



# Reasons of Conscience: The Bioethics Debate in Germany

*Stefan Sperling*

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The implicit questions that inevitably underlie German bioethics are the same ones that have pervaded all of German public life for decades: How could the Holocaust have happened? And how can Germans make sure that it will never happen again? In *Reasons of Conscience*, Stefan Sperling considers the bioethical debates surrounding embryonic stem cell research in Germany at the turn of the twenty-first century, highlighting how the country's ongoing struggle to come to terms with its past informs the decisions it makes today.

Sperling brings the reader unmatched access to the offices of the German parliament to convey the role that morality and ethics play in contemporary Germany. He describes the separate and interactive workings of the two bodies assigned to shape German bioethics—the parliamentary Enquiry Commission on Law and Ethics in Modern Medicine and the executive branch's National Ethics Council—tracing each institution's genesis, projected image, and operations, and revealing that the content of bioethics cannot be separated from the workings of these institutions. Sperling then focuses his discussion around three core categories—transparency, conscience, and Germany itself—arguing that without fully considering these, we fail to understand German bioethics. He concludes with an assessment of German legislators and regulators' attempts to incorporate criteria of ethical research into the German Stem Cell Law.

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