a Christian may not kill, a state may, especially when it came to the more severely disabled individuals whose “soul-life had not been raised above the plant or animal level.” And a prominent Protestant professor in Göttingen felt that “the elimination” of such “nuclei” or “sprouts” (Keime – he meant severely disabled individuals) “for which the force of human care will not be able to bring them to their destiny-appropriate development” could in fact be “compatible with full love of God and genuine humanitarianism.” Christians, he contended, believed that unlike nature, which sometimes produced mistakes, God was directed toward perfection. Thus, he wrote that if caregiving staff had tried, but “had the experience of being unable to awaken and nurture the personal life of an idiot, then one cannot in this case speak of a crime against a person.”1 These arguments provided religious legitimation for Binding and Hoche’s position.

Commentators who were directly involved in charity and care work, by contrast, were at pains in their texts to declare themselves opposed to killing, or to remind readers that Christianity strictly forbade it, and yet their texts often, and peculiarly, amplified rather than challenged a sense of revulsion toward the most severely disabled. Simultaneously, a number of these commentators took the opportunity of public interest in the theme of disability and its supposed high costs to drag in a welter of unrelated subjects, and above all to elaborate a variety of connecting links between sex and sin and disability.

Rather than functioning as opposition to Binding and Hoche, then, these responses created an accrual of further negative perspectives on the disabled. This had everything to do with conservative Christian distaste for the liberalization of sexual mores that had been going on already since the beginning of the twentieth century, but to them seemed to have reached its apotheosis in the Weimar Republic. Indeed, much mid-to-late 1920s response to Binding and Hoche pseudo-scientifically sourced disability as being a result of the sexual disorder of Weimar. Binding and Hoche had not mentioned sex; it took their self-defined Christian opponents to introduce, and then keep harping on, the idea that there was – as one author put it – a “connection,” indeed “a tight one,” “between idiocy and sin.”2

1 Karl Weidel, Karl Ernst Thrändorf, Ludwig Lemme, and Arthur Titius quoted in Ewald Meltzer, Das Problem der Abkürzung “lebensunwerten” Lebens (Halle: Carl Marhold, 1925), 76, 78, 81, 82.