamperl—a brief outline

Herwig Hamperl (Fig. 1, [1]) was born the son of a municipal doctor in Vienna on September 12, 1899 [2–8]. In March 1917 he passed his final school examinations (*Matura*) at the Döblinger Gymnasium in Vienna [9,10]. Then he completed military service until autumn 1918 – this was thus still during World War I [9,10]. After the war he started studying medicine at the University of Vienna. Already during his studies he worked as a demonstrator at the Institute for Pathology. After passing his examinations in 1923, he became an assistant there [9,10]. In 1923 he also succeeded in completing his doctorate [9,10]. In 1928 Hamperl worked under Ludwig Aschoff at the Institute for Pathology of the University of Freiburg im Breisgau [10]. From 1929 to autumn 1930 he was a fellow of the predecessor of the German Research Foundation (*Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft*) in the Soviet Union [9,10].

There he studied the spread of stomach ulcers "depending on race and geographical area". He then returned to the Institute of Pathology in Vienna as an assistant and habilitated in pathology in 1931 [9,10].

In 1935, at the instigation of Robert Rössle, he was appointed associate professor at the Institute of Pathology at the Charité in Berlin (see Fig. 2) [11]. In 1939, he finally became a full professor at the University of Prague, which he had to leave after the defeat of the German Wehrmacht and the end of the Third Reich in 1945 [10]. Hamperl went to Austria, where he was taken as prisoner of war by the Red Army – but he was spared deportation and longer captivity, because he provided interpreting services at the Russian commandant's office in Grein [12]. Already in September, Hamperl became employed as a prosecutor in St. Pölten (which was part of the Soviet occupation zone of Austria). He left the city after a few months and around spring 1946 he arrived in Salzburg (being part of the American occupation

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: dgross@ukaachen.de (D. Gross), skaiser@ukaachen.de (S. Kaiser), christina.graef@gmx.net (C. Gräf), huhlendahl@ukaachen.de (H. Uhlendahl), maschmidt@ukaachen.de (M. Schmidt).

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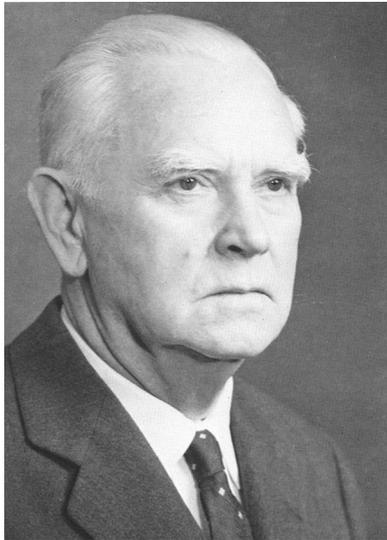


Fig. 1. Portrait of Herwig Hamperl [1].

zone). After brief activities as a prosecutor in St. Pölten and Salzburg, he was appointed to the University of Marburg in 1949 [9,10]. In 1950, he rejected an appointment to the Charité in East Berlin (as successor to Robert Rössle). In 1951/52 he was dean of the Medical Faculty of Marburg. He was also appointed director of the International Office of the University of Marburg. In 1954, he became a full professor and director of the Institute of Pathology in Bonn – a position that he held until his retirement in 1967 [13,14].

Hamperl died from a sudden cardiac arrest on April 12, 1976, a few days after the implantation of a cardiac pacemaker [15].

Before and after 1945 Hamperl had numerous international contacts and received many honours. He was a member of the Royal Swedish Scientific Society in Uppsala and the corresponding Finnish Society (1942) [16]. He also became an elected member of the German Academy of Sciences (1950), the Royal Society of Medicine in London (1958) [16] and the Academy of Sciences of the GDR (1969) – to name but a few international awards and recognitions. Furthermore, he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Innsbruck (1969), [17], the Award of Merit from the Union for International Cancer Control (1970), and the Austrian Decoration for Science and Art 1st Class (1971) [18,19].

Hamperl achieved worldwide recognition with his research activities: He was one of the founders of fluorescence microscopy and, together with Max Haitinger, he established fluorescence staining in histology [20]. He is also regarded as the first researcher to describe reflux esophagitis [21] and pneumocystis carinii pneumonia in premature babies and newborns [22]. In addition, he introduced the term "oncocyte" in 1931 for certain tumor-modified epithelial cells [23]. In 1954 he became editor of the journal "Virchows Archiv", holding this position until 1974 [3]. Finally, he was a well-known textbook author: In 1938, he had taken over the fundamental revision of a textbook for General Pathology and Pathological Anatomy (*Ribberts Lehrbuch der Allgemeinen Pathologie und der Pathologischen Anatomie*) and since then had published several most successful editions of that book, before passing this task on to his academic student Peter Gedigk. Two other textbooks also became international successes. Apart from his three reference books, Hamperl left almost 220 scientific publications [24]. To this must be added a special collection of letters written by Robert Rössle (to Hamperl) which was edited in 1976 [2] and the aforementioned autobiography published in 1972. The latter is the focus of attention below [24]. It forms the starting point for the question of Hamperl's role in the Nazi era. A first step is therefore the examination

of Hamperl's personal descriptions of the Third Reich and his relationship to National Socialism. Subsequently, his autobiographical statements are to be compared with the historical facts and – if necessary – contrasted and corrected. The same applies to the qualities Hamperl attributed to those colleagues who were part of his personal network.

2. Material and methods

The study is based on Hamperl's autobiography and on numerous archival sources concerning him. The latter were found in the Federal Archives (*Bundesarchiv*) in Berlin-Lichterfelde (BArch Berlin), the University Archives of the Humboldt University in Berlin (HU/UA Berlin), the University Archives of Bonn University (UA Bonn), the Hessian State Archives of Marburg (StA MR), the Hessian Main State Archives in Wiesbaden (HHStAW), and the University Archive in Prague (UA P). In addition, a systematic re-analysis of the relevant secondary literature on the life and work of Hamperl was performed.

3. Egodocuments as historical sources – potentials and limits

Before referring to the results of these analyses, it will be useful to outline the specific nature of autobiography as a source of historical knowledge:

Hamperl's memoirs, entitled *Career and Life of a Pathologist* (*Werdegang und Lebensweg eines Pathologen*), can be attributed to the genre of "egodocuments". This generic term is used for documents in which the self-perceptions of persons in their respective surroundings are expressed. They are characterised by the fact that the author is both the main character and describes himself [25–27].

Strictly speaking, autobiographies and memoirs are two different source genres: The term "autobiography" stands for the retrospective description of one's own life story or parts of it. These elements can also be found in memoirs – however, memoirs place more emphasis on the depiction of contemporary events or on one's own work in the context of time [28]. Nevertheless, there are fluid transitions. Hamperl's writing is essentially an autobiography, although it offers some insights into contemporary history.

A critical point with egodocuments is the question of historicity: egodocuments do not usually depict history or historical facts, but at best offer an access to the *subjective experience* of historical events. Life memories in particular are susceptible to the (unconscious and/or conscious) "falsifying" of facts by the weighting and reinterpretation of different life events and elements – a phenomenon that is also described as "self-fashioning". This also has to do with the fact that autobiographical texts are written retrospectively, i.e. there are often considerable periods of time between the actual experience of events and the writing process. This distinguishes them from diary entries, for example.

Thus it becomes clear that the truth content of egodocuments must always be critically questioned. However, egodocuments also offer special insights: Thus it is revealing not only to look for gaps and omissions in the narrative of the author, but also for repressions and shifts, for vagueness and veiling, for contradictions and breaks, and for (rhetorical) justification strategies. Against this background it is of utmost importance to compare the statements and omissions in Hamperl's autobiography with the historical facts and to thereby identify any inconsistencies.

In order to fully grasp the intentions that Hamperl pursued with his autobiography and to correctly classify his statements on National Socialism, it is necessary to analyse his book in terms of both form and content.

485. 7

Die Deutsche Dozentenschaft



Fragebogen

nach dem Stande vom:

Name (deutsch): Hamperl

Vorname: Herwig

Verteilte Dozentenschaft: Die Dozentenschaft Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Berlin

Institut: Patholog. Institut

Wohnung: NW 20, Neues Tor 1

Telefonnummer: D 1 4650

Fakultät: med

Dienstverhältnis: beamt a. o. Prof.

Wissenschaftliches Fachgebiet: Pathologische Anatomie

Geburtsdatum: 11. Sept. 1899

Geburtsort: Wien

Staatsangehörigkeit: deutsch

Religionsbekenntnis: wang

Verheiratet: ja

Kinder: Zahl: 1

Alter: _____

Arische Abstammung: ja nein

Arische Abstammung der Ehefrau: ja nein

Bisherige wissenschaftliche Laufbahn:

Studium: wann? wo?

Wien 1918/23

Staatsprüfungen: _____

Promotion: wann? wo?

Wien bez 1923

Assistentenstellungen: wann? wo?

Patholog. Institut Wien
1924 – 1935

deutsches Kol. Institut
Freiburg i. B. 1928/9

Morkau (Forschungsstelle d.
Notgemeinschaft) 1929/30

Sabilitation: Mai 1932

Ernennung zum a.o. Professor: April 1935

Berufung zum Ordinarius: _____

Wenden!

Fig. 2. Questionnaire of the Lecturers' League, completed by Herwig Hamperl, around 1940 [11].

4. Results

4.1. Formal characteristics and idiosyncracies of Hamperl's autobiography [24]

4.1.1. Publication date

Hamperl's work appeared in the Federal Republic of Germany – at a time (1972) when the reconstruction of West Germany had already

been completed and the republic was politically and economically consolidated. However, the autobiography appeared before the phase in the Federal Republic of coming to terms with the role of medicine in the Nazi dictatorship, which essentially only started in the 1980s. In the beginning 1970s, by contrast, the Nazi past still tended to be repressed in German consciousness. Those physicians who had been perpetrators, followers or onlookers in the Third Reich therefore felt no public pressure to take a critical look at their own past. Against this

background, Hamperl could assume that his autobiographical statements and descriptions would not be scrutinized.

4.1.2. Book structure

Hamperl's memoirs are strictly chronological and, at 291 pages, quite detailed. They focus on his professional career, the contact with colleagues and professional relationships as well as on the (further) development of the subject of pathology. They are provided with a detailed register of persons, which gives the reader the impression of a systematic approach and critical accuracy.

4.1.3. Language level

The chosen language level is that of an individual person writing and thus also serves as a stylistic tool: Hamperl's sentence constructions are not too sophisticated. The autobiography is rather easy to read and does not make any special technical and/or extreme intellectual demands on the reader. Thus even non-pathologists would have been in a position to follow the book.

4.1.4. Publication strategy

In selecting F. K. Schattauer as a publisher, Hamperl chose a leading publishing house which was well established in medical-scientific literature. Accordingly, the assumed addressees of his autobiography were (younger) pathologists, doctors and natural scientists, but also – in general – humanistically trained, middle-class and university readers.

4.1.5. Rhetorical strategies

For a formal analysis of the memoirs, it is of utmost importance to determine the rhetorical strategies Hamperl used to emphasize his own significance and his prominent role in pathology. He chose discreet but effective tools to this end:

Firstly, Hamperl emphasizes his personal contact with various Nobel Prize winners (such as Butenandt, Domagk and von Euler, p. 262) and public figures (e.g. audiences with Pope Pius XII and with Juliana, Queen of the Netherlands, p. 272, a reception held by the French President Charles de Gaulle, p. 273f.). In doing so, he documents the upper circles in which he moved and the social class to which he wants to be included.

Secondly, he portrays himself as a person who repeatedly doubts himself and exercises self-criticism. However, these passages are skillfully combined with quotes of praise and recognition that he allegedly received from third parties in the situations in question – a topic for which the literary historian Ernst Robert Curtius coined the term "affected modesty". For example, Hamperl explains that he was concerned that a lecture he had given was "too primitive and old-fashioned" and that he felt that he had been unsuccessful, but in the same context he states: "The students said that I had the least reason to complain about the bad attendance of my lecture, because it was one of the best attended of the clinical studies [...]" (p. 253, *transl. dg*). He proceeds in a similar way when he wants to point out his extraordinary talent for foreign languages. Again he quotes third persons: "Often enough I was asked how I started learning so many languages". Then he mentions his "modest" explanation: "I have experienced that the best way to draw the new 'register' on the speech organ is to say only a few, even if rather insignificant words in the new language – then it is there" (p. 263, *transl. dg*). The reader learns in passing that Hamperl speaks German, English, French, Swedish, Russian, and Spanish.

In a similar way, Hamperl tries to make it clear to the reader that he also achieved great success abroad, which brought him extraordinary popularity there. He begins with a seemingly modest remark stating that he actually considers himself to be an ordinary pathologist. Then he adds: "It is really a strange feeling when a simple scientist and pathologist is asked to sign autographs like a film actor after a lecture abroad" (p. 179, *transl. dg*).

Hamperl also attaches great importance to the fact that he achieved his professional successes and outstanding positions without having to

be proactive. Thus he writes with reference to his appointment in Bonn: "Without lifting a single finger, the choice fell on me" (p. 245, *transl. dg*). He also mentions that he had been offered the editorship of Virchows Archiv (p. 258), that he had been elected dean and member of the senate of the German Research Foundation (DFG) (p. 261). He notes that he was appointed to the Cultural Committee of the Goethe-Institute (p. 263) and that he became chairman of the German Society for Pathology (DGP) (p. 262). Hamperl suggests that he had not actively sought any of these academic posts.

Using the rhetorical tools described, Hamperl wants to demonstrate personal humility. At the same time, however, he refers to the statements of third parties, which in turn underline the significance and special position of his person.

4.2. Herwig Hamperl and the Third Reich: memoirs vs. historical facts

4.2.1. General references to the Third Reich and National Socialism [24]

First of all, it should be pointed out that Hamperl's memoirs deal only cursorily with the Third Reich and the delicate subject of National Socialism, and that just a few statements or historical evaluations are made.

When Hitler came to power in Germany, Hamperl was working in Vienna, the capital of Austria. He uses this fact as an explicit argument for claiming that he had little contact with National Socialism:

"I myself was lucky once again. I had not experienced the 'seizure of power', in which so many personal ties in Germany were ruthlessly torn apart two years before my entry [into the country]. I came to Berlin at a time when a certain stability had already become established. [...] As against this, I was spared the tensions arising from the rise of National Socialism in Austria during these years" (p. 176, *transl. dg*).

In other words, Hamperl claims that the establishment of National Socialism in both Austria and Germany passed him by. He also describes his path into the German Wehrmacht – without, however, giving any indication of the political significance of this step: "When I entered the Prussian civil service I had become a German citizen. Since the Wehrmacht was being established during these years, friendly-minded people, including Paul Schürmann, advised me to secure my rank in the Wehrmacht. For this purpose I had to take part in a so-called exercise [...] as a junior physician (*Unterarzt*). After the exercise I was promoted to [the rank of] senior physician of the reserve" (p. 175, *transl. dg*). Later on he continues with reference to his time in Prague: "Furthermore I was appointed [...] as a consultant pathologist [...] and was thus responsible for the processing of all cases of death of Wehrmacht members in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. In the meantime, I had been promoted from senior physician [...] to senior field physician" (p. 194, *transl. dg*).

All in all, Hamperl presents himself as an apolitical person. This self-image also fits in well with his emphasis that he had already avoided membership in political student groups during his studies (p. 38). However, it is not credible that Hamperl hardly experienced the radical political change in Germany and Austria brought about by the assumption of power by the National Socialists.

4.2.2. Attitude towards National Socialism and the NSDAP [24]

With reference to his appointment as an associate professor at the Institute of Pathology at the Charité in Berlin in 1935, he stresses: "Neither I nor Rössle were party members [...]" In precisely this context he mentions speculation by the Austrian press that he might have been called to Nazi Germany for political reasons: "It did not occur to people that such an appointment could have been made on the basis of aptitude or merit." All the more decidedly he sums up: "The appointment did not have the least political background and was only made for objective reasons" (p. 155, *transl. dg*). A political assessment of Hamperl requested by the regional leader of the Lecturers' League (*Gau-Dozentenbundführer*) in 1937 confirms this to some extent: It was declared there that even though he was not (yet) a member of the Nazi

Party when moving to Berlin, Hamperl was looked upon as politically absolutely reliable [29].

Hamperl also describes the political mood in Vienna and at the Viennese Pathological Institute after 1933: "Like many of my assistant colleagues, I sympathized with the National Socialists, as both the threatening **red** dictatorship and the ruling **black** dictatorship seemed to me to be completely undesirable – I still didn't know the **brown** one! I did not engage in party politics – my sympathy was too weak for that and my time was filled up with activities that seemed to be more important" (p. 154, *transl. dg*).

According to Hamperl, political issues were rarely discussed at the Berlin Institute, where he worked from 1935 to 1939. It was, however, understandable in his view that young Berlin colleagues "considered a proper development of their gifts possible only if, despite many inner reservations, they at least made peace with the regime outwardly" (p. 176, *transl. dg*).

On page 194 he then surprisingly withdraws his twofold assertion that he had not been a party member. What is also interesting here is how he argues:

"In the last phase of the war I was finally made medical director of the university hospital [...] But it wasn't just me in Prague. My colleagues also had to hold several offices in the university, the Wehrmacht, the city, or the party" (p. 194, *transl. dg*). Then he reports on the NSDAP memberships of his Prague colleagues, to finally add: "Out of a certain solidarity I let myself be seduced into joining the party in 1942, too, without ever exercising any function" (p. 194, *transl. dg*).

Hamperl's figure of justification is interesting: His statement, that his entry was late and that it occurred at a seductive moment out of solidarity with his Prague colleagues is not very convincing. The truth looked different anyway: In fact, Hamperl had become a member of the NSDAP before 1942. After the war, he himself admitted on the obligatory registration form (*Meldebogen*) that he joined the Nazi Party on July 1, 1940 [30]. Remarkably, he tried to weaken the significance of his membership in the Nazi Party on the registration form. Thus he added "remarks" in handwriting: "My 'party membership' is considered null and void in Austria, since I had been in military service since 1939 and therefore could not be accepted into the party in 1940" (see also Fig. 3) [31].

Hamperl's written statement about his entry to the party coincide roughly with Míšková's reference. She states that Hamperl had been admitted to the NSDAP on June 1, 1940 and had received party number 7.623.526, without citing an archive document [32]. In contrast, Klee dates the year of Hamperl's joining the NSDAP to 1937 [6]. He refers to Aumüller et al., who note that Hamperl had been admitted to the Nazi party in 1937 and was given party number 5.438.049. Aumüller et al. do not refer to primary sources either [4]. On the other hand, a letter of November 8, 1937 in Hamperl's personal file at Humboldt University Berlin states that he had not yet joined any political party [29].

Unfortunately, the exact year of entry – whether 1940 or even 1937 – cannot be verified by the evaluation of the most relevant actual primary source, the so called "NSDAP membership index". This is located in the Federal Archives in Berlin-Lichterfelde, but is known to be incomplete. Hamperl is not listed there. The University archives in Prague do not contain any information on the date of entry [33], and the former personal file of the University of Prague during the time of Nazi occupation – now also kept in the Federal Archives in Berlin – does not provide information either [34].

In any case, it should be noted that Hamperl makes false statements on the question of his NSDAP membership. Moreover, Hamperl was a member of the NS Lecturers' League (NSDDB) [32,35]. According to Aumüller et al., Hamperl had also joined the SA – the paramilitary Storm Detachment (*Sturmabteilung*) [4]. Furthermore, it is not plausible that an Austrian could be appointed in Germany after 1933 without his political stance being scrutinized. Only university lecturers who were regarded as "politically reliable" were supposed to be appointed to the German Charles University in Prague. The faculty of the Charles

University was dominated by National Socialists [32]. Moreover, Hamperl soon took up influential positions there: From 1940 to 1945 he was faculty representative of the NSDDB [32], from July 31, 1940 to December 10, 1942 even vice rector (*Prorector*) of the German University [32]. The office of the Prague rector was considered "primarily a National Socialist task", as the incumbent Reich Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick put it [32]. In light of this, it is already difficult to imagine the position of a (vice) rector being filled with a professor who was not loyal to the party line. In addition, Hamperl was also the official press representative of the Medical Faculty [32]. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Hamperl's research topics were of interest to the National Socialists.

4.2.3. Putting his own research into the political context [24]

Hamperl did not mention in his autobiography that some of his research topics received special attention in the Third Reich and during World War II, respectively. He had been engaged in racial research and was considered "experienced" in that very field [6]. Hamperl had worked at the German-Russian Institute for Racial Research in Moscow as early as 1929/30 [36]. In his memoirs, he mentions the name of the institute only once (p. 105). There he worked together with Ludwig Aschoff, who was one of the most renowned contemporary pathologists and who demonstrably had a positive attitude towards National Socialism [37]. Hamperl's studies dealt, among other things, with the question of the frequency of stomach ulcers during critical periods of hunger; this was to be examined "with regard to geography and race" (p. 106, *transl. dg*). Accordingly, this type of research was called "racial pathology" [6] or "geographical pathology" [38]. Increased attention was paid to it again during World War II in view of the hunger crises of the time (p. 107f.). It should be emphasized, however, that Hamperl did not link his research with "racial hygiene assessments" as far as can be ascertained.

4.2.4. Attitude towards Hitler's policy of annexation [24]

Hitler's warmongering policies were not really problematized by Hamperl either. His appointment to the German University of Prague in 1939 is, rather, outlined as a personal opportunity. He does not speak of the actual annexation of the Eastern territories concerned, but uses the euphemistic terminology of the National Socialists: Even in retrospect (1972) he still speaks of the "establishment of the Protectorate Bohemia-Moravia" and places the annexation in a positive context by stating: "Thus the Prague universities [...] had become institutions of the German Reich. Great development opportunities now opened up for the German university, which had previously been rather neglected" (p. 181, *transl. dg*). In addition, he assumes that the German higher education system at that time was superior to the Czech system. Thus he states that, on his arrival, the German University in Prague was still "in the reduced state" into which it had fallen during the "Czech period" (p. 186, *transl. dg*).

4.2.5. "Jewish question" and Holocaust [24]

Hamperl also does not comment critically on the disenfranchisement of his Jewish colleagues either. Rather, he writes succinctly: "Moreover, since the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Jewish members of the faculty had retired" (p. 186, *transl. dg*).

Later on he claimed to have heard of the "horrible" extermination camps in Terezin (*Theresienstadt*) for the first time only in 1944: "Up to then one could see that Jews had been removed. It was always said, however, that they would be settled somewhere together" (p. 199, *transl. dg*).

A further comment on his Jewish fellow citizens can be found in Hamperl's description of his post-war activities in St. Pölten. As in the first-mentioned commentary, every indication of empathy is missing: "Finally, I still had a strange clientele [*Klientel*, sic!] to look after. The Jews who wanted to emigrate to the USA were accommodated in a

Fig. 3. Reporting form on the basis of the Law for the Liberation of National Socialism and Militarism of March 5, 1946, filled in by Hamperl, signed "21 September 48, Upsala" (2 pages) [31].

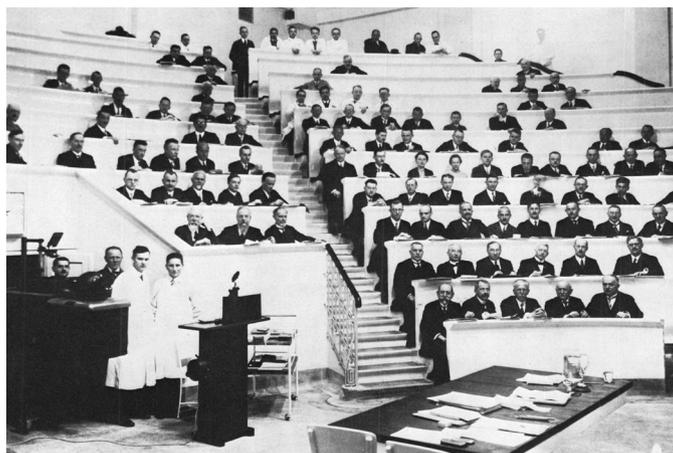


Fig. 4. Herwig Hamperl (left) and Hans Popper (right) – the two men in the white doctor's coat next to the projector – at the conference of the DGP in Vienna (1929) [24].

camp near Salzburg, they had to provide evidence of a negative serum reaction for syphilis and be free of tuberculosis in order to obtain an entry permit. Here, too, there has been no lack of attempts to turn positive findings into negative ones by offering bribes" (p. 225, transl. dg). Such callous remarks do not quite fit in with Hamperl's claims of having maintained good relations with Jewish schoolmates (p. 26f.) and university teachers (p. 53f.).

4.2.6. Attitude towards the "NS standardisation" (Gleichschaltung) of universities and the health sector [24]

Similarly, Hamperl does not have a critical word to say about the political standardisation of professional bodies and the antidemocratic National Socialist "leader principle" (Führerprinzip) that was introduced into society and thus also into the universities – although he does touch upon this in his book: He reports on faculty meetings "which were

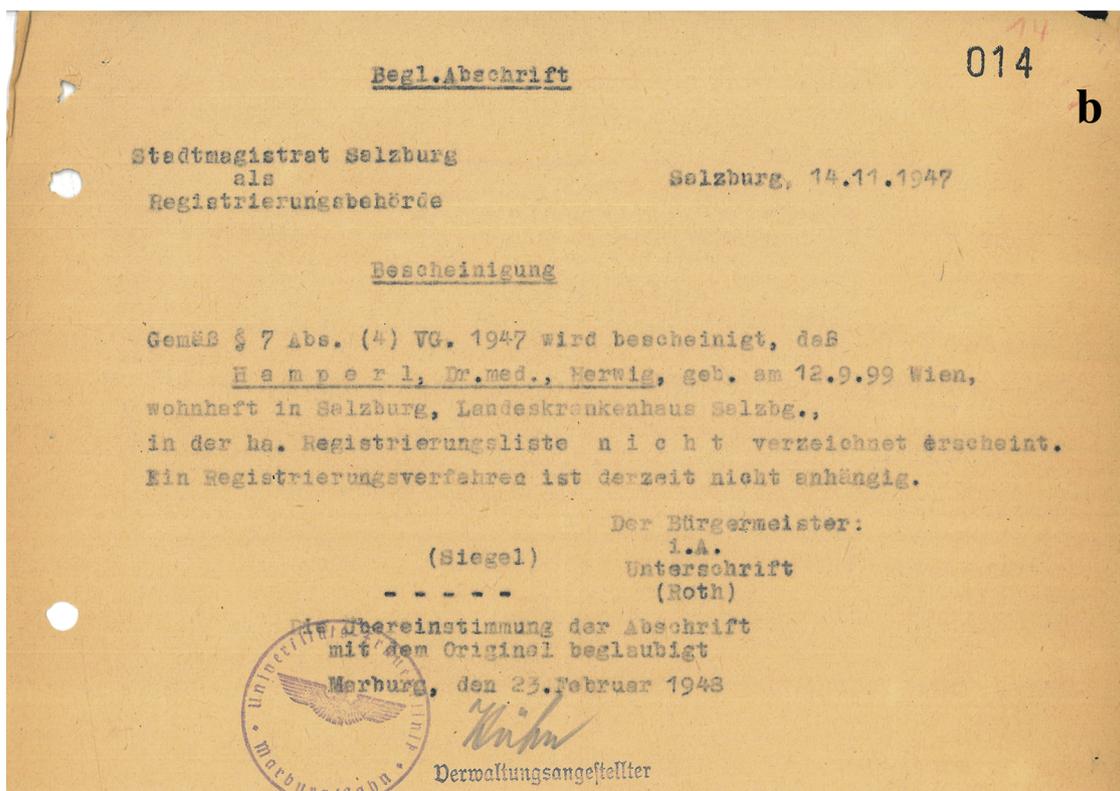
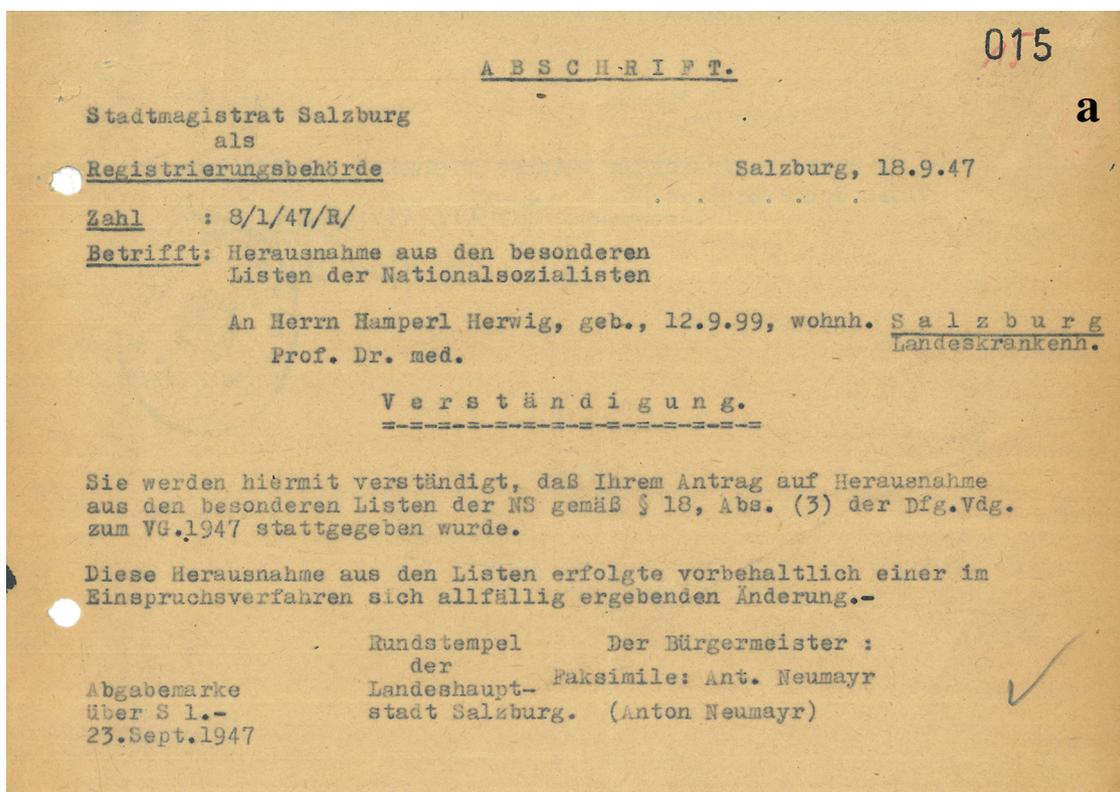


Fig. 5. Certifications of the City of Salzburg regarding Herwig Hamperl 5a: Copy of a certificate of the Stadtmagistrat Salzburg, September 18, 1947 [53] 5b: Copy of a certificate of the Stadtmagistrat Salzburg, November 14, 1947 [54].

chaired by the dean according to the leader principle, i.e. there was no vote, but the dean decided independently after hearing the faculty. If he was a wise man [...], then the system did not function badly at all, sometimes even better than the over-democratic and tedious talking of every subject in today's faculty meetings" (p. 172, *transl. dg*).

4.2.7. Relations with leading National Socialists and Nazi colleagues [24]

Although Hamperl took on a prominent role as a professor and even as a prorektor of the Charles University and although he reported in great detail about his meetings with high-ranking political and social figures for the period *after* 1945 (p. 262–273), there are no such

references for the time of the Third Reich. Rather, he emphasizes that he never came into contact with Hitler, stating that he only saw him pass by once (p. 176, *transl. dg*). Also the truly spectacular fact that Hamperl performed an autopsy on the leading Nazi functionary Reinhard Heydrich [39] following the latter's assassination is dealt with very briefly – Hamperl does not even mention Heydrich's full name (p. 200).

Hamperl's statements about pathologists who were friends are also interesting: He refers in many places to his deep friendship with Rössle (p. 153, 157f., 167–169), who was significantly responsible for his appointment to the Charité in 1935. In fact, Rössle's involvement in National Socialism was impossible to overlook [40,41]: He had been appointed to the Chair of Pathology at the Charité in Berlin in 1929. During the Third Reich he was one of the editors of the Journal for Human Heredity and Constitutional Theory (*Zeitschrift für menschliche Vererbungs- und Konstitutionslehre*). Besides, he was active on the advisory board of the German Society for the Study of Constitution (*Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der Konstitution*) and knew about the human experiments performed by the German Air Force (*Luftwaffe*). Also controversial was the fact that Rössle acted as mentor to the infamous Armed SS (*Waffen-SS*) physician Robert Neumann [42]. Neumann was able to habilitate under Rössle's supervision even though his scientific achievements lagged behind the usual standards. Neumann was responsible for human experiments and the deaths of prisoners in several concentration camps. Rössle was loyal to the Nazi state and held influential positions. In 1942 he was appointed to the Senate of the Army Medical Service. In 1944 he became a member of the scientific advisory board of the General Commissioner for Sanitation and Health, Karl Brandt. However, Rössle was not a member of the NSDAP and was thus able to retain his professorship after 1945 [40–43].

Hamperl, on the other hand, emphasizes Rössle's distance from the National Socialist regime in various places, even suggesting an oppositional stance on his part. According to Hamperl, Rössle even "fought as far as possible against the National Socialist direction" (p. 155, *transl. dg*). Moreover, he had become embittered because he "had lost so many of his best friends through forced emigration" (p. 176, *transl. dg*). Hamperl does not say a word about Rössle's above-mentioned links to National Socialism. Only at one point does he mention that Rössle was "particularly interested in the autopsies of twins and relatives", without, however, placing any of this in a political context (p. 169, *transl. dg*).

Hamperl also counted the internist Hans Eppinger among his friends. He had often visited him at home (pp. 151, 227–229). Nowadays, Eppinger's involvement in National Socialism is widely known: Eppinger had worked as professor of Internal Medicine at the University of Vienna since 1933. During World War II he was involved in human experiments on prisoners in Dachau concentration camp carried out by his assistant Wilhelm Beiglböck. Tests were performed on whether the prisoners developed physical symptoms or even died after drinking sea water, and also on what could be done to make sea water drinkable. Although it was Beiglböck who made the experiments, the latter stressed Eppinger's "crucial role" [44] in this matter. The (ostensible) aim of the tests was to save the lives of German pilots who crashed over the open sea. Eppinger committed suicide on September 25, 1946 to avoid interrogation at the Nuremberg Doctors' Trial (*Nürnberger Ärzteprozess*). In the month before, the Austrian police had "collected evidence against Eppinger" [44]. Despite his participation in those experiments, the "Eppinger Prize" was established in the Federal Republic of Germany. It was only abolished after strong protests in the 1980s [45].

In contrast, Hamperl does not mention that Eppinger was responsible for human experiments. Instead, he provides his own explanation for the legal accusations that Eppinger had experienced after 1945: "In the course of the medical war crimes trials, his name was also mentioned, as Dr. Beiglböck, one of his assistants, had carried out experiments on people. The constant demands made on him by Russian military personnel, which I had experienced myself, were a strain on his

nerves" (p. 227, *transl. dg*).

Hamperl admits that Eppinger sometimes appeared "ruthless" to outsiders – but notes that he himself had looked behind this facade and had become aware of a "soft, accessible Eppinger" (p. 229, *transl. dg*). The crucial historical fact that Eppinger had committed suicide before the decisive interrogation in court is also concealed by Hamperl: "Soon after his return from Salzburg to Vienna, Eppinger voluntarily retired from life" (p. 228, *transl. dg*).

Hamperl's narrative is unambiguous: In order to portray the picture of an apolitical pathologist, it was crucial to make it clear that there was no personal closeness to the Nazi rulers and that his own circle of friends was also largely above suspicion. In his autobiography, he is consistently anxious to adhere to this position.

On the other hand, Hamperl only says a few words about the fate of the Jewish Hans Popper (1903–1988), although the latter was one of his colleagues in Vienna (p. 83, 96 – see also Fig. 4, [24,45]). Popper was forced to take refuge in the USA in 1938 under the pressure of political events. Hamperl only casually mentions this drastic caesura with the euphemistic words that Popper "finally had to leave Vienna when I was already working in Berlin" (p. 83, *transl. dg*). Popper was later to become a world-famous liver pathologist.

4.2.8. Denazification (*Entnazifizierung*) [24]

Similarly remarkable is the fact that Hamperl makes no mention of his denazification, merely noting with a gloss: "Only in autumn 1949, after overcoming all bureaucratic difficulties, things had finally come so far that I was able to take up a full professorship (*Ordinariat*) in Marburg" (p. 234, *transl. dg*). The reader does not learn what these "bureaucratic difficulties" were and how they were resolved. It can be assumed that Hamperl saw a personal flaw in the "denazification issue" and felt that this should not be given any place in his autobiography. This is also indicated by the fact that he made false and contradictory statements about his NSDAP membership and that he did not admit to his further memberships in Nazi organisations.

Objectively, he could have been more open about his denazification because the review actually ended well for him, as for many other NSDAP members: Most of them succeeded in "clearing" themselves of allegations of political entanglement by presenting testimonies from character witnesses [46,47]. In the end, only about 1.4 percent of those assessed were attributed to the first two categories ("major offenders", "incriminated"). The vast majority of the National Socialists who underwent a denazification process were ultimately classified as "followers" or "persons exonerated" [48]. In Hamperl's case there are no files documenting that he was denazified at all. Although the Austrian "Prohibition Act" (*Verbotsgesetz*) required that all persons who were resident in Austria and were members of the Nazi Party should register [49], he was able to elude the process: In fact, the Provisional Government of Austria allowed exemptions from the registration requirement if the person concerned had not "abused" his or her membership of the NSDAP. This clause was interpreted increasingly broadly, so that in the end 85 to 90 percent of the persons with compulsory registration claimed to have "never abused" their membership. Eventually, many of them didn't appear on the list [50].

The archival records show that Hamperl also tried to make use of this "exception rule" [51,52] in order to clean up his political commitment: In autumn 1947, he had applied to the City of Salzburg to be removed from the National Socialist registration list retrospectively. His demand was, in fact, met, but "with reservation" (see Fig. 5a, [53]). Why the City of Salzburg made such a concession is not documented.

Two months later, the City of Salzburg was able to confirm to Hamperl that he "apparently did not appear on the registration list" (see also Fig. 5b, [54]). This confirmation should prove useful: In the further course of correspondence on Hamperl, the original remark "did not appear on the registration list" was finally "reworded" to "being exonerated" (*transl. dg*) [55,56]. This reinterpretation occurred at the University of Marburg in 1948. As can be seen from the files, the Marburg

faculty was greatly interested in Hamperl's appointment. The linguistic "whitewashing" may thus have served the purpose of successfully concluding his appointment process.

The Marburg medical historian Cornelia Grundmann also fell into this "rewording trap": In her study, she dealt with the denazification procedures of professors appointed to the University of Marburg and drew her findings from the documents of the University Archives of Marburg. Thus she came to the (incorrect) conclusion that Hamperl had been denazified and classified in group V – probably, because the word "exonerated" that appears in the Marburg files was generally used for persons who had been denazified and classified as "persons exonerated" (group V) [8,55,56]. It is unclear to what extent Hamperl promoted the "whitewashing" in his appointment proceedings in Marburg. At the very least he appears to have made no attempt to correct it.

The aforementioned change of location – from St. Pölten to Salzburg – should have facilitated that process of concealment: The Austrian cities were located in different occupation zones, which obviously did not work together smoothly.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Authors of autobiographies and memoirs are generally susceptible to the subjective weighting and evaluating of their perceptions, experiences and life events and thus of ultimately constructing a "Me" that says more about their own personality and self-image than about historical facts [27]. This is also true of Hamperl. His central motivation for writing this book seems to be taking a place in the history of pathology – all rhetorical strategies chosen by him point to this reading. His memoirs are largely marked by omissions and embellishments, and in this respect they are a prototypical example of distinct "self-fashioning". One could almost say that Hamperl created his own legend. In this respect his explanations are necessarily calculated and sometimes manipulative.

This applies in particular to his statements on the Third Reich and National Socialism. Hamperl paints a picture of himself as a university teacher who was politically largely uninvolved and who, unimpressed by National Socialism, above all pursued his specialist tasks in the Third Reich. He fluctuates between false statements and euphemisms: He first claims that he was not a party member. Later on he states that he did not join the party until 1942, and that he did so only out of collegial solidarity and because he was somehow tempted to do so – by which he stresses that he had no intrinsic motivation and was not really a convinced member. The fact that Hamperl does not report on any encounters with National Socialists, that he misrepresents his relationship with the NSDAP, that he conceals further NS memberships and that he applied to the City of Salzburg to be removed from the list with National Socialists (without mentioning this request in his autobiography) fits in with this whitewashing.

The autobiography evidently fulfilled its purpose: The obituaries that appeared after Hamperl's death in 1976 not only drew the picture of an extraordinary, internationally successful scholar, but also praised his character and personal integrity, thus securing him a considerable posthumous reputation [3,57–59]. The obituaries almost seem like hagiographies. Hamperl is honoured as a "person with unusual charisma", "a spiritual mediator between the times" and as a man whom "you long to be your superior and your role model" [58]. The obituaries praise his "indulgence" and call him "a friend to this generation" [58]: "He showed our generation that grieves for him how honest, clean science is made." His academic pupil Peter Gedigk attested that Hamperl had been "a sympathetic and helpful man" [3]: "Everyone could come to him with personal needs and count on his help" [3] (*transl. dg*).

But the analysis of the autobiography also reveals another disturbing insight: even in 1972 Hamperl found it difficult to distance himself from the crimes of the National Socialists. This is especially evident on the linguistic-semantic level: Hamperl still uses old euphemistic NS terms such as the "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia".

He also writes in a veiled manner that the Jews had "retired" (*ausgeschieden*) from university service – far more accurate terms such as "expulsed", "deprived of rights" or "repressed" are missing.

Although Hamperl was a contemporary witness of the Third Reich and a prominent representative of contemporary medicine, expressions such as "persecution of the Jews", "mass extermination", "forced emigration", "concentration camps", "human experiments", and "racial hygiene" do not appear in his memoirs. The proven willingness of many contemporary doctors and pathologists to cooperate with the Nazi regime is not mentioned either – this is not actually surprising, since Hamperl himself must be attributed to this very group.

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