

Dear Mrs. Gruetters,

Dear Mr. Geisel,

Dear Mrs. Riedel,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel honoured to be invited to the opening ceremony of this exposition. I am also extremely grateful to the Topography of Terror, Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Natural History Museum Vienna for devoting time and effort to assemble the unique materials we can see here on display.

And what we do see is a documentation of the perversion of the human mind that breaks one of the fundamental laws governing science and philosophy. The law that stipulates that we as scientists and educators, and I do speak as a long-time academic, should always see the human being, its welfare and development as the objective of our actions and not the means to achieve private or political gains. Perhaps this is what the ancient philosopher meant when he claimed that “human is the measure of all things”, rather than the encouragement to relativize values based on individual fancies, as some would have it.

Nazi pseudo-scientist such as Anton Plügel, Maria Kahlich und Elfriede Fliethmann as well as other researchers employed in the German Eastern Research Institute (Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit), have clearly broken this fundamental moral rule of science. They literally measured humans like objects rather than treat them as the measure. It is well that the revolting results of their actions in Tarnów ghetto are juxtaposed with the family pictures of some of their victims, pictures that show those people in their natural environment rather than as research “material” as the pseudoscientist dubbed them.

Kahlich and Fliethman who were responsible for most of the research conducted in the Tarnów ghetto seemed to have believed that they were building a scientific basis for the new order of the peoples of Europe. Indeed their malevolent work was but a part of a larger project which included similar research of many different ethnic groups. There are well document cases of racist studies of many other citizens of Poland some with the goal of searching out those with the so-called “Arian” appearance. Children became separated

from their parents and send to Germany, many never to return. A racist empire was under construction with the German nation of the overlords at its pinnacle, other races serving as slaves and the Jews, Sinti and Roma singled out for extermination.

It is no secret that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century racist social theory was, regrettably, a part of the academic mainstream. First proposed by a Frenchman Arthur de Gobineau in 1853, it gained wide popularity in a number of states. In the 1930s Germany, however, took the lead. In 1934 one of the leading proponents of eugenics and racial hygiene in the USA famously wrote: "the Germans are beating us at our own game". Indeed, it remains for historians to answer why, although, racism as a social theory was so prevalent among scientists of the time, it is only in Germany that it bore a bitter fruit of mass destruction on an unprecedented scale. The answer to this question is no doubt a complex one, but we need to acknowledge that something in the German political culture and social conditions of this period convinced a whole generation of educated, refined scholars to do the unthinkable in their attempt to better organize the world, as they themselves claimed. This exhibition brings us closer to understanding this moral and intellectual collapse. One of the more disturbing elements of the history of the inhuman research conducted in Tarnów, something which I have already noticed in the catalogue, is the post-war fate of Kahlich and Fliethmann. They both died at a ripe old age as respectable citizens of Austria and West Germany respectively. Fliethmann was actually a social worker dealing with young people (Sozialpädagogin), she passed away 1987 in West Berlin just a couple of years before the reunification of Germany.

What can we learn now from the perversion of science that we see here before our eyes? Let me turn once again to the idea of the human being as the goal and not the means to achieve other aims. We live in a world where gathering many, even the most intimate data about our lives can be conducted with more efficiency and speed than ever before. There are governments, fortunately not in Europe, which already use complex algorithms to classify their citizens into separate casts akin to the horrific vision of Aldous Huxley. Politics still continues to use scientific tools to justify and enact social engineering. It may be that in the future biotechnology will even further expand those possibilities. This exposition carries a clear message: this is a false direction. The fundamental dignity of a human being cannot be reduced to a chosen set of physical features and personal characteristics. The value of human life cannot be

expressed by numbers, shapes and colours. A life's value rests in a potential for developing, feeling, learning and loving. Robbing someone of this potential is the greatest crime imaginable. Talmud teaches that not only saving one person is like saving all, it also mentions the dire opposite, arbitrarily killing just one human being is like killing the whole humanity, which will simply never be the same without her or him.

Prof. Dr. Andrzej Przyłębski, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the Federal Republic of Germany