

Categories of Complicity: Philosophy under National Socialism

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While one may debate whether there was a National Socialist philosophy, there were certainly National Socialist philosophers. Who were these philosophers? What qualified them as National Socialist? What use did this discipline, which was deemed “ideologically critical” by the Nazi Ministry of Education, have for the regime? How has their impact on the discipline of philosophy continued to inform the professional practice of philosophy today? *Categories of Complicity: Philosophy under National Socialism* answers these questions by focusing on the transformations in the discipline of philosophy from the 1920s to 1940s in Germany and Austria.

My research reveals that, even while the party deemed philosophy an ideologically critical discipline, it did not impose a top-down vision upon the discipline, but instead fostered professors with many competing visions of philosophy’s role in the regime’s racial and imperial projects. This ideological *Spielraum* enabled many complicit professors to position themselves as “inner emigrants” or even resisters during denazification. While analyses of philosophy in the Nazi era often focus on prominent figures such as Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, and Carl Schmitt, I focus on the everyday practices of philosophy professors and their seemingly mundane teaching, administrative and publication activities under National Socialism in order to describe the complex place of philosophy within the regime’s education policies and surveillance practices.

Central to this investigation is the role of denazification and an examination of the professional continuities across the Weimar, Nazi and post-WWII eras. What enabled professors of this “ideologically critical” discipline to navigate denazification? As a history of the discipline of philosophy from the Weimar era to post-war Germany, this project draws on literature and methodology from the fields of philosophy, intellectual history, and the history of knowledge.