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Compulsory Death:  
A Historiographic Study of the Eugenics and Euthanasia Movements in Nazi Germany

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Masters of Arts in History

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by

Michael Hawkins

May 2010

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Keywords: Eugenics, Euthanasia, Nazi Germany, Holocaust, Historiographic

## ABSTRACT

Compulsory Death:  
A Historiographic Study of the Eugenics and Euthanasia Movements in Nazi Germany

by

Michael Hawkins

This thesis is a historiographical study of the eugenics and euthanasia programs of Nazi Germany. It traces their development from the end of World War One to the fall of Hitler's Third Reich. There are three stages in this study. First, I examine eugenics after World War One and the effect the era had on society. Then I study the Nazi transition from eugenics measures to "euthanasia", and last I analyze the transferring of the killing methods from the "euthanasia" centers to the concentration camps. The questions of how did the idea for eugenics develop in Germany society, what role did World War One play in its development, why did the Nazis move from eugenics to "euthanasia", was the children's euthanasia program and *Aktion T-4* the same or different programs, did doctors willingly participate in the programs, was there a resistance to "euthanasia", and what role did the T-4 program play in the "Final Solution" are examined.

This study uses a wide range of secondary sources. It examines the authors of those sources arguments and if their work plays a role in our better understanding of the event. Many of these authors are the leading scholars in their field. This study concludes that these sources have led to our better understanding of the Holocaust, and the argument as to whether or not the mass murder of European Jewry was a well planned event or a trial and error process that led to mass murder.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Creating a Killing Society: The Effects World War One Had on European Society*

The eugenics and euthanasia program of Nazi Germany were two key elements to Hitler's goal to creating his perfect racial community, the *Volksgemeinschaft*. By examining these two programs historians have come to a better understanding of many of the ideological aspects of Nazi Germany. Understanding everything of the origins of these programs to their implementation into the Nazi death camps has shed a light on things like the effects World War One had European society, the role America played in the influence of Nazi ideas, the step from eugenics to euthanasia, the role the euthanasia program played in the Holocaust, and finally the historical argument of when did murder become the Nazis "Final Solution." By examining the scholarly work that has been done on these aspects of Nazism, the functionalism vs. intentionalism argument can final be concluded in favor of a synthesis of the two. Over the course of the following pages the historical arguments of the leading scholars who study the eugenics and euthanasia programs of Nazi Germany are examined. The Holocaust finds its roots in World War One, and because of that it is vital to understand the effects World War One had on European society.

World War One was a huge turning point in European history. Many European historians argue that it marked the end of the nineteenth century and the true beginning of the twentieth century. They say this because the old world style of culture and government was gone, and the new modern style had been born. One would think this would be a great thing for Europe, but as had been demonstrated, it was the opposite. The war itself lead to a massive loss

of life, economic disability in many nations, and a political atmosphere that would lead to rise of one of the most evil regimes the world had ever seen--Nazism.

From 1939-1945 the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* or NSDAP murdered almost six million Jews for ideological reasons. One of the questions that has arisen from this atrocity is; when did humanity get the capability to commit such a horrible act? The answer to that question is World War I; however, this answer poses another question, what kind of effect did World War I have on the idea of industrialized killing? The answer to this question has spawned great historical works by some of the world's leading historians on this subject. By looking at the historiography of the answer to this question, one can better understand how the Holocaust was able to take place. These leading historians have looked at the technology of war as well as the psychological and political effects of the war. However, none of their work has been grouped together and examined until now.

In order to comprehend where the origins of the human capabilities to commit such acts came from, it seems only logical to first try and grasp the origins of the technology the Germans used. Knowledge of the origins of the technology reveals the mindset of scientific community at the time. Since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Germany had been the leading nation in science and technology. According to John Cornwell in his book *Hitler's scientist* the Germans had been far ahead of any other nation in Europe in terms of the development of scientific knowledge. In the second chapter of his book, he refers to Germany as the "Mecca of Science."<sup>1</sup> According to Cornwell for years Germany had been leading the world in all of the fields of science. Many of the developments that German scientists made during World War I were later used during World

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<sup>1</sup>John Cornwell, *Hitler's Scientists: Science, War, and the Devil's Pact*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 38.

War II both on the battle fields and in the concentration camps.<sup>2</sup> This was made possible for two reasons. One is because death was so common in the First World War, and the second reason is because this new technology was so effective during the First World War. It was natural that they use them again later. While the gas that was invented by men like Fritz Haber was not used during World War II on the battlefield, it was used to kill Jews in the concentration camps. Cornwell argues that because of these developments, Hitler was able to carry out his policies of mass death.<sup>3</sup>

He also argues a new partnership developed between “civilian scientists and the military”<sup>4</sup> because civilian scientists were developing the latest and greatest of the military weapons. According to Cornwell the fact that these men were from Germany enabled them to develop and grow as scientists because of the scientific culture in Germany at the time. Although Cornwell stops shy of crediting Haber with the Holocaust, it was these developments that allowed the Holocaust to be so atrocious. While the author does not acknowledge that the weapons likely would have been developed even in the absence of Haber, it seems safe to infer that he feels Haber’s creations helped make it possible for the Third Reich to implement its racial policies.

The idea of the “Science of Racial Hygiene” had been something that was wide-spread throughout Germany and many other parts of Europe since around 1883. Cornwell argues that World War One had an effect on this idea as well. Because of the massive loss of life, people were now looking at life and death in different ways. Many Germans felt if they had weeded out the lesser people of their society they might not have lost the war. There was also the idea that

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<sup>2</sup> Cornwell, 40

<sup>3</sup> Cornwell, 59

<sup>4</sup> Cornwell, 61.

the “best” had been killed during the war, so eugenics measures had to be used to restore the balance. This idea was common in all other postwar societies not just Germany.

Cornwell makes mention of the technology that was used during the war as well. Regarding such technology as poisonous gas, machine guns, airplanes, tanks, and even trench warfare, Cornwell discusses, as do other historians, the impact these technologies had on the battle field as well as the mindset of the people using the weapons. While the technology needed to kill on a massive scale had been around, World War One both refined the old technology and saw the development of new technology. World War I also saw for the first time the human capability to implement such horrific weaponry.

Knowledge of the technology of the war is vital, but what also is important is to understand the effect on the human mind. The war left more than just visible scares; it also left many soldiers insane. Historians tend to forget that war involves more than just combatants; it also involves civilians. Many civilians who were affected by the war were left with psychological scaring as well. Omer Bartov’s book titled *Murder in our Midst* discusses the psychological effect World War I had on the participants and civilians. In his first two chapters he not only asserts a link exists between the ideal of the heroic image of war and mass killing but also argues that war by nature introduces men to mass death and in turn genocide.<sup>5</sup> Bartov believes that the new technology had shattered the old world’s heroic image of war and that many of the officers feared that new technology such as the machine gun would turn the battle fields into “death factories”.<sup>6</sup> He also makes the case that new technology was turning war into an industry and, by that fact, that technology was now so important to war, making death an industry as well. War was no longer going to be decided by just whose military had the greater

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<sup>5</sup>Omer Bartov, *Murder in our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 15.

<sup>6</sup>Bartov, 21.

human skill but by which had the best technology. For Bartov this is also led to desensitization to death. Now that life could be so easily taken away by technology, it was no longer as valuable as it once was. When one nation can lose almost sixty thousand men in a single day, the importance and value of life is somehow lost.

Bartov argues that “the architects and executioners of the ‘Final Solution’ underwent their own baptism by fire” in which he is referring to their service on the battlefields of World War One.<sup>7</sup> This trauma had a huge effect on their psyche. As proof of this, Bartov would point to Ernst Jünger who in his book *The Storm of Steel* chronicled the impact of the war on the average soldiers. For Jünger the battlefield toyed with a soldiers mind: Gas mask-clad pickets become demons that he converses with, fields of dead and dying exude a sweet smell that drives the living insane, men disappear for no apparent reason and are never to be seen again.<sup>8</sup> Events like this torment soldiers and can reshape their minds.

For Bartov places like “Auschwitz could neither have been imagined, nor constructed and set to work without the experiences and memory of the Great War.”<sup>9</sup> It created a fascination with death because killing was now so easy and not just the ability to kill an individual but the ability to slaughter millions of people. When combined with Cornwell’s insights about the emerging technology of war, Bartov’s assertions seem entirely plausible: by combining the mindset produced by modern industrial war with the corresponding technology, the foundations for the conceptualization of a system like Auschwitz were possible. Bartov is correct in his argument as well, without the many experiences of World War One and the effects that those experiences had on society, it is hard to conceive of a place such as Auschwitz, but it is also

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<sup>7</sup>Bartov, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Jünger, Ernst, *Storm of Steel: From the diary of a German storm-troop officer on the western front*, (New York: H. Fertig, 1975), 94.

<sup>9</sup>Bartov, 23.

important to remember that just because World War One was so horrible for society that did not grantee that a place such as Auschwitz was a given. Many other events had to take place in order for this death camp to be conceived.

In *Murder in our Midst* Bartov also makes the interesting point that there are resemblances between battlefield accounts in World War I literature and accounts of the Holocaust; he states there are “striking aspects of the battlefield descriptions in Great War literature in the extent to which they resemble accounts of the Holocaust.” He goes on to say that these images are rooted in “the sense of existing in an unimaginable environment.”<sup>10</sup> The fields of death on the Western front of World War One and the horrific images of Crematories 2 and 3 at Auschwitz were both unthinkable before the outbreak of the war, but the images of the piles of bodies in the former, seared into collective European memory, made it possible to envision the pile of bodies in the latter.

What made this industrialization of war possible? Bartov offers an answer that covers the question well. With the growing industrialization of Europe and changes in the economic and social structures since the revolutions of 1848, it seemed highly likely the next war in Europe to break out was going to be one such as World War One. It also had a profound impact on the political situations of both Germany and France. These changes in turn affected the militaries of both countries. So, as time progressed without a major war and the technology had become more advanced, when war does finally break out in 1914, a senseless bloody affair seems to be the most likely result.

In the closing of the first section of Bartov’s book, the author suggests that scholars do not like to link the Great War with the Holocaust because it is very “discomforting” to associate war between nations with genocide, yet he argues that is the case with the World War I. Thus

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<sup>10</sup>Bartov, 33.

because of the “introduction of industrial killing to the battlefield, the systematic murder of whole peoples became both practical and thinkable: those who had experienced the former could imagine and plan, organize, and perpetrate the latter.”<sup>11</sup> This is observation helps to summarize everything that Bartov has set out to prove about the link between the Great War and the Holocaust.

Knowing both the technology and the mindset that allowed industrial killing to come to Europe helps us comprehend how Hitler was able to enact his killing policies. This knowledge can come about by looking at how the policies of industrial killing were able to come to the forefront. While Bartov’s book helps with this notation by looking at Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann’s book, *The Racial State*, one comprehends how World War One helped lead to the rise of the Nazis. It seems only obvious that World War One is directly responsible for the atmosphere that leads to the rise of Hitler and his party. What kind of role did this atmosphere play? While their book is dedicated to the racial policies of the Third Reich not the rise of Nazism out of World War One, the authors do use the first chapter of their book to explain the effects World War One had on German society.

Burleigh and Wippermann talk about Hitler’s “Stab in the back” theory.<sup>12</sup> This theory attributed Germany's losing the war not to military defeat on the battlefield but to the public's failure to respond to its "patriotic calling" at the most crucial of times and to intentional sabotaging of the war effort particularly by Jews, Socialists, and Bolsheviks. *Der dolchstoß* (literally dagger to the back) is cited as an important factor in Adolf Hitler's later rise to power, as the Nazi Party grew its original political base stemmed largely from embittered World War

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<sup>11</sup> Bartov, 50.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 37.

One veterans and those sympathetic to the *dolchstoß* interpretation of Germany's then-recent history.

The stab-in-the-back theory of German defeat was very popular among the German people. Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels was able to take full advantage of this rhetoric. According to Doris L. Bergen in her book *War and Genocide*, the Great War affected the image people had of the Jews and other races living in Europe at the time of the war.<sup>13</sup> Bergen believes that the German refusal to accept defeat led them to scapegoat other ethnicities. This happened to be the Jews, communists, homosexuals, or anyone else that was considered an outsider. In 1918 Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff asked the German government to sue for peace. They realized that Germany did not have the resources to carry on the war. In an effort to save their own reputations, however, they blamed it on the German civilians losing their nerve to fight. According to Bergen the two top generals claimed “it was the disloyal, revolutionary home front...that had stabbed the fighting men in the back and betrayed them to their enemies.”<sup>14</sup> Hitler was able to make great use of this myth because German military leaders had done nothing to refute it by the time he came into the national spotlight. He was therefore able to take the myth and apply it to the Jews. Instead of it being the patriotic people of Germany, it was in fact the Jews and other “outsiders” who caused them to lose World War One.

Bergen also illustrates the effects that World War One had on the “cheapening of human life.”<sup>15</sup> One of the most important things to come out of the Great War, she concludes, was it seemed to “many Europeans to prove that human life was cheap and expendable.”<sup>16</sup> Bergen also links the cheapening of human life to the growth of Nazism. World War One left lasting effects

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<sup>13</sup> Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, (Lanham MD, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 26.

<sup>14</sup> Bergen, 47.

<sup>15</sup> Bergen, 26

<sup>16</sup> Bergen, 28

on Europe, and in Germany life was confusing and frightening for those who remained during this time. The amount of bloodshed that occurred during the Great War was massive and had been unseen in Europe. People now saw life as being less important. Thus paramilitary groups were able to recruit and spread more rapidly than before the war, and this in turn led to the rise and growth of Nazism.

Burleigh and Wippermann also discuss the effects World War One had on the euthanasia movement in Europe. After the war the notion of quality was raised again by society. The Great War had cost the country the lives of many of its best and brightest young men.<sup>17</sup> Society was now suffering because of this loss. The idea was to take what the Nazis perceived as the “worst” of society and either euthanize them or sterilize them. This path if followed would lead Germany into becoming a better and much stronger nation by eliminating the “weak” and deliberately nurturing and promoting the “strong”. The Führer later enacted euthanasia programs on the sick and mentally ill of Germany; according to him, this would make Germany a mightier nation. He marketed this idea as an act that would save the nation money.

While it is common knowledge that Hitler blamed the Jews for Germany’s defeat in World War One, it is not as well known that he also laid part of the blame on them for the outbreak of the war. He also blamed them for the German Revolution and credited them as the ‘fathers’ of Weimar Germany. According to Hitler, “the Jews in Germany and elsewhere were the champions of ‘Marxism’, the ‘dictatorship’ of the ‘proletariat’, ‘democracy’ and the majority principle”.<sup>18</sup> It seems obvious that Hitler was greatly affected by both the war itself and its outcome. These are the ideas that inspired him to seek his rise to power. The German people were left dazed after the defeat of World War One, and Hitler had the ability to recognize this

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<sup>17</sup> Burleigh and Wippermann, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Burleigh and Wippermann, 41.

weakness and exploit it. He was able to impose his ideas and views of the world on a vulnerable Germany society.

The Great War left Europe, especially Germany, susceptible to political upheaval and according to Wolfgang Mommsen in his book *Imperial Germany: 1867-1918*, it was the perfect atmosphere for the growth of political ideas. Mommsen argues in the last part of his book that World War One caused great social consequences in Germany.<sup>19</sup> Mommsen points out that the old world was gone. The war had brought an end not only to the old European diplomatic system but to the German political system as well. The collapse of both left a void not soon to be replaced.<sup>20</sup> The author shows how the failing economy led the German people to stage a revolution that resulted in the rise of the Weimar Republic. The Great War had such a huge impact on the economy of Germany that people were suffering and felt it was the government's fault. However, the economy is not the only thing that led to the revolution in Germany and the rise of the Weimar Republic. Mommsen briefly mentions the feelings that the German people had about the left-wing politicians stabbing them in the back politically but fails to emphasize the importance of the stab-in-the-back myth for the German mindset. Thus, his explanation of the political environment in which Hitler rose to power is sound, even though he neglects to explore the psychology of German society at the time.

One of the worst effects of the war was the devaluing human life. Instead of people coming out of the war with a better understanding of the importance of life, they viewed life as less valuable. New technologies enabled the idea due to its ease of destroying multiple lives within a short period. Killing had in part become industrialized on the battlefield as well as within the factory with the production of weaponry. This technology and the massive loss of

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<sup>19</sup> Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867-1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State* (New York: Arnold Press, 1997), 217.

<sup>20</sup> Mommsen, 217.

lives also lead to the image of war changing. War in centuries past carried a heroic image with it. War was where boys become men. It was a great honor to fight for your country and come back home to tell about it. But with World War One not many boys came home to tell of great deeds. War was no longer something between great men; which general could lead his troops best was no longer the only determining factor of the battle. The skill of the men with their weapons was also less important. War was about who had the better technology and who was able to take better advantage of its uses. It was no longer men meeting on the battle field to fight; it was technology meeting on the battle field simply to kill. All men did now was stay in the trenches and suffer through the horrendous conditions they were forced to endure. They had no stories to tell of a great battle; they only had stories of death. War had lost its great heroic image.

The First World War was not directly responsible for the Holocaust, but it fostered ideas that created genocide. It seems obvious, however, given the historiography, that World War One played a huge role in the development of Nazism and the enabling of Hitler to commit the atrocities of the Holocaust. With the growth of the technology and the power of rhetoric, World War One created an atmosphere for mass murder. The Great War left Germany and most of Europe bankrupt and with waning economies. The society was disillusioned with its government and the outcome of the war. This weakness fostered the perfect climate for the growth of Nazism. World War One also changed how European society viewed both war and death. War no longer had a heroic image; it now only carried the image of massive graves. Technology and ideology had taken the heroic image out of war. It also changed the perception of human view life; life was no longer sacred and meaningful. It was less valuable than before; technology had provided society with the means for mass killing. This showed society that technology could

destroy anything. Out of this cesspool of death and chaos grew one of the most evil and murderous régimes in history--the Nazis.

## CHAPTER 2

### INFLUENCING HITLER: THE INFLUENCES OF THE GERMAN EUGENICS MOVEMENT

Eugenics programs were part of the Nazi Racial Hygiene program that was meant to purify the blood of Germany once again. By sterilizing those who qualified as “*Lebensunwertes Leben*“, or life unworthy of life, the Germans would then be able to reach the prominence they once held in the world. This program led to the forced sterilization of tens of thousands. However, it is often thought that this idea was unique to National Socialism, but that is incorrect. Eugenic movements had long been a part of Western thought. The following pages examine the scholarly works on the Eugenics programs in the west and their impact on Nazi ideas. It then traces the development of the Nazi programs and their evolution from Eugenics to Euthanasia.

Eugenics was a pseudoscience that aimed to “purify” society of the “undesirables“. The ideal race was one of blond hair and blue eyes. It is often a misconception that the blonde haired, blue eyed master race was Hitler’s idea. This notion has its origins in America and more specifically California. In 1902 David Starr Jordon, president of Stanford University, published *Blood of a Nation*, which stimulated the emergence of the American eugenics movement. Edwin Black points out the role that Stanford’s president played in the development of the eugenics movements in America in his book *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and American’s Campaign to Create a Master Race*. Black traces the influence of the American pseudoscientific movement from its origins in university laboratories through its use in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany.

The origins of America’s war with the “feble-minded” began with university professors, scientists, the wealthy elite, and corporate Americans. The professors and scientists came up with ideas of “raceology” and ways in which to carry out their goals of purifying the Nordic race

of America, while America's rich elite funded the process. The victims of this quest, this war, were often "poor urban dwellers" and "immigrants from across Europe, Blacks, Jews, Mexicans, Native Americans, epileptics, alcoholics, petty criminals, the mentally ill and anyone else who did not resemble the blond and blue Nordic ideal."<sup>21</sup> Black argues that these victims would never have suffered had it not been for the "backing of corporate philanthropic largess."<sup>22</sup> Black's argument is a sound one, because most of the philanthropic work done by large American corporations at this time was done in order to help this pseudoscience.

A primary example of this type of corporate philanthropic work is the Carnegie Institution's Station for Experimental Evolution at Cold Spring Harbor. This was the east coast hub for eugenics research.<sup>23</sup> With wealthy supporters such as the widow of E.H Harriman and her daughter, Cold Spring Harbor sought a global solution to this alleged problem of humanity. The powers that be at Cold Harbor wanted to recruit the best and brightest scientists and scholars in the field of racial science the world had to offer. They even gained political supporters for the ideas and practices. They held meetings with high level government officials, even with President Theodore Roosevelt.

As Black points out many fail to see that eugenics was an idea that gained massive support in the United States. It was encouraged to grow and prosper with the support of legal statutes and money from some of the most powerful and influential people in America at the time. Something that is also forgotten is the influence American eugenics societies had on Nazi ideas. For an understanding of the link between American and Nazi eugenics movements, Stefan Kühl's *The Nazi Connection* provides the best information. Kühl traces the link between the two

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<sup>21</sup> Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and American's Campaign to Create the Master Race*, (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003) pp. xvi.

<sup>22</sup> Black, pp. xvii

<sup>23</sup> Black, pp. 43

nation's eugenics ideas from their origins until they began to lose momentum in America because of their growth in Nazi Germany.

Kühl points out that the Nazis repeatedly emphasized that they used the United States as a model for their own race policies; in fact, Hitler was personally interested in American eugenics developments. Hitler sent personal letters to two leading American eugenicists requesting copies of their books on the subject. The two eugenicists, Leon Whitney and Madison Grant, eagerly sent the Nazi leader the requested copies; Hitler in return sent personal letters of appreciation to the two men, letters they often bragged about receiving.<sup>24</sup> The *Rassenpolitische Auslandskorrespondenz* was the main Nazi observer of racial policies in foreign circles; they published eleven reports on American eugenics activities between 1933 and 1939, of which four concerned American support of Nazi policies. According to Kühl in this regard America played a prominent role in Nazi propaganda.<sup>25</sup> The RPAS noted that Germany was a disciple of other civilized societies. During the 1930s Nazi newspapers and journals repeatedly praised American eugenics measures. They also argued that while the US was more limited in some of its practices, some states practiced a more radical form than the Nazis. Interestingly Kühl notes the Nazis, unlike in the United States, refused to use sterilization as punishment and criticized American arbitrary method of enforcement. Kühl shows that while the Nazis may have been influenced by American eugenics measures, they still felt the Americans needed to take their programs to the next level.

The Americans did however have immigration laws that kept people with hereditary diseases and non-Nordic features from entering the country. Laws such as these are what Kühl points out as having direct influence on Nazi policies. Kühl also notes that many American

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<sup>24</sup> Stefan Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics American Racism and German National Socialism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) pp 85.

<sup>25</sup> Kuhl, pp.53

eugenicists were aware and some were even proud of their impact on Nazi legislation.<sup>26</sup> Several Nazi laws were influenced by US immigration laws. However, once again the Nazis took American laws to the next level. While the American laws did not allow ones they deemed “undesirable” to be sterilized, the Nazis forced sterilization on them.

The founder of German racial science, Alfred Ploetz, said that America was the “bold leader in the realm of eugenics.”<sup>27</sup> Comments like those show the relationship and admiration between American and German eugenics leaders. Statements such as the one by Ploetz went both ways; American eugenicists also admired the work of the Germans. They admired it so much that they made frequent trips to Germany to meet with the leading German eugenicists. Even after 1933 when Hitler came to power, the American Eugenics Society “boasted that eugenics had enjoyed a steady increase in public interest since 1934.”<sup>28</sup> They believed this was the result of the American media’s coverage of Hitler’s plans to sterilize 400,000 people. This gives an insight into the mindset of the 1930s in America. The idea of a perfect society was so strong that some eugenicists in America were willing to look to someone like Hitler and Nazi Germany for inspiration.

Although America and its eugenics programs and laws had a great influence on German eugenics, it was not the only influence. The culture that was created as a result of World War One also had a profound impact. The war had left German society dazed and confused, with many unable to explain what had just happened. World War One had toppled the monarchy and given birth to the largely unpopular Weimar Republic. That society did, however, believe that its best and brightest had just been lost. Moreover, during the 1920s many in Germany came to believe that the society they lived in had slipped into degradation and immorality. Eugenics

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<sup>26</sup> Kühn, pp. 43

<sup>27</sup> Kühn, pp. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Kühn, pp. 53.

seemed to offer a solution to this problem; it wanted to cleanse society of those who were allegedly degrading Germany and the ones who were responsible for Germany's loss in the Great War. In addition, eugenics could aid the rebuilding of the 'healthy' German racial stock. Weimar Germany for many was a culture of decadence. Certain segments of society no longer trusted its government, leading to a situation of growing mistrust and social disunity. This distrust, disunity, and social decay led eugenicists and parts of society to believe that eugenics measures were going to save the body of the German nation. Many of the same issues that preoccupied the minds of racial hygienists before the war continued to take center stage. Some of those concerns were the degeneration of the national hereditary stock, population policy, and the alleged financial drain of maintaining the unfit in mental institutions, hospitals, and nursing homes.<sup>29</sup> After the loss of more than two million men, the idea of restoring the hereditary stock began to move to the front as the primary concern. Many eugenicists saw themselves as "nation healers" and it was their responsibility to restore German stock back to its prewar prominence. Racial hygienists aimed to save German society from itself; they were going to scourge society of its crime, venereal disease, tuberculosis (TB), alcoholism, falling birthrate, and other social ills that plagued society.<sup>30</sup> According to Mark Mazower's book *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, the other social ills of society were "Juvenile delinquents or the sexually promiscuous were also seen as jeopardizing family stability and public order".<sup>31</sup> Also for Mazower many of the men who left as the best and brightest of the nation came home scared and changed. Many of these soldiers were now making up large portions of the categories that were degrading society. Not only did suicide rates of young men rise just after the war, but so did

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<sup>29</sup> Sheila Faith Weiss, "German Eugenics 1890-1933" in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, ed. Sara J. Bloomfield, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) pp. 23

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 23

<sup>31</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's twentieth century*, (Vintage Books: New York, 1998), 77-78.

domestic violence cases. For many women their husbands had come home very violent and were looking to displace their anger.

For Mazower these issues society faced after World War One not only affected Germany but the whole of Europe. World War One had started the process of creating the perfect society for the rise of Nazism and Fascism. These two political systems came along when they did and grew in popularity as did they because they “fit-in” now.<sup>32</sup> This can be compared to a puzzle, when working a puzzle always starts at the outer edges and work your way to the center. World War One was the edges, the affects it had on society were the center pieces, and final Nazism and Fascism was the final piece of puzzle. They were the perfect fit for the time and place that European society had arrived.

The defeat in World War One also caused another problem in the eyes of German racial hygienists, for example, the mixing of races in regions such as the Rhineland. The French used troops from its colonial empire (Arab and African) to police this region.<sup>33</sup> This caused in the eyes of German society lesser races to mix with pure European white races. For eugenics supporters at the time, this was going to lead to the further decay of society. Their idea was that the good that had been left after the war was now going to be overtaken by the mixed blood. A few racial hygienists felt the French were intentionally doing this in order to keep the Germans down. People like Edwin Baur believed the French knew how this would affect society and by mixing these lesser peoples blood with the good German stock, they would lessen what was left of society and always be able to keep the Germans down.

Later in World War Two the French again drafted by all accounts 100,000 men from its West African colonies to serve in the French army to defend French from the German attack.

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<sup>32</sup> Mazower, 78-79

<sup>33</sup> Weiss, “German Eugenics 1890-1933”, 23.

According to many historical accounts these troops when captured were subjected to substandard treatment by the Germans, and more often than not they were simply shot a point blank range. According to Raffael Scheck in his article, “The Killing of Black Soldiers from the French Army by the *Wehrmacht* in 1940: The Question of Authorization, 20,000 of the *Tirailleurs senegalais*, as they were known, were killed, and another 15-20,00 that were sent to German POW camps were mistreated often being beaten and starved to death.<sup>34</sup> Scheck raises the question of authorization for these killings, was it on the initiative of the *Wehrmacht* leaders or did the command come from a higher authority. Scheck makes the argument that the authorization came from the Army officers, and that in some cases the soldiers took it up on themselves to kill these black soldiers.<sup>35</sup> Scheck believes that the propaganda that was being produced by the Nazis greatly influenced these soldiers’ actions. For Scheck these are some of the first racial motivated killings of the war.<sup>36</sup> This anti-African sentiment traces back to the soldiers who occupied the Rhineland after World War One and shows the Nazis racism was not just against Jews. Given the low number of casualties involved when compared to the massive number of Jews killed, this had been a relatively unexplored aspect of World War Two until the late 1990s. There are also some historians who make the argument that some of the African French troops were sent to concentration camps in the east; however, this is a false claim. There is no supporting evidence to suggest that any of those soldiers were ever sent to any concentration camp.

The Great War had allowed eugenics to grow in popularity. Well known eugenicists now were able to reach a wider audience with brochures, pamphlets, newsletters, and even traveling

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<sup>34</sup> Raffael Scheck, “The Killing of Black Soldiers from the French Army by the *Wehrmacht* in 1940: The Question of Authorization”, *German Studies Review*, 28(3), 2005, 596.

<sup>35</sup> Scheck, 596.

<sup>36</sup> Scheck, 597.

exhibitions.<sup>37</sup> In order to expand their audience further racial hygienists in Berlin created the *Deutscher Bund Fur Volksaufartung und Erbkunde* (German League for National Regeneration and Heredity) in 1925.<sup>38</sup> This was an organization for eugenics education in Germany. Its main purpose was to spread the idea of eugenics to as many people as possible. Part of the organization's name reflected a national mood at the time. "National Regeneration" (*Volksaufartung*) was a concern because of the high losses of World War One. It reflected a spirit of optimism about the ability to regenerate German society. The league's slogan, "Protect German Heredity and thus the German Type" had nationalistic appeal.

The Weimar period also brought professionalism and institutionalization to eugenics. This also helped eugenics ideas gain popularity during this time, especially since racial classification now seemed to be proven scientifically and thus had been given the imprimatur and legitimacy of science. According to Eric Ehrenreich's *The Nazi Ancestral Proof* people throughout Germany wanted to use science as a way to prove racial classification. This was justification enough for many people; if science proves it then it is correct. This professionalism had brought a universal acceptance to eugenics. Ehrenreich argues that "the reason behind this acceptance was that a great amount of Germans *wanted* to believe that racist ideas had been scientifically proven."<sup>39</sup> However, people glazed over the fact this was manipulation of what science truly stood for, the truth. Eugenicists were simply taking science and making it fit their wild theories of race.

Ehrenreich also points to the spread of eugenics literature as another reason why eugenics developed so much during the Weimar Republic. The publication of pamphlets and brochures

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<sup>37</sup> Weiss, "German Eugenics 1890-1933", pp. 24

<sup>38</sup> Weiss, "German Eugenics 1890-1933", pp. 26

<sup>39</sup> Eric Ehrenreich, *The Nazi Ancestral Proof: Genealogy, Racial Science, and the Final Solution*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007) pp. xii

grew tenfold during the 1920s and 1930s. While Ehrenreich does not point to a direct cause for this, it is safe to infer part of the reason was the growing support from the scientific and intellectual community. This community must publish in order to survive, if not then perish. Eugenicists widely published their pseudoscientific finds under legitimate publications. They were also in a better position to create their institutes and reform the practices and ideas of old institutes. After the fall of the *Kaiserreich* two words began to appear more and more in eugenics publications, “science” and “biology”.<sup>40</sup> Having already discussed the impact of the word science, the word biology needs some explanation. Biology had a similar impact on the idea of eugenics. Now that biologists were taking an interest in eugenics, it had a more scientific following and more legitimacy. Literature that was being published for wide circulation used the words eugenics and biology together, almost as though they were interchangeable words. Eugenics had become a subject taught in school as if it were biology.

#### *The Nazis Come to Power*

The *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (Nazis) came to power in January of 1933 with the swearing in of Adolf Hitler as chancellor. However, at first Hitler and his Nazis were not all powerful. His party’s numbers in the November 1932 election were down from their July 1932 high of 37%.<sup>41</sup> While eugenics laws had been discussed at length prior to the Nazis, it was the Nazi attitude and determination to create a racial *Volksgemeinschaft* that touched off a radicalizing process. Historians have separated Nazi eugenics into two broad categories; positive and negative.

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<sup>40</sup> Ehrenreich, pp. 39

<sup>41</sup> Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 55.

The word “positive” can be somewhat misleading, for when dealing with eugenics nothing is “positive”. However, positive eugenics is not forced sterilization, it is quite the opposite; positive eugenics encourages people to mate. Moreover, positive eugenics was an aspect that promoted growth of those deemed “fit” to procreate. There was, however, a catch, the Nazis positive eugenics only applied to the right couples. They encouraged Aryan women to mate with Aryan men. This aspect has led to great historical debate on the notion of women’s role in Nazi Germany. The historian Gisela Bock makes a strong case that Nazi racial policy, at least early on was more clearly anti-female than anti-Jewish. Bock's best known work was her 1986 book *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus* (Forced Sterilization in National Socialism), a study of the 400,000 compulsory sterilizations performed in Nazi Germany from 1934-1945. Bock examined the history of sterilization in Nazi Germany from above and below. She claimed that sexism and racism in Nazism were linked so closely as to be inseparable. She also claimed that the Nazi sterilization policy was not a prelude to the genocidal policies but rather an integral part of the population policy of the regime. Finally, Bock maintains pronatalism was not the main concern of Nazi women's policy but instead its principle focus was anti-natalism.<sup>42</sup> She claimed that by threatening all German women with the possibility of compulsory sterilization or abortion if they were not producing children that were "racially fit", the regime victimized all women. Bock’s last claim is the most controversial issue. Bock's assertions is that women who were sterilized suffered more than men who were sterilized and, therefore, the pain experienced by those women who were sterilized should be projected onto the female population of Germany. Many historians such as Claudia Koonz have claimed that Nazi population policies were as much pronatal as they were anti-natal and the experience of those

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<sup>42</sup> Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik*, (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986), 132.

women sterilized cannot be projected onto all women under the Third Reich. In some of her more extreme versions Bock is suggesting that women were as much if not more than victims of Nazism than the Jews. Bock also makes the claim that the Nazis saw women as inferior, despite the emphasis they put on women as the key to building the racial *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Much of Koonz's and other historians' problem with Bock's argument come from the view from which she looked at these events. Bock is applying a modern feminist perspective, so by definition they had to have been antifemale. If, however, you view the issue from the Nazi perspective, the desire to build a racial state, then their policies don't seem so antiwomen. Even the negative eugenics e.g. forced sterilization seem more 'racially' motivated than anti women. Koonz's book *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the family, and Nazi politics* argues almost the exact opposite of Bock. She argues that women such as Ilse Koch who most successfully asserted themselves in the Third Reich were also the women who violated the norms of civilized society. For Koonz women like Ilse Koch prove that Bock's argument is not sound. Koonz maintains that only women who were opposed to Nazism completely can be considered to be a resistance; those women who protested against sterilization and the Action T4 program but who did not protest the deportation of Jews to death camps are not considered to be part of the resistance. Also for Koonz women under the Third Reich benefited too much from the régime to be considered victims. Moreover, for Koonz women participated in Nazism to avidly to be place in the victim category. Koonz, however, is not saying that all women inside of Nazi Germany willingly took part in Nazism; she is simply saying that women inside of Nazi Germany cannot be classified as victims of the Reich. Koonz's argument is the best of this historical debate, Bock argument loses some of its credibility because she often says that German women suffered more the Jews did, men or women, and that it simply not the case. Koonz, however, proves that

many women did benefit from the Nazis' policies and therefore were in no way victims of the Nazi régime. While there women who fell victim to the Nazis, they in no way suffered more than Jews did during the years of Nazi reign.

The first step in negative eugenics began on June 28, 1933, when Wilhelm Frick, Reich Minister of the Interior, drew up a detailed plan of "Population and race policy".<sup>43</sup> On July 14, 1933, the next step took place. Hitler issued the "Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring", requiring physicians to register every case of hereditary illness known to them except in women over forty-five years of age. The law also stated physicians could be fined for failing to comply.<sup>44</sup> This law was both positive eugenics and negative eugenics. It was meant to show who was and was not "fit" to reproduce. This law was far more directive than the Weimar government's plan. People with so-called hereditary illnesses had to be sterilized even if they objected. The law established some 200 Genetic Health Courts at which teams of lawyers and doctors would subpoena medical records in order to choose candidates for sterilization. The Court proceedings were secret, and the decisions could rarely be reversed. The new Nazi law was coauthored by Falk Ruttke, a lawyer, Arthur Gütt, a physician and director of public health affairs, and Ernst Rüdin, a psychiatrist and early leader of the German racial hygiene movement. Individuals who were subject to the law were those men and women who "suffered" from any conditions assumed to be hereditary, such as feeble-mindedness, schizophrenia, manic-depressive disorder, genetic epilepsy, Huntington's chorea (a fatal form of dementia), genetic blindness, genetic deafness, severe physical deformity, and chronic alcoholism.<sup>45</sup> This law also included

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<sup>43</sup> Gisela Bock, "Nazi Sterilization and Reproductive Policies", in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, ed. Sara J. Bloomfield, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 61.

<sup>44</sup> Bock, 62.

<sup>45</sup> Bock, 68.

Roma and Sinti, who were classified as “asocial”.<sup>46</sup> These were less important targets to Hitler. According to Ian Kershaw in *Hitler: A Profile in Power* almost half a million people would be forcibly sterilized. In 1934 the first year the law was enacted, more than 3,500 people were sterilized against their will.<sup>47</sup> Wilhelm Frick, the Nazi minister of interior, went as far as to say that some 20 percent of the German population needed to be sterilized. Doris Bergen suggests in her book *War and Genocide* that the actual number of people sterilized was close to .5 percent of the population.<sup>48</sup>

Prior to the Nazis there had been laws that had prohibited one from doing bodily harm to others. On May 26, 1933, however, that law was amended by a short paragraph that “permitted doctors to perform voluntary eugenic sterilizations”.<sup>49</sup> The Nazis had to do this in order to keep the process legitimate and lawful. Eric Ehrenreich argues this worked as well, according to his book *The Nazi Ancestral Proof*, the Nazis were testing the waters. Ehrenreich contends that they wanted to see how such laws would be accepted by German society.<sup>50</sup> Something else they wanted to see was how these laws were going to sit with the courts. However, the Nazis first troubles did not arise out of legal problems but moral ones. After the sterilization laws of July 14 the Catholic Church raised some objections. In 1930 the Pope had issued an encyclical, *Casti Connubi*, that condemned sterilization as moral and ethically wrong. Hitler, however, had insisted that “all measures are legitimate which serve the preservation of the German people.”<sup>51</sup> For the most part the Church dropped the issue; the only thing they asked was that Catholic judges and officials not be asked to enforce the laws. At this time Hitler was not powerful enough

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<sup>46</sup> Bergen, 63.

<sup>47</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: A Profile in Power*, (London: Longman Press, 1991)

<sup>48</sup> Bergen, 64.

<sup>49</sup> Bock, 67.

<sup>50</sup> Ehrenreich, 62-63

<sup>51</sup> Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik*, (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986), 230-242.

to break the hold the Church had on Germany. Hitler was yet to know it, but the church itself would play a large role in the “official” ending of the euthanasia program.

According to Ehrenreich the racial laws were started in Imperial Germany more than 40 years before Hitler, and as Germany grew and developed over time these laws just progressed with the nation. His book is the first detailed study of the laws that forced Germans to prove their ancestry. Ehrenreich argues that while the Germans claimed to have resisted, they wanted the laws. These laws now justified morally the feelings of many. This caused widespread acceptance of the racial laws and the ancestral proof laws. The acceptance also helped usher in both the euthanasia program and what became the ‘Final Solution’.

On April 1, the Nazi Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels, declared a national economic boycott against Jewish-owned business. The boycott was carefully planned to begin simultaneously in every city and town at ten o’clock that morning. Uniformed and often armed *Sturmabteilung* or SA men were placed in front of every store or business owned by Jews. Customers were prevented from entering. Guards were also placed at the offices of Jewish lawyers and doctors. The national boycott was one of the first anti-Jewish acts by the Nazis after they come to power. The Star of David was painted in yellow and black across thousands of doors and windows with accompanying anti-Semitic slogans. Signs were posted saying "Don't Buy from Jews" and "The Jews Are Our Misfortune."<sup>52</sup> Throughout Germany acts of violence against individual Jews and Jewish property occurred; the police intervened only rarely. Before this the Nazis had largely confined themselves to anti-Jewish propaganda. Bergen contends that this was the Nazis first attempt at driving as many Jews out of Germany as possible by denying them an economic livelihood. While the boycott for the most part was not violent, it was meant

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<sup>52</sup> Karl A. Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy Toward German Jews 1933-1939*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), pp. 63

to show German-Jews they were not wanted and had no future in Germany. Although the national boycott operation organized by local Nazi party chiefs lasted only one day and was ignored by many individual Germans who continued to shop in Jewish-owned stores, it marked the beginning of a nationwide campaign by the Nazi party against the entire German Jewish population.

By the end of 1933 “racial hygiene” had been legalized and institutionalized. Perhaps the most remarkable part was the sterilizations courts. No other nations that had sterilization laws developed such courts. These courts consisted of three judges, only one of whom was a professional judge; the other two were either psychiatrists, geneticists, population scientists, or anthropologists.<sup>53</sup> A simple majority vote and sentence was passed, and there were no appeals. The judges of these courts had the full backing of the law, so decisions were never overturned. For eugenicists there was from a legal point of view no greater desire than what the Nazis had done in Germany. The Nazis had simply taken laws they liked from other nations around the world and perfected them, at least in their twisted minds. Eugenicists from all over the world looked to Germany as an example of what a nation needed to do in order to implement an active and progressive racial policy.

After sterilizations had been made fully legal, further institutional revolutions followed. The most important of these revolutions was the unification of the Public Health System, which created the term *Erb und Rassenpflege* or heredity and racial care.<sup>54</sup> This was the Nazi term for eugenics and ethnic racism; it placed public health in the care of state doctors who ran State Health Offices. This whole system had but one task, to “implement the three core laws of National Socialist hereditary and racial policy: first the sterilization law, second, the infamous

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<sup>53</sup> Bock, *Nazi Sterilization*, 70.

<sup>54</sup> Bock, *Nazi Sterilization*, 71.

Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor (Blood Protection Law) of September 1935, which banned marriage and sexual intercourse between German Jews and non-Jewish Germans; and third, the Marital Health Law, of October 1935, which banned marriages between the ‘superior’ and the ‘inferior’.<sup>55</sup> To aid in helping Germans select a proper mate, the Nazis issued a pamphlet with ten simple rules to keep in mind. These were known as the “Ten Commandments for Choosing a Mate” and were published by the Reich Committee for Public Health.

The Blood Protection Law was the first of the Nuremberg Laws. The law stated: “Entirely convinced that the purity of German blood is essential to the further existence of the German people, and inspired by the uncompromising determination to safeguard the future of the German nation, the Reichstag has unanimously resolved upon the following law”.<sup>56</sup> The laws that followed were meant to restrict the legal rights of Jews as much as possible. These laws were the Nazis first attempt at legal enforcing anti-Semitism and understanding Nazi anti-Semitism is a key component in understand the eugenics and euthanasia programs. While the Nazis racial hygiene programs were not aimed at just the Jews, there were, however, the precursors for the Holocaust. These laws were aimed at restricting German-Jewish life as much as possible. Taken together these early anti-Jewish laws can be seen as the initial Nazi attempt to solve the so called “Jewish Problem”. When the Nazis came to power they had no intention of murdering every Jew. They did, however, want to get every Jew out of Germany, and this is the first attempt. Part of the intention of these laws is to get German-Jews to want to leave Germany on their own.

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<sup>55</sup> Bock, *Nazi Sterilization*, 71.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/nurmlaw2.html>, accessed November 22, 2009.

The forced sterilization law was a difficult law to enforce. It required the assistance of many outside the government and even outside the Nazi party. The law depended upon “lawyers who drafted the legislation; medical and social workers who reported people to be sterilized; doctors, nurses, and aides who performed the procedures.”<sup>57</sup> This is how, Bergen claims, the Nazis were able to gain widespread acceptance of their racial laws. The more and more people that were involved in the forced sterilization programs the greater it grew in size and power, a dynamic that meant that more and more people had a stake in its continuation.<sup>58</sup> This was especially true of the researchers and academics whose funding depended upon the continuation of these programs. Because these programs now employed many people and had the legitimacy of both the state and science, they grew in acceptance by those who were originally opposed to the laws and programs. The question that arises out of this is very simple, why? Why did these people do these things? Was it because they believed what their Führer was telling them? Was it because they had a vested interest in making sure the sterilization programs grew? Was it because they were simply afraid to speak out against these programs and laws? At this point it seems most likely that the people believed Hitler to a certain point, and because they had a vested interest in making sure the programs were both successful and prospered. From the time the Nazis came to power in 1933, they initiated a series of measures that might broadly be termed “educational” laws. These measures sought not only to force Jewish students out of all German schools but were designed to educate the broader German public about the new ways of a racial state. Since the “racially impure” were to be prevented from working in the government, ancestral proof laws required individuals to show proof they were “racial pure” for as far back as five generations. As Peter Fritzsche has shown in *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, these laws

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<sup>57</sup> Bergen, 64.

<sup>58</sup> Bergen, 64.

sparked the growth of a vigorous genealogical industry. Eric Ehrenreich's book *The Nazi Ancestral Proof* is also an excellent book for this subject. Ehrenreich claims that some 15 million people were affected by these ancestral proof laws.<sup>59</sup> These laws were later extended to the Reich's new territorial gains in later years such as Poland, Austria, and the Sudetenland.

The Jews did however get a short reprieve from persecution thanks to the Olympic Games. In the weeks before and during the 1936 Winter and Summer Olympic Games held in Garmisch-Partenkirchen and Berlin, the Nazi regime actually toned down much of its public anti-Jewish rhetoric and activities. The regime even removed some of the signs saying "Jews Unwelcome" from public places. Hitler did not want international criticism of his government to result in the transfer of the Games to another country. Such a loss would have been a serious blow to German prestige. Likewise, Nazi leaders did not want to discourage international tourism and the revenue that it would bring during the Olympic year. The Nazis also wanted to use the games to demonstrate German superiority to the rest of the world.

This reprieve was very short lived however; the in following years Nazi persecution was stepped up again. In 1937 and 1938 the government set out to impoverish Jews and remove them from the German economy by requiring them to register their property. Even before the Olympics, the Nazi government had initiated the practice of "Aryanizing" Jewish businesses. "Aryanization" meant the dismissal of Jewish workers and managers of a company and the takeover of Jewish-owned businesses by non-Jewish Germans who bought them at bargain prices fixed by government or Nazi party officials. In the same two years, the government forbade Jewish doctors from treating non-Jews and revoked the licenses of Jewish lawyers to practice law. Many Jewish doctors were called "anti-healers" by Nazi propaganda according to Robert

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<sup>59</sup> Ehrenreich, 60.

Jay Lifton in his work *The Nazi Doctors*. Jewish doctors were seen as the opposite of “Aryan” doctors; instead of helping the sick and physical ill, Jewish doctors allegedly wanted to bring physical harm to patients.<sup>60</sup> Not only was Nazi propaganda portraying Jewish doctors as anti-healers, but many non-Jewish medical doctors embraced this depiction. Many articles were published by leading medical doctors that encouraged more laws similar to the ones for protection of the blood and sterilization. These articles traced the history of the Jewish *volk* back to the time of Moses to prove that if Germans intermarried with Jews the society would decay.<sup>61</sup> The sharp increase in anti-Jewish propaganda as part of the campaign to force Jewish Germans to emigrate had only limited success. While some Jews did leave under this immense pressure, many did not; however, they choose to stay in what they felt was their country. These laws were also put in place to prove to people that Jews were “disloyal and untrustworthy” and “they could not be trusted with German women.”<sup>62</sup> The Nazis wanted to isolate Jews from the rest of society and these laws where the first part of the process. The idea was that if the Jews did not leave then they would be isolated from the rest of society and perhaps even forced to leave by the community.

An interesting point that Lifton makes in his book is that many physicians saw Hitler’s Reich as the healing regime. They believed that Hitler would heal the damage that Jews had supposedly caused to the German blood. Because of intermarriage and sexual relations between Germans and Jews the German “organism” was ill and wounded; the Nazis would stop the disease and heal the wounds. This is a primary example of what many in the medical profession thought about what the Nazis were doing with sterilization. There was, however, a conflict

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<sup>60</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000), pp. 41.

<sup>61</sup> Lifton. 41-42.

<sup>62</sup> Bergen, 74.

between Nazi doctors and Nazis. The Nazis also supported traditional “healers” as well; medical doctors saw this as tarnish on Germany. Many top Nazis such as Rudolph Hess praised the work of these “healers”, which often brought the biomedical fields into conflict with the Nazi leadership vision of the German biomedical future. Despite their opposition to the privileged place accorded traditional healers in this medical utopia, most medical professionals were in agreement with Nazi goals. One question that often comes from this is why these doctors were willing to forcibly sterilize people. Lifton interviewed many of the doctors who took part in the forced sterilizations; their answer was simply “they believed the laws to be consistent with prevailing medical and genetic knowledge concerning the prevention of hereditary defects.”<sup>63</sup> The real question is not so much whether this belief excuses them from the consequences of their actions but why so many educated people in a healing profession believed such actions both valid and legitimate. These were after all not a group of sociopaths but men who would see themselves as modern and progressive

Saul Friedlander in his excellent book *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution* gives an extraordinary account of the events that took place before the mass extermination policies began. Friedlander makes an excellent point about the difference in Jews and the handicapped. For the Nazis the handicapped, as well as the Gypsies and homosexuals, were racially dangerous. These groups allegedly contributed to the degradation of German society.<sup>64</sup> The Jews, however, were the only group that Hitler feared had the capability for world domination. This is why the Jews were the primary target for Hitler and the Nazis. They believed that the handicapped and the other “undesirables” were too inferior to cause any real problems. The only difficulties they posed were the weakening of society as well as the financial

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<sup>63</sup> Lifton, 30.

<sup>64</sup> Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: 1933-1945*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 56.

strain of supporting them. The Jews, in Hitler's mind, would take advantage of this weakening of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and seek to destroy Germany. This is going against the common misconception that Hitler believed the Jews as racially inferior; in fact he saw them as almost racially superior. The Jews to Hitler were smart, tough, and imbued with a strong racial self-awareness but as destructive by nature would seek to take advantage of internal disharmony to destroy Germany. The Jews were a threat, Hitler believed, precisely because they sought to undermine the key Germany strength, the sense of community.

One question that comes to mind is what did the non-Jewish Germans think of these laws? As the Nazis steadily imposed these eugenics and anti-Jewish measures, the next question that comes to mind would be what did non-Jewish German think of these laws? The answer to this is that most did not care one way or the other. They simply saw them as a "bureaucratic measure that would have little direct impact on their life."<sup>65</sup> Not only had Germans for the most part cared little about the laws, so had the international community. Most countries by 1933 had some kind of sterilization law or "racial hygiene" law on the books. This helps explain why no other nation raised any kind of red flag to what was happening inside Nazi Germany. Also, up to 1935 there had been little violence against Jews or other "asocials". Until the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 9 and 10, 1938 violence against Jews and other groups had been limited to isolated incidents. Because of this Nazi Germany was much different from any other nation in Europe or the west in its treatment of Jews and "asocials". Even after the violence broke out many found it hard to believe it was as severe as they were being told.

One large problem that Nazis faced with these laws was there was no clear cut definition of what classified someone as "Aryan". The Blood Protection law said that anyone with all four

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<sup>65</sup> Bergen, 74.

grandparents as baptized Christians were to be considered “Aryan”. The law seems to have been open to interpretation. People could be Jewish simply because they held the same “physical” features as a “Jew”. The Nazis said that because of “racial mixing” it was harder to judge who was really Jewish. The main problem was Jews were not a race but members of a religion. Therefore, they had no “racial” characteristics to classify someone under. This is why the Nazis created the ancestral proof laws. This required documentation of a person ancestral heritage (Ahnenerbe). The proofs required people to give the family tree back as far as five generations sometimes, and if one member was “questionable” then proof must be provide that they were “Aryan”.

Something that gets forgotten is that not all of these laws were met with widespread enthusiasm. Many of these measures were met with criticism and opposition. An example was when a judge on a Hereditary Health Appeals Court raised the question “of the burden of unusual responsibility” placed on doctors to require them to perform operations that “serve no therapeutic purpose”.<sup>66</sup> This seems to indicate that some were questioning the purpose in sterilizing people that served no medical purpose. The Nazis countered this argument by saying that it was serving the greater purpose of the nation. In the Nazi mind in order for the nation to “heal” the “disease” had to be stopped and in order for it to be stopped those who caused society to decay must be annihilated. Most of the doctors’ opposition to the laws came from the fact that they, the doctors, were not involved in the legal process more. Many of the doctors felt the law was being hurt by the lawyers. Doctors felt also that the process was being hurt by the bureaucratic process. If the medical professionals were more involved in the process there would have been less red tape and legal consequences. The Nazis, however, wanted this process to be completely

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<sup>66</sup> Lifton, 29.

legal in the eyes of the nation. While some doctors were concerned by the widespread zeal for the laws among the doctors, the zeal was contributed to the idealism of the time. These doctors wanted to help contribute to help “heal” the nation from the disease of not only the Jews but the mental and physical disabled. This same enthusiasm for helping the nation also explains the academic communities support for sterilization. Many academics felt that these policies were Darwinism at work. The universities were to be aware of these ideas for new and better ways to “cure” Germany was to be formed. This excited many of the academics at the time as well; they were seen as playing their part, similar to the doctors’ role.

The forced sterilization laws and other Nuremberg laws are a small precursor for what is to come in a just a few short years. While eugenics solves one of the problems for the Nazi, it does not rid them of the “useless eaters”. For the Nazis these people must also be dealt with and dealt with quickly. The next logical step for the Nazis came in the form of euthanasia. Euthanasia both prevented the spread of the genes of the weak in German society and eliminated the “useless eaters”. With widespread acceptance of the eugenics laws, the Nazis saw no trouble in getting acceptance for their euthanasia ideas. This step required even more willingness from doctors, nurses, and other supporting people.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE NEXT “LOGICAL” STEP: THE NAZIS MOVE FROM EUGENICS TO EUTHANASIA

After the enactment of the of the Nuremberg laws, certain Jews and non-Jewish Germans experienced horrors inside Nazi Germany. The government deemed the citizens in sanitariums and asylums as “useless eaters” and “unworthy of life”. The Nazis subjected the unfortunate inhabitants of these institutions to an extreme form of eugenics, that of euthanasia. For the regime, this proved the ultimate means of racial purification. The movement from eugenics to euthanasia was not a sudden or rash one. Quite the contrary, it was a product of the times in Nazi Germany. It was the next “logical” step for Nazi bureaucrats. For the Nazis this was “killing two birds with one stone”; after euthanasia, the patient would be both sterile (because he/she would be dead) and no longer a “burden” for the government. Even more disturbing was the fact that it was the next “logical” progression for the scientific community as well. The modern definition of euthanasia implies dual consent between doctor and patient while the process used by Nazi Germany was completely one-sided. Loosely translated as “good death”, the word’s meaning/usage during pre-World War II Germany would prove “good” only to the regime and not to the victims involved in the process. Most of the victims subjected to this extinguishing of life were naïve to the fate that awaited them in the shower rooms of Hadamar or Brandenburg and the five other designated killing centers.

For the Nazis, euthanasia provided the answer to their perceived problem of current handicapped and incurably ill citizens of the nation being institutionalized and thus supported by the state. While eugenics measures prevented the so-called “undesirable” element from having children, thus perpetuating undesired outcomes of a Jewish population or children with birth defects, it did not resolve the impending need for financial resources and medical space that the

war would create. For the Nazis, this was unacceptable and a better solution needed to be found; that solution was euthanasia. Euthanasia solved both “problems” for the Nazis. It meant they would no longer need to pay for supporting the individual who had been deemed “unworthy of life”; it also meant that they would not be able to procreate offspring, because they would be dead. Also, with the understanding that war was imminent, the extermination of these individuals meant for the Nazis that more money would be available for the war effort and that more hospitals and staff would be open for care of wounded soldiers.

While the government enforced the racial laws during the early part of Hitler’s reign, he began to expose Germany to the idea of a national euthanasia program. Hitler and others in his regime understood that such a program would be difficult to enact until the outbreak of war in Europe. Michael Burleigh in *Death and Deliverance: Euthanasia in Germany 1900-1945* points to this as being why the Nazis waited to enact this policy of death. According to Burleigh, Hitler spoke on many occasions about his wishes for a “euthanasia” program. This idea appealed to Hitler on the basis that it put the racial cleansed *Volksgemeinschaft* that much closer to a reality. Burleigh also makes the argument that the eugenics and euthanasia programs were cost cutting measures as well. During the Weimar Republic this may initially have been more a factor than under the Nazis. Burleigh focuses the first part of his book on the policies of both the Weimar Republic and National Socialist Germany. According to Jürgen Matthäus in a recently published article Burleigh believes the “killing of hospitalized persons is the final result of preceding developments firmly rooted in German social and medical history. His argument is most convincing when dealing with what he calls ‘saving money, spending lives’: the abandonment of caring as a state responsibility in favor of a cost-cutting approach based on the concept of the

well-being of the nation, not the individual.”<sup>67</sup> He then makes the claim that “some of the most inhumane policies pursued by the Nazis had their origins in developments during the Weimar period.”<sup>68</sup> According to Burleigh approximately 140,000 patients had died in German psychiatric asylums during World War One and more than half of them died as a result of malnutrition and epidemic disease. Their suffering, according to Burleigh, led Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche to write *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens* (The Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life) that advocated “euthanasia” to those deemed by doctors to have an incurable illness. While this idea met opposition from many doctors, lawyers, and clergymen due to its ethical, legal, and moral implications, it shockingly met agreement from parents who had severely handicapped children. While many psychiatrists needed to prove their importance to the government and deal with the effects of reform upon their community, influences such as the “inherently economic and selection features” that are emphasized by Burleigh affect the doctors’ decisions regarding these inhumane measures. Burleigh contrasts the years of psychiatric reform to the following era of eugenics and euthanasia by stating that the two are “not between black and white, but rather between subtle shades of grey.”<sup>69</sup>

During a 1939 conference that occurred a few months before the euthanasia decree, Hitler provided examples to Health Minister Leonardo Conti and the head of the Reich Chancellery, Hans Lammers, of what he deemed “life unworthy of life.” These examples were severely mentally ill people who could only be bedded on sawdust or sand because they “perpetually dirtied themselves”, or who “put their own excrement into their mouths, eating it and so on”.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Jürgen Matthäus, “‘Euthanasia’ in Nazi Germany: Recent Accounts by Michael Burleigh and Henry Friedlander”, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 42 (1), 98.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: “Euthanasia” in Nazi Germany c. 1900-1945*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> Burleigh, 34.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 62.

According to Robert Jay Lifton in *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* Hitler stated in 1933, when the sterilization law was passed, that he favored killing the incurably ill yet realized that such an idea would not be readily accepted by the public. In 1935 Hitler told the Reich Doctors' Leader, Dr. Gerhard Wagner, that the question could not be taken up in peacetime: "Such a problem could be more smoothly and easily carried out in war", said Hitler. He therefore intended "in the event of a war radically to solve the problem of the mental asylums".<sup>71</sup> Hitler also knew, given his plans for *Lebensraum* (living space), that a war in the east was inevitable, thus allowing him to instigate his plans for the killing of Germany's incurably ill. Hitler had known this from day one. His plans called for taking massive swaths of land in the east, and he knew that Russia would not allow this to happen and that war would break out.

For the Nazis, the war also gave this issue of euthanasia a new urgency. People designated "unworthy of life" even after being sterilized, still needed institutional care. They occupied places in facilities that soon were to be needed for wounded soldiers. These individuals were housed and fed at the expense of the state and therefore took up the valuable time of doctors and nurses. This valuable time would also be needed in the upcoming war effort. The Nazis found this barely tolerable in peacetime and completely unacceptable in wartime. A leading Nazi doctor, Dr. Hermann Pfannmüller, stated, "The idea is unbearable to me that the best, the flower of our youth must lose its life at the front in order that feeble-minded and irresponsible asocial elements can have a secure existence in the asylum."<sup>72</sup> According to Lifton, as early as the beginning of 1939 the "euthanizing" of children was well underway despite the Nazis' plans to use the war as a cover for this atrocity. Toward the end of 1938, letters from

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<sup>71</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Nemesis 1937-1945*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 256.

<sup>72</sup> Lifton, 62.

parents were already arriving in Hitler's office requesting permission to end their child's life. One particular case pointed to by Lifton was that of a boy with the surname Knauer, who was born blind, missing one leg and part of one arm. The official request for euthanasia came from the boy's grandmother. However, Karl Brandt said the request came from the boy's parents. Lifton argues that many of these families who cared for children with birth defects similar to Knauer's were "encouraged" to "euthanize" their child.<sup>73</sup> Lifton marks this as the true beginning of the T-4 program. In response to these letters, Hitler sent his personal doctor, Karl Brandt, "to the clinic at the University of Leipzig, where the Knauer child was hospitalized, in order to determine whether the information submitted was accurate and to consult with physicians there."<sup>74</sup>

Lifton provides numerous details about the children's euthanasia program. However, the author's main crux explores how the doctors participating in these atrocities coped with their actions. He was the first to study in-depth the doctor's rationalizations behind the creation and implementation of the children's euthanasia program and T-4. Lifton theorizes that their exposure to the current political environment enabled them to commit these crimes against children and adults. He studied the behavior of people who had committed war crimes, individually and in a group setting, and concluded that while human nature is not innately cruel or evil, only rare sociopaths can participate in atrocities without suffering lasting emotional harm. Such crimes do not, however, require any unusual degree of personal evil or mental illness. For Lifton these atrocities are nearly certain to happen given certain conditions either accidental or deliberately arranged that Lifton calls "atrocities-producing situations." Using this argument, Hitler created this ideal situation when he came to power in 1933. As a result the

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<sup>73</sup> Lifton, 50.

<sup>74</sup> Lifton, 51.

doctors were merely swept up in events that were out of their control but not entirely against their wishes. Had the Führer not set these events in motion, the doctors responsible could not have started such a “euthanasia” program according to Lifton’s argument. His idea parallels that of Christopher Browning’s concerning the men who carried out the first mass killings of the Holocaust during 1941-1942. Browning perceived these men who conducted the killings as being psychologically motivated as well as influenced by the current political environment. The events that the doctors and the men of the Police Battalion, were participating in were well out of their hands. Lifton, like Browning, does not excuse the atrocities committed by the men but seeks the causation of their actions.

Contrary to Lifton’s line of thinking, Hugh Gregory Gallagher in *By Trust Betrayed: Patients, Physicians, and the License to Kill in the Third Reich* makes the argument that in order to understand their motivations one must look at the many economic benefits offered by the Nazis and examine the “strength of the appeal to the physicians of policies based upon the supposed imperatives of modern biological science.”<sup>75</sup> Gallagher makes the concession that there were psychological factors involved, but he mentions this in what seems as almost an afterthought. “These things,” in reference to the economic and scientific factors, “provide a circumstantial framework for developing an explanation for behavior of the doctors; there were, also, psychological factors at work,” he goes on to say that they too must be examined. His manner in mentioning these “psychological factors” is what seems to imply that he thinks these factors are far less important than the economic or scientific ones. While Gallagher never says that Lifton is wrong, he does insinuate that Lifton left some important factors out of his argument.

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<sup>75</sup> Hugh Gregory Gallagher, *By Trust Betrayed: Patients, Physicians, and the License to kill in the Third Reich*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), 178.

The motivation for these doctors according to Gallagher was not one single factor such as money or the lure of scientific discovery or for that matter a psychological factor. All three factors influenced their behavior. Instead of it being just the fear-inducing environment that forced these doctors to commit these horrible acts, it was in fact the situation and the doctors themselves. For Gallagher the doctors met the "atrocious-producing situations" half way with their eagerness for both personal and professional gain. Götz Aly also points out the motivation of doctors during the euthanasia period. In his article "Medicine against the Useless", which was reprinted in the book *Cleansing the Fatherland*, he offers insight into the "normality" of the daily lives of the doctors who embraced and enacted Nazi racial theory. Aly points out that these doctors were experienced clinicians at the top of their fields, known and respected within the medical community and thus with a status that did not warrant such behavior as that of a physician who was not as well known or had not practiced medicine for as long. Also, Aly argues against the common idea that German society would be against "mercy killings" because of social conscience or religious convictions. This is allegedly why Hitler wanted to wait until the outbreak of war. Aly argues that this theory is a myth because such an argument has no supporting evidence. He says that the idea of a "state secret" was just an excuse, and that these excuses were offered by the government so that society could avoid moral responsibility.

Aly provides one of his most interesting points when he ties the euthanasia program with the Holocaust. Aly claims that T-4 was not just a random experiment but that it was a planned trial for the Holocaust. This exercise would also prove the government's ability to suppress its actions from German society. Aly categorizes the euthanasia program as an "undeniable political success – in the overt as well as tacit acceptance of the murder of marginalized, defenseless people by the overwhelming majority of all sectors of the population. It is thus hardly surprising

that the national leadership drew the obvious conclusions, counting its extermination policy and trusting that Germans would silently consent to this policy.”<sup>76</sup> In Aly’s opinion German society did not raise enough objections to what the Nazis were doing, and that their claim of ignorance is not valid. He firmly subscribes to the theory that the public’s acceptance of the Nazi’s “open secret” motivated Hitler’s regime to expand its cleansing methods to adult Jews and Gypsies. Aly does not shift the blame from the government to German society; he simply states that the German people share some of the responsibility for both the euthanasia program and the Holocaust. Aly is so convinced of this argument that in a later work, *Endlosung: Volkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden*, he reiterates these points verbatim.

One of most interesting and important points that Hugh Gregory Gallagher makes in *By Trust Betrayed* is that “Aktion T-4 did not extend to children and infants.”<sup>77</sup> Most historians work under the assumption that the children euthanasia program was the beginning of the T-4 program. Gallagher does not subscribe to this theory. He suggests that these programs are in fact two separate programs and need to be studied as such. He makes a valid point, with the fact that the children euthanasia program started almost a year earlier than Hitler’s authorization for the creation of the T-4 program and it continued after he “officially” ceased the operation of the latter program. Robert Jay Lifton writes that as many as 5,000 children died after Hitler’s end of T-4, but, of course, so did adults—the key is whether children’s euthanasia was still known by the public to occur. Gallagher’s theory thus warrants reexamination. He mentions it as though his point is understood and needs no further explanation. This question of the children euthanasia program is far reaching. As historians have duly noted, there were many protests from the

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<sup>76</sup> Goty Aly, Peter Chroust. Christian Pross, *Cleansing the Fatherland: Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 92-93.

<sup>77</sup> Gallagher, 120.

family members of the victims of the T-4 program; however, there were little to no objections for the children euthanasia program. This seems primarily because the majority of the children who were being subjected to the program were recommended for the program by their parents. This also illustrates the mindset of many in pre-World War II Germany that easily justified children or infants considered “mentally retarded” being sent to their death because it was deemed to be in the children’s best interest. Such a notion likely formed as a result of exposure to the government-sanctioned killing of adults branded “unworthy of life” and parents requesting that their own offspring be extinguished because their children did not conform to the German ideal. The problem is that children’s program came first and infanticide of “defective” children was not uncommon in European society up to industrialization.

Full comprehension of the social reactions to the children euthanasia warrants further examination. For example, why did Germans accept the killing of innocent children? This question can be readily explained because this process started at the grass roots level; it came from the people not the government. Unlike T-4, the child euthanasia program was started by requests from parents and families. T-4 was a government issued action with the family of the victims having no voice in the process. This, however, directly contrasts with the children’s euthanasia program where the family had the loudest voice in the process. This also explains why when Hitler backdated the Aktion T-4 he did so to September 1, 1939, and not the winter of 1938. Since there were little to no protests from family members against the program, he had no reason to authorize legislation that would legitimize the program.

One fact that often goes unnoticed is that the children euthanasia program lasted far longer than T-4. Many of the staff and methods of T-4 were later used in Aktion 14f13, but the two programs are not the same. The child euthanasia, however, was carried on with no official

halt ever being ordered. Robert Jay Lifton and Henry Friedlander both claim that more than 5,000 children died after Hitler orders an end to T-4. This is a very important point to the argument that the child euthanasia program and Aktion T-4 were separate programs. Most historians agree that after T-4 ended the child euthanasia program continued, but no one seems to see them as separate programs before the ending of T-4.

The children's euthanasia program and T-4 are not, however, completely separate. While an argument can be made that the programs are two separate programs, T-4 is influenced by the child euthanasia program. For the Nazis, children euthanasia was a success met with little resistance and it aided Germany's purification efforts. It is safe to say that because of this lack of protest against the child euthanasia program, Hitler believed that an adult program would be welcomed in much the same way. He and other Nazis speculated because there were so many parents writing in about their children, that family members might write similar letters concerning adults. These letters from parents were responsible for the creation/inception of the children's euthanasia program. The popularity of the program allows the historian to infer that Hitler postulated that an adult program would be met with the same regard.

One argument that can be made for the lack of protest that made by Robert N. Proctor in *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*. In this book Proctor writes that some of the killing practices such as poison were often administered over the course of several days, even weeks, so that cause of death could be "disguised as pneumonia, bronchitis, or some other complication induced by the injections."<sup>78</sup> Also, Hermann Pfannmuller would starve the children under his care to death, so that the death certificate could read "natural causes".<sup>79</sup> These type of tactics would help keep grieving parents from raising an issue with what was happening, as well as

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<sup>78</sup> Robert N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 187.

<sup>79</sup> Proctor, 187.

keeping “the gentlemen in Switzerland” (the Red Cross) and other foreign press agencies from seeing what was really going on behind closed doors.<sup>80</sup> This also would help if any legal argument arose later. By listing “natural causes” or pneumonia as the cause of death then that doctor could not be accused of murder. Many of the doctors had this idea in mind when they would leave the children’s ward of their facility with no heat, so that the patients would die of exposure.<sup>81</sup> While this does raise the issue of neglect, “Nazi medical men could thus argue....they were simply withholding care and ‘letting nature take its course’”.<sup>82</sup>

While there is no clear argument against the theory that the children’s euthanasia program and Aktion T-4 were different programs, many historians’ arguments about T-4 suggest that children’s euthanasia and T-4 were closely linked. Henry Friedlander in *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the ‘Final Solution’*, argues that the Final Solution grew out of T-4. In Chapter Three, he writes that out of success of the children’s euthanasia program, Aktion T-4 is born. Therefore, the children’s euthanasia program becomes part of T-4 and the reason the killing of children continued after Hitler had ordered an end to T-4 was because the doctors knew they are carrying out the wishes of the Führer. Friedlander is of the opinion that the success of the children’s euthanasia program killing without much incident encouraged the belief that an adult program would have similar success. Therefore, T-4 was born and children’s euthanasia became a part of T-4. In *Death and Deliverance: ‘Euthanasia’ in Germany 1900-1945* Michael Burleigh shares Friedlander’s argument that the children euthanasia program became part of T-4 after its inception in 1939. Most historians also concur that the Children’s euthanasia program simply became a part of T-4 once the adult program was established. This theory would answer

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<sup>80</sup> Proctor, 187.

<sup>81</sup> Proctor, 187.

<sup>82</sup> Proctor, 187.

many of the questions raised by Gallagher; however, this is a point that needs to be further researched.

### *From Children to Adults*

The program for killing adults with mental or physical disabilities began with a letter from Hitler that was issued in October 1939. The letter charged Philipp Bouhler and Karl Brandt with "enlarging the authority of certain physicians, to be designated by name, in such a manner that persons who, according to human judgment, are incurable, can, upon a most careful diagnosis of their condition of sickness, be accorded a mercy death."<sup>83</sup> The letter was backdated to September 1 in order to provide legality to the killings already carried out and to link the program more definitely to the war, giving it a rationale of wartime necessity.<sup>84</sup> This move for Lifton proves that as early as 1933 Hitler knew that his plans were not going to be well received by the general public. It also aids the intentionalist argument that says, from day one Hitler meant to kill those he saw as "unfit" and "harmful" to German society whether a Jew or a mentally or physically disabled person. Hitler's letter, which provided the sole legal basis for the euthanasia program, was not a formal "Führer decree", which in Nazi Germany had the force of law. For this reason Hitler deliberately bypassed Health Minister Conti and his department, which was held to be not sufficiently imbued with National Socialist ruthlessness and which therefore might have raised awkward questions about the legality of the program. Instead, it was entrusted to his personal agents Bouhler and Brandt.<sup>85</sup> He chose these men because of their work with the children euthanasia program but also because he knew they would not raise objections to the program.

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<sup>83</sup> Lifton, 63.

<sup>84</sup> Kershaw, 253.

<sup>85</sup> Lifton, 64.

The program was administered by Victor Brack's staff from *Tiergartenstraße 4* under the guise of the *Charitable Foundation for Cure and Institutional Care*, supervised by Bouhler and Brandt. Others closely involved included Dr. Herbert Linden, who had been heavily involved in the children's program, Dr. Ernst-Robert Grawitz, chief physician of the SS, and August Becker, an SS chemist. These officials chose the doctors who were to carry out the operational part of the program. They were chosen for their political reliability, professional reputation, and known sympathy for radical eugenics. They included several who had proven their worth and reliability in the child euthanasia program such as Unger, Heinze, and Pfannmüller. The newest members were mostly psychiatrists such as Professor Carl Schneider, Professor Max de Crinis, and Professor Paul Nitsche. Heyde became the operational leader of the program, succeeded later by Nitsche.<sup>86</sup>

In early October all hospitals, nursing homes, old-age homes, and sanatoria were required to report all patients who had been institutionalized for five years or more, who had been committed as "criminally insane", who were considered "non-Aryan", or who had been diagnosed with any of a list of specified conditions such as schizophrenia, epilepsy, Huntington's chorea, advanced syphilis, dementia, paralysis, encephalitis, and "terminal neurological conditions generally". Many doctors and administrators assumed that the purpose of the reports was to identify inmates who were capable of being drafted for "labor service". This misconception led many of the doctors and administrators, therefore, to overstate the degree of incapacity of their patients, to protect them from labor conscription, with fatal consequences.<sup>87</sup> When some institutions, mainly in Catholic areas, refused to co-operate, teams of T-4 doctors, or in some cases Nazi medical students, visited them and simply compiled their own lists,

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<sup>86</sup> Lifton, 64.

<sup>87</sup> Lifton, 66.

sometimes in a very haphazard way.<sup>88</sup> According to Christopher Browning, during this same time all Jewish patients were removed from institutions and were killed.<sup>89</sup>

The Nazi euthanasia program is complex and often difficult to understand. Michael Burleigh, however, makes it somewhat easier to comprehend in *Ethics and Extermination: Reflections on Nazi Genocide*. This is a collection of essays that Dr. Burleigh has written that deal with Nazi Genocide. His nine essays trace the development of the Nazi genocide and follow it through to its ultimate ending in the ‘Final Solution’. An important part of Burleigh’s argument in this book is the role of “psychiatry after the First World War” and the “interplay between economy measures and limited reform [of psychiatry]” during the Weimar Republic.<sup>90</sup> For Burleigh this is often an overlooked but important point.

Also, as with his other work on this same subject, *Death and Deliverance: Euthanasia in Germany 1900-1945*, Burleigh stresses the importance of understanding that Hitler enacted the euthanasia program to clear bed space for the upcoming war and for economic reasons. There is an important reason for pointing out Burleigh’s argument. Most historians link euthanasia to the creation of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and rightfully so. The Nazis used both eugenics and euthanasia in order to create the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Where Burleigh differs is the importance that he places on the economic aspects and need for more doctors and bed space. Giving the timing of the start of the euthanasia program, Burleigh makes a valid point. Because the euthanasia program did not start until the outbreak of the war, it is reasonable for Burleigh to infer that a major factor was the need for more doctors and bed space. The question to be asked

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<sup>88</sup> Lifton, 67.

<sup>89</sup> Browning, 191.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Burleigh, *Ethics and Extermination: Reflections on Nazi Genocide*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 113.

here is did this now take precedence in the minds of top Nazis? However, this is a difficult question to answer. The war for *Lebensraum* in the east was ultimately about creating and sustaining the *Volksgemeinschaft*, so it is reasonable to believe that anything deemed as beneficial to the war effort would take precedence. As for the economic factors, timing was not so much an issue; regardless of when the war broke out, Hitler tried to save money by destroying “useless eaters.” It can be seen as a necessary step in the Nazi mind given the economic climate of the time. Most historians do see these other issues as additional factors, but they do not place the amount of importance on them as does Burleigh. It is worth noting that Burleigh does not say that the creation of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was not the main goal of the program. He is simply stating that there were other factors involved. All of these factors do, however, fit together and point to the same conclusion regardless of the primary motivation: that conclusion being murder.

It is also important to note that most historians who write on Nazi euthanasia do not mention any other factors when writing about the creation and implementation of the program. The creation of *Volksgemeinschaft* was the ultimate goal of Hitler and the Nazis. Euthanasia as well as eugenics were just steps in that process albeit very important steps. Most historians assume the connection between “racial cleansing” and the construction of *Volksgemeinschaft*. This is what makes Burleigh’s discussion of other factors so important, by simply stating that there were indeed other reasons, he is separating himself from the rest of the historical community. As well, he also points to programmatic factors that might have been more convincing to many in the medical profession than ideological motions. Burleigh makes a good point, but it is important to remember that “racial cleansing” was the ultimate goal of the

euthanasia program, while these other issues may have been factors they were not the primary reason for the program.

### *The Beginning of the "End"*

Hitler was aware from the beginning of T-4 that a program which involved the killing of large numbers of Germans with disabilities would likely be unpopular. Although Hitler had a policy of not issuing written orders or instructions for policies that might be seen as unpopular in the public eye, he made an exception when he provided Bouhler and Brandt with written authority for the T-4 program in an October 1939 letter. This was apparently to overcome opposition from within the German state bureaucracy more specifically the Justice Minister, Franz Gürtner, who asked to be shown Hitler's letter in August 1940 to gain his cooperation.<sup>91</sup> According to Ian Kershaw, Gürtner found it difficult to believe his Führer would authorize such a program. Even after the August 1940 letter, opposition persisted within the bureaucracy. A district judge and member of the Confessing Church, Lothar Kreyssig, wrote to Gürtner protesting that the T-4 program was illegal because no law or formal decree authorizing the killing had come from Hitler; Gürtner replied, "If you cannot recognize the will of the Führer as a source of law, then you cannot remain a judge." Kreyssig was promptly dismissed.<sup>92</sup>

Opposition within the party was much easier to handle than public opposition. The primary area of concern was the Catholic Church; there was particular need for caution in Catholic areas, especially since by 1941 many were already exposed to British aerial bombing attacks. Hitler informed Bouhler at the outset of T-4 that "the Führer's Chancellery must under no circumstances be seen to be active in this matter." The Catholic Church, which after the

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<sup>91</sup> Kershaw, 253.

<sup>92</sup> Kershaw, 254.

annexations of Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938 claimed spiritual authority over nearly half the population of Greater Germany, had agreed to withdraw from all political activity in the Concordat of 1933 between Germany and the Holy See. However, the prospect of a state-sanctioned mass killing program of German citizens had not occurred to the Church in 1933. Such a program was a challenge to fundamental Christian belief about the sanctity of human life and posed a serious dilemma for German Catholics. In 1935 the Church had protested in a private memorandum against proposals to pass a law legalizing euthanasia. The church's protest in 1933 was with the true sense of euthanasia "mercy killing".

To help anticipate and understand the possible backlash of the church, Brack in January 1939 commissioned a paper from Dr Joseph Mayer, a Professor of Moral Theology, on the reactions of the churches in the event of a state euthanasia program being instituted. Dr. Mayer, who was a longstanding euthanasia advocate, reported to Brack that the churches would not oppose such a program if it was seen to be in the national interest. Brack showed this paper to Hitler in July, and it may have increased his confidence that the "euthanasia" program would be acceptable to German public opinion.<sup>93</sup> When Gitta Sereny interviewed Mayer for her book, *Into that Darkness*, shortly before his death in 1967, he denied that he had approved of killing people with disabilities, but since no evidence exists it is difficult to prove either way.<sup>94</sup> Mayer's report however, proved to be wrong and T-4 was the sole example of an action by the Nazi regime that provoked large-scale public protests.

Regardless of the Nazi efforts to hide what they were doing, it was impossible for them to conceal T-4 from the public. There were too many people, doctors, nurses, and bureaucrats,

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<sup>93</sup> Kershaw, 259.

<sup>94</sup> Gitta Sereny, *Into that Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), 62.

involved in the operation to completely conceal the program as the Nazis had hoped. Moreover, the majority of those killed had families who were actively concerned about their welfare. Despite the strictest orders to maintain secrecy, some of the staff at the killing centers talked about what was going on there. In some cases families could tell that the cause of death specified in the death notices were false, for example, when a patient was claimed to have died of “appendicitis” even though the patient’s appendix had been surgically removed years earlier. In other cases several families in the same town received death certificates on the same day. In the towns where the killing centers were located, many people saw the inmates arrive in buses, saw the smoke from the crematoria chimneys, noticed that no bus-loads of inmates ever left the killing centers, and after weeks of new inmates arriving and none leaving the people drew their own conclusions. In Hadamar ashes containing human hair rained down on the town.<sup>95</sup> In May 1941 the Frankfurt County Court wrote to Gürtner describing scenes in Hadamar where children shouted in the streets that people were being taken away in buses to be gassed.<sup>96</sup>

Among those who did protest there is a group that is often forgotten, the nurses and other workers in the insane asylums who were torn morally about their actions. Gitta Sereny points out in *Into that Darkness* that many of those who were involved in either the killing centers or the asylums were morally divided about their actions. Many felt as though they were relieving their patients of pain and suffering. Sereny notes that this moral dilemma was felt the most by “nuns and priests, perhaps particularly affected by the sadness and hopelessness *many* people feel that work continuously in mental institutions, came at that time to agree...that euthanasia represented release, the chance of an eternal and far happier life for these particular patients.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Lifton, 75.

<sup>96</sup> Sereny, 58.

<sup>97</sup> Sereny, 59.

The Nazis were very good at manipulating words and actions, and this is a primary example. Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels was able to use these nuns' and priests' beliefs in his favor. The Nazis were selling murder as a humanitarian effort. Sereny is trying to show that the often people ridicule the men and women who worked in these asylums, yet their choices were not easy to make given the times. Sereny is right; often historians criticized the workers of these facilities without considering the fact that the workers were placed into an impossible situation. That does not condone what these men and women did, but it is important to remember that their decision may not have always been an easy one.

As the T-4 program gathered momentum, the Catholic Church became increasingly unable to keep silent in the face of mounting evidence about the killing of inmates at hospitals and asylums. Since 1933 the Church had tried to keep itself out of the affairs of Nazi Germany in order to keep its core institutions intact. However, the moral ramifications of the Nazi killing policy forced the Church to protest these actions. Leading Catholic churchmen wrote privately to the government protesting against the policy. In July 1941 the Church broke its silence when a pastoral letter from the bishops was read out in all churches, declaring that it was wrong to kill except in self-defense or in a morally justified war.<sup>98</sup> This emboldened Catholics to make more outspoken protests. However, Sereny notes that while the Holy See's official position may have been against the euthanasia program, some priests secretly and openly supported the Nazi killing program.<sup>99</sup> While this in contrast to what she precisely wrote about the people from inside the asylums protesting the killing, it hammers home one of her main points, which is to show that this was not simply a black and white issue but lined with shades of gray.

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<sup>98</sup> Sereny, 69.

<sup>99</sup> Sereny, 69.

A few weeks after the pastoral letter was read, the Catholic Bishop, Clemens August Graf von Galen, publicly denounced the T-4 program in a sermon and sent the text of his sermon to Hitler, calling on "the Führer to defend the people against the Gestapo". "It is a terrible, unjust and catastrophic thing when man opposes his will to the will of God," Galen said. "We are talking about men and women, our compatriots, our brothers and sisters. Poor unproductive people if you wish, but did this mean that they had lost their right to live?"<sup>100</sup> Robert Jay Lifton writes that, "This powerful, populist sermon was immediately reproduced and distributed throughout Germany. Galen's sermon probably had a greater impact than any other statement in consolidating anti-'euthanasia' sentiment."<sup>101</sup> Another Bishop, Franz Bornewasser, also sent protests to Hitler, though not in public. Later that year in August, Galen was even more outspoken, broadening his attack to include the Nazi persecution of religious orders and the closing of Catholic institutions. He attributed the heavy allied bombing of towns throughout Westphalia as the wrath of God against Germany for breaking His (God's) laws. Galen's sermons were not reported in the German press but were widely circulated in the form of illegally printed leaflets.<sup>102</sup> Local Nazis asked for Galen to be arrested, but Goebbels feared that there would be widespread revolting in Westphalia were Galen was priest.<sup>103</sup> The sermons were also kept from the public for this same reason; the Nazis feared that they would incite the public to riot in the streets.

In *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity 1919-1945* Richard Steigmann-Gall makes the interesting point that as early as 1931 many Christian priests, while not endorsing euthanasia, believed that "the artificial prolongation of life which is in the process of being

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<sup>100</sup> Kershaw, 256.

<sup>101</sup> Lifton, 93.

<sup>102</sup> Lifton, 94.

<sup>103</sup> Kershaw, 429.

extinguished” represented “an interference in God’s creative will.”<sup>104</sup> Steigmann-Gall is trying to point out that not every church priest in Nazi Germany felt what T-4 was about was wrong. He also wants to make the point that for many of these priests, nuns, and others involved with T-4 this was a massive moral dilemma. For years people had been told that in cases where people were mentally ill or incurably sick that the humanitarian thing to do was to care for them. The Nazis were telling them that the opposite was the case, that if they really wanted to be humanitarian then ending the life of “these” people was the only option. Hitler was asking them to interfere with God’s will and end their “suffering”. Something that Steigmann-Gall also points out is that while this may have been a difficult decision to make “fully half of the victims of the Nazi euthanasia” program came from church run institutions.<sup>105</sup> This fact shows that not only were many church groups quite about euthanasia in the beginning, they also supported these activities. There is, however, something that Steigmann-Gall fails to point out, and that is the fact that while at first these religious groups may have stood silently by, they were a major factor later in Hitler calling an “end” to the killing.

While the Catholic Church was more vocal than the Protestant, Protestants such as the Lutheran theologian Friedrich von Bodelschwingh and Pastor Gerhard Braune still privately protested. These were prominent Lutherans who were well connected. Both used their connections with the regime to negotiate exemptions for their institutions: Bodelschwingh negotiated directly with Brandt and indirectly with Hermann Göring, whose cousin was a prominent psychiatrist. Braune had meetings with Justice Minister Gürtner, who was always doubtful about the legality of the program, and later wrote a strongly worded letter to Hitler

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<sup>104</sup> Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity 1919-1945*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 193-194.

<sup>105</sup> Steigmann-Gall, 200.

protesting against it: Hitler did not read it, of course, but was told about it by Lammers.<sup>106</sup> In general, however, the Protestant church was more enmeshed with the Nazi regime than was the case for the Catholics and was unwilling to criticize its actions.<sup>107</sup> Robert Lifton has an excellent section of his book *The Nazi Doctors* that deals with this issue. Much the same as Steigmann-Gall, Lifton notes that this was a huge moral dilemma that faced both the Catholic and Protestants churches.

Also in 1940 protest letters began to arrive at the Reich Chancellery and the Ministry of Justice, some of them even from Nazi Party members. The first open protest against the removal of people from asylums took place at Absberg in Franconia in February 1941, and others followed shortly after. For Hugh Gregory Gallagher what happened at Absberg was what truly brought about the end of T-4. Hitler saw that the people of Germany were not ready for, in his mind, what had to be done. The SD report on the incident at Absberg noted that "the removal of residents from the Ottilien Home has caused a great deal of unpleasantness", and described large crowds of Catholic townspeople, among them Party members, protesting against the action.<sup>108</sup> Opposition to the T-4 policy sharpened after the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 because the war in the east produced for the first time large-scale German casualties, and the hospitals and asylums began to fill up with maimed and disabled young German soldiers. Rumors began to circulate that these men would also be subject to "euthanasia", although there seems to be no evidence that suggest such plans ever existed. It is also difficult to conceive that

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<sup>106</sup> Lifton, 90.

<sup>107</sup> Lifton, 90-92.

<sup>108</sup> Lifton, 90.

Hitler would have ever approved such a program, for him these men were the Heroes of the new Germany and must be honored.<sup>109</sup>

During 1940 and 1941 rumors of what was taking place inside the asylums and sanatoriums spread throughout Germany, and many people withdrew their relatives from these institutions to care for them at home. Some doctors and psychiatrists co-operated with families to have patients discharged, or, if the families could afford it, had them transferred to private clinics where the reach of T-4 did not extend. T-4 had a class aspect to it as well; it was mainly working-class families whose relatives were in state institutions. Wealthy families protected their disabled relatives by keeping them at home or in private clinics. Other doctors agreed to "re-diagnose" some patients so that they no longer met the T-4 criteria, although this ran the risk of exposure when the Nazi zealots from Berlin conducted inspections. In Kiel Professor Hans Gerhard Creutzfeldt managed to save nearly all of his patients.<sup>110</sup> For the most part, however, doctors co-operated with the program, either out of ignorance as to its true nature or out of agreement with Nazi eugenicist policies.<sup>111</sup>

By August 1941 the protests had spread to Bavaria. According to Gitta Sereny, Hitler himself was jeered by an angry crowd at Hof that according to Sereny was the only time Hitler was opposed in public during his 12 years in power.<sup>112</sup> Despite his private fury, Hitler knew that he could not afford a confrontation with the Church at a time when Germany was engaged in a life-and-death war, a belief that was reinforced by the advice of Goebbels, Martin Bormann, and Heinrich Himmler. Hitler also knew that at that point in time the Church was still very powerful

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<sup>109</sup> Gallagher, 139.

<sup>110</sup> Lifton, 82.

<sup>111</sup> Lifton, 80.

<sup>112</sup> Sereny, 59.

and held great influence over the German people. He therefore decided to wait and take this issue up once more after the war had ended and he could control the church. Robert Lifton writes that "Nazi leaders faced the prospect of either having to imprison prominent, highly admired clergymen and other protesters, a course with consequences in terms of adverse public reaction they greatly feared, or else end the program." Himmler said: "If operation T-4 had been entrusted to the SS, things would have happened differently" because "when the Führer entrusts us with a job, we know how to deal with it correctly, without causing useless uproar among the people."<sup>113</sup>

On August 24, 1941, Hitler ordered the cancellation of Aktion T-4 and also issued strict instructions to the *Gauleiters*<sup>114</sup> that there were to be no further provocations of the churches for the duration of the war. The invasion of the Soviet Union in June had opened up new opportunities for the T-4 personnel, who were soon transferred to the east to begin work on a vastly greater program of killing: the "final solution of the Jewish question". But the winding up of the T-4 program did not bring the killing of people with disabilities to an end, although from the end of 1941 the killing became less systematic. Robert Lifton notes that the killing of both adults and children continued to the end of the war on the local initiative of institute directors and party leaders. The methods reverted to those employed before the gas chambers were employed: lethal injection or simple starvation.<sup>115</sup> Ian Kershaw and other historians estimate that by the end of 1941 some 75,000 to 100,000 people had been killed as a result of Aktion T-4, but that further tens of thousands of concentration camp inmates and people judged incapable of work, were killed in Germany between 1942 and 1945. Some of the T-4 killing centers such as

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<sup>113</sup> Lifton, 95.

<sup>114</sup> This is a regional branch leader of the Nazi party.

<sup>115</sup> Lifton, 96-98.

Hartheim continued to kill individuals sent to them from all over Germany until 1945. These euthanasia centers practiced what is called “wild” euthanasia. However, they knew there would be no punishment for their actions.

## CHAPTER 4

### “THE TWISTED ROAD”: THE NAZIS SEARCH FOR THE “FINAL SOLUTION” AND THE ROLE OF T-4

T-4 had not seen its last days; although it had been officially “ended”, it later proved to be of great value to Hitler and the Nazi leadership. The war for Lebensraum in the East created a “problem” for Nazi Germany. As the Wehrmacht advanced forward conquering more territory, they also took in larger numbers of Jewish Poles and Non-Jewish Poles. For Hitler this created a space problem. The conquered territory in the East was for the resettlement of ethnic Germans. This meant that the current inhabitants of that land needed to be moved elsewhere. However, none of the Nazis had any sort of idea as to where. The Nazis needed a new plan for dealing with their so called “problem.” The answer to this “problem” took the form of *Sonderbehandlung* (special treatment) 14f13. 14f13 also led to the “solution” to the overall “Jewish problem” or what today is known as *Die Endlösung* or ‘the Final Solution’.

The Nazis used a coded language when recording the death of the inmates of concentration camps. “14 f 1” was natural death, “14 f 2” - suicide or accidental death, “14 f 3” - shot while trying to escape, “14 f I” – execution. By Himmler’s order, in April 1941, 14 f 13, the “euthanasia” of sick or infirm prisoners was instituted.<sup>116</sup> According to Henry Friedlander early in 1941 Himmler had asked Phillip Bouhler how the staff of T-4 might still be used in the concentration camps.<sup>117</sup> From the inception of Operation 14f13, T-4 sent medical personnel to the camps to select and list prisoners for liquidation. Collaboration between the Inspectorate of the Concentration Camps and the T-4 administrators did not require extensive negotiations.

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<sup>116</sup> Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 142.

<sup>117</sup> Friedlander, 142.

Himmler had provided some support services for T-4 killing operations that were organized by Viktor Brack.<sup>118</sup> Once Himmler and Bouhler “had reached an agreement on the killing of concentration camp prisoners, Brack simply coordinated the joint killing operation.”<sup>119</sup> This SS-T-4 collaboration included both the process of selecting the victims and the actual killing operation. Prisoners from all camps administered by the Inspectorate, “except Natzweiler, which was established too late to be included”, were selected for 14 f 13.<sup>120</sup>

Wolfgang Sofsky in *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* suggests that T-4 was the model for *Aktion 14f13*. It served as the ideal model for the extermination of the camp inmates. Sofsky argues, rightly so, that the euthanasia practises were first used on the “mentally ill” camp inmates than were extended to include those inmates unable, and in some cases who refused, to work. This turned the forced labor camps into killing factories.<sup>121</sup> The selection process involved a two-tier approach. SS camp physicians preselected a pool of potential victims, and T-4 physicians then picked the ones to receive “special treatment” from this pool. Officially, the Inspectorate directed SS camp physicians to select those suffering from incurable physical diseases who were permanently unable to undertake physical labor.<sup>122</sup> In addition to personal data, the reason for arrest, and the date of incarceration, SS camp physicians had to provide details about physical ailments but not about the disabilities that had been used to evaluate the handicapped. Unofficially, the Inspectorate applied other criteria that were not transmitted in writing. The unofficial instructions covered racial and eugenic criteria for

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<sup>118</sup> Friedlander, 143.

<sup>119</sup> Friedlander, 143.

<sup>120</sup> Friedlander, 143.

<sup>121</sup> Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 243.

<sup>122</sup> Friedlander, 143.

selection.<sup>123</sup> This was too easy any fears that what was being done was illegal and some way. By “officially” only killing those with incurable physical diseases, they could spin the deaths as “mercy killings.” This was also a technique learned from the T-4 personnel.

The SS camp physicians were also instructed to include a large proportion of prisoners with criminal or antisocial records, since prior criminal charges and current behaviour had to be listed. However, in reality the prisoner's ability to do physical labor was the deciding factor in whether or not the person was to be included in the program, but even there the SS physicians picked their victims in the arbitrary manner common in the concentration camps. It was not in fact necessary for the condemned to be ailing particularly if they were Jewish. It was sufficient if somebody in authority had decided to dispose of them. Physicians sometimes saw the victims, but examinations were cursory and essentially irrelevant. Decisions were indicated with a cross in a box on the form provided for the purpose. The SS spread the rumour in the camps that sick and weak prisoners could report for transfer to a sanatorium; to accept such a transfer was, of course, volunteering for death. The methods that were used in tricking the inmate into believing they were going to receive some kind of medical care, and the manner in which the inmate was chosen all come from the T-4 staff that was assigned to 14F13.<sup>124</sup>

On April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1940, Herbert Linden sent a request to all local health officials to send in the names of all their Jewish patients. A few months thereafter these patients were transferred in large groups to various gathering points; from there they would be directed to “euthanasia” centers in Reich territory for gassing. According to Christopher Browning in *Origins of the*

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<sup>123</sup> Friedlander, 143-144

<sup>124</sup> Friedlander, 144.

*Final Solution* these were some of the first gassings of the Holocaust.<sup>125</sup> While these gassings might have been the first they were not the first choice, quite the contrary actually, they were the last choice. For Browning, the killing of Jews by the methods of the T-4 staff was the last step in a long, often twisted, line of Nazi racial policy evolution. This process is evident by the trial and error system the Nazis went about in trying to find a more permanent “solution” to their self-imposed “problem”. Browning’s argument is sound because this process is evolutionary. This evolutionary process began early with deportation attempts by the Nazis. However, the war in the east had taken in large swaths of land that was rich in Jewish inhabitants. This land was to be made available for the resettlement of ethnic Germans. This meant that millions of Jews had to be relocated. There were many ideas among the Nazis as to how to handle this issue; one of the first that Hitler took seriously was the idea of sending Jews to reservations. These reservations were to be similar to those in which the American government had forced Native Americans onto in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first of these reservations were to be near the Polish cities of Nisko and Lublin.

In late summer 1939 Hitler with one of his foremost Nazi intellectuals, Alfred Rosenberg, developed the idea for a Jewish reservation (*Judenreservat*). The town of Lublin in Poland had been in the focus of Nazi planners since the earlier 1930s, with Nazi ideologue Herrmann Seiffert~~s~~ describing it as a center of Jewish worldwide power and source of genetic potential.<sup>126</sup> After Nazi Germany defeated Poland in September 1939 and partitioned it with the Soviet Union, the Lublin area became part of the Nazi German Generalgouvernement headed by Hans Frank. Once under Nazi German control, the area was inspected by Frank's deputy Artur

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<sup>125</sup> Christopher Browning, *Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004),

<sup>126</sup> Leni Yahil, Ina Friedman, Hayah Galai, *The Holocaust: the fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.160.

Seyss-Inquart in November 1939. He reported that - according to the local governor - the area, "swampy in its nature", would serve well as a reservation for Jews, and that "this action would cause [their] considerable decimation."<sup>127</sup> On 25 November, Frank informed the local administration that an influx of "millions of Jews" was proposed.<sup>128</sup> Also in November Odilo Globocnik was put in charge of all issues regarding the Jews in the Lublin area, representing Heinrich Himmler's SS as the area's SS and Police Leader (SSPF).<sup>129</sup> Globocnik set up a department led by a Dr. Hofbauer to plan the settlement of the expected Jews and their conscription to forced labor.<sup>130</sup> Christopher Browning in *Origins of the Final Solution* argues that this was another step in a long line of Nazi failed attempts at a "solution" to the "Jewish Question." For Browning this solution evolved over the course of the Nazi reign after many failed attempts at deporting the Jews out of German and other Reich controlled areas the Nazis attempted a resettlement program. The "problem" only got worse with the invasion of Poland, for this brought in an additional two millions Jews under their control. In addition Nazi plans for the removal of Jews of Eastern Europe were just one part of the much larger racial restructuring plan for the same region. This anticipated the removal of not only Jews but also Poles and Gypsies. The ultimate goal, which took precedence at the time, was resettling the *Volksdeutsche* or ethnic Germans back under the control of Nazi Germany.

Leni Yahil in *The Holocaust: The fate of European Jewry* argues that the Nazis placed the Jews in Lublin hoping that "natural death" would take a quick course. Either conditions would be too harsh for many Jews to survive or because they would be so far from civilization they would die of starvation or disease. The Nazis liked death by "natural causes" because it

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<sup>127</sup> Yahil, 160.

<sup>128</sup> Yahil, 160.

<sup>129</sup> Yahil, 161.

<sup>130</sup> Yahil, 161.

absolved them of any guilt. Yahil also believes that because of its location Lublin would lend itself nicely to extermination camps. Lublin was far enough away that any news of this kind of camp would be unlikely to reach Germany. So, in anticipation of this Himmler placed Odilo Globocnik in charge of “the systematic organization of all matters pertaining to the Jews of the district of Lublin.”<sup>131</sup> Globocnik had been selected for this job because of his previous experience in Austria. While ultimately the Lublin plan was abandoned because of logistical difficulties, it did not stop the deportations to this region, which shortly became a forced labor camp for the Jews who had already arrived before the abandonment of the plan. For the most part Yahil makes a good argument; however, there is no evidence to suggest that the Nazis ever intended to create an extermination camp if the Lublin plan worked. The Nazis have not yet decided what the Final Solution will be; the Lublin plan may have been the Final Solution had it have worked. While this plan would have seen the death of many Jews, it would not, however, have been as murderous as the “Final Solution”.

With the shelving of the Lublin plan the Nazis were once again forced to search for a solution to their “Jewish question.” This led to the development of another outlandish scheme known as the Madagascar Plan. This plan depended squarely on two things: first the fall of France, which the Nazis got in 1940. Next, they needed to defeat the British so the German Navy would have control of the Mediterranean Sea. The idea of sending the Jews to the island of Madagascar off the southeast coast of Africa had been around since the 1880s. During the

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<sup>131</sup> Philip Friedman, “The Lublin Reservation and the Madagascar Plan: Two aspects of Nazi Jewish Policy During the Second World War,” in *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust*, ed. Ada J. Friedman (New York: 1980), 35-37, see also, Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The fate of European Jewry*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 160.

interwar period it was first proposed by the British anti-Semite Henry Hamilton Beamish.<sup>132</sup> In 1938 Adolf Eichmann was instructed to research a foreign police solution to the “Jewish question”, but the idea itself did not catch fire until the summer of 1940 after the fall of France. In his doctoral dissertation, later published as *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office: A Study of Referat D III of Abteilung Deutschland 1940-1943*, Christopher Browning argues that the Madagascar plan was a last ditch effort at deportations. When this plan failed the whole idea of deportation went along as well. From this point on the ‘Final Solution’ was going to result in the death of all Jews under German control one way or another. However, Browning’s book is better known for its contribution to what historians know about the bureaucrats in the German Foreign office. He does this by shedding light on what motivated these people seek the solution to the “Jewish question.” Browning argues that the men and women of this office were motivated by careerism and not some deep rooted ideological hatred of the Jews. This work also gives an excellent assessment of the Madagascar plan from its early origins to its ultimate abandonment for a murders solution to the “Jewish question.” Also, Browning shows that while other historians dismiss this plan as a sham, in 1940 this was an idea the Nazis not only took seriously but made concrete decisions based on the reality of the Madagascar plan.<sup>133</sup> An important point that Browning makes is that while this plan is considered to be a territorial solution it still implied a massive loss of life among the Jewish population. Once again these deaths were to be referred to by the Nazis as death by “natural causes.” Browning is correct on all of his points. The Madagascar Plan was a final last ditch effort to deport the Jews out of both Germany and German controlled Europe. All documents

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<sup>132</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office: A Study of Referat D III of Abteilung Deutschland 1940-1943*, (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1978), 35-36.

<sup>133</sup> Browning, 39.

seem to suggest that this was indeed a very serious plan. The Nazis fully intended to send all Jews under their control to the island if they could gain sea control of the Mediterranean Sea.

After the Luftwaffe's failure to defeat the RAF (Royal Air Force), the Madagascar plan was put on a shelf; however, this did not stop Hitler from using it as a smoke screen when the mass exterminations later began. The failure of the Madagascar Plan and the eventual logistical problems of deportation in general would ultimately lead to the conception of the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question." However, what is today thought of as the 'Final Solution', the factory style extermination camps of the Holocaust, was not the first of the murderous solutions. The first step in the Nazi took in finding the ultimate murders solution to their self imposed "problem" was the ghettoization of Jews.

At first the ghettos were meant to be a short term 'solution' to the Nazis "problem" until the Final Solution could be worked out. Reinhard Heydrich had made it clear at a September 21, 1939, conference with leaders of the Einsatzgruppen that he wanted immediate concentration of Jews in "ghettos...in order to facilitate a 'better possibility of control and later deportation.'"<sup>134</sup> However, they turned out to last much longer than originally intended. The Nazis began systematically to move Polish Jews into designated areas of large Polish cities in the autumn of 1939. The first ghetto at Piotrków Trybunalski was established in October 1939, followed by the first large scale ghetto, the Łódź Ghetto in April 1940 and the Warsaw Ghetto in October of the same year, with many other ghettos established throughout 1940 and 1941. Many Ghettos were walled off or enclosed with barbed wire and bricks. In the case of sealed ghettos, any Jew found

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<sup>134</sup> Browning, *Origins of the Final Solution*, 111.

leaving them was shot on sight. The Warsaw Ghetto was the largest ghetto in Nazi occupied Europe, with 380,000 people and the Łódź Ghetto, the second largest, holding about 160,000.<sup>135</sup>

Life in the ghettos was brutal. In Warsaw 30 percent of the population was forced to live in 2.4 percent of the city's area, a density of 9.2 people per room. In the ghetto of Odrzywół, 700 people lived in an area previously occupied by five families, between 12 and 30 to each small room. The Jews were not allowed out of the ghetto, so they had to rely on food supplied by the Nazis: in Warsaw this was 253 calories (1,060 kJ) per Jew, compared to 669 calories (2,800 kJ) per Pole and 2,613 calories (10,940 kJ) per German. With crowded living conditions, starvation diets, and little sanitation hundreds of thousands of Jews died of disease and starvation.<sup>136</sup> In the spring (or early summer) of 1942, the Germans began Operation Reinhard, the systematic deportation to extermination camps during the Holocaust. The authorities deported Jews from everywhere in Europe to the ghettos of the East or directly to the extermination camps — almost 300,000 people were deported from the Warsaw Ghetto alone to Treblinka over the course of fifty-two days. In some of the Ghettos the local resistance organizations started Ghetto uprisings. None were successful, and the Jewish populations of the ghettos were almost entirely killed. It was understood that many of the Jews who lived in the ghettos would die at some point. Whether that cause was starvation, disease, or some other form of “natural causes” Nazis did not care. In the Nazi mind if Jews died of “natural causes” then they were absolved of all guilt.

### *A More Murderous Solution*

There is an ongoing historical debate as to when the decision was made for the “Final Solution.” Many historians argue that when Hitler made his “prophecy” speech of January 30<sup>th</sup>,

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<sup>135</sup> Browning, *Origins of the Final Solution*, 115.

<sup>136</sup> Browning, *Origins of the Final Solution*, 115-117.

1939, he had already decided on the “Final Solution.” Christian Gerlach has argued for a different timeframe, however, suggesting the decision was made by Hitler on December 12, 1941, when he addressed a meeting of the Nazi Party and of regional party leaders. Gerlach believes that the proof for this is in Joseph Goebbels diary entry of December 13, 1941, the day after Hitler’s private speech. Goebbels wrote:

"Regarding the Jewish Question, the Führer is determined to clear the table. He warned the Jews that if they were to cause another world war, it would lead to their own destruction. Those were not empty words. Now the world war has come. The destruction of the Jews must be its necessary consequence. We cannot be sentimental about it. It is not for us to feel sympathy for the Jews. We should have sympathy rather with our own German people. If the German people have to sacrifice 160,000 victims in yet another campaign in the east, then those responsible for this bloody conflict will have to pay for it with their lives."<sup>137</sup>

Gerlach makes his argument in an article that he published in 1998. In it he argues that Hitler had not decided on what the true “Final Solution” was until the euphoria of victory swept over the German leadership in the summer of 1942 in the wake of the anticipated victory over Russia. Even, then, though, the initial killings would involve only Soviet Jews. Not until the German set-back in front of Moscow and the American entry made the war world war did Hitler see that in order to fully “answer” the “Jewish question” all Jews would have to die.<sup>138</sup> What makes Gerlach’s argument so unique is that it falls in the middle of the two historical schools of thought on the issue, intentionalism and functionalism. Intentionalism is the theory of the Holocaust that

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<sup>137</sup> Ed. And Trans. Louis P. Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1970),

<sup>138</sup> Christen Gerlach, “The Wannsee Conference, the Fate of German Jews and Hitler’s Decision in Principle to Exterminate all European Jews”, *Journal of Modern History*, 70(4), 1998, pg. 792.

states that Hitler intended to kill the Jews of Europe from day one of his reign, in other words “No Hitler, no Holocaust.” Functionalism is the theory that the final solution was only arrived at after many other attempts to get the Jews of Europe to leave; his theory stresses “the twisted road to Auschwitz.” Today most historians side with the functionalist argument because there is more supporting evidence for a long and crooked path to the Holocaust.

There is a constant pattern of euphoria of victory and frustration for the Nazis. After Poland they created the reservations; after the fall of France they conceived of the Madagascar Plan; the *Einsatzgruppen* had been created and employed before the invasion of the Soviet Union, but within a month after the invasion, when most top Generals believed that Russian defeat was imminent, they expanded the scope of the *Einsatzgruppen* to include all Soviet Jews, not just the males. In each case, the Nazis thought they had found a solution to their 'problem' only to have frustrations arise. As a consequence, though, each time there was a new outburst of euphoria, the proposed 'solution' was much more murderous than the previous one. Since frustrations at the local level were also leading in a murderous direction, a process was generated that leads to the 'logic' of murder. While most historians accept the notion of frustration as driving the murderous process, there is still debate over the euphoria of victory notion. A case can be made, however, for both theories. Many historians are unsure about the correlation between Nazis quick victories in the war and the ‘solution’ to the Nazis so called problem. In *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* Christopher Browning argues that this idea had been “overshadowed by the history of European and German anti-Semitism, the development of the eugenics movement, and the functioning of the Nazi system of government.”<sup>139</sup> Browning is not trying to underestimate the importance of German anti-Semitism but is of the opinion that

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<sup>139</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *Nazi Policy. Jewish Workers, German Killers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000), 2.

while these factors are important they are not the only ones that need to be examined. The Swiss historian Philippe Burrin disagrees with Browning on the idea of euphoria of victory. For Burrin the driving force of the efforts to find the 'Final Solution' was the frustrations the Nazis encountered each time one of their previous proposed 'solutions' failed. While most historians agree that the constant frustrations the Nazis were experienced were the driving force for the murderous solutions, the disagreement comes from the euphoria of victory idea. Göty Aly believes in the frustration theory as well. In *'Final Solution': Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews*, he argues that each subsequent idea was developed only after the Nazis were filled with euphoria of victory, and that after each frustrated failure the next "solution" was more murderous than the last.<sup>140</sup> This also supports Aly's argument that the Nazi plan for mass murder of the Jews came within the government as a response to local pressures. For Aly, most of these decisions come from Himmler or Heydrich, not Hitler. Even the decisions from Himmler and Heydrich were because of internal pressures to solve the "Jewish question" according to Aly.<sup>141</sup> Aly's argument is highly unlikely, however; Himmler and Heydrich, while very ambitious, would never sanction an operation as massive as the killing of the Jews without express permission from Hitler. That permission did not have to be in the form of a written command but would have come through closed door meetings with Hitler.

Although the deportations and the ghettos can be called murderous solutions in their own right, they are not the Final Solution. The ghettos themselves were just temporary holding pens until a more "permanent solution" was developed. The development of the "permanent solution" started with the Einsatzgruppen. The Einsatzgruppen were squads composed primarily of

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<sup>140</sup> Göty Aly, *'Final Solution': Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews*, (New York: Arnold Press, 1999) 195.

<sup>141</sup> Aly, 95-96.

German SS and police personnel. Under the command of the German Security Police (Sicherheitspolizei or Sipo) and Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst or SD) officers, the Einsatzgruppen had among their tasks the murder of those perceived to be racial or political enemies found behind German combat lines in the occupied Soviet Union. These victims included Jews, Roma (Gypsies), and officials of the Soviet state and the Soviet Communist party. The Einsatzgruppen also murdered thousands of residents of institutions for the mentally and physically disabled. Many scholars believe that the systematic killing of Jews in the occupied Soviet Union by Einsatzgruppen and Order Police (Ordnungspolizei) battalions was the first step of the "Final Solution," the Nazi program to murder all European Jews. However, some scholars such as Dina Porat and Konrad Kweit contend that the Final Solution started in Lithuania after the German invasion. Dina Porat argues that "The Final Solution - the systematic overall physical extermination of Jewish communities one after the other - began in Lithuania."<sup>142</sup> Konrad Kweit supports Porat's argument by saying "Lithuanian Jews were among the first victims of the Holocaust. The Germans carried out the mass executions ... signaling the beginning of the "Final Solution."<sup>143</sup> Scholars such as Christopher Browning, however, disagree with Porat and Kweit. He argues that the first killings took place in eastern Poland and European Russia just after the Nazi invasion in 1941. According to Browning the Einsatzgruppen, composed of four battalion-sized operational groups, followed the German army into the Soviet Union. Einsatzgruppe A fanned out from East Prussia across Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia toward Leningrad. Einsatzgruppe B started from Warsaw in occupied Poland and moved out across Belorussia toward Smolensk and Minsk. Einsatzgruppe C began operations from Krakow

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<sup>142</sup> Dina Porat, "The Holocaust in Lithuania: Some Unique Aspects", in David Cesarani, *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation*, Routledge, 2002

<sup>143</sup> Konrad Kweit, "Rehearsing for Murder: The Beginning of the Final Solution in Lithuania in June 1941", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Volume 12, Number 1, pp. 3-26, 1998.

and moved forward to the western Ukraine toward Kharkov and Rostov-on-Don. Einsatzgruppe C in two days in late September 1941 massacred 33,771 Jews, from Kiev, in the ravine at Babi Yar. Einsatzgruppe D operated farthest south. Its personnel carried out massacres in the southern Ukraine and the Crimea, around Nikolayev, Kherson, Simferopol, Sevastopol, Feodosiya, and in the Krasnodar region.

Richard Rhodes's book *Master's of Death: The SS-Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust* offers a detailed account of the Einsatzgruppen. Rhodes provides powerful descriptions of the killings carried out by each Einsatzgruppen A, B, C, and D. He also moves particularly well between policy and personalities, seeking to explain why top level policy became steadily more lethal and how it was that recognizably human beings should have been willing to pursue such a homicidal policy. Rhodes mentions the history of violence and the importance that it played in the Einsatzgruppen. Rhodes succeeds especially well in highlighting the importance of a violent background without downplaying the role of ideology in the motivation for the Einsatzgruppen.

Shooting was the most common form of killing used by the Einsatzgruppen. Yet in the late summer of 1941, Heinrich Himmler, noting the psychological burden that mass shootings produced on his men, requested that a more convenient mode of killing be developed. The result was the gas van, a mobile gas chamber mounted on the chassis of a cargo truck that used carbon monoxide from the truck's exhaust to kill its victims. Gas vans made their first appearance on the eastern front in late fall 1941 and were eventually used along with shooting to murder Jews and other victims in most areas where the Einsatzgruppen operated. This was the next step in the

murderous process for the Nazis. Himmler had “concern” for the psychological burden of the horrendous mass shootings. His fear led to the development of factory style killing.<sup>144</sup>

The gas vans marked the beginning of a long line of Nazi experiments to find the perfect form of mass murder. That Nazis needed a more efficient way of killing large numbers of people; the gas vans were a step in that direction. The vans were an “improvement” for the Nazis; however, it was not the method they were looking for. They found that method in a program they had been forced to end recently, *Aktion T-4*. The T-4 program had already created the perfect killing method for the Nazis, and given them the perfect means of disposing of bodies. Henry Friedlander’s *Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* traces the history of T-4. Friedlander argued that the origins of the Holocaust can be traced to the coming together of two lines of Nazi policies, the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazi regime and its “racial cleansing” policies that led to the Action T-4 program. In Friedlander’s opinion the decisive origins of the Holocaust came from the T-4 Program. He has pointed out that the poison gas used to commit mass murder and the crematoria used to dispose of the bodies of those killed by the gas were originally deployed in the T-4 program in 1939, and that only later in 1941 were the experts from the T-4 Program imported by the SS to help design and later run the death camps for the Jews of Europe. Because the “chronology of Nazi killing operations provides a road map...The murder of the handicapped preceded the murder of Jews and Gypsies, and it is therefore reasonable to conclude that T-4’s killing operation served as a model for the final solution.”<sup>145</sup> Though Friedlander does not deny the importance of Nazi anti-Semitic ideology, in his view the T-4 Program was the crucial seed that gave birth to the Holocaust. The overall

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<sup>144</sup> Browning, *Origins of Nazi Genocide*, p 192.

<sup>145</sup> Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 284.

success of the euthanasia program convinced the Nazis that mass murder was possible according to Friedlander. He also points out that it showed the Nazi leadership two very important points; first, that ordinary men and women could kill large numbers of innocent people, and second, that bureaucracy would cooperate. These are two very important points for the Nazis. Mass killing is a new and unknown business; the Nazis are not for sure how people will react. T-4 proved that the ordinary person was capable of killing massive numbers of people if told.

Friedlander also makes the point that T-4 proved to the Nazis that it was much more efficient to bring the victims to a central killing facility instead of going village to village shooting them.<sup>146</sup> It was also only logical that these centers were modeled after the T-4 facilities.<sup>147</sup> However, they also learned that these killing centers needed to be located outside of Germany. The public response to T-4 had been very negative. Himmler and the SS knew that in order to avoid another situation like the public outcry against T-4, the killing facilities need to be outside the German borders, and what better place than in Poland. Therefore, in December of 1941 “the first killing center of the Final Solution began functioning at Chelmno in the Wartheland.”<sup>148</sup> After Chelmno Operation Reinhard was started, named in honor of Reinhard Heydrich, this operation created the stationary killing centers. Chelmno had been a stationary center, but it made use of the gas vans; the camps of *Aktion* Reinhard, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka had gas chambers on site.

Götz Aly supports Friedlander’s argument about the importance of *Aktion* T-4. In *Final Solution’ Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews*, Aly writes that T-4 was crucial in the development of the Final Solution. For the Nazis “the experiences of Operation T-

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<sup>146</sup> Friedlander, 286.

<sup>147</sup> Friedlander, 286.

<sup>148</sup> Friedlander, 286.

4 remained crucial for the later organizers of the ‘final solution of the Jewish questions’.<sup>149</sup> Aly emphasized the same point as Friedlander; the importance of the experiences of T-4. The lessons that the Nazi were able to take away from T-4 taught them everything they needed to know in order to create the Final Solution. Aly believes that “it gave them the certainty that systematically planned mass murder, organized according to a division of labor, was essentially possible to achieve with the German government apparatus and the German people.”<sup>150</sup> Aly’s argument is sound; T-4 had proved that mass murder on the scale the Nazis needed was possible. The only exception to this was the Bishop Galen of Münster; his sermon sparked the uproar that led to the end of T-4. The Nazis, however, had learned that in order to keep a similar situation from happening with the Jews, all that was needed was to move the killing centers outside of Germany. Aly argues that the decision for using T-4 methods for the killing centers in Poland came from within the German government apparatus. He argues that the decision for the Final Solution came mostly from within the same apparatus; his line of thinking can thus be classified as extreme functionalism. He believes that the top Nazi leadership had nothing to do with initiating the Holocaust and that the entire initiative came from the lower ranks of the German bureaucracy. Aly is on the fringe of the Functionalist camp. There are few if any historians that side with Aly. Aly for the most simply seeks to prod the argument and see what kind of reaction he can cause with his arguments. While most of the other historians of the functionalist and intentionalist debate have aided in historians’ understanding of the Nazi process that led to the Holocaust, Aly has not furthered that debate along like many others. His views are important to mention because they are to extreme of one end of the argument and that many other historians do not agree with.

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<sup>149</sup> Aly, 244.

<sup>150</sup> Aly, 244.

Friedlander has come into conflict with Yehuda Bauer. The two disagree on who should and should not be counted as victims of the Nazi Holocaust. Friedlander has argued that three groups should be considered victims of the Holocaust, namely Jews, Roma, and the mentally and physically disabled, noting that the latter were Nazism's first victims. Friedlander's arguments concerning the inclusion of both the mentally and physically disabled and Roma as victims of the Holocaust have often been embodied in the form of intense debates with those such as the Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer who has argued that only Jews should be considered victims of the Holocaust.<sup>151</sup> With the Holocaust being as much about racial purification as was the T-4 program Friedlander's argument seems to be the better one. Any person who died as a result of Nazi racial policy, be it the mentally or physical disabled, a Polish person who was worked to death building roads in the east, or a Jew who died by the gun of an Einsatzgruppen member does not matter. Bauer republished a collection of his most important articles on the Holocaust in *Rethinking the Holocaust* in which he reexamines what the Holocaust was. Bauer has long argued the uniqueness of the Holocaust but in this work stressed instead the "unprecedentedness" of the Holocaust.<sup>152</sup> The latter term is more accurate term for the Holocaust, but Bauer's central argument does not change. However, because Bauer believes that the Holocaust was a well planned attempt at mass murder, his view on who is a victim is influenced by it. That view also influences how Bauer defines what the Holocaust is and what is genocide. Because Bauer argues that the Holocaust was a planned mass murder of one "race", it differs from genocide.<sup>153</sup> Bauer is right that there are differences but just not the differences he points out. The main difference is that the factory style mass murder of the killing centers and the manner in which the trains delivered the victims to the centers makes the Nazi genocide very different from any other

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<sup>151</sup> Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 11-12.

<sup>152</sup> Bauer, 20.

<sup>153</sup> Bauer, 12.

genocide. Bauer also argues that the victims of the Holocaust were selected based on heredity factors as is the case for the Jews. However, the Gypsies, who were murdered in the same killing centers as Jews, were also selected based on heredity factors. This is the hole in Bauer's argument. This is also the same for the mentally and physical disabled that were murdered under the T-4 program. While they were not murdered in the same killing facilities as the Jews or Gypsies, they were the first to die and died by the same methods as the Jews and Gypsies. Bauer classifies the victims of T-4 as "an internal cleansing actions" which is true, but the murder of the Jews was also "an internal cleansing action."<sup>154</sup> Bauer says that the Gypsies cannot be considered victims of the Holocaust because not every Gypsy was targeted for death. He notes many exemptions for different Gypsies.<sup>155</sup> What he fails to note is that these exemptions were only to last as long as it took the Nazis to win the war. Fortunately, Hitler lost the war, but had the role been reversed these exemptions would have ended as soon as the war. Something interesting that Bauer does is concede that the same ideology drove the killing of Jews, Gypsies, and the mental and physical disabled. He still contends that only Jews can be considered victims of the Holocaust. It seems as though because there were murdered for the same reason, they should therefore all be considered victims of the Holocaust.

Regardless of who is counted as a victim of the Holocaust, one thing that is obvious is the role which both the staff and the methods of T-4 played in the Final Solution. From the designing of the killing centers to the methods used for killing and elimination of bodies, the staff of the T-4 program was pivotal. T-4 brought the factory style killing of the death camps and is what made possible the massive death tolls that came from 1942-1944. The staff of the T-4 program found the "solution" to the Nazi self imposed "Jewish problem."

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<sup>154</sup> Bauer, 284.

<sup>155</sup> Bauer, 60-61.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### *A Final Word on Euthanasia and the Holocaust*

Eugenics and euthanasia had been a key part in Hitler's dream to create the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Understanding both movements' importance is a key factor in understanding Nazism. It is also very important in understanding the evolution of the Holocaust. *Aktion T-4* played a decisive role in both understanding and answering the complex argument of the intentionalism vs. functionalism debate. However, in order to fully understand the importance of T-4 and the role that is played, it must be examined from its origins, and those origins are the end of World War One.

The Great War played a monumental role in shaping the world. The impact that it had on German society at the time is what helped pave the road that Hitler traveled to power. People had been changed by the war and not for the good. German society had lost the war but could not understand why. So they sought a scapegoat, the Jews. Many in Germany also felt that World War One had been in a sense a case of reverse Darwinism. The war had cost society the smartest and the strongest, the best and brightest; those left behind were thought to be the weak and feebleminded. Historians now agree that this is what led to the popular eugenics mindset in Germany at the time. Hitler was able to use this fear in his rise to power later.

Technology had also played a large role in making a society that could kill millions of people. For the first time death was experienced on a massive scale during World War One. Technology now devalued human life. It was no longer as scarred as it once had been; machines could now take a life easier than ever. This also led to a desensitization of society to death. People had never seen death on such a large scale. Killing was no longer a face to face event;

with the aid of a machine death could be delivered both close and afar. These types of technology had been around before but never had they been used in such a manner. The American Civil War had seen massive amounts of death, but after each battle came a feeling of shock. During World War One after each battle had come a feeling of “how can we kill more next time.”

Society and the Nazis had been shaped by the war, but the Nazis had also gained influence from America. Eugenics grew up in America, with many of the leading eugenicists being American. The United States had some of the world’s first laws that were aimed at creating a master race. As has been argued, Hitler was a great admirer of American laws on eugenics. Hitler now believed that the German state could regain its lost glory only if the state applied to German society the principles of racial hygiene and eugenics. George Mosse in *Fallen Soldiers* and Mark Mazower in *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth century*, makes excellent arguments as to the effect World War One had on society. Both show that not only did World War One have immediate effects but also lasting effects on both Germany and the people of Europe.

Guided by the over-riding principles of racial hygiene, racial purity, and national health, the Nazi regime was committed to the removal of those unfit to live and produce inferior offspring. In 1935, the Nuremberg Laws provided for the forced sterilization of the unfit. Not only did Hitler have in mind such "inferior races" as Jews and Gypsies, he also included Aryans he saw as unfit such as the mentally ill, handicapped, the incurably insane and the terminally sick. He believed that once these people have been removed from society Germany would once again rule Europe.

When Hitler came to power he knew that Europe was eventually going to be at war; however, he was not sure as to when. In 1939 he understands that war will be coming soon, so he orders the killing of the same people mentally ill and physical disabled. This was the first time that Hitler authorized the killing of people whom he deemed as unfit for society. The mandate does not apply to Jews yet. This is where the argument of the intentionalists starts to come into question. If their argument is correct, Hitler should have sought to kill the Jews with them and sooner than the middle to end of 1939.

One of the many questions that surround T-4 is whether or not the children's euthanasia program was part of the *Aktion T-4* program? This question has yet to be answered and needs to be researched further. A tentative answer would be that they were both separate programs. While the T-4 program was influenced by the children's program, much of the evidence points to the fact that these may have been two separate programs that historians have just treated as one over the years. The children's euthanasia program both started before and ended after the T-4 program. There is also no document that officially created the children's program like with T-4.

A question that has been answered thoroughly by historians is the motivation for the doctors and other staff of the euthanasia program. For the doctors career advancement was one of the main factors, but there were many others. The era in which these doctors worked was also a big factor, unlike modern medicine euthanasia was not frowned upon, in fact it was seen as the next logical step in racial hygiene. One very interesting argument about why the doctors murdered so many people is that without Hitler these doctors would have never committed such acts. This is the proposed argument by Robert Jay Lifton. This argument is very much in accord with the intentionalist who argued that without Hitler, there would have been no Holocaust. However, the more plausible answer, as proposed by Hugh Gregory Gallagher, is that both sides

meet in the middle. Hitler was very influential in their motivation, but the doctors were also willing participants in their own actions.

Something that Hitler was not as influential over as he had hoped was public opinion. He never anticipated full cooperation on the part of the German people; however, he also never anticipated the reaction that T-4 received. The power and influence of the church was greater than the influence of Hitler. However, after the war Hitler was going to take up that very issue. Hitler was very cautious about putting his name on a document that might later be unpopular with the public, however, with T-4 he made an exception and it was the last time he ever did so again. Public opinion was very important to Hitler and the Nazis, and T-4 proved to be a blemish on that popularity that Hitler enjoyed so much.

While T-4 had proven to be unpopular with the people, it was not unpopular with the Nazis and later proved to be very useful to the Nazis in the quest to “solve the Jewish problem.” With the Nazis many failed attempts at answering their self imposed “Jewish problem” came much frustration; the methods of T-4 later helped the Nazis end that frustration. There is an important point that comes from this frustration though, and that is the theory that with the euphoria of victory that Nazis experienced with their quick victories early in the war, also came the frustrations of failure with each unsuccessful attempt to answer the “Jewish question.” Also, with each frustration that the Nazis experienced came a new and more murderous solution. The methods of T-4 end this long line of Nazi frustration.

T-4 answered the Nazis biggest “problem”, but it creates a historical one. Should the victims of T-4 be counted as Holocaust victims, and the answer is yes. The argument has been made that only Jews can be considered victims of the Nazi Holocaust because they were the target of the persecution. Henry Friedlander makes the claim that all those who died as a result

of the Nazis racial hygiene policies are to be considered victims of the Holocaust. This means the Poles who died while working on forced labor projects, Jews, Gypsies, and the mentally and physical disabled all were victims of the Holocaust.

Within the intentionalist versus functionalist debate, investigation of the T-4 program has provided useful clarification. If the Nazis attempt to murder all the Jews of Europe was a well planned event than they would not have had to borrow ideas from other killing programs. Also, as Christopher Browning points out there would have been no need for such a long experimentation progress had the Holocaust been planned from the beginning of the Third Reich. If this were the case, as soon as Hitler got the chance the killing would have begun, and as the evidence points out this was not the case. The experimentation process and the decision to use the killing methods of T-4, and to use the staff of T-4, as a solution to the “Jewish Question” proves that the Nazis were shopping around for the best methods of killing. By showing that the Nazis were still looking for the best methods of killing also shows that Hitler was not following a master plan but was simply improvising as he went along. The ultimate answer to this debate, however, can be found in the synthesis that has been proposed by scholars such as Ian Kershaw and Michael Marrus. They have suggested the Holocaust was a result of pressures that came from both above and below and that Hitler lacked a master plan but was the decisive force behind the Holocaust. The phrase 'cumulative radicalization' is used in this context to sum up the way extreme rhetoric and competition among different Nazi agencies produced increasingly extreme policies.

So many have written on this and studied it, that many often ask, why continue to study these horrible acts more, that answer is simple, because no matter how much we study about the Nazis and the eugenics and the euthanasia programs there is always more to learn. How and why

are two of the most important questions that exist in the study of history, and the more one learns about these horrible acts the more those two simple words, how and why, become increasingly important. It is hard to say that we will ever fully understand Nazism, but for the sake of so many who died, from the euthanasia center at Hadamar to the crematorium at Auschwitz, we must never stop trying.

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