

Kai Ambos

National Socialist Criminal Law

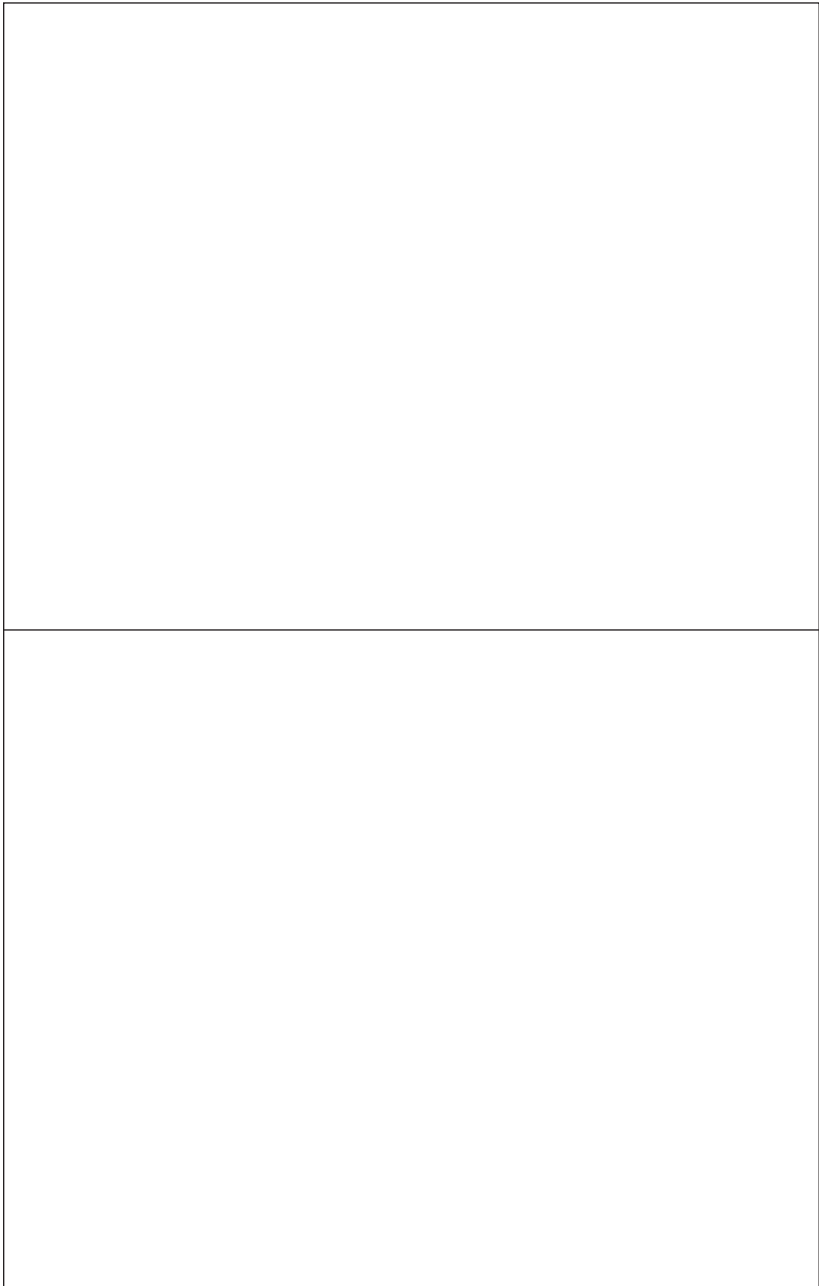
Continuity and Radicalization



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Preface by R.A. Duff



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For Analu, Patrick and Lara

“Does such a system deserve the name of law? Yes, if law is merely the will of the sovereign; definitely not, if law, unlike the sovereign's command must be rational either in form or in content. The National Socialist legal system is nothing but a technique of mass manipulation by terror. Criminal courts, together with the Gestapo, the public prosecutor, and the executioners, are now primarily practitioners of violence.”

(Franz Neumann, *Behemoth*, 1942, p 458)

“But precisely because the Third Reich destroyed a tradition with which German identity was so profoundly connected, the Germans... need to think back before Auschwitz and forward beyond Auschwitz... In any case, Jewishness forms an inalienable part of German identity, and those born after [the Holocaust] should see it as their duty not only to lastingly commemorate the important history of Jewishness, but also to scatter the fruitful seed of this commemoration, sowing it in Germany's and Europe's future.”

(Dieter Borchmeyer, *Was ist Deutsch?*, 2017, p 22
[translation from German])

“How arrogant to believe we could get away so easily! As if there were any way or any time that anything could ever be normal once more. ... *Nothing will ever be alright again.*”

(Max Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch* [“Disintegrate Yourselves”], 2018, p 182 [italics in original, translation from German]).

Preface

Mention ‘National Socialist criminal law’ to many people, at least in the common law world, and they will suppose it to have been simply an aberration: if it should be counted as ‘law’ at all (given that it was part of the *Unrechtsstaat* of Nazi Germany), it must be seen as marking a radical hiatus in the history of German criminal law, utterly disconnected both from what had gone before and from what was then reconstructed after 1945. Mention ‘National Socialist criminal law theory’, and the reaction is likely to be the same: no doubt Nazi propagandists offered ‘theories’ of criminal law, as part of their efforts to rationalise their regime; but such theories could have no real connection with the doctrines that informed and structured German criminal law before and after the Nazi era. In this fascinating book Kai Ambos shows just how mistaken such reactions would be.

Ambos meticulously traces the deep continuities between National Socialist criminal law doctrine and pre-1933 criminal law scholarship, as well as the traces that it left in post-1945 doctrine (in Germany, but also in Latin America). He does this by paying careful attention to the writings of doctrinal theorists of the period, to their relationships and disagreements with each other, and to the ways in which they drew on earlier doctrines and philosophical ideas, whilst also more or less profoundly modifying those doctrines and ideas in the service of the Nazi ideology. He presents these authors in their own words, and thus enables us to see for ourselves the ways in which they developed doctrines that would sustain a National Socialist criminal law.

The book offers us an illuminating history of this dark period of German criminal law doctrine and theory, and revealing insights into the doctrinal theorists who helped to form it (as well as those who resisted it); but it also shows us revealingly how, as Ambos puts it in his Foreword, ‘National Socialist criminal law neither came out of nowhere nor disappeared completely after 1945’. If we reflect on the historical character of the institutions of criminal law, and the historically situated character of criminal law doctrine and theory, this should not surprise us: but given prevalent conceptions of the Nazi era, it might surprise many of us; this book, apart from its intrinsic historical interest, provides an invaluable corrective.

R A Duff, July 2019

Foreword

The present study came about as a result of reading the famous Argentinian criminal law scholar Eugenio Raúl Zaffaroni's recent monograph on National Socialist criminal law doctrine ("Doctrina Penal Nazi", 2017). While the initial aim was to produce only a brief review, the in-depth examination of the sources cited by Zaffaroni and consultation of further primary and secondary sources have resulted in an independent treatise of its own. In line with theories of National Socialism as a continuation and radicalisation of existing trends, it interprets Nazi criminal law as a racist (anti-Semitic), nationalist ("Germanic"), and totalitarian construct that continues and develops further the authoritarian and anti-liberal tendencies of German criminal law of the *fin-de-siècle* and the Weimar Republic. This is borne out by a systematic analysis of writings by relevant authors that focuses first and foremost on the texts, which speak for themselves, and is less concerned with morally judging the scholars who produced them. Readers will also learn about the reception of German (National Socialist) criminal law in Latin America.

A brief word on the aforementioned continuity: it existed not only between the Nazi period and the eras preceding it, but also between National Socialism and the period that followed (the Bonn and even the Berlin Republic). In short, National Socialist criminal law neither came out of nowhere nor disappeared completely after 1945. Current identitarian attempts by the so-called *Neue Rechte* ("New Right") to reconstruct the Germanic myth represent yet another continuation that links seamlessly to National Socialist ideology. In today's digital age, the New Right's populist style of politics is seeking to replace argumentative discourse by "supposedly direct and immediate agreement in a virtual ethnic community" (Stollberg-Rilinger, Interview, faz.net, updated 2 September 2018). This discourse is disturbingly reminiscent of Nazi language and its racist undertones (Detering, 2019).

There are many colleagues I would like to thank for their critical comments, which helped to develop this study. Thomas Vormbaum and Fritz Loos read the manuscript in its entirety. Friederike Wapler provided me with valuable suggestions for the fourth chapter (NS criminal law and Neo-Kantianism), as did Gunnar Duttge, Katrin Gierhake, Luis Greco, Katrin Höffler, Tatjana Hörnle, Günther Jakobs, Urs Kindhäuser, Uwe Mur-

Foreword

mann and Dietmar von der Pfordten. Paulo de Sousa Mendes, Leandro Dias, Michael Kubiciel, Javier Llobet, Eva Schumann and Fernando Velásquez commented on other aspects. Florian Jessberger and Moritz Vormbaum kindly provided me with their forthcoming contributions on H. Henkel, and Urs Kindhäuser let me have a copy of his forthcoming essay on “Günther Jakobs and Hans Welzel”. Furthermore, I would like to thank my student assistants Marieke Buchholz, Matthias Friese, Leon Augustin Hill, Roman Jusen, Alina Sviridenko, Dara-Lisa Szielinski and Tjorven Vogt for their support in researching this project (Tjorven's help was indispensable to create the list of figures). My gratitude also goes to my doctoral student Yingxin He for comments on the Chinese understanding of the rule of law.

This English version would not have been possible without the help of Dr Margaret Hiley, who produced a translation from the German original in close collaboration with myself. I also want to thank Antony Duff, who not only took it upon himself to write a preface, but also read the translation carefully, suggesting improvements. Last but not least, the publisher, especially Prof. Rux and Mr. Schwarzenberger, have been extremely helpful and flexible. This research is a work in progress, and therefore not only updates but also substantive additions have been made to this English version.

Kai Ambos, Göttingen, August 2019

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