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- Lecture

IFK

[Paul Weindling](#)

PROVENANCE AND PERSONAL IDENTITY: PROBLEMS OF BRAIN TISSUES FROM THE ERA OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

18:15

The issue of the provenance of medical specimens deriving from victims of Nazi atrocities has been addressed in various ways since the late 1980s. Academic institutions have systematically denied and lied, collectively buried without identifying the victims, or secretly disposed of victim body parts. By way of contrast, the named burials and commemoration of the Spiegelgrund victims have established a model of best practice.

Despite the late (2002) but relatively successful Spiegelgrund identifications and commemoration, recent discoveries of body parts and tissues in Berlin and Strasbourg reveal the academic institutions find full disclosure painful and problematic. Whereas Holocaust victims are commemorated by name, the situation for commemorating Nazi victims with mental and physical disabilities remains one of very partial disclosure of victim names. There is no publicly accessible documentation at a national level in Germany and Austria – where there was a high rate of killing of psychiatric patients – commemorating psychiatric, disabled and infirm, and elderly murdered patients. Since the opening of the “T4” memorial in Berlin in 2014 some relatives have authorised the public inclusion of victim details. Yet full recognition of victim identities, whether psychiatric patients, prisoners of war, forced labourers and Polish Jews continues to be problematic, as is tracing their post-mortem remains and scientific use in medical collections. Parallels arise with issues of looted art and books, as well as with anthropological specimens and other museum objects.

Paul Weindling currently researches life histories of victims of National Socialist medical research and their post-mortem histories in terms of body parts, the forced migration of physicians and others in health care, and topics related to Nazi medical education, research and practice. He is City of Vienna/IFK_Fellow.

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