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Lebensborn Mothers: The Women of the Thousand-Year Reich

Zachary Herzog  
*Brigham Young University*

Dr. Hans-Wilhelm Kelling  
*Brigham Young University*

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There have been few, if any, events during the 20th century that have drawn more interest from philosophers and historians than those leading up to and culminating in the Second World War. Consequently, much has been said already concerning the aims of the Third Reich. Yet, while there is an increasing amount of literature reflecting upon numerous aspects of the period, the literature surrounding the highly secretive Lebensborn (“Fount of Life”) organization remains somewhat thin. In fact, despite there being thousands of men, women, and children involved in the eugenics experiment, much of what is now known of the Lebensborn was not revealed until decades after the war. What then, was the Lebensborn organization, and what ideas caused it to come about?

In my paper I first give a somewhat detailed history of the Lebensborn, as well as its lasting effects on those individuals most profoundly affected by it, namely the Norwegian women and children who were involved in and a product of it. I then attempt to identify some of the key philosophies and ideas behind the organization’s conception and try to trace their history as far back as I am able. By doing so, I hope to shed light on the various ideas which had so strong an influence on the National Socialist movement during the 1930s and 40s.

In the mid-1930s, word had spread throughout Germany of a special care program intended for unwed mothers of Aryan children. Those who participated, it was rumored, would receive the best medical care available to German citizens, their children would be well taken care of, the mothers would receive generous financial benefits, and each participant would be held in high esteem as an honorable patriot and loyal member of the Third Reich. Some of these claims were true, though it later became clear that it was intended to be much more than a government-run program for unwed mothers. What the American soldiers of the 86th Infantry Division discovered on that day in Steinhöring was not simply a socialized welfare program aimed at helping unwed mothers re-assimilate themselves into German society; it was rather an intricate human breeding program envisioned by Hitler and Himmler to be the means of producing racially pure individuals to serve and defend the Reich for the next thousand years.

Primary participants consisted of male SS officers and Aryan women of German or Scandinavian heritage, regardless of marital status. Extramarital relations, in fact, were not only authorized but were encouraged within the organization. Both married and non-married SS officers fathered numerous children with either married or non-married Aryan women. Secrecy, then, became an important priority for those overseeing the breeding, in large part to avoid subjecting Lebensborn participants to a number of social stigmas. Until the Allies arrived on May 3, 1945, much of what went on inside the home was left somewhat a mystery even to the German citizens just outside its walls.

The philosophical influences on Hitler and Himmler were significant. Writings from both Plato and Arthur de Gobineau were key in influencing Hitler to develop his dream for producing a pure race. While it is true that a lot of Hitler’s ideas originated in texts from these thinkers, what seems to be the case is that what became Hitler’s and Himmler’s end goal for Germany was certainly a bastardization of these ideas to a great extent. In order to further defend that point more research will have to be done in the area of philosophy.
Because of the depth and scope of this philosophical research, Dr. Kelling and I plan to continue to work on this project until it is ready for publication. We hope to prepare it for a philosophical journal or a journal on Women’s studies. We hope that this will be published within the next few months.