

Seduction, Delusion, & Politics: Culture within the Nazi Control System

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“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil,
is for good men to do nothing.”

-Edmund Burke

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Foreword

The central themes of this theoretical work draw heavily on the social-psychological and historical interpretations produced by Philip Zimbardo and Christopher Browning, respectively. Though this is a case-study of the control system which would ultimately be implemented by the Nazis during their reign of control in Germany from 1933 to 1945, it is important to understand that the ideas put forth here are not intended to insinuate that manipulations of culture have been confined to a single epoch, rather they occur and have occurred throughout time. The contention here is that the immediate history of the German state, the pre-existing fodder for in-group and out-group distinctions, and the authoritative political and social structures combined with the ideological rhetoric and material tactics of the National Socialists to facilitate participation in atrocities by zealots and ordinary citizens alike.

The work includes an introduction which shall serve to define the terms that will be discussed throughout, three middle sections titled "Germany and the Populace," "Hitler and Himmler," and "Hitler's Agents," and a conclusion to summarize the main ideas. This structure corresponds to the different levels of investment in and modes of engagement with Nazi policies. "Germany and the Populace" provides an overview of the immediate history of the German state as well as the experience of the ordinary people under Nazi control. The section "Hitler and Himmler" contrasts the mindset of two leaders of the Third Reich. "Hitler's Agents" is intended to indicate the disassociation of the *Wehrmacht* or regular German Army from Nazi police entities and their auxiliaries which are the focus of the discussion.

Introduction

In June of 1941 Adolf Hitler unleashed his "war of annihilation" against the Soviet Union. By this time Germany had grown out of the economic ruin which it had endured in the years following World War I, and experienced again following the crash of 1929, to become one of the most powerful nations on Earth. The government's conception of what they deemed an ethnic community bound by blood created a strong internal will amongst the populace to contribute to this new society. The military was educated in their racial superiority and fought against anyone who believed otherwise. The leaders of this nation believed so strongly in their ideological views that some even lost touch with sanity. What developed in Germany was an alternate culture, comprising a set of cognitive possibilities allowing people's perceptions to overwrite what one might expect to have been accepted ideals and moral standards of an advanced western population. The Nazi culture made common sense out of ignorance, clouded the mind, and redefined the order of moral values. Such a variance in cultural understanding can arise out of a system's creation and manipulation of situational forces. The strong Nazi system of control was able to take advantage of pre-existing situational forces to create and manipulate their own in order to facilitate the existence of their own culture, ultimately leading to the Holocaust, the most destructive war in history, and some of the worst wartime atrocities ever witnessed. This work therefore will seek to highlight aspects of the Nazi system which created situational forces capable of altering culturally accepted norms. Depending on the division of society, this acceptance of a new culture had the power to manifest malevolent innate characteristics and manipulate the group and the individual towards a path of, as viewed by those outside of the Nazi culture, evil, inhumanity, and indifference.

In order for a systemically manufactured culture to exist, there must be a system capable of creating one.¹ A well entrenched system capable of bringing about such subordination of groups and individuals requires three *pillars of support*: authority, identification, and fear.² Authority provides the justification to rule just as fear subsequently prevents the subordinates from questioning said authority. Identification by the groups and individuals with their ruler or ruler's set of ideals blinds their human predisposition to question their respective roles. The theories presented in this work are not confined to a single epoch and are even evinced within religious institutions such as the Catholic Church. The authority is said to stem from God, therefore the Pope (God's earthly representative), and a conceptual identification with religious figures or their livelihoods such as saints, leaders, and Christ himself. The Pope's justification of authority has come through his election by the College of Cardinals. The fear and avoidance of sin caused by the threat of eternal damnation has been preached thousands of years, keeping every self-loving Christian from questioning this authority stemming from old Christian "tradition" (Weber 36). Thus when Christian knights in the Crusades were ordered by their rulers to destroy preachers and followers of infidelity, they did so without question, for to be a successful Crusader was to guarantee a place in Heaven. The fact that they actively broke the Commandment "You shall not kill" was forgiven by the Pope as they were seen as doing so in service to God.

¹ A set of rules or laws created by an entity and enforced by agents possessing some sort of authority. To call a system a "control system" is to insinuate a high level of censorship, such as that within a police state. Here system is used in most cases to refer to a specific government. Though a system can also be thought of as a religious institution, a military, etc.

² Another possibility might be love and admiration; this, however, as suggested by Niccolo Machiavelli in his famous work *The Prince*, creates a greater susceptibility to assassination, because it is assumed that a loved dictator would be predisposed towards returning such affection and therefore lower his guard. Hitler happened to benefit from both, as well as often enjoying them simultaneously depending on the makeup of his audience.

These pillars also existed within Nazism. After the failure of his November 1923 coup attempt in Munich, Hitler's subsequent methods allowed him to assume power through legal means in 1933, ensuring a much greater sense of legitimacy behind his authority. Hitler's authority was founded in "charisma," as he was viewed by many as a sort of savior (Weber 36). Once having assumed power, the legitimacy of his administration was kept from question by the shroud of police and informants who created a vast aura of not only fear throughout the population, but also a high level of uncertainty, uncertainty about the future, the whereabouts of those who had been arrested, and the new demands of this dictatorship. The Nazis effectively catered their policy to whomever they were speaking in any given venue, thus allowing for a level of identification to stem from almost every aspect of German society (Allen 193).

The influence of a control system is entirely dependent upon the mutual strength of its pillars of support. Authority existing without any perceived legitimacy and held in place solely by fear cannot be expected to last for any significant period of time. Existence of this illegitimate authority is often the case in developing countries whose governments are regularly overthrown by coups, often violently. Without the perception of legitimacy these governments only last until the next coup or uprising. Likewise, fear absent authority is nothing more than terrorism. Terrorists seek to create fear as a means of enforcing their will, but without any perceived authority backing them up, their efforts become endless. This is the problem that the Taliban creates in Afghanistan. They actively promote an aura of fear among villagers but have no authority to rule (it was eliminated by NATO and the Northern Alliance) short of their specific interpretation of Islam, however the fear that they create prevails over any loyalty that the villagers may have to their new government which does not have the

means to protect them. Thus a state of limbo will exist until NATO is either able to eradicate the Taliban fighters, or until NATO leaves and the Taliban is able to reestablish their authority. Identification with like-minded ideals is necessary to take the last step in building a loyalty within a population. Without this sense of identification the number of dissidents will be significant enough to weaken any new cultural acceptance so that it is never fully recognized. Upon the strong support of these pillars a control system becomes erected. It will not decay by means of internal factors alone. Over time these pillars will only decay through a prevalence of conflicting external and internal factors. The Nazi control system met with destruction primarily due to external factors, i.e. war, though towards the end it also began to crumble from within through various coup attempts and power struggles within the upper leadership. However, the absence of these factors makes it impossible for a control system to crumble entirely from within. Once having become entrenched, a control system develops and furthers an ability to manipulate *situational forces*, creating its own culture. In so doing, it is able to control the actions of its subordinates as well as draw innate feelings to surface level.

Now that the makeup of effective control systems is understood, the next question becomes: what are these situational forces that the control system is able to manipulate in order to create new cultural boundaries and bring out innate human propensities to violence on a large scale? The forces involved include, but are not strictly limited to, the presence of superiors with perceived legitimate authority, dehumanization and deindividuation of so-called enemies, political apathy, endurance of hardship (economic, social, and/or political), and nationalism.³ The existence of

³ Deindividuation has two different meanings, both of which are argued here to be situational forces on their own. The first is the loss of one's own personal identification when operating within a group. The second is the elimination of an enemy's identity, comparable to

these forces is dependent upon the existence of a control system. Specifically which forces exist and how they are managed is dependent upon the strength of the control system's pillars of support.

Many unthinkable actions are often brought about by the presence of systemic superiors. The subordinates to this figure feel compelled to do as they are ordered and are reassured that what they are doing is necessary. They have no reason to think for themselves, as this greater power is perceived as such and has convincingly endorsed their proposed actions. Ultimately they have been slightly manipulated by the encouragement of their superior who has effectively used his or her position to influence subordinate behavior through their own sanctification. Adolf Hitler himself summarized this phenomenon in the following statement, "What luck for rulers that people do not think" (Fest 576).⁴ This is a primary factor when considering any case of sanctioned mass murder. An ordinary person in democratic society today easily comes to the conclusion that had a soldier simply questioned his actions or the commands of his officer, that soldier would have refused to commit such an act.⁵ However, that same person lacks the ability to fathom the intricate network of cognitive processes, or some might say lack thereof, which the influence of the control system has conjured. Stanley Milgram's study of obedience helps explain this "ordinary person's" lack of understanding.⁶ Partly inspired by the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem,

dehumanization but at the individual, i.e. one on one, level. To prevent confusion, the first example will be referred to as "personal deindividuation" and the second as "deindividuation of others".

⁴ "Was für ein Glück für die Regierenden, dass die Menschen nicht denken."

⁵ Regardless of the form of government, militaries are control systems, though they exist within larger systems.

⁶ In Milgram's experiment there are three parties. The "teacher" (the unwitting subject) shocks the "learner" (a confederate) with a progressively increased voltage each time the learner incorrectly answers a question. The teacher is able to hear the cries of pain, etc. of the learner but is urged to continue by the experimenter (a superior) until the maximum voltage is reached or the teacher refuses to continue.

Milgram's experiment gave a shocking glimpse into the willingness of people to do as they are told, as the ordinary person who shocked each victim did so out of a sense of obligation rather than any abnormally violent or destructive tendencies (Milgram 1987). The results of this experiment thus served to strengthen, to a frightening degree, Hannah Arendt's concept of the *banality of evil*, i.e. the suggestion that evils such as the Holocaust are not precipitated solely, perhaps not even to any large degree, by fanatics or sociopaths, but rather by normal individuals who have chosen to adhere to the principles set in place by their, in this case, governmental system in order to advance their careers and protect their way of life (1986). In essence, the moral obligations of ordinary people were reordered. The obligation to "do one's duty" became more important than the obligation not to commit murder (Sabini & Silver 201).

Another situational force, dehumanization, serves to amplify exponentially the obedience of a subordinate. Dehumanization is the process in which enemies of a particular system are molded to be seen as having non-human characteristics, making them less than human. Military action in general does this both intentionally and unintentionally. It is easier to kill someone whose life is not seen as having equal value as other humans, and enemy forces, the subjects of propaganda in this particular case, are targeted this way. The unintentional side is the fact that a soldier's comrades are being killed by this common enemy, an enemy who holds different values and who is killing those people close to that soldier. In this way personal feelings of vengeance are unintentionally triggered by the enemy. As a result, the enemy is distanced to the point where they, in view of the soldier, are not of equal stature. Dehumanization is witnessed in differing degrees. Racism plays a major role, as it is easier to dehumanize an enemy who differs in physical appearance. The success of the Nazis in dehumanizing those

they determined to be *Volksfeinde* (enemies of the people) coincides with the systematic mass murder of the latter and will be revisited in further detail later.

Already noted was the intensifying effect created by learned dehumanization among groups and individuals subject to an immediate presence of systemic superiors. It must also be recognized that expressions of intrinsic feelings and thoughts can also occur in the *absence* of these superiors, once again due to the effects of dehumanization. As previously suggested, actions are the mark of successful systemic training whether intended or not, as the following examples will illustrate. The group or individual uses what they have been taught, i.e. what the system would expect. The Nazi foot soldier who acts on his own accord and guns down a group of Jews without being commanded to do so has been affected by situational forces in a way that he no longer recognizes a need to question his actions or the consequences thereof. He has effectively assumed a role within a realm of in-group vs. out-group hostility which the Nazis have created, the *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community) vs. those who have been deemed enemies of the nation.

In so doing, the system has perverted the fundamental human need to belong into excessive conformity and compliance (Zimbardo 230). A contemporary military example of dehumanization in the absence of superiors, which Philip Zimbardo discusses extensively in his book *The Lucifer Effect*, is that of the abuses perpetrated by American military police against Iraqi prisoners of war at Abu Ghraib Prison. This is a situation in which governmental and military ideologies come to head. A pluralist democracy such as the contemporary United States, as long as they house political interest groups and lobbies made up of minority populations, does not seek to dehumanize specific ethnic groups as did the Nazis. However, one cannot

underestimate the fundamental requirement of a soldier (i.e. military on a larger scale) to dehumanize his or her enemy. Why? How is it possible to repeatedly kill (which is what soldiers are trained to do) others whom one does not consider to be less than human and therefore deserving of death? In response to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution the Soviets largely used divisions consisting of troops from Asia rather than Europe in a successful effort to augment the dehumanization of Hungarian separatists racially in addition to politically, because it was harder to do politically, as many felt a similar need for protest. As difficult as it is to consider for a nation consisting of a largely cosmopolitan attitude, American soldiers too are forced to dehumanize their enemy. The MPs managing the prison in Baghdad heard continual reports of their friends and allies being killed by suicide bombers and guerrilla fighters. Not subject to constant supervision, these soldiers who had essentially become bored, decided to implement their own methods of interrogation against these, as they saw them, less than human prisoners (Zimbardo 352). In many of the photographs the detainees are naked. For prison guards, stripping detainees is a specific method of dehumanization.⁷ Being naked is against the traditional norm, therefore naked or partially naked prisoners who are in the presence of fully clothed guards essentially creates a situation in which they are perceived as less than human, as was the case in the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE), Abu Ghraib, and Nazi extermination camps.⁸

A simple analysis of a particular element within the SPE will illustrate the difference between dehumanization and deindividuation of others. By forcing the

⁷ Stripping detainees is a side-effect of othering created in the absence of immediate authority. A greater sense of power over the detainees is felt by the prison guards, making them more ambitious.

⁸ (SPE) Controversial study conducted by Dr. Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University to show the psychological effects on ordinary students forced to transition into the roles of prison guards and inmates.

prisoners to strip naked, the guards effectively dehumanized them. They were no longer on the same level, so to speak. Each prisoner was given a number. The number replaced their name and was written on their smocks. They were no longer referred to by their names but rather their numbers, this became their new identity. This made it difficult for the guards to identify with the prisoners on a personal level, thus effectively deindividuating them. The same holds true within Nazi Germany. Railroad workers who were, in most cases, sending Jews to their presumed deaths felt no personal identification with them. Many in Germany took solace in the thought that the Jews whom they *did* know, they treated with respect, effectively distancing themselves from the work that the Nazis were doing, thus feeling relief from any sense of responsibility.

Perpetrators of genocidal executions are always part of a group. This group creates an atmosphere of anonymity, easing individual transition into total susceptibility. Zimbardo references this as the "Mardi Gras effect," a label given to the feeling of personal deindividuation experienced by an individual when he or she is part of a group (367). The individual is caught up in the actions of the group and personal identity is erased along with any sense of responsibility that might otherwise have been felt. Just as the old adage "safety in numbers" would suggest, so too do these individuals feel a sense of security within this realm of perceived anonymity.

Fear, discussed already as a systemic support mechanism, of course, is also an influence of behavior. Many Europeans became Nazi sympathizers out of utter fear that nonconformity would lead to imprisonment or death.⁹ Parallels are often drawn

⁹ In contrast to this, many were seduced by the prospect of joining the Nazi definition of the Volksgemeinschaft. The Nazis did not view the members of their "master race" as necessarily having been only German, rather Nordic or Germanic. The Waffen SS recruited members from all over Europe initially including volunteers from Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

between George Orwell's *1984*, and aspects of Nazi Germany, both societies whose citizens led lives with order and ambiguity fueled by the fear and uncertainty that any deviation from the given norm would result in unwanted attention, culminating in some form of interrogation or punishment. In Nazi Germany it was the responsibility of police elements to penetrate into every aspect of public and private life secretly, and publicly to create a legend of terror designed to make them appear even more omniscient and ubiquitous than they were (Crankshaw 89).

A well constructed control system which manipulates situational forces is able to manufacture culture. The new perceptions resulting from the adoption of the culture are available at the group level as well as the individual level. The intoxicating feeling brought about by nationalism is created at the group level. Nationalism itself is a perception, an intoxicating feeling of being able to identify oneself as part of a society on the state level. The intoxication is created by the influence of commonality, commonality within culture, language, economy, intelligence, origin, political entities, etc. Still too, it is directly influenced by a system of governing, the centralization of which provides for stronger identification amongst perceived realities that exist within the individual. Recognizing national pride drives him or her towards a nationally common goal, whether it is orchestrated by a common national identity or systemic influence. The Nazis indeed sought to create a national community exclusive to those they deemed Aryan. Their brand of "official nationalism" would prevail as the Nazis expanded their influence into territories east of Germany proper (Anderson 95). For the Nazis it was not just any nationalism, but ethnic nationalism. In other words, a nationalism founded in blood, which included only Aryans. The ethno-nationalistic aims of the Nazi regime would create a subordinate periphery in their conquered eastern

territories as the Slavs which came under their control were selectively relocated and or killed in order to provide the *Lebensraum* so desperately sought by the Nazis. Ethnic nationalism's reliance on racism creates a dichotomous in-group/out-group relationship through the *othering* of subordinated groups. As a direct consequence of this relationship, an individual becomes no longer identifiable as such, but rather as part of his or her group or nation. This weakens individual perceptibility of wrong-doing and strengthens the culture. These so called lesser peoples are subsequently *othered* into a less than human status, making the decision to pull the trigger a relatively easier one.

Once the culture is created, it is left up to the individual as to how far he or she will follow the group into higher levels of intoxication. The anonymity brought about by this acceptance provides the individual with a sense of detachment from his or her actions. The affected group is capable of committing acts that might not have been perceptible within the accepted norms of, in the case of Nazi Germany, Western society.¹⁰ Forces such as deindividuation occur on the individual level. When committing an act of slaughter, police units acting as a group created a sense of anonymity for the individual. The individuals, despite this feeling of anonymity, act alone to murder victims with whom they feel no personal bond. Varying levels of acceptance of new moral standards were experienced by different categories of society. The general populace and the regular armed forces were not as malleable as SS and other police units, and thus, on a relative scale, experienced a lower level of intoxication.

The transition into and acceptance of a new culture, as well as the effects of situational forces are eased by a feeling of detachment created by the concept of

¹⁰ The word "Western" should be interpreted very loosely here. It is meant merely to distinguish European, American, and Eurasian norms from East-Asian, other Asian, and African norms.

what Robert Lifton calls "doubling." During the process of doubling the self is essentially split into two selves. One self remains loyal to ordinarily humane moral standards while the other, "killing self," is created in order to facilitate one's personal survival in an environment of death and "dirty work" (Lifton 219). This theory suggests that members of Nazi culture were able to create a self capable of inhuman acts, yet feel detached from those acts and an absence of any responsibility, even though they were responsible, because their good self was incapable of ugly deeds. Unfortunately, the obligations associated with accepting Nazi culture forced the killing self to take over the dominant role.

In order to better understand the principle of doubling, which is brought about by the transitioning into a new culture, consider the analogy of the movie actor. An actor or actress who assumes a role in a film obviously has their own life to go home to every day. However, in order to be considered a good actor, they must possess the ability to close off their minds to their own lives and assume the life of another in what one would consider an alternate set of cultural beliefs. They must then exist in this culture for the duration of their work. Everyone who has ever read a book or watched a movie and been emotionally touched thereby experiences a similar effect. It is commonly referred to as "identifying with a character." They assume this role and become the actor in their own mind. The point is that ordinary people go to a movie theater to *escape* the difficulties of their daily lives. Imagining one's own existence within the movie itself is synonymous with experiencing a different set of emotional responses resulting from the overarching culture. Upon leaving the theater, a movie which was particularly moving does not leave one's mind immediately, one thinks about it, imagines what one would have done differently, and perhaps goes even

further in living out this alternate life within one's own mind. Therefore a successful systemic influence creates that second part, a lasting change of cultural and moral values within the mind of the individual beyond the point when they are directly propagated. Consequently it is evident that a culture's values can be perceived on an individual basis and personal feelings and manifestations thereof are brought about once a culture is accepted. Moreover, the fact that entire groups within society do experience its ongoing effects similarly only strengthened the culture. The group consensus that this culture is acceptable means that questioning its existence is more difficult, because it is what everyone is experiencing, rather than just oneself.

The adoption of religious or political ideals happens in a similar fashion. A child who is baptized into a particular religion is not born believing in the ideals of that religion; rather these ideals are learned through a process of indoctrination. Each successful case then occurs when that child leaves worship continuing to believe in that set of ideals even when the administrator thereof is not present to advocate this particular set of beliefs. The child has thus stepped into a role within a specific culture.

Strong pillars of fear and authority allow for the entrenchment of systems capable of manipulating culturally accepted norms and therefore the actions of their subordinates. Behind the shroud of the resulting unreality, the actions of ordinary men and women are altered from what a person outside of the controlled culture would expect to see exhibited. Having outlined the broader concept of systemic structure and influence, the Nazi culture will now be examined as it affected the three aspects of society which contributed to the murderous program: the German people as a whole, the leadership, and the police units in the East. Much of Germany was influenced by an overwhelming presence of economic, political, and social hardship, through which

they struggled for years. Their unique history caused them to be gradually consumed by the desire for national greatness. Eventually they would come to deindividuate those who had once been their neighbors. The leadership sought to maintain their hold on power and push through their ideological values no matter the consequences. Hitler's ideology caused him to make a series of rash military decisions which would cost Germany the war, while Himmler used his mundane skills to manufacture genocide. The Nazi police units were the perpetrators of mass-murder. They dehumanized their enemies and murdered them mercilessly, employing what had been ordered by the system without question.

The goal of this study is to analyze the mentalities of groups and individuals based on their everyday lives under a restrictive government. Analyzing the different levels of society relieves some of the ambiguity that comes with implying such broad theories. The study will show how each level of Nazi society effectively embraced, to varying degrees, the objectives of their leaders, and how the leadership was able to accomplish this.

Germany and the Populace

Perhaps one of the earliest anomalies that led to the NSDAP's rise in Germany and the subsequent campaigns of war and mass murder is the concept of the German *Sonderweg*.¹¹ The term *Sonderweg*, although it originated much earlier, came again to the forefront of German historiography in West Germany following World War II, as the Germans sought their true identity. It is intended to define how Germany during the 19th and early 20th centuries deviated from the *norm*.¹² Germany, on the other hand, was neither here nor there. Germany, first of all, did not exist until 1871. Germany was somewhere between the autocratic Russian Empire and the capitalist democracies of the United States and Britain. The Germans of the time remained the most widely educated people in the world (Lukacs 45). Many states within what would become Germany had their own university amounting to several dozen in total; they had to, in order to train doctors and lawyers. Britain, by comparison, had two. Despite this emphasis on an advanced culture, industrialization came rather late.

Aside from the reasons given above, there were two relatively intertwined themes that created a *Sonderweg* for Germany in its history. The first one is the repeated failure of both revolution and democracy. Prussian and other leaders during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century were able to anticipate the call for reforms, therefore weakening resentment towards absolutism in view of what they were to portray as enlightened absolutism. This created a unique trust in the

¹¹ Separate path. There is no perfect translation to explain the exact meaning of this word, though it should be made clear by the context.

¹² The norm was considered to be both Britain and the United States and, to a lesser degree, France. It's no coincidence that this insinuation gained much life prior to the war considering that the United States and Britain occupied Western Germany for a time. The justification therefore is that both examples of normality were unified, industrialized, capitalist nations with a strong middle class ruled by an elected body.

monarchies that did not implement enlightened policies, contrary to revolutionary tendencies in the soon to be United States or in France, whose ruler, in the case of the latter, did not offer any concessions to a vastly expanding bourgeoisie in the midst of the Enlightenment.

The second, and perhaps more vital theme, was the renewed concentration on German culture, leading to the creation of a *Bildungsbürgertum*.¹³ Because of their relative appeasement, in the way of the aforementioned policies of enlightened absolutism after attempted revolutions during the mid-nineteenth century, many intellectuals and thinkers became disinterested in government, digressing to the point into which they became apolitical. This retreat from the “mechanical” ponderings of society to the “organic” ones, along with the political sphere being dominated by the elite, contributed to the success of the Nazis (Blackbourn & Eley 161). Many intellectuals in the 1930s did not support the Nazis, but by no means were they against them. Many of those doctors, lawyers, and engineers who were interested in politics joined the Nazi party.¹⁴ Many of the subjects associated with the word *Bildungsbürgertum* fell under the implication that the well educated part of society did not use their education in a mechanical or political manner and merely watched events unfold rather than acting in one way or the other.

It is no coincidence that the apolitical mindset of many German people in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century coincides with what is to be expected by a military person. When such high levels of apathy exist, human nature suggests that one simply will follow along with what others suggest. Likewise, an officer or soldier who

¹³ The word *Bildungsbürgertum* can be translated simply as “educated middle class.”

¹⁴ Almost every member of the failed 1923 Putsch commemorated by Hitler in *Mein Kampf* belonged to one of these groups.

swears allegiance, in so doing, agrees not to be affiliated with a certain political party. The same was true in Nazi Germany. There are few exceptions, but in most cases even high ranking generals were not part of the Nazi party (Wette 151).

The unique mindset of the German populace leading up to and during the rise of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) was compounded by the hardship they would experience during and following World War I. The weaknesses the structure of the Weimar Republic, which did not allow it to overcome the cries for fast results promised by extremist parties during time of hardship. These weaknesses combined with a strong feeling of nationalism to lead to the breakdown of democracy.

Towards the end of WWI, the British blockade of German ports was taking a severe toll on food rations and unrest continued to grow. The German populace began to undergo social and economic hardship which will never be forgotten. Thus from this point on, the first situational force is created. Despite this, the news that Germany had signed the Armistice while their armies still occupied parts of Belgium and France left them with the frame of mind that they had not lost the war, but rather had been betrayed by their leaders who had abdicated power (Willmott 289). Thus the myth of the *Dolchstoß*, or "the stab in the back," was born, of which Adolf Hitler would be a major beneficiary (289). Hitler made certain that the misperception of Jews, Bolsheviks, and Socialists having contributed to the fiasco was reinforced.

After its defeat in WWI, Germany fell into a state of total disarray nearly culminating in revolution, introducing political hardship in addition to economic and social. After the Kaiser fled the unrest in Berlin, power was given to the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which was charged with creating a new civilian government (Fulbrook 25). The SPD enlisted the aid of the military and various units of the *Freikorps*

(demobilized soldiers funded by the private sector) which violently suppressed a major coup attempt by the far-left (28). Seen here is the continuance of an in-group/out-group relationship, the fear of Bolshevism and communism which the Nazis would ultimately exploit. The constitution of the Weimar Republic, which would soon take effect, gave the President and head of state incredible personal power. He had the ability to appoint and dismiss Chancellors at will, dissolve the parliament and call new elections, and, in the case that the parliament could not negotiate a majority, authorize the Chancellor to rule by presidential decree (29). Considering the relative power of the president, it is remarkable that the democracy lasted as long as it did. In view of this, it is important to note that Friedrich Ebert, the initial presidential appointee, used his power to promote and stabilize democracy. Because of the limited success of the Weimar Republic in stabilizing the regime, there was a lack of identification stemming from the populace (Kocka 66).

The situation went from bad to worse. The Belgians and French, who were dissatisfied with the German production of reparation goods, sent a force of 100,000 men (equal to that of the entire German Army, which was limited to such a number as a condition of the Treaty of Versailles) to the Ruhr region. The subsequent boycott by the Germans to work under occupation compounded the economic situation in the rest of the country, ultimately leading to a period of hyper-inflation during 1923. The nationalistic attitude of the German populace led to this refusal to work, worsening their situation. By November 15, 1923, the US Dollar was worth approximately 4.2 trillion marks, an unfathomable number, creating an impossible situation for the average person whose savings had been wiped away (Fulbrook 34). Alongside the eventual termination of the policy of passive resistance in the Ruhr a new form of currency was

introduced, easing the pressure on the economy but not serving to resolve the problem entirely. Clearly the conditions of reparation imposed by the Treaty of Versailles were too severe and would need to be renegotiated.

The political and economic events beginning in 1917 until noticeable stabilization in the mid 1920s are significant because, as previously mentioned, they laid the ground work for hardship and nationalism (manifesting out of resentment; resentment for the Treaty of Versailles, the loss of WWI, the Weimar Republic, occupation of the Ruhr, etc.) which would later be exploited to the fullest by the Nazis. Once the U.S. Stock Market crashed in 1929 and American loans ceased nearly all aspects of German society collapsed once again. Voters who remembered their recent suffering were drawn to the promises and extreme proposals bestowed by a wonderfully charismatic speaker, Adolf Hitler. Ebert's successor, Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, an ageing military hero and old elite seeking to reinstate such rule, was considerably less committed to upholding democratic rule (Kershaw 107). Ironically, he helped to pave the road for Hitler, someone who did not wish to see a return to monarchy, to eventually rise to power (106). This was able to occur because of the out-group sentiment created early on by the SDP. Hitler was obviously not the ideal choice for the old elites, he was rather what they viewed at the time as a lesser of two evils. Attempts by the old elite to control Hitler having failed, and fearing a communist takeover, they had no choice but to convince Hindenburg to appoint Hitler Chancellor in 1933. This was an enormously significant event for the sake of the Nazi system, because it presented a perception of legitimacy to the German people, a perception, because the last free elections held in 1933 were indeed less than free (Fulbrook 67). The Reichstag fire of February 27 condoned mass arrests of communists and social democrats, creating a daunting

environment for voters (67). The *Sturmabteilung* (SA), essentially the Nazi private army, was a powerful instrument of, among other things, fear, and was largely responsible for creating this “environment.” Their uniforms, flags, and songs were an inspiration for nationalistic tendencies. Their aggression towards opposition groups, at times bordering upon civil war, set the tone for Nazi expectations.

After the Reichstag was burned, Hitler finally achieved the two-thirds majority vote that he required to pass his *Ermächtigungsgesetz* (Enabling Law) restricting civil liberties and effectively ending democracy (68). The Catholics were promised that their religious livelihoods would remain relatively untouched in future years by Hitler's signing of the *Reichskonkordat* of 1933 with Pope Pius XI. Alongside other central parties, whose belief was that they could moderate a Nazi controlled government, the Catholics voted for the law, while only the Social Democrats chose to vote against it (Koonz 273). Some Social Democrats and all Communists were prevented from joining the session.

Despite the Nazi suggestion of a *Machtergreifung* (seizure of power), Hitler did seemingly legalize his authority, thus legitimizing his hold on the country (Bracher 97). Even though he turned Germany into a dictatorship, he dismantled the constitution through a vote in the Reichstag. Over the next year or so, Hitler implemented his policy of *Gleichschaltung*, literally meaning “same gear,” as a means of consolidating his rule. In 1934, following the death of Hindenburg, Hitler took the liberty of merging the offices of Chancellor and President for himself, subsequently assuming the title of *Führer*. With this first pillar, that of authority, in place, he needed to make sure to strengthen the rest of his systemic support structure.

Once the NSDAP became a respectable political power, however, the SA developed into more or less a liability rather than an asset. The *Schutzstaffel* (protection squad or SS), who had assumed the role of Hitler's bodyguard and was made up typically of well educated and somewhat affluent men, as well as the Army, soon felt threatened by the existence of the lower class band of troublemakers who made up the SA. Hitler knew the support of the former two groups was more important and thus subsequently ordered a liquidation of the SA leadership which would occur during the "Night of Long Knives" (71). The SA was soon thereafter integrated into the regular army. The SS, who at their height would number five million, had many branches incorporated into them, including the *Geheime Staatspolizei* ("secret state police" or Gestapo) (Crankshaw 16). Once Heinrich Himmler was officially appointed the Head of the German Police in 1936, he quickly merged the Gestapo, which would adopt the role of the regime's instrument of terror, into the SS (90). The Secret State Police, as their name suggests, were able to create an aura of fear that kept any questioning of the decisions of the regime in check.¹⁵ Herein lays the second pillar: fear of one's government silences the majority of voices, therefore leading to an increased unlikelihood for rebellious thought and talk. The Gestapo were given sole power to place people in "protective custody" which meant sending them to concentration camps, as well as the power to "rearrest" anyone who had already been tried and released by the courts, a power which effectively placed them above the law (114).

¹⁵ A classic literary example of this is portrayed in Bertolt Brecht's work *The Informer*. The main characters, whose seemingly innocuous comments against Hitler and members of his system of control, are incredibly stricken by fear once they notice that their son, a member of the Hitler Youth, has suddenly left the house. They fear that he has gone to report what they've said to his instructors and that they will soon be arrested. In actuality, their son had merely gone to buy candy and their fears were ultimately produced by the atmosphere of paranoia and uncertainty, which one might assume has been created by the Gestapo.

In order to exert external control of the populace, the Nazis needed a body such as the SS. Hitler, as the figure head, also fit perfectly into the mold which made complete repression near possible, where the fearful remained so, and those with a desire to speak out were hidden away from public view (Wolff 42). The classic example of this level of total repression is in George Orwell's *1984*, in which all are slaves – the proles, the outer, and the inner party members (42). Regardless of the extent to which the populace buys into the systemically manufactured culture, individual escape, and group collaboration against the regime become impossible. The figure of *Big Brother* is something to idealize, an icon, a hero, a god to look up to and obey. Hitler's talent for public speaking made him such an entity. The depiction of Hitler as such a figure stems yet from the ideology of the Nazis themselves.

The Nazi ideology can be summarized in three key points. The Nazis sought to defeat what they deemed an infestation of "international Jewry," which in their eyes had infiltrated every part of society, by exterminating those people they acknowledged as "less than human" (Fulbrook 52). The second objective for the Nazis was to defend the world against the "onslaught" of Bolshevism from the East (Kocka 67). The dichotomy in respect which later existed between Hitler and Stalin is interesting. Hitler, whose ideological goals had beseeched him to attack the Soviet Union from the very beginning as well as his contempt for Stalin and Slavic peoples in general, were in stark contrast to Stalin's perplexing respect for Hitler and the German people (Lukacs 55). By June of 1941 Hitler wanted a war with Stalin no matter what, he did not present Stalin with demands because he feared that they might be accepted, while at the same time Stalin did not believe that Hitler would attack him and refused to accept this reality, even days after the fact (4). The final aspect of Nazi ideology, and

that most relevant to the creation of a new culture, was the aim to create a *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community). This national community would be devoid of traditional class structure and be “pure” of “inferior” races and degenerates (Fulbrook 52). Also encompassed by the idea of this community was the need for the creation of *Lebensraum* (living space) for the German peoples which would not come from the acquisition of colonies abroad, but rather by expanding to the east, requiring war with the Soviet Union to achieve mastery in Europe as well as the subsequent elimination of the inhabitants of these lands. The economic and nationalistic goals envisioned by Hitler became appealing to a wide range of social groups holding differing resentments, yet all suffering under the same economic depression, precisely because he was ambiguous as to the details of the new economic order (Falter 93). Hitler's rise as an icon was fueled by the sensation surrounding the creation of a national community spurned by the scapegoating of what the Nazis deemed “subversive” groups. Remembering the hardship and embarrassment of the years during and following World War I, the idea of strong leader for this proud group of people was very alluring (Moeller 8).

The first facet of Nazi ideology manages to dehumanize what Nazi laws would make into a very visible enemy. The second and third create a sense of nationalism which inspires added intoxication within the moment. The third part of Nazi ideology manages to further develop a perceived in-group vs. out-group struggle which had been stewing for decades. Systemic influencing of these situational forces began to create a new culture for both the general populace and the SS, the latter of which was already responsible for the mass-murder of millions of Jews and others, for which the systematic extermination of whom was a step further. *Die Endlösung*, or Final Solution,

was enacted in January of 1942 at a secret conference in Wannsee. Already Jews had been deported to concentration camps or confined to ghettos, but not until 1942 did the Nazis initiate perhaps the most horrifying atrocity the world has ever seen.

In addition to the anti-Semitic propaganda produced by the Nazis, such as the release of *Der ewige Jude*, or The Eternal Jew (Appendix A), intended to “prepare” the population for the imminent extermination, the Nazis used a medley of linguistic tools in an effort to soften the realization that Jews were being aggressively targeted (Willmott, Cross, & Messenger 156). The Nazi manipulation of the German language, both in creating new words as well as altering the meaning of existing ones, was so prevalent that such terminology is capable of being comprised within an entire lexicon. The connotation of seemingly harmless words such as *Umsiedlung* (resettlement) is carried even today, so much so that German journalists are often provided with a list of such words that they should not use. The verb *reinigen*, which can simply mean “to clean,” was used to refer to the “purification” of the German Volk. The word *Untermensch*, which literally means “subhuman,” is a teaching term coming from the Nazi *Rassenkunde* and was used to refer to any racial or ethnic group that the Nazis determined to be “undesirable,” essentially anyone who was not of “Nordic” or “Germanic” descent, i.e. Aryan (Kammer & Bartsch 270).¹⁶ Thus the Nazis went to a great extent to prepare the German people, as they saw it, for the Final Solution, which they knew pushed all limits. Yet new moral standards brought about by the prevailing acceptance of the Nazi culture and the agents of the system were enough to prevent the populace from denouncing these heinous acts.

¹⁶ The study of race. The German citizenry, notably the youth, was educated in what was deemed by the Nazis to be their superior racial status.

In his work *Hitler in Ourselves* Max Picard makes the statement: “. . . with the Germans, nothing counts that presently exists” (112). His insinuation is that the Germans, as a people, are always dissatisfied with the present and long for a return to the past or the embracing of something new. He goes on to suggest that in this vacuum of an undying desire for things past or things future occurs the inability to accept the future once it becomes present, thus creating a mindless cycle in which the “dictator’s” orders become a desirable answer to those seemingly stuck in limbo on the outskirts of existence (113). Of course this is a dramatically pessimistic, post-war view of one’s own people. A pervasive longing for the past, seemingly synonymous with a desire for the new, can be written off neither as an explanation for submission in it of itself nor as an exclusively German problem. This is rather a Western desire in general. One’s present environment is almost never a satisfactory achievement; past fortune is desirable during strenuous and tumultuous times, and the future can appear both terrible and attractive. Picard also argues for the existence of a state of discontinuity, or a state of seeking momentary desires within Germany leading up to and during World War II, a state in which only statements of fact matter, and truth, a characteristic of permanence, is disregarded (102).¹⁷ The absence of truth is synonymous with the failure to accept one’s past. The Germans during the 30’s were willing to take on and acknowledge Hitler as their leader because they failed to accept the exactness of conditions in which they lost the First World War. The presence of allied victory parades in German cities may have served to facilitate this acceptance, yet they did not occur and many Germans went on believing the myth that they had been stabbed in the back, a myth which was exploited to all ends by Hitler and the NSDAP. These examples are meant to

¹⁷ This exists as an individual “disconnects” himself from the world at large in order to seek out desires that would be most advantageous both presently and temporarily.

illustrate Picard's insistence of a dichotomy between truth and fact spurred on by the state of discontinuity he claims existed within Germany. Surely this suggestion offers contribution to the creation of newly acceptable cultural norms by the Nazis, but a less than desirable present cannot, as Picard seems to offer, be the *only* explanation to the horrors committed by the regime and its followers.

The prevalence of apathy towards Hitler and his party in the early days, allowed situational forces to be built up and subsequently acted upon by the Nazis, creating an environment in which they would flourish.¹⁸ Obviously the ascension of Hitler to the position of chancellor was never an absolute certainty, but rather the consummation of many factors. The Allies imposed very strict reparations on Germany after World War I, who solely bore the blame. In 1929 the U.S. Stock Market crashed, cutting off American money which had been helping to stabilize a fledgling democracy. These coinciding factors contributed to the success of Hitler and the Nazis in creating new cultural norms amidst a realm of uncertainty and *Verführbarkeit* (seductability) within the German populace.¹⁹

¹⁸ The political apathy attributed to German intellectuals prior to the rise of the NSDAP was a subject of popular culture following the war. This attitude is embodied in the following statement by Martin Niemöller, a German theologian, "They came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me and by that time no one was left to speak up" (Marcuse).

¹⁹ The German word *Verführbarkeit* can be loosely translated to the notion of *seductibility*. Heinrich Heine's poem *Lorelei* is often interpreted as a metaphor to the seductiveness of nationalism. Having written the poem before German unification in 1871, it foreshadowed the dangers of nationalism which contributed largely to Germany's entry into World War I. During and after Hitler's rise to power, there was a renewed focus on the seductive powers of nationalism, a concept preached relentlessly by the NSDAP. The Lorelei is a rock along the Rhine River at a particularly dangerous bend, atop of which, it was said, sat a beautiful maiden, combing her hair and singing a song. The sailors down below were mesmerized by her beauty of both flesh and song, and ignored the dangers ahead leading to their demise. The maiden, representing nationalism or Hitler in this context, mesmerizes the people of Germany which will

With the three pillars of their systemic support structure in place, Hitler's legitimized authority, fear of imprisonment, and identification with a strong leader, the Nazis were able to tighten repression and create a culture in which notorious deeds of inhumanity were acted out. This solid structure of support thus served to cement the existence of the Nazi control system. With their hold on power now secure, the regime was able to manipulate the pieces and individuals of the system at will and without any threat of destruction from within. With the concurrent absence of any external threat, so dutifully provided by France and Britain's policy of appeasement, the Nazi system became impenetrable. Just like the fictional existence of *Oceania* in Orwell's *1984* the system's only threat could now come from a coordinated uprising of the *proles*, or general populace, the unlikelihood of which is embodied in impossibility and little more than a fool's hope.

ultimately lead them unto ruin. Heinrich Heine was one of many whose works were burned by the Nazis at political rallies.

Hitler & Himmler

Hitler's position as leader of the German Volk carries some uniqueness as far as the discussion of culture is concerned. He experienced the same intoxicating feeling of nationalism and certainly underwent a period of hardship (Toland). However, his eventual position of power led him away from the pressures of any superiors and strengthened his belief that he was meant to save Germany, leading to his fanatical implementation of Nazi ideology (Hitler). The following section on Hitler focuses on those ideological stressors of Hitler's in-group vs. out-group stance which overshadowed nearly all of his decisions.

From the beginning of Nazi control, Hitler's own ideological values left little doubt as to the question of war. This included little doubt towards whether or not Nazi Germany would declare war on the Soviet Union despite the Non-Aggression Pact signed by the countries respective leaders. In Hitler's view the war in the West was that between differing political ideologies, that of democracy and National Socialism (Toland). Hitler held a great deal of respect for Winston Churchill and the resolve of the British people, whom he viewed as racial cousins, more of an obstacle on his way to victory, rather than what he considered to be an enemy pitted in an "eternal struggle" against the Aryan race (Hitler 124).

Hitler's own ideological blindness forced him to ignore a multitude of threats in addition to an obvious path to victory. He decided against knocking Britain out of the war and therefore any threat of American intervention, as a cross-Atlantic invasion in the face of a combined British-German fleet would have been nothing short of

impossibility (Alexander 47).²⁰ Perhaps more significantly, he chose not to supply Erwin Rommel with an ample amount of panzer divisions which would have quickly overrun the British in North Africa, subsequently allowing him to take Cairo and the Suez Canal, the latter of which the British were already in the process of abandoning as they feared a German onslaught (79). His armies could have gone all the way to British colonial India, neutral Turkey would have been forced to allow for German troop transport, and German guns would have reached the Caucuses. Had he heeded the advice of his level-headed generals he would have been able to both surround and defeat the Soviet Union through indirect means, rather than a head-on confrontation which was to ensure massive German casualties. Even having ignored all of this, victory in a head-on invasion of the Soviet Union might still have been possible given either an April start, or, as alluded to earlier, a consolidated drive of all three army groups towards either Stalingrad and the territory south of there, which would have given the Germans access to an infinite amount of fuel and supplies, or Moscow, the Soviet capital and communication hub (83).

These events were obviously not the course that history has taken. Hitler, already displeased that an invasion of the Soviet Union had not taken place before 1941, as well as his ideologically-driven insistence on taking all three objectives immediately, ensured that the advice and requests of military minds such as Rommel, Heinz Guderian, and Erich von Manstein (considered by many to have been not only the best

²⁰ In this section, one will notice frequent reference to Bevin Alexander's work: *How Hitler Could Have Won WWII: The Fatal Errors That Led to Nazi Defeat*. The reason for this is Alexander's expertise in military history, as well as the theoretical nature of this particular work. This section is intended to supplement understanding of the overlying ideological attitude.

German strategists, but the best of the war) fell on deaf ears.²¹ Hitler, in response to an expanding delusion of grandeur in his own mind (another symptom of his), instead saw himself as the true military genius, a fact emboldened by his coincidental support of Manstein's earlier strategy to invade France through the Ardennes in addition to the obvious route through Belgium, thus avoiding almost entirely the tribulations of coming up against the Maginot Line (Bullock 393). This, coupled with the reassurance of adulators such as Wilhelm Keitel and Hermann Göring, gave Hitler no reason to believe that the impractical goal of capturing each objective in the East could be achieved in little time (Alexander 80). Therefore, the phrase "turning point of the war," commonly associated with the Sixth Army's collapse and successive surrender in Stalingrad, is correct, though Stalingrad is neither where the war was lost by Germany, nor where it should have been. In all likelihood the war was not necessarily lost as much as a German victory had become impossible once the order was given to commence Operation Barbarossa. The war was lost due to Hitler's no-retreat policy, a policy which

²¹ The first objective was Leningrad in the North, due to its ideological value to the Soviets as the birthplace of Bolshevism. Leningrad was logistically the most attainable of the three objectives laid out by Hitler because of its relative location to the Baltic Sea and Finland, a German ally. The Finns however, having allied themselves with Hitler more or less out of necessity, were only interested in reestablishing their pre-war border with the Soviets, which had been pushed back in 1939, and never intended to commit themselves in full contribution to Hitler's end war against the Soviets. For that reason, Finland represented only a logistical advantage to Germany and offered no real aid in terms of personnel once the Germans crossed the pre-war boundary. The second objective was Moscow, which is obvious as it was the Soviet capital. The third objective was the oil fields to the south of Stalingrad, which would have provided the Germans with an infinite supply of fuel. The fact that Hitler had the sense to declare this last objective suggests that he had some sense about him militarily, yet the fact that he felt the simultaneous completion of these objectives was possible due to his view of the respective fighting qualities of the Aryan and the Slav would seemingly cancel out this assertion. As a direct consequence of this view, none of the three objectives were completed in their entirety. Leningrad was surrounded and besieged, but never captured. German advance units came within sight of Moscow before being permanently turned away. Hitler gave up the Wehrmacht's tactical advantage by ordering the Sixth Army to capture Stalingrad instead of encircling it, thus the Soviets won a war of attrition here in which they held the overwhelming advantage, and thus the Germans were never able to establish a significant hold to the respective south amongst the oil fields in the Caucasus.

he had decreed after the initial success of the German forces in the summer of 1941 (Bullock 418). He claimed that he would create "a Garden of Eden" in the East, and would take all necessary measures to see this happen (Browning 10). As anyone with even an elementary understanding of military strategy knows, tactical withdrawals are often a necessity. Instead the conflict became a war of attrition heavily favoring the Soviets, who held the luxury of being able to call upon millions more men.

The upper echelon's terms of acceptance of new cultural norms are, in many cases, unique from that of the general populace. The other Nazi leader worth examining is Heinrich Himmler, who would become head of the SS and essentially second in command of the Reich. He organized the reign of terror perpetrated by his police forces as well as the implementation of the Final Solution. Hitler was strongly attached to his actions and was seemingly not plagued by questions of morality (Bullock 469). Himmler, in contrast, represents perhaps the most undeniably frightening, historical example of evil manifesting from an ordinary, boring person who was able to reach a very high level of authority. The claim that Himmler was a normal man turned evil, as opposed to Hitler who was driven from early on by ideological values, warrants a brief look at his childhood and personal life.

Born into a middle-class, Catholic family in Munich, Himmler was the middle child between two other brothers with whom he would share his parents' affection. From an early age he became obsessed with the idea of ancestry. He spent many hours in what he would later incorrectly refer to as the *Ahnzimmer*, or ancestry room, a kind of shrine built in his parent's home to honor their ancestors (Frischauer 16). This obsession

with ancestry later would lead to his establishment of a requirement to prove Aryan heritage back to 1750 in order to be admitted to the SS.²²

Like many young men of the time, filled with nationalistic pride in the new Germany, Heinrich and his older brother Gebhard were intrigued by the prospects of World War I, and at first saw war training as more of a game rather than anything military (Himmler 51). By 1917 Gebhard finished his schooling and was old enough to be called up into officer training and sent to the front. Heinrich was able to convince his father, a school official, to let him leave school early to go to officer training. The war ended before Heinrich finished his training. For Himmler, the lack of any opportunity for him to prove himself in battle was a massive disappointment which remained with him as a stigma for the rest of his life, not only was he forced to renounce his dream of becoming an officer, but he did not possess a certificate of completion from school (60). An interpretation of Heinrich's diary by his grand-niece makes clear the mix of admiration and envy he held for his older brother, and is an indication of the sibling rivalry which would help spur him to the head of the SS (61).

Himmler's nationalistic pride inspired him to join the *Freikorps* unit commanded by Ernst Röhm in 1919. Years later he was appointed chief of police, a relatively insignificant position (141). Over a short period of time he made his way to what would become his highest appointment of *Reichsführer-SS*, a small organization at the time, but through determination and excellent organization he was able to expand the group to over 50,000 members by 1933, and to millions by the time the war was over.

²² Ironically something that Himmler was never able to prove despite the wartime dedication of an entire staff. I.e., he (and Hitler) would have not been admitted into the SS based on his own stipulations.

He adored Hitler, the leader of the Volk with whom he sought identification, and was heavily influenced by Hitler (Frischauer 23).

The new cultural norms and moral boundaries experienced by Himmler make him the epitome of many SS officers and men. Though he was not born a fanatic, his racially driven obsession with ancestry and the elimination of "lesser peoples" eased his transition in Hitler's world (120). The fact that Himmler was able to escape Nazi culture by betraying Hitler in lieu of impending defeat, and subsequently attempt to flee the allies because of his murderous actions proves a certain level of banality (Toland 895). Once the acceptance of Nazi culture faded, Himmler was able to recognize the wrongness of his actions (those outside of the Nazi culture were always capable of this recognition) and cowardly attempted to flee. Himmler, evidenced by his confession to his personal masseur, Felix Kersten, that he always kept with him a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* because it relieved him of guilt about implementing the Final Solution, felt that he was simply "doing his duty" without attachment to his actions (Padfield 402).²³ This level of detachment represents the difference between true believers like Hitler and those who were drawn in, to differing degrees, by situational forces such as Himmler.

Once having assumed power, Hitler ultimately lived within his own mind, oblivious to the truths around him. His ideological values ran his decision making. The case of Himmler was akin to the epitome of what many Nazi underlings experienced. But, Himmler was among the architects of the Holocaust and the acts of atrocity in the East,

²³ The *Bhagavad Gita*, or *Gita*, is a sacred Hindu scripture, the content of which consists of the conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna taking place on the battlefield before the start of the Kurukshetra War. Responding to Arjuna's confusion and moral dilemma about fighting his own cousins, Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna his duties as a warrior and prince. The parallel is the obligation towards duty and the insinuation that moral dilemmas do not exist, there is no right or wrong, there is simply what must be done.

and was largely responsible for implementing Hitler's racial policies. While some of the populace chose to look the other way and did nothing to prevent these acts of horror, Hitler had Himmler and other agents to aid him directly in his murderous plans.

Hitler's Agents

Hitler needed men as fanatically driven as he was in order for his racial policies to become part of Nazi culture. Though the *Wehrmacht* was kept separate from political policies he had the perfect set of agents within Himmler's SS.

As Hitler made his decision to invade the Soviet Union, he might not have realized what a daunting task his ideological drive had laid before him. The sheer size alone of Eurasia meant it represented an abundance of Nazi enemies, yet also represented a logistical nightmare for any military planner. The roads of the Soviet Union were quite primitive relative to the rest of Europe, and the difficulties of moving mass numbers of troops and armored vehicles were only compounded by the, *Rasputitsa*, the onset of months of rainy weather, which turned the roads into mud. Hitler's insistence on a military campaign against the Soviet Union, as soon as possible, and in so doing a simultaneous advance on the cities of Leningrad, Stalingrad, and Moscow, forced his generals into ignoring the fact that a June start would ensure that they would not be able to reach Moscow by the time the rains and the subsequent winter set in. As was the fate of Napoleon and his *Grande Armée*, the *Wehrmacht* was not properly equipped for the harsh Russian winter and paid dearly for such a grotesque miscalculation.

Upon the commencement of Operation Barbarossa, four *Einsatzgruppen* would follow the *Wehrmacht* into Soviet controlled territory.²⁴ This was not the first time that *Einsatzgruppen* would be used. They were deployed in Austria and Czechoslovakia

²⁴ Literally meaning *task force(s)*, these special paramilitary units were created and organized by the SS (though at times during Operation Barbarossa they were forced under military jurisdiction). The composition as well as the responsibilities of these task forces differed depending on the theater of conflict to which they were deployed. In the East they consisted of not only personnel from the SS proper but also of various reserve police units and local volunteers (Langerbein 26).

prior to the war, Poland, as well as in the West. In Austria and the West, the Einsatzgruppen were tasked with securing government offices and documents and were given lists of names of persons to be arrested immediately (Langerbein 25). Likewise there were several units given similar orders upon a successful invasion of Britain. Those units following in the wake of the Wehrmacht in the East were tasked with a much different responsibility. On paper, the Einsatzgruppen in the East were placed under military jurisdiction by Reinhard Heydrich, who was head of the Gestapo and other federal police units, as well as the *Sicherheitsdienst (SD)* (26).²⁵

In Poland the mission had been to eliminate the Polish *Intelligentsia*, armed (a term that was used very loosely) rebels, and communists. The idea was to eliminate any sense of a Polish nation. They arrested all aspects of the Polish elite, Communists, nationalists, Catholic priests, and Jews. The stipulations of the campaign were summed up in Heydrich's own words, "We want to spare the little people, but the nobility, the priests and the Jews must be killed" (25).

The four Einsatzgruppen following the Wehrmacht into the Soviet Union were given a similar mission. Orders for execution were given for all functionaries of the *Comintern*, central party committees, regional and local committees, peoples commissaries, Jews in the Soviet party and state positions, and other radical elements such as saboteurs, propagandists and partisans.²⁶ The term "partisan" carried a very loose definition, left up to discretion. Stalin's decree for partisan warfare provided a useful cover for the extermination of the Jews and other peoples deemed "racially

²⁵ The *security service* was an elite branch of the SS and generally consisted of very well-educated members who had also undergone a series of modes of indoctrination and were obligated to prove Aryan ancestry back to 1750 (Langerbein 21).

²⁶ Comintern is an abbreviation for the Communist International, also known as the Third International. It represented an international communist organization founded in Moscow in 1919.

inferior" by the administration, such as the disabled, Gypsies, Mongols, Armenians, and Muslims, as well as, in Hitler's words, ". . . anyone who looks askew at us (Browning 10). As many as one to 2.5 million persons, mostly Jews, were murdered by the Einsatzgruppen and their local volunteers.

In order for the Nazis to create a *Lebensraum* in the East, they had to remove the Jews, a process made easier by several "favorable" conditions (Langerbein 34). The Jews in the Western portion of the Soviet Union were highly concentrated due to a mandate established by Catherine the Great all the way back in 1791 limiting their movement (34). Because of their concentration here, as well as their perceived participation in the Bolshevik Revolution, there was already a high level of anti-Semitism waiting to be exploited by the Einsatzgruppen. There existed a particular resentment amongst populations in the Ukraine, who had seen their independence movement crushed during the civil war, making it even easier for Einsatzgruppen units to initiate pogroms. Another factor influencing the efficiency of the executions was the relative "ignorance" of the Jews (36). Many of the Jews living in this area were alive or had relatives who were alive when the Germans came through during World War I. Jewish culture was typically oriented towards Western Europe and Germany. Many welcomed the arrival of the Germans who were members of a "Kulturnation" and would finally save them from Soviet barbarism (36). The speed with which the Germans advanced through the western territories of the Soviet Union also proved to be a factor. Einsatzgruppen units operated directly behind units of the Wehrmacht and were often a welcomed addition because the army did not want to have to deal with the civilian population. The Jews who soon realized that the tales of German atrocities were true attempted to flee but were often given up by their anti-Semitic neighbors or forced into

the wilderness. The anti-Semitism fueled in-group/out-group dichotomy present already in these territories, created a horrible chance of survival for Nazi victims.

The atrocities committed by the Einsatzgruppen in the East were among the worst of the war. Hitler's strategic blunders, as earlier mentioned, prevented an even more massive extermination of Jews, et al. not only in Europe but in the rest of the world. The Nazi yearning to extend their ideological beliefs and system of control to other parts of the world is evidenced by the presence of an Einsatzgruppe in Greece as late as 1942, which was awaiting deployment to the British mandate of Palestine (Sattloff 23). They were tasked with enlisting support from the local Arab populations to kill the area's approximately half million Jews.

For Hitler, the war in the East, in contrast to the previously mentioned war in the West, was a war of differing ethnicities. Hitler and the Nazis held the Slavs in these territories to be of a lower class than they, and as a result the fighting was much more brutal as well as the casualty figures much greater (Yahil 319). This was a war to decide the fate of the German Volk, and one which called upon the force of nationalism to enlist the help of ordinary people in an unordinary struggle.

In the particular case of Nazi Germany, officers and men of the Wehrmacht swore obedience to Hitler, the figure, the *Führer*, rather than to Germany (Deist 173). In his work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson claims the existence of a "lemming-like level of sacrifice" amongst nationally recruited military personnel and inspired by nationalistic zeal (141).²⁷ For some, this level of dedication started as early as their childhood as members of the *Hitlerjugend* (HJ, Hitler Youth). Such unbridled

²⁷ The title of this work itself helps to illustrate the imaginativeness created by nationalistic fervor. Thus the insinuation here is that of an existence of an "imagined" realm inspired by nationalism as well as an actual one.

zeal would ensure that the war in the East was fought with an unprecedented level of brutality, matched perhaps only by the Japanese campaigns in Manchuria (Yahil 319). The peoples and the ideologies of the East represented everything that Hitler, and therefore the Nazis stood against (Hitler). The Soviet Union in particular was looked upon as a scourge necessitating annihilation, and Hitler would stop at absolutely nothing to see this done through to the end. The alliance between Germany and Japan was, for both, nothing more than a means to an end. Japan sought first to assert its dominance upon Eastern Asia before initiating its final war with the Western races. Germany did not alert Japan of its plans to attack the Soviet Union, with whom Japan had recently signed a non-aggression pact.

Members of the SS in particular received a higher level of indoctrination and obedience training than did other groups, and therefore experienced a much more evident forsaking of previously accepted moral standards (Lang 99). Their religion was Hitler's racial dogma: blood and soil (Kammer & Bartsch 46). They declared war on anyone who believed otherwise. They were a political army who swore loyalty to Adolf Hitler the person, not the figure, as did the armed services. Likewise the SS and their auxiliary affiliates were responsible for the worst acts of inhumanity before and during the war. Guidelines for SS members were expressed within the illustrated book *The Path to Obedience*, as requiring a quasi-religious devotion to the Führer, unconditional obedience, and continuing struggle and vigilance. In fact, many Einsatzgruppen officers had firsthand experience with the negative impact of the earlier economic depression, therefore it is not surprising that the Nazi programs of fiscal revival attracted many of them to the SA and later SS even before Hitler came to power (Langerbein 154). Most SS men were of the middle-class nature, i.e. those who were most affected

by the economic depression. They did not have jobs, and once having identified with Hitler and the Nazis, they quickly fell in line.

Not trying to draw direct parallels between religion and nationalism, other than the fact that they both potentially condone an air of in-group/out-group relations, one of the most mysterious aspects of SS lore is Himmler's desire to establish a "center of the New World" at the castle Wewelsburg. Wewelsburg is a Renaissance castle located in the German state of North-Rhine Westphalia. Himmler sought a location with historical significance for his SS-leadership school (Hüser 9). Himmler chose this particular location because he heard the legend of (among other various occult tales) the *Schlacht am Birkenbaum* (Battle of the Birch Tree) (2). The legend tells of a future battle in which a massive force from the East is decisively beaten by the West, obviously an intriguing tale for any Nazi. It is certain that he intended on creating a religion based education system and library for select SS officers and men. Himmler wanted to replace general Christianity with a folk cult comparable to pre-Christian German paganism (2). At the center of the SS-Generals' Hall lay the symbol of the Black Sun. This symbol is often attributed to Nazi-mysticism and occult legends, but is also a common replacement for the Swastika in today's Neo-Nazi groups because, upon careful study, one notices that it consists of three Swastikas, or a sun-wheel and twelve "victory runes" (300). The only documented meeting of SS Generals took place a week before Operation Barbarossa. Himmler apparently envisioned the castle as a meeting place for his own version of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table, represented by the twelve rays extending from the Black sun (57). Himmler ordered the castle to be destroyed in 1945 as the Americans closed in. Though it was only partially destroyed, most of its mysteries died along with it.

No actual schooling ever took place at the castle, which was meant to be one of its primary functions. However, the restoration of the castle itself, by SS funding, serves to illustrate just how far the most fanatical wing of Nazism was willing to go to educate future generations in their way of thinking. In general, this particular aspect of Nazism, that being the SS, experienced, as mentioned earlier, new truths more disconnected from previous acceptance than did most other groups. Most were capable of unparalleled acts of violence and horror. The SS and its auxiliaries ran the concentration camps and the death camps, they made up the leadership of the *Einsatzgruppen*, and they showed unquestioned loyalty choosing death rather than surrender in many cases. Even in the absence of immediate superiors, several thousand SS, Hitler Youth, and *Volkssturm* (home guard) units defended the Reichstag during the last days of the war to the point where only a few hundred finally surrendered and long after the Soviet flag had been raised atop the building (Willmott, Cross, and Messenger 278).

In reference to the earlier comments on Himmler, the words "without attachment" represent perhaps the most significant effect felt by the perpetrators of mass-murder. Without attachment carries a different connotation depending on the rank of the individual. For someone like Himmler, as was the claim by many officers, he never did the shooting and therefore should not have been held accountable for murder. Heading down the chain of command, the guards who did the shooting did not often bury or burn the bodies. Those tasks were often left up to volunteers and, in extermination camps, selected able-bodied workers (Weiss). Still too, at times the *Einsatzgruppen* units merely collected the Jewish inhabitants of villages in the East and transported them to the sites where they were to be shot. They did not always do the

shooting themselves, leaving it up to the *Hiwis*, assuming they were sober enough to get the job done (Langerbein 39).²⁸ Alcohol was another influence of the term “without attachment,” especially for the local volunteers. Even when the Einsatzgruppen units began to use gas vans in which the exhaust pipes were redirected into the rear of the trucks transporting victims, they simply drove around until the movement and screaming stopped, leaving it up to volunteers to empty out the bodies (39).

Continuing along the same line of thinking, the next factor which aided in the perpetration of these crimes is repetition or “routinization of the task” (Browning 159). I.e. repeatedly completing the same task over and over again, regardless of what it may be, makes it seem less complicated, less extreme. Imagine the following analogy. A doctor in the intensive care unit of a hospital will overtime deal repeatedly with what is referred to as a *train wreck code*.²⁹ A doctor's first real life experience with this type of emergency seems overwhelming, foreign, complicated. However once the same doctor has handled dozens of these emergencies, the process becomes routine or relatively simple and each instance becomes forgettable. Though this analogy might seem far removed from the context at hand, any task has the capacity of becoming routine, regardless of its extremity. Only the initial instance is memorable, and unless the individual manages to break from the culture they are experiencing, the routinization of the task forces each subsequent instance to be removed from conscious regard.

²⁸ Short for *Hilfswillige* (volunteers). Because of the prevalence of anti-Semitism in Nazi-occupied territory in the East, it was not difficult for them to find volunteers willing to partake in the massacres. However, they were often drunk and though their help when it came to the dirty work was most welcome, they sometimes shot each other or SS units accidentally amidst the crossfire.

²⁹ A train wreck code refers to an instance in which a patient is dying due to multiple complications that need to be resolved quickly.

One must remember that war time atrocities were not a monopoly of the Nazi regime, for with war undoubtedly comes atrocity. The accounts of entire American units in the Pacific openly boasting of a "take no prisoners" policy and routinely collecting body parts of Japanese soldiers as battlefield souvenirs is a chilling reference to this fact (159). War, especially race war, leads to brutalization and othering, which in turn lead to atrocity (159). This othering is showcased by American propaganda during the war. Disney propaganda videos targeting the Nazis consist merely of a degrading of their ideology and leadership (Appendix B). Dissimilarly, anti-Japanese propaganda videos made by Disney target the Japanese themselves. They consist of derogatory images depicting the Japanese as having monkey-like qualities and facial features meant to insinuate that they are less human, less evolved, and thus brutal, dumb, and uncivilized (Appendix C). Nazi description and propaganda targeting Eastern peoples and Jews was very much in the same vein.

Nazi agents were the perpetrators of the campaign of mass-murder organized by the leadership. Their ineffectiveness to question their actions led to heinous acts of evil, rarely witnessed throughout history. Their dehumanization of and lack of attachment to their victims made their tasks seem mundane and routine. Their pledge of loyalty to their leader and their devotion to the vision of the Volk placed them in a culture in which their moral ideals were reordered.

Conclusion

Knowing that the acceptance of culture is dependent upon both external and internal factors, closer looks must be taken, not only at Germany and its politics, but at the world as a whole. The formation and results of Nazism and their German origins can be written off neither as a German problem nor as one that will never again be capable of coming to fruition.³⁰ The popularity of extremist left and right wing forms of government grows to its greatest potential during times of hardship, as people seek strong leadership capable of bringing them fast results. They actively seek to, again, *escape* their own lives and are much more susceptible to new levels of indoctrination. This was true in the case of Adolf Hitler.

John Lukacs, in his work *June 1941*, makes the following observation:

The Germans whom Hitler inherited were the most educated people in the world. The peoples whom Stalin came to rule were not. That is why the fanaticism and the brutality and the mass killings ordered by Hitler and committed by Germans were, and have remained, more shocking and unexpected than the brutalities and murder ordered by Stalin and committed by his underlings; and that, too, is why Hitler remains more interesting and more extraordinary than Stalin (and National Socialism than Communism) (45).

³⁰ An often mistaken belief amongst Americans is that the Great Depression of the 1930's was cured by the enactment of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal policies, on the contrary and though not intended, it was ultimately attributable to the production of war goods much as was the case in Nazi Germany where it was in fact the original solution. During these trying times many influential Americans, including publisher William Randolph Hearst, did in fact call for dictatorial leadership. Within FDR's own inaugural address he stated that he would seek "broad executive power to wage a war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to [him] if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe" (Roosevelt).

The Germans whom Lukacs calls "the most educated people in the world" are no less susceptible to fanatical indoctrination than less educated peoples.³¹ That Hitler and Nazi Germany are so closely analyzed on a whole is also a testament to the power of seduction created by situational forces.

The culture that has been described was not impermeable. There were those who stood up to the Nazis, and many who refused to adopt the Nazi culture. Many elements of the regular army are examples of this because they were kept separate from domestic issues. The fact that Erwin Rommel's *Afrikakorps* was not guilty of any sort of atrocity is a tribute both to the man, and to the theater (Showalter). Rommel, widely considered one of the few professional soldiers under Nazi command, was routinely given orders to execute captured Jews, whether they were inhabitants of captured cities or British prisoners of war, which he subsequently ignored. Even on the Eastern Front Wehrmacht units at times refused to hand over captured cities to the *Sonderkommando* (task force) because it soon became clear that these auxiliaries were charged with liquidating the Jewish populations (Langerbein 39).

Another example of the new culture not taking hold is the use of alcohol and its widespread use in the East. The use of alcohol was most often implemented by Hiwis, understandably so given their lack of discipline and the fact that they often handled the most gruesome tasks. Even SS units as well as their auxiliaries were often guilty of using alcohol. The fact that many executioners were forced to resort to substance abuse when committing these atrocities is a tribute to the argument that in many cases

³¹ This common misconception is attributable to Americans today who think that all terrorists are dumb or uneducated, yet the Christmas Day bomber who attempted to explode a commercial airliner over Detroit, MI in 2009 purportedly had not become radicalized until sometime after he received his degree from a London university.

the new, culturally acceptable actions did not set in entirely within their conscious minds. In other words, their actions challenged their moral values, but they chose to proceed anyways, because these moral values had been reworked making the influence of factors such as obedience stronger than the desire not to commit murder. That being said however, the use of mind-altering substances does not always evidence a paltry existence of culturally tolerable actions. In many cases it might also have been used merely as a means of making one's, for lack of a better word, work seem less tedious.

The ideas expressed here are not all about German problems, but are attributable to our contemporary world as well. Democratic society, especially Western democracy, is cosmopolitan. That is to say people are different, and from these differences there is much to learn. The cosmopolitan neither desires nor expects that every person or society converge on a single mode of life (Appiah xv). Though we live in a state of constant change and globalization, there are still isolationist countries such as North Korea who live in contrast to our yearning for a cosmopolitan world, and whose control system has been in effect far longer than that of the Nazis. Its citizens live their lives in a state of ignorance towards the outside world, and view this outside world with a high level of distaste which has been stimulated by their leaders and their education. Another example exists in the decentralized realm of Islamic extremism, notably *Wahabism*, which also controls its agents with a philosophy of rule wrought with singularity. They live in a culture that I and others would have to join or be forced into it, whereas they are born accepted, by the reasonable person, into my cosmopolitan society.

The case study presented here of the Nazi control system's creation of culture is an historical example of this singular way of thinking. Its leaders and subjects existed within a bubble, the pluralist societies peering in.

Appendix A



(Willmott, Cross, & Messenger 131)

A film poster for *Der ewige Jude* or *The Eternal Jew*. The film, made in 1940, was an attempt to prepare the population for the deportation of the Jews. It was a message of pure hate, juxtaposing images of Jews with rats in order to justify their extermination. Many felt the film went too far in this regard, and it was relatively unpopular. Though its intended effect never came to fruition, it did serve to strengthen the populace's feeling of deindividuation. Much as was the reaction to *Kristallnacht*, many took solace in the fact that they were not like the Nazis, whose barbarity had again gone too far, and felt detached from the impending genocide.

Appendix B



Retrieved from: <<http://www.headinjurytheater.com/article27.htm>>

A still from a Disney production exhibiting anti-Nazi propaganda. It is intended to depict the Nazi ideology as a cruel, strict society, focused upon unbridled dedication to the Führer. Contrast this still with that of the Japanese man.

Appendix C



Retrieved from: <<http://www.headinjurytheater.com/article27.htm>>

A still from a short Disney film meant as anti-Japanese propaganda. Notice how the facial features portray monkey-like qualities, yet this person is wearing glasses.

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