



## CHAPTER 8

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# The Nazi's Pursuit for a "Humane" Method of Killing

When Nazis from a wide variety of ranks, whether lowly Rolf-Heinz Höppner in Łódź or Auschwitz Commandant Rudolf Höss, Wilhelm Kube, Karl Brandt, or even those of the heights of Heinrich Himmler spoke of a "humane" method of killing other human beings, what exactly did they mean? One outcome of this book is a tentative outline of the key characteristics—a Weberian Ideal-Type—of what the Nazis regarded as the most humane method of killing. As this chapter will argue, when these and other Nazis spoke of such matters, what they seemed to desire was a method of killing that rated highly on four main conditions. First, victims should remain totally unaware that they are about to die. Second, perpetrators need not touch, see, or hear their victims as they die. Third, the death blow should avoid leaving any visual indications of harm on the victims' bodies. And finally, the death blow should be instantaneous. At the start of the Holocaust, the Nazis did not have a cheap and efficient method of killing civilians that came remotely close to meeting all four of these conditions. Over time, however, and with much competitive trial-and-error experimentation, certain innovators in places like Auschwitz inched their way ever closer to this ideal.

### NO ANTICIPATION OF DEATH

Most Nazis strongly preferred that their many civilian victims not experience the stress of knowing they were about to die. To secure such a condition, the Nazis relied most often on elaborate props of deception.

These included, for example, promises of water, food, and work after taking a quick shower, fake railway stations, pleasantly painted gas chambers with flowers and a carefully placed Star of David—all to trick victims into thinking they had not arrived at a place of death. So why was it so important to the perpetrators that the victims not anticipate their own deaths? One explanation is that such props encouraged victim docility, which helped to secure a smooth and efficient flow of victims through the killing process. There is certainly much truth to this explanation; however, a closer look reveals other, more subtle but equally important motives.

A strong indicator that the “overt stage sets” were not only about securing an efficient killing process comes from an example near the end of the war. At the Stutthof camp between August and November 1944, camp commandant Paul Werner Hoppe instructed his subordinates to kill all Jews who were old, sick, and unable to work.<sup>1</sup> To deal with similar requests in the past, a railway car was converted into a hermetically sealed Zyklon-B gas chamber. In this case, a group of Jewish women were told they were to go to a stocking and darning shop—easy indoor work—and had to be transported there by train:

One of the SS men put on a railroad employee’s uniform and whistled, as is usually done in marshaling yards. To make the subterfuge complete, an ordinary car was placed next to the gassing car [...] The SS staff of the camp urged the twenty or thirty victims to hurry: it was time to leave; they had to go clear to Danzig. As soon as everybody was in the car, the doors were closed. Then the gas was thrown through the opening in the roof.<sup>2</sup>

Why did this SS man go to such inefficient lengths—putting on a special uniform, blowing a whistle, arranging another carriage, and putting on such a big show? Did he simply wish to avoid the display of force and physical intimidation that would have more efficiently resulted in the women doing as they were told? In fact, he seems to have tried to tempt the women into willingly, perhaps even cheerfully, entering the gas chamber of their own accord. It seems that such elaborate and inefficient deception likely grew out of a concern for the reaction victims might have had to knowledge of their impending deaths. If they were oblivious to their fate, then the victims could be expected to avoid the reactions of terror likely to accompany such knowledge. Thus, for the victims, the elaborate deception would make for a less stressful and therefore more

"humane" dying experience. This is no doubt part of the explanation, as the following admission by SS-Mann Heinrich Hesse makes clear:

One of the Jewish people killed by me was a Jewish woman aged between twenty and thirty, I cannot remember exactly. She was a beautiful woman. I was glad to be able to shoot her so that she did not fall into the hands of the Untersturmführer. But please don't take that to mean that I enjoyed it. I said to the Jewess when I brought her from the cellar that the Untersturmführer wanted to speak to her, or something to that effect. My only thought was that if I had to do something I should cause the person as little pain as possible. I did not want the Jewess to suffer fear of death. I then made her come out of the cellar. She went in front of me. On the way to the grave or graves, which had already been dug, I suddenly shot her from behind.<sup>3</sup>

Here, again the perpetrator's sole concern seems to have been the stress generated by the victim's "fear of death." The same concern led to a refinement to the Zyklon-B killing method. The SS preferred using Zyklon-B that had its distinctive nutty smell removed, which the manufacturers added to provide humans with an early warning of the gas's lethal presence.<sup>4</sup> Even after deceiving their victims into entering the "shower," the SS preferred they remain incapable of identifying the mysterious "delousing" gas. This deception, however, fooled nobody—the victims could immediately feel that the gas was noxious. Therefore, it appears that the purpose behind removing the smell was a Milgram-like "balm to the...conscience"<sup>5</sup> whereby although the victims still ended up dying, the perpetrators could tell themselves that they never saw death coming. That is, the removal of the nutty smell was a strain resolving technique of self-deception where the perpetrators made a slight change to the killing method that really did little more than making them feel a lot better about their extermination of other human beings.

Another closely related explanation for the preference to deceive victims is that perpetrators hoped to avoid having to deal with their victims' guilt-inducing reactions to suddenly realizing they were about to die. Having to encounter potentially emotional victims just before killing them—the begging, sobbing, crying, screaming, and expressions of absolute horror—would have probably made the perpetrators feel like the ruthless executioners they had become. Keeping victims oblivious to their fate arguably resulted in much less stress for the perpetrators.

When, as survivor Ada Lichtman noted, the props of deception encouraged victims to dance, sing, and applauded on their way to the grave, perpetrators would have found the psychological stress associated with being an executioner much easier to bear. Certainly, these acts of deception made for a relatively less stressful and more tolerable work environment.

The importance of subterfuge for easing perpetrators' guilty consciences is perhaps best illustrated in the powerful emotional sting killers often experienced when their victims saw through the techniques of deception. With just a few words, powerless people were capable of inflicting deep wounds on the guilty consciences of the most efficient Nazi killers. Consider, for example, the recollections of Rudolf Höss, in regards to a "shattering" event that he believed he would "never forget:"

One woman approached me as she walked past and, pointing to her four children who were manfully helping the smallest ones over the rough ground, whispered: 'How can you bring yourself to kill such beautiful, darling children? Have you no heart at all?' [...] I remember, too, a woman who tried to throw her children out of the gas-chamber, just as the door was closing. Weeping she called out: 'At least let my precious children live.' There were many such shattering scenes, which affected all who witnessed them.<sup>6</sup>

For Höss, there were other events:

On one occasion two small children were so absorbed in some game that they quite refused to let their mother tear them away from it. Even the Jews of the Special Detachment were reluctant to pick the children up. The imploring look in the eyes of the mother, who certainly knew what was happening, is something I shall never forget. The people were already in the gas-chamber and becoming restive, and I had to act. Everyone was looking at me. I nodded to the junior non-commissioned officer on duty and he picked up the screaming, struggling children in his arms and carried them into the gas-chamber, accompanied by their mother who was weeping in the most heart-rending fashion. My pity was so great that I longed to vanish from the scene: yet I might not show the slightest trace of emotion.<sup>7</sup>

In the most sophisticated of killing centers like Auschwitz, elaborate acts of deception could secure victim docility and greatly aided in

maintaining killing efficiency. But it was equally important that such techniques *also* enabled perpetrators to generally avoid the great psychological stress that they were killers of defenseless civilians. For the most directly involved Germans, techniques of victim deception also served as tools of self-deception so that the killing of other human beings felt to them like a humane and gentle experience.

### TOUCHING, SEEING, OR HEARING

The Nazi regime's pursuit of a method of killing capable of destroying large numbers of civilians gradually moved in a direction that allowed German perpetrators to emotionally distance themselves from their victims. By the time Crematorium II was completed at Auschwitz, the Germans most directly involved in the killing process need not touch, see, or hear their victims die. According to German political prisoner Karl Lil, once victims of Auschwitz were trapped in the hermetically sealed gas chambers, little of their fate could be detected by those outside. "A few seconds later a cry, muffled, stifled by the concrete walls. And then, a few minutes afterward, a brownish-yellow vapor poured out of the chimney."<sup>8</sup> Because the most directly involved Germans could be, if they so chose, physically and emotionally distant from the act of killing, they tended to perceive this method as a more humane and gentle experience (again, for them).

How could the Germans regard a method of killing that barely stimulated their sensory systems as humane? The more perceptually benign the method of killing, the greater the disconnect between cause and effect. And the greater the disconnect between cause and effect, the greater the responsibility ambiguity. And it was this responsibility ambiguity that helped those Germans working in the camps to perceive themselves only indirectly involved. This distinction made no difference to the lethal outcome, but it did wonders for German perpetrators' self-perceptions. When Germans in Auschwitz killed, the separation of cause from effect inherent in the process ensured that the end result did not *feel* gruesome or beastly, like say, killing with their bare hands. For Höss, the Zyklon-B method was, as he put it himself, more "humane."<sup>9</sup> Much like the desk murderers in Berlin, or those that rounded up victims, or drove the trains, partaking in the killing process for Höss and his men was not gruesome because none of them were "directly" involved. The indirectness of the entire operation seductively ensured that their essential

contributions to the wider organizational process resembled the structurally disconnected and perceptually benign contributions of all the other specialist functionary links further up the organizational chain.

As the perceptual distance between cause and effect increased, Germans in the camps became more and more able to avoid encountering the consequences of their lethal contributions. Avoidance was an option for the German camp staff because, much like Milgram's participants, they were in a position of power to control what they were willing to know (or not know). It had become possible for all Germans involved to engage in "intentional ignorance"<sup>10</sup>—all could look away and then continue to contribute and benefit from that contribution. This is why Stangl was able to say, "unless one was actually working in the forest, one could live without actually seeing; most of us [Germans] never saw anybody dying or dead."<sup>11</sup> As Hayes notes, this occurred in the ghettos as well: "the Germans were adept at insulating themselves from the worst aspects of the killing processes [...] they often made the Jewish police forces do their dirty work of rounding up people who did not appear for deportation when scheduled to do so."<sup>12</sup> If Germans never saw anything, how could they be directly responsible? Stangl, for one, went to great lengths to make sure he was unlikely to experience anything that might upset him. For example, when asked after the war where the worst place in the extermination camps was for him, his response suggests he put great effort into shielding himself from the realities surrounding him. "The undressing barracks,' he said at once. 'I avoided it from my innermost being; I couldn't confront them; I couldn't lie to them; I avoided at any price talking to those who were about to die: *I couldn't stand it*'" [italics added].<sup>13</sup> Stangl's self-centered viewpoint which skirted over his victims' actually horrific experiences was not only very common among the German perpetrators,<sup>14</sup> it shares some similarity to Mrs. Rosenblum's sole concern with *her* terrible experience during the Obedience studies. What Stangl failed to consider was that it was his selective avoidance of personal encounters with his approximately one million victims that ensured that he was indeed able to "stand it." Höss conceded, "My inner scruples about remaining in the concentration camp, despite my unsuitability for such work, receded into the background now that I no longer came into such direct contact with the prisoners as I had done in Dachau." As Wistrich said of both Höss and Stangl, "Their sleep was never disturbed since they rarely saw any

suffering faces, concentrating as they did solely on the organizational task at hand."<sup>15</sup> As Primo Levi perceptively put it:

The best way to defend oneself against the invasion of burdensome memories is to impede their entry, to extend a *cordon sanitaire*. It is easier to deny entry to a memory than to free oneself from it after it has been recorded. This, in substance, was the purpose of many of the artifices thought up by the Nazi commanders in order to protect the consciences of those assigned to do the dirty work and to ensure their services, disagreeable even for the most hardened cutthroats.<sup>16</sup>

It transpires that the Führer often informed those like Himmler tasked with implementing the Holocaust that extermination should be implemented as "humanely" as possible.<sup>17</sup> And what it seems he meant by this was that killing should be "done impersonally." For Hitler, killing "impersonally" was, according to John Toland, synonymous with doing so "without cruelty."<sup>18</sup> This is why during Himmler's second visit to Sobibor in 1943, the camp guards were instructed not to wear their whips and truncheons<sup>19</sup>—the leadership desperately needed to hold on to the belief that (where possible) their goal was a generally cruelty-free and humane enterprise. Cruelty was, however, as Goldhagen so convincingly shows, endemic.<sup>20</sup> But this tactile "hands on"-type cruelty—often physical beatings—was, as Levi implied at the end of Volume I, usually not lethal (and often—although certainly not always—it had a "rational" organizational purpose).<sup>21</sup> Violence during the roundups and in the concentration camps was, generally speaking, only lethal when Germans had ready access to means of killing that enabled them to (at least) avoid having to touch their victims.<sup>22</sup> And when Germans were more intimately connected to the deaths of their victims, they often—although again certainly not always<sup>23</sup>—had quite different experiences to the more indirect perpetrators like Stangl and Höss. Consider, for example, the postwar admission by one elderly German to his son:

the brown eyes of a six-year-old girl had never let him rest. He was a Wehrmacht soldier in Warsaw during the ghetto uprising. They were clearing the bunkers, and one morning a six-year-old girl came out of one of these bunkers and ran over to hug him. He could still remember the look in her eyes, both fearful and trusting. Then his commander ordered him to stab her with his bayonet—which he did. He killed her. But the look in her eyes followed him all those years. [...] He had never told it to anyone before.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, technocrats concentrating on step-by-step organizational tasks—timetables, transports, supplies, disposal—while others suffer, shares much in common with the Obedience Studies. As one participant in the Remote condition stated, “It’s funny how you really begin to forget that there’s a guy out there, even though you can hear him. For a long time I just concentrated on pressing the switches and reading the words.”<sup>25</sup> Unlike the above Wehrmacht soldier, technocrats were, with varying degrees of success, able to “forget,” because the technology is structurally divorced from the moral.

As long as Höss, Stangl, and most other Germans in the more advanced gassing camps received no (or only a few) perceptual cues, it seems they could avoid thinking about the implications of their contributions. For the vast majority of Germans working within Auschwitz, the camp’s structural compartmentalization—its many different sectors—greatly aided in separating cause from effect. Auschwitz bookkeeper Oskar Gröning, for example, took great comfort in the fact that he worked in the much larger “living” section of the camp; he could claim to have nothing to do with the remotely located, compartmentalized, and relatively tiny gas chamber sector. As Gröning said himself:

Part of living in Auschwitz was perfectly normal. [...] It was like a small city. I had my unit, and gas chambers were irrelevant in that unit. There was one side of life in Auschwitz, and there was another, and the two were more or less separate.<sup>26</sup>

For the vast majority of German perpetrators who worked within the camp, it was almost as if the mass killing of human beings was not even happening. Such mind games were easier to maintain in Auschwitz than in the Operation Reinhard camps because the former, unlike the latter, was first and foremost a *work* (not extermination) camp.<sup>27</sup> Unlike at Auschwitz, in the Operation Reinhard camps every worker, strategy, objective, and building was much more closely connected to the sole task of extermination. Thus, the Germans based in Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka had to be more proficient than those at Auschwitz in the art of self-deception and delusional thinking.

Even at Auschwitz, however, there were occasions when, even for the most determined of officers, confronting death was unavoidable. Höss, for example, saw things he wished he had not. But he relied on certain strategies to deal with such encounters. When upset, he “found it



impossible to go back to my home and my family." Instead, "I would mount my horse and ride, until I had chased the terrible picture away."<sup>28</sup> Germans at Auschwitz able to control how much perceptual information they were exposed to lived, as Willem A. Visser't Hooft put it, "in a twilight between knowing and not knowing."<sup>29</sup>

The power to know what was happening in concept but not in perceptual reality was even greater for the leadership comfortably based in Berlin. Walther Funk, the Nazi Minister of Economic Affairs, said of the atrocities after the war: "That was just the trouble; we were all blinded."<sup>30</sup> Funk is largely right, except that during the war (even after it; see below footnote) he actively chose not to look in fear of what he might see. After the war and at the Nuremberg trials, the Allied forces used their greater power to reverse the Nazi leadership's earlier option to engage in avoidance by forcing them to view the chilling liberation film footage of the insides of Nazi concentration camps. Suddenly unable to so easily avoid the perceptually intense reality, some of these leading Nazis reacted by trying to look away from the footage playing before them, many looked stunned, shocked, and, for the most part, shameful. One of them—again the "blinded" Funk—could not help sobbing and crying.<sup>31</sup>

If, as Stangl said, the Germans in the camps rarely ever saw any death, such purposeful avoidance powerfully aided in reducing their feelings of responsibility for the end result. Much like those in the Peer Administrators Shock condition, all those indirectly involved could argue that they were not responsible because they never directly hurt anybody. Stangl was keen to point out, "Of course, I wasn't 'involved' in that sense... Not in the operational sense."<sup>32</sup> This seemingly trivial difference was of great importance to Stangl—as perhaps best illustrated by how upset he became when accused of being more directly involved:

Stangl, insisting that he had never shot into a crowd of people, appeared to be more indignant about this accusation than about anything else, and to find irrelevant the fact that, whether he shot into the group or not, these very same people died anyway, less than two hours later, through actions ultimately under his control.<sup>33</sup>

After the war, Eichmann became equally indignant when he was accused of beating a boy to death.<sup>34</sup> A similar reaction might have been expected had participants who completed Milgram's Peer Administrators Shock

condition been accused of directly inflicting shocks on the learner. Actually, every German perpetrator right up to Hitler not involved in the “operational sense” could rely on Stangl’s strain resolving logic. Eichmann, for one, repeatedly argued, “I never killed a single one. [...] I never killed anyone and I never gave the order to kill anyone.”<sup>35</sup> Eichmann said that after the Wannsee Conference he:

felt something of the satisfaction of Pilate, because I felt entirely innocent of any guilt. The leading figures of the Reich at the time had spoken at the Wannsee Conference, the “Popes” had given their orders; it was up to me to obey, and that is what I bore in mind over the future years.<sup>36</sup>

The problem for Eichmann was that he was willing to admit (or could not deny) that he was, in his own words, guilty of “aiding and abetting...”<sup>37</sup> Although he was purposefully (and, in terms of his career, opportunistically) lost in the fog of responsibility ambiguity, this admission directly connected him to the Holocaust. So, in the sense that he knew without knowing, Eichmann, irrespective of all his strain resolving coping mechanisms, was guilty. No matter how he spun the mind games in his head, he (like Milgram) *was* responsible for his harmful contributions, and he knew it. “I created a situation for myself in which I could find a spark of inner calm. The main medicament was: I have nothing to do with it all personally. They are not my people. [...] But my nervousness got worse. I had no rest at night.”<sup>38</sup>

The reason Eichmann never personally killed anyone was that, in all likelihood, he was no killer. To be clear, *from his desk* Eichmann proved more than capable of sending millions of people to their deaths. But, remove the distancing factors offered by bureaucracy and technology, Eichmann—intense anti-semitic or not, evil monster or not—was impotent, squeamish, and likely harmless.<sup>39</sup> Consider, for example, his timid reaction to someone describing the gassing procedure: “I was horrified. My nerves aren’t strong enough...I can’t listen to such things...without their affecting me. Even today, if I see someone with a deep cut, I have to look away.”<sup>40</sup> As mentioned, during the winter of 1941–1942, the meek Eichmann was sent to Chelmno to gather a detailed account of the camp’s extermination process. The experience left him so shaken that he both forgot to time the operation with his stopwatch and politely declined an offer to observe, through a peephole, the victims in their

death throes.<sup>41</sup> For Eichmann, worse was to come. Asked to record the Chełmno process, he felt obliged to observe the visually intense end result. He saw:

the most horrifying thing I had ever seen in my life. The gassing van drove up to a somewhat long pit, the doors were opened, and the corpses were tossed out. It was as if they were still alive, their limbs were so supple. [...] and I can still picture the way a civilian pulled teeth out with a pair of pliers. Then I cleared out.<sup>42</sup>

Even the Germans most directly involved in operations at Auschwitz-Birkenau could hold on to the strain resolving logic that, like Höss, Stangl, and even the more distant Eichmann, they too were *only* indirectly involved. They *merely* dropped Zyklon-B crystals or switched on a diesel motor—they were *just* technicians. They never killed anybody, not personally anyway. If such coping mechanisms failed to salve their consciences, they, much like Milgram's "obedient" participants, could tell themselves or others that they would never have done such things of their own accord. They were just following orders. As said, the German gas chamber supervisor Werner Karl Dubois, who participated in both the T4 program and Operation Reinhard:

What should be taken into account is that we did not act on our own initiative, but in the context of the Reich's Final Solution to the Jewish problem.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, Höss was keen to point out, "I must obey, since I was a soldier."<sup>44</sup> But, again, like many of Milgram's participants, he also continued under the sneaking suspicion that he could probably act with impunity. "You see, in Germany it was understood that if something went wrong, then the man who gave the orders was responsible."<sup>45</sup> Eichmann was no different. Despite the occasional nervous feelings of responsibility, he suspected that because he did not *appear* responsible for directly killing anyone, he too (opportunistically) believed himself "covered..."<sup>46</sup> Hidden within the fog of responsibility ambiguity, Eichmann knew that he could (and did) blame the Nazi Popes. Höss's men no doubt blamed him, he blamed Himmler, and Himmler blamed Hitler. But, again, Hitler never killed any Jews, not *directly* anyway. Perhaps Milgram was right when he argued that the same psychological

process inherent within modern bureaucratic organizations influenced both his “obedient” participants and the Nazi perpetrators.<sup>47</sup> That is, when goal achievement is, as it was in both these cases, divided between groups of specialists, fragmentation of the overall process enables the displacement of personal responsibility. Under such a system, the person ultimately responsible for the evil act seems to disappear.

If displacing responsibility for one’s actions did not ease the “burdening of the soul,” another technique capable of subduing such feelings was to concede that all involved were a little bit responsible. As the bookkeeper Oskar Gröning, for example, claimed, he was only a “small cog in the gears.” But if all perpetrators are a little bit responsible, no single person is ultimately responsible. This kind of thinking can reduce personal feelings of responsibility because everyone is just a little bit guilty of what Eichmann earlier called “aiding and abetting...”—a relatively minor infraction during the Holocaust (so they liked to tell themselves). Most certainly, at no other point or place during the entire Holocaust did responsibility ambiguity at every link in the organizational chain reach the heights it did at Auschwitz.

Because Germans working in the most advanced gassing camps could all argue that they had neither heard, seen, nor touched the end result of the extermination process, all could claim that they were not personally responsible. And if, to some extent, they could convince themselves they were not personally responsible, then the vast majority felt little or no “burdening of the soul,” and thus they were at a much lower risk than members of the shooting squads of becoming “neurotics” or “savages.” Because the camp workers had the option of perceptually circumventing the frightful consequences of their contributions, they were comparatively more capable of carrying on, of contributing to the apparently “necessary” yet “humane” murder of other human beings on an unimaginable scale.

### A PEACEFUL AND GENTLE DEATH

Another factor of the “humane death” that many Nazi perpetrators valued highly was that the method of killing civilians should leave no post-mortem indications of pain or violence. Preferably, victims’ bodies would show no bloody wounds or other signs of physical trauma like bruising. Also, no signs of defecation, vomiting, or frothing at the mouth or nose. Finally, a victim’s postmortem countenance should appear calm and neutral as if to suggest they were peacefully sleeping. It was the T4 chemist

August Becker who perhaps best captured all this when, as mentioned, he complained to his superiors about certain gas van operators: "In order to get the Aktion finished as quickly as possible the driver presses down on the accelerator as far as it will go. As a result the persons to be executed die of suffocation and do not doze off as was planned." He then added, "It has proved that if my instructions are followed and the levers are properly adjusted death comes faster and the prisoners fall asleep peacefully. Distorted faces and excretions, such as were observed before, no longer occur."<sup>48</sup> On the measure of eliminating postmortem indicators of a violent death, gassing was clearly preferable to using firearms because it did not leave the horrific wounds produced by the early mass shootings. But different types of gas produced different results. Kurt Gerstein (the Chief Disinfection Officer) argued that carbon monoxide gassing left a greater mess than Zyklon-B. When the doors of the carbon monoxide chamber opened, "the bodies were thrown out blue, wet with sweat and urine, the legs covered with excrement and menstrual blood."<sup>49</sup> For this reason, Höss preferred Zyklon-B:

There was no noticeable change in the bodies and no sign of convulsions or discolorations. Only after the bodies had been left lying for some time, that is to say after several hours, did the usual death stains appear in the places where they had lain. Soiling through opening of the bowels was also rare. There were no signs of wounding of any kind. The faces showed no distortion.<sup>50</sup>

Even if Höss's impression was an exaggeration (and it probably was),<sup>51</sup> because Germans at Auschwitz were able to purposefully avoid encountering what actually took place in the gas chamber, the untested belief that Zyklon-B left no signs of a painful death fulfilled the strain resolving role of another Milgram-like "balm to the...conscience."

### INSTANTANEOUS DEATH

The final characteristic the Nazi's most "humane" means of killing was that it killed instantaneously. The victim should be dead before he or she could register any pain. As Browning, clearly astounded, notes, "a quick death without agony of anticipation was considered an example of human compassion!"<sup>52</sup> On this measure, no method could compete with a bullet in the back of the neck (but, of course, killing with guns failed in other ways, most notably, the anticipation of death and the infliction of visually disturbing wounds).

Although Zyklon-B performed well on most of the four conditions, when compared with a bullet in the back of the neck, it still killed slowly. It could be argued that the introduction of the numerous techniques of deception (one of which applied after the docile victims were locked inside the chamber) was, at least in part, introduced with the purpose of addressing this weakness. Again, it was preferable that the victims never saw death coming. But clearly such measures were not enough because the Nazi planners attempted to directly increase the speed with which Zyklon-B killed. For example, on one rare occasion when Höss chose to observe the gassings through a peephole in the gas chamber door, he noticed:

those who were standing nearest to the induction vents were killed at once. It can be said that about one-third died straightaway. The remainder staggered about and began to scream and struggle for air. The screaming, however, soon changed to the death rattle and in a few minutes all lay still.<sup>53</sup>

Just as Milgram would later tweak his procedure, Höss's observation appears to have stimulated a subtle change to the design of the gas chamber. While Crematoria II and III were, as mentioned, designed as mirror images of one another, the link to the Allied aerial photo presented in the previous chapter revealed one slight difference:

gas introduction columns of crematorium II were arrayed in a straight line, roughly along the longitudinal axis of the gas chamber, whereas in crematorium III they were spaced in pairs on both sides of the axis. This placement was meant to ensure rapid and uniform spread of the poison inside the chamber.<sup>54</sup>

This innovation ensured that more victims died, as Höss put it, "straightaway." Although Zyklon-B still killed slower than a shot to the neck, it did its work faster than any other type of gas available to the Nazis. Höss elaborated:

The doctors explained to me that the prussic acid had a paralysing effect on the lungs, but its action was so quick and strong that death came before the convulsions could set in, and in this its effects differed from those produced by carbon monoxide or by a general oxygen deficiency.<sup>55</sup>

As we have seen, Wirth had tried to remedy the relative sluggishness of carbon monoxide by lowering the height of the ceiling in Treblinka's second set of gas chambers. But even with this innovation, his method could not compete with Zyklon-B. As Wellers notes:

Gerhard Peters, the general manager of Degesch, the firm that developed Zyklon B and delivered it to Auschwitz, was able to establish scientifically that hydrocyanic acid is six times more toxic than chlorine, thirty-four times more than carbon monoxide, and 750 times more than chloroform.<sup>56</sup>

Without a doubt, the carbon monoxide exhaust fumes used during Operation Reinhard could be an efficient means of killing large numbers of humans (as was leaving freight cars full of Jews outside Treblinka for too long in the intense summer heat, as Eberl did), but concerns lingered about celerity. These concerns explain why Pfannenstiel went to Belzec armed with a stopwatch. It is interesting to note in this context that a month after Himmler's July 1942 visit to Auschwitz where he observed Bunker II in action, Kurt Gerstein and Rolf Günther were instructed (probably by the SS-Reichsführer himself) to pay Wirth a visit at Belzec. As Hilberg points out:

They had about 200 pounds of Zyklon with them and were about to convert the carbon monoxide chambers to the hydrogen cyanide method. The unwelcome guests stayed to watch a gassing which took an especially long time (over three hours) because the diesel engine had failed. To Wirth's great embarrassment and mortification, Gerstein timed the operation with a stopwatch. Facing the greatest crisis of his career, Wirth dropped his pride and asked Gerstein "not to propose any other type of gas chamber in Berlin." Gerstein obliged, ordering the Zyklon to be buried on the pretext that it had spoiled. Höss and Wirth were henceforth enemies.<sup>57</sup>

The two men were enemies because the delivery of Zyklon-B clearly signaled to Wirth that he had lost to Höss in the fierce competition to discover a more perfect solution to the seemingly unresolvable "Jewish problem": the most "humane" means of converting the Führer's wish into reality. According to Konrad Morgen, after the regime dumped him, all that was left to Wirth before he was killed in an ambush in Italy near the war's end was invidious bragging rights: Höss (who had no T4 Euthanasia experience) was his "untalented pupil."<sup>58</sup>

An interesting question remains. If only work Jews had to face the horrific realities of the insides of the gas chambers, why were Germans who could, and typically did, avoid such spectacles, so concerned about finding a method of extermination that killed quickly, cleanly, imperceptibly, and covertly? Put simply, many Nazis believed extermination to be necessary, and for the German camp staff Zyklon-B helped deactivate the censoring gaze of their guilty conscience.<sup>59</sup> If they were somewhat involved in the killing process, at least they could tell themselves it was humane.<sup>60</sup> As Hans Mommsen notes: “Inhumanity had first to be declared as ‘humanity’ before it could be put into technocratic practice, with moral inhibitions thereafter reduced to a minimum.”<sup>61</sup>

After the war, Höss tried to explain all this to the Allied forces when he “spoke proudly of his ‘improvements.’”<sup>62</sup> But his indignant audience could not comprehend his logic—his words were surely the ramblings of a madman. Höss then tried to bridge their understanding by adding that if not for him, many of the victims would have died more horrifically. But a frightful flaw remained in Höss’s logic. If he and the other Nazi innovators had never introduced their “humane improvements,” killing by other, more gruesome, methods likely would have stimulated defiance among the ranks (much as it did when the SS Cavalry Brigade refused to implement Himmler’s direct orders in 1941 to shoot women and children in the Pripet marshes using a more traditional military-style execution technique). Thus, without the “humane” enhancements, the number of victims would have been much lower (and Himmler and Heydrich’s little experiment would probably have been abandoned in favor of other more “realistic” solutions).<sup>63</sup> But instead, innovators and problem-solvers like Höss provided the remote and blinkered Nazi leadership with ever-greater capacity to eliminate an ever-expanding array of so-called inferiors.

Some of the above quotations capture why, for the Nazi leadership, Höss was more than just the most efficient of Nazi mass murderers. He was really the epitome of the perfect Nazi in the (killing) field—the kind of executioner genocidal managers like Himmler and Heydrich greatly desired and heavily relied upon. In terms of efficiency, Höss was creative, determined, and ambitious. But he was also controlled, outwardly unemotional, and thus sufficiently “hard,” as they termed it.<sup>64</sup> Despite his masked performance of “hardness,” during the implementation of his difficult duties, Höss also managed to remain what Himmler termed “decent...” As the SS-Reichsführer said himself on 4 October 1943



during a speech where, to an audience of high ranking SS officers, he touched on the Holocaust:

Most of you must know what it means to see a hundred corpses lie side by side, or five hundred, or a thousand. To have stuck this out and—excepting cases of human weakness—to have kept our integrity, that is what has made us hard. In our history, this is an unwritten and never-to-be-written page of glory...<sup>65</sup>

During the Holocaust some Germans had, as Himmler notes, fallen prey to human weakness: They were too “soft” and could not do what (apparently) needed to be done. Or worse, they abused their positions of power by opportunistically gratifying their pathological proclivity for sadism or penchant—perhaps stimulated by feelings of boredom—for unnecessary cruelty.<sup>66</sup> Decent Germans, according to Himmler, were never unnecessarily cruel. As he said in the same speech: “We shall never be rough and heartless when it is not necessary, that is clear. We Germans, who are the only people in the world who have a decent attitude towards animals, will also assume a decent attitude towards these human animals.”<sup>67</sup> What could Himmler possibly have meant by such words? He was alluding to Jewish Kosher animal slaughter techniques which Himmler, like Hitler, believed to be inherently cruel and inhumane. In 1944, as Clemens Giese and Waldemar Kahler (both involved in the introduction of the November 1933 Nazi animal protection laws) noted:

The animals protection movement, strongly promoted by the National Socialist government, has long demanded that animals be given anesthesia before being killed. The overwhelming majority of the German people have long condemned killing without anesthesia, a practice universal among Jews though not confined to them, ...as against the cultivated sensitivities of our society.<sup>68</sup>

When the sensitive Himmler instructed that “human animals” be killed—much like with other animals—it was preferable these acts be undertaken without cruelty—all were gently to go to sleep. Unlike the “weak” Germans who inflicted extraneous cruelties on their human victims, Höss had no interest in or time for such base pursuits. Thus, always with his eye fixed firmly on achieving the bureaucratic goal at hand, Höss proved to be a far deadlier executioner than the pathological and tyrannical killers.

Therefore, what Himmler—and clearly Hitler—liked about executioners like Höss was that he was the kind of person who would “carry out mass murder with self-control and ‘decency’ rather than with sadism” (the last of which the Nazis deemed a crime for which some Germans faced prosecution).<sup>69</sup> Höss, the consummate professional, was what the Nazi leadership believed to be an efficient yet, were possible, *civilized* killer. This is why, as mentioned, Höss could say with a straight face:

I find it incredible that human beings could ever turn into such beasts. The way the ‘greens’ [conventional criminals] knocked the French Jewesses about, tearing them to pieces, killing them with axes, and throttling them—it was simply gruesome.<sup>70</sup>

Such interpersonal violence was barbaric, cruel, and unbecoming of a professional, rational, sensitive, humane, and thus civilized Nazi executioner.<sup>71</sup> To use these adjectives in the same sentence as the noun Nazi may cause an incredulous snicker among many readers. But to do so perhaps risks missing something which, in my view, is crucial yet so frequently misunderstood when it comes to the Holocaust: For the most expert of Nazi genocidaires like Höss, the distasteful duty of killing was a higher calling because, as Hayes observes, the Nazis genuinely believed “that the Reich’s expansion to the east was part of a civilizing process that expanded European culture at the expense of supposedly barbaric Asia.”<sup>72</sup> Of course, for many years now undefeated Europeans (and their descendants) of all stripes have relied on this “Nazi”-like logic to justify the expansion of their settler colonies. And with reference to the word “humane,” as Neitzel and Welzer incisively observe:

Ideologists of annihilation like Himmler or practitioners like Rudolf Höss continually stressed that destroying human lives was an unpleasant task that ran contrary to their “humane” instincts. But the ability to overcome such scruples was seen as a measure of one’s character. It was the coupling of murder and morality – the realization that unpleasant acts were necessary and the will to carry out those acts *in defiance of* feelings of human sympathy – that allowed the perpetrators of genocide to see themselves as “respectable” people, as people whose hearts, in Höss’ words, “were not bad.”<sup>73</sup>

Perhaps there is a little more to the sociology of Norbert Elias than previously imagined.

As Bauman notes, extermination through work, the Zyklon-B stationary gas chamber, and the industrialized cremation process finished the war as "the most perfect" solution to the Jewish problem that "the Nazis had time to invent..."<sup>74</sup> It was cheap, profitable, highly efficient, *and* the most "humane" method they could find (thus suggesting there might exist a dialectical link between the apparently incompatible Bauman on rationalization and Elias on civility).<sup>75</sup> In the end, Höss beat out people like Jeckeln, Lange, and Wirth to win the competition to fulfill Hitler's wish mainly because his method of killing rated highest on the most important of the four characteristics discussed above: Zyklon-B did not require Germans to touch, see, or (barely) hear the killing of their victims. And as a result, these Germans could convincingly engage in strain resolving acts of self-deception, telling themselves that the gassings "probably" killed without any anticipation of death, killed without leaving any marks indicative of a painful death, and killed quickly, even if, in reality, this was not true.

But despite Höss's success in this competition, the leading Nazis never found his methods completely satisfactory. As Bauman implies in the above quotation, the method of killing at Auschwitz was not perfect per se: In reality, it did not eliminate the anticipation of death, it did not kill instantaneously, and it did leave marks indicative of a painful death. What the Nazis ultimately desired was a method of eliminating unwanted civilians that did not necessitate killing. Even before the start of the Soviet invasion, Nazi realists had pursued and almost discovered what the Chief Doctor of the SS, Ernst-Robert von Grawitz, termed the "perfect solution to the problem"<sup>76</sup>—sterilization.

#### THE SEARCH FOR THE MOST EFFICIENT, PROFITABLE, AND HUMANE METHOD OF KILLING (WITHOUT KILLING)

As Höss and others competed to kill more efficiently, a group of Nazi scientists undertook a variety of experiments to invent a cheap, rapid, and surreptitious technique of mass sterilization. It was believed that by sterilizing those deemed inferior, large categories of people like Jews, Gypsies, and other groups could be eliminated through natural death. Moreover, by eliminating the ability of these "inferiors" to procreate, all could safely be retained as a long-term source of slave labor, thereby providing the opportunity for all Germans "to pursue higher pleasures."<sup>77</sup>

The search for a solution started in March 1941 as the Soviet invasion was being planned. After corresponding with the T4's Victor Brack, Himmler became interested in mass sterilization as it might be applied to the expanding Jewish problem. Hilberg outlines the general contents of Brack's correspondence with Himmler:

It started as a sober account of the possibilities of X-rays in the field of sterilization and castration. Preliminary investigations by medical experts of the chancellery, wrote Brack, had indicated that small doses of X-rays achieved only temporary sterilization; large doses caused burns. Having come to this conclusion, Brack ignored it completely and continued with the following fantastic scheme: The persons to be "processed"...would step up to a counter to be asked some questions or to fill out forms. Thus occupied, the unsuspecting candidate for sterilization would face the window for two or three minutes while the official sitting behind the counter would throw a switch which would release X-rays through two tubes pointing at the victim. With twenty such counters (cost: 20,000-30,000 marks apiece) 3000-4000 persons could be sterilized daily.<sup>78</sup>

Also in March 1941, Himmler expressed interest in Professor Carl Clauberg's nonsurgical attempts at female sterilization. The technique called for circumventing conception by injecting an irritant into the uterus. Himmler requested Clauberg's transfer to the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück where he could perfect his method. At the time, however, Clauberg held no interest in relocating and negotiations between the two ceased. Perhaps because Hitler initially disapproved of this potential solution, Himmler's interest in sterilization waned.<sup>79</sup>

In October 1941, however, Adolf Pokorny, a retired army medical practitioner, contacted Himmler in regards to another possible mass sterilization technique. Pokorny informed Himmler about a Dr. Madaus at Radebeul-Dresden who had apparently sterilized mice and rats with a serum extracted from a South American plant called *Caladium seguinum*.<sup>80</sup> In reference to Himmler's preferred source of slave labor, Pokorny pointed out:

If, on the basis of this research, it were possible to produce a drug which, after a relatively short time, effects an imperceptible sterilization on human beings, then we would have a powerful new weapon at our disposal. The thought alone that the three million Bolsheviks, who are at present German prisoners, could be sterilized so that they could be used as laborers but be prevented from reproduction, opens the most far-reaching perspectives.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the Führer's disapproval of this strategy, on 10 March 1942 Himmler ordered Pohl to offer Madaus a research contract to undertake experiments on concentration camp prisoners, and within six months Madaus had agreed to the transfer.<sup>82</sup>

A few months later, in June of 1942, Brack felt it important to remind Himmler of the potential advantages of sterilization over killing. "Castration by X-rays...is not only relatively cheap but can also be performed on many thousands in the shortest time."<sup>83</sup> He also pointed out that Chief Reichsleiter Philipp Bouhler had been able to set up an experimental research program. Soon after, ex-T4 employee and medical doctor Horst Schumann began experiments on men and women at Auschwitz.<sup>84</sup> Around the same time, on 7 July 1942, Clauberg finally accepted Himmler's offer to move to Auschwitz to start an experimental program on who Clauberg termed "unworthy women..."<sup>85</sup>

All of these programs ended in failure, the only outcome being the misery and misfortune of all those unfortunately selected as research subjects. Had just one of these programs succeeded in producing a perfect method of killing without killing, Hilberg is convinced the net of potential human targets would have widened:

In the very conception of these explorations, the destruction process threatened to escape from its narrowly defined channel and to engulf everyone within reach who might be branded as "inferior." Already, the fate of *Mischlinge* of the first degree hung in the balance while the Interior Ministry waited for the perfection of mass sterilization techniques. In consequence of the failure of these experiments a development was arrested which had spelled in its dim outlines the doom of large sections of the population of Europe.<sup>86</sup>

As Ernst Kaltenbrunner (Heydrich's replacement) said in 1944, "Germany must see to it...that the populations of eastern Europe and most of the Balkan and Danubian countries are forced to die out as a result of sterilization and the destruction of the ruling class in these countries."<sup>87</sup>

By the end of the same year, even those Himmler believed to be ugly were being lined up for extermination.<sup>88</sup> Clearly, the less the method psychologically burdened the most direct perpetrators' conscience, the easier it would be for them to perform their tasks. And the easier the task, the wider the potential pool of targets. Interestingly (or disturbingly):

When Clauberg returned from Russia to Germany in October, 1951, he had the first opportunity in ten years to tell interviewing reporters that just prior to his capture he had perfected his sterilization method after all. The new method consisted of a simple injection, and he was now looking forward to its application, albeit only in “special cases.”<sup>89</sup>

If Clauberg had perfected his method of sterilization before the end of the war and then used it on “inferior” populations, it is likely that he would have surpassed Höss in the rationally driven competition to discover the most “humane” method of converting the Führer’s wish into reality. But, of course, these Nazi scientists failed, leaving the regime with the next best option: the most advanced gassing systems at Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, and finally Auschwitz-Birkenau.<sup>90</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Although implementing an efficient (formally rational) system of mass murder was of great importance to the Nazi regime, it was equally important for the perpetrators across the division of labor to find a method of killing perceived to be “humane.” Four main factors were involved: Optimally victims had (1) no anticipation of death; (2) need not be touched, seen, or heard when being killed; (3) died gently; and (4) instantaneously. As the victims’ horrific experiences clearly illustrate, in reality the most popular methods of killing in places like Auschwitz were not “humane” experiences at all. “Humane killing,” as the perpetrators saw it, was probably a contradiction. A method of killing only had to feel sufficiently humane to them to act as a strain resolving mechanism. That is, much like the all-important responsibility ambiguity, these kinds of perpetrator beliefs played a crucial role in reducing the so-called burdening of the soul. And the less the soul was burdened, the easier it became for the leadership to persuade, tempt, or coerce the most directly involved ordinary Germans into inflicting harm on others.

Perpetrator perceptions over “humane” methods of killing might help increase our understanding of what it was that was so *moderate* about German anti-semitism. That is, unlike the Eastern Europeans and their barbaric pogroms where Jews were clubbed to death by the “Death-dealer of Kovno,” most “moderately antisemitic” Germans would only kill Jews with more “humane”—clean, emotionally distant, and civilized—methods. Although many ordinary Germans had come to agree

that *something* needed to be done about the "Jewish problem"—thus indisputably rendering them anti-semitic—their more sensitive constitutions rendered the Eastern European pogrom an offensive final solution. The Wehrmacht colonel who observed the death-dealer in action believed it "probably the most frightful event that I had seen during the course of two world wars," and aroused in him and other Germans present a similar feeling of "horror and outrage." And when offended like this, Germans were commonly observed to behave in ways that sharply conflicted with the popular perception of the cruel and sadistic Nazi killer. As Arendt observed:

in Rumania even the S.S. were taken aback, and occasionally frightened, by the horrors of old-fashioned, spontaneous pogroms on a gigantic scale; they often intervened to save Jews from sheer butchery, so that the killing could be done in what, according to them, was a civilized way.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, from this perspective, the anti-semitism common among Germans was, relatively speaking, much more moderate compared to that found in some Eastern European countries. The problem, however, with this moderate anti-semitism was that it stimulated a demand for a more "humane" and "civilized" method of killing that happened also to advance killing efficiency enormously.

Thus, in places like Auschwitz, it became possible for only moderately anti-semitic or even indifferent Germans to easily and repeatedly participate in a killing process capable of exterminating Jews on an unprecedented scale. And because the most advanced killing methods hardly "burdened the soul" (unlike the less organized and more repulsive pogroms where intense feelings of hatred quickly fizzled out), the German's seemingly banal machinery of destruction could continue consuming the lives of victims with no end in sight. It would seem to me that this is how and why moderate anti-semitism so common among Hitler's willing executioners ended up being so much more deadly and destructive. It is here that I believe we find an answer to Bauer's "real question" of how during the Holocaust so many moderately anti-semitic Germans were so quickly converted into willing executioners.

After the war when Germans were bombarded with the horrifying evidence of the Holocaust, many Nazi sympathizers rejected the Final Solution's methods, but in many cases the moderate anti-semitism

remained. Consider, for example, one German architect's rather defensive, candid, and no doubt common postwar reaction to the Holocaust:

[T]he Jews ... were a problem. They came from the east. You should see them in Poland; the lowest class of people, full of lice, dirty and poor, running about in their Ghettos in filthy caftans. They came here, and got rich by unbelievable methods after the first war. They occupied all the good places ... in medicine and law and government posts! ... [What the Nazis did] of course ... was no way to settle the Jewish problem. But there was a problem and it had to be settled some way.<sup>92</sup>

As Koonz points out, after the war the conscience of many respectable yet clearly Nazified Germans (like that above) remained untroubled, "because they could forget their passivity in the face of white-collar persecution and simultaneously express moral outrage about the violent attacks and coarse language common in the hardcore Nazi subculture."<sup>93</sup> Somewhat like the architect, one German POW said to another during a bugged conversation: "I quite agree that the Jews had to be turned out, that was obvious, but the manner in which it was done was absolutely wrong, and the present hatred [directed at post-war Germany] is the result."<sup>94</sup> From such evidence, Felix Römer concludes (much like during the Obedience studies where Milgram's application of greater power typically trumped the participants' more benign individual preferences) that even when Germans in the armed forces professed their belief that "extreme violence against defenseless civilians...cross[ed] a line, they were" still, far more often than not, "capable of such violence, the minute group pressure of the circumstances demanded it."<sup>95</sup> All this aside, perhaps these moderately anti-semitic Germans would have been more amenable to the Nazi's preferred but unperfected final solution of mass sterilization: the most "humane" method of killing (without killing). Maybe Norbert Elias was right after all, "if humanity can survive the violence of our age, [our descendants] might consider us as late barbarians."<sup>96</sup>

## NOTES

1. Quoted in Pingel (1993, p. 192).
2. Pingel (1993, pp. 192–193).
3. Quoted in Klee et al. (1988, p. 201).



4. Gutman (1990d, p. 1750, as cited in Berger 2002, p. 68).
5. Milgram (1974, p. 159).
6. Höss (2001, pp. 149–150).
7. Höss (2001, p. 154). In conflict with this, Wistrich (2001, p. 228) argues that Höss “never personally attended mass executions....”
8. Quoted in Naumann (1966, p. 249).
9. Quoted in Wistrich (2001, p. 28).
10. Seibel (2005, p. 351).
11. Quoted in Sereny (1974, p. 157). Those Germans in the forest indeed saw a great deal. In the Maiden forest (Chełmno), for example, one SS guard was noted for standing on the edge of a mass grave where the Jewish work detail was busy stacking adult victims head-to-toe. The guard then used a stick to identify small gaps in the stacked bodies where Jewish workers were to stuff children’s corpses (Cesarani 2016, p. 462).
12. Hayes (2017, pp. 143–144).
13. Quoted in Sereny (1974, p. 203).
14. As Hayes (2017, p. 144) notes, “among the camp guards, as in the shooting squads, a fateful element was self-centeredness, a preoccupation with one’s own challenges rather than the pain being inflicted.”
15. Wistrich (2001, p. 231).
16. Levi (1988, p. 31).
17. Quoted in Toland (1976, p. 703). For another example of Hitler using the term “humane” in relation to the Holocaust, see Mommsen (1986, pp. 109–110).
18. Toland (1976, p. 703).
19. See Schelvis (2007, p. 94).
20. Goldhagen (1996).
21. According to Kühl, cruelty could serve a variety of functions. For example, partaking in acts of cruelty can strengthen perpetrator solidarity (2016, p. 112). It can also help perpetrators convince themselves about the righteousness of their decision to start and remain working within a genocidal organization (pp. 110–111). And in the macho world of Nazism, had a German from the start presented themselves to their comrades as a “hard man,” then to maintain presentational consistency, they could not then go “soft” on state enemies as the violence escalated (pp. 111, 120–121). Perpetrators might also inflict nonfatal blows on some victims to push the wider group more quickly through the extermination system, thereby reducing the formation of what their boss’s feared most: “tie ups” (quoted in Angrick and Klein 2009, p. 149). As mentioned, it was not unusual during the Obedience studies for Williams to impatiently push participants who failed to move at a brisk pace during the allocated one-hour time slots (see Milgram 1965). Finally, during what

can become a repetitive and routinized task, acts of cruelty can also aid in relieving perpetrators' feelings of boredom (e.g., see Goldhagen 1996, p. 259 and Schelvis 2007, p. 113). This arguably occurred during the Obedience studies when, as mentioned, the experimenter occasionally broke out of his usual robotic delivery and would—seemingly playing a game of cat and mouse—invent his own rhetorical prod-like devices in an attempt to entrap participants into inflicting further shocks.

22. One quite destructive method of killing during the Holocaust that did necessitate the establishment of a tactile connection between German perpetrators and their victims was death by lethal injection. This fairly common method of killing is probably the present study's most salient counterfactual example. For example, in his postwar interrogation the German doctor Wilhelm Gustav Schueppe admitted that between September 1941 and March 1942 a score of physicians and SD disguised as medics working under his supervision at the Kiev Pathological Institute killed more than 100,000 civilians using lethal injections—a method of killing where cause is directly connected to effect (Friedlander 1995, p. 142). Lethal injection was also used at Auschwitz, killing several tens of thousands of victims (see Lifton 1986, pp. 254–268). During Auschwitz's 14f13 killing program, it was established that fast-acting phenol injections were a cheaper means of killing unproductive laborers than, say, transporting them all the way back to Germany to be gassed in the T4 gas chambers (p. 255). Early on the injection site was changed from just below the elbow to the fifth rib space (thereby requiring the use of a long needle) because the latter technique killed much more quickly (p. 258). Having said this, Auschwitz's advancing gassing technique supplanted the lethal injection technique (p. 257).
23. Again, see, for example, Friedlander (1995, p. 142) and Lifton (1986, pp. 254–268).
24. Quoted in Bar-On (1989, p. 196).
25. Quoted in Milgram (1974, p. 38).
26. Quoted in Geyer (2005).
27. See Mommsen (1986, p. 126).
28. Höss (2001, p. 155).
29. Quoted in Sereny (1995, p. 335).
30. Quoted in Gilbert (1947, p. 406).
31. According to Gilbert's notebook (1947, p. 45, as cited in Schwan 2001, pp. 70–71): "Schacht objects to being made to look at the film as I ask him to move over; turns away, folds arms, gazes into gallery...(Film starts). Frank nods at authentication at introduction of film [...] Fritzsche (who had not seen any part of film before) already looks pale and sits aghast as it starts with scenes of prisoners burned alive in a barn [...]"

Keitel wipes brow, takes off headphones [...] Hess glares at screen looking like a ghoul with sunken eyes over the footlamp [...] Keitel puts on headphone, glares at screen out of the corner of his eye [...] von Neurath has head bowed, doesn't look [...] Funk covers his eyes, looks away [...] Sauckel mops brow [...] Frank swallows hard, blinks eyes, trying to stifle tears [...] Fritzsche watches intensely with knitted brow, cramped at the end of his seat, evidently in agony [...] Goering keeps leaning on balustrade, not watching most of the time, looking droopy [...] Funk mumbles something under his breath [...] Streicher keeps watching, immobile except for an occasional squint [...] Funk now in tears, blows nose, wipes eyes, looks down [...] Frick shakes head at illustration of "violent death."—Frank mutters "Horrible!" [...] Rosenberg fidgets, peeks at screen, bows head, looks to see how others are reacting [...] Seyss-Inquart stoic throughout [...] Speer looks very sad, swallows hard [...] Defense attorneys are now muttering, "for God's sake—terrible." Raeder watches without budging [...] von Papen sits with hand over brow, looking down, has not looked at screen yet [...] Hess keeps looking bewildered...piles of dead are shown in a slave labor camp [...] von Schirach watching intently, gasps, whispers to Sauckel [...] Funk crying now [...] Goering looks sad, leaning on elbow [...] Doenitz has head bowed, no longer watching [...] Sauckel shudders at picture of Buchenwald crematorium oven...as human skin lampshade is shown, Streicher says, "I don't believe that" [...] Goering coughing [...] Attorneys gasping [...] Now Dachau [...] Schacht still not looking [...] Frank nods his head bitterly and says, "Horrible!" [...] Rosenberg still fidgeting, leans forward, looks around, leans back, hangs head [...] Fritzsche, pale biting lips, really seems in agony [...] Doenitz has head buried in his hands [...] Keitel now bowing head [...] Ribbentrop looks up at screen as British officer starts to speak, saying he has already buried 17,000 corpses [...] Frank biting his nails [...] Frick shakes his head incredulously at speech of female doctor describing treatment and experiments on female prisoners at Belsen [...] As Kramer is shown, Funk says with a choking voice, "The dirty swine!" [...] Ribbentrop sitting with pursed lips and blinking eyes, not looking at screen [...] Funk crying bitterly, claps [*sic*] hand over mouth as women's naked corpses are thrown into pit [...] Keitel and Ribbentrop look up at mention of tractor clearing corpses, see it, then hang their heads [...] Streicher shows signs of disturbance for the first time [...] Film ends. After the showing of the film, Hess remarks, "I don't believe it." Goering whispers to him to keep quiet, his own cockiness quite gone. Streicher says something about "perhaps in the last days." Fritzsche retorts mournfully, "Million? In the last

- days—No.” Otherwise there is gloomy silence as the prisoners file out of the courtroom.”
32. Quoted in Sereny (1974, p. 57).
  33. Sereny (1974, p. 124).
  34. See Arendt (1984, p. 109).
  35. Quoted in Todorov (1999, p. 152, as cited in Wistrich 2001, p. 231). See also Arendt (1984, p. 22). That Eichmann never gave orders to kill is certainly questionable (see Cesarani 2016, p. 445).
  36. Cesarani (2004, p. 277). Cesarani continues, “If Eichmann had been consistent, and stood by his Pontius Pilate defence, he could have admitted many acts and simply washed his hands of them. Instead, he continued to deny and evade responsibility, day after day. Such tactics begged the question of why he should have felt absolved of guilt if he did hardly anything to justify a bad conscience.”
  37. Quoted in Arendt (1984, p. 246).
  38. Quoted in Kulcsar et al. (1966, p. 39).
  39. De Swaan (2015, pp. 22–23) argues, “Were the perpetrators banal? Arendt’s thesis on the ‘banality of evil’ does not stand critical scrutiny, certainly not as applied to Adolf Eichmann or other Nazi leaders, nor for that matter to the rank-and-file killers. Her model might, however, fit the countless minor middle men of the Holocaust: the administrators in the civil service registry who passed on the names of the prospective victims, the local police who rounded them up, the engineers who transported them in cattle cars, the contractors who built the gas chambers and supplied the extermination camps...most of them, indeed, were in some sense banal.” An important point De Swaan overlooks—and he is not alone in doing so (see Lozowick 2002, pp. 1–5, 270–275)—is that the Nazi’s methods of extermination, with time, moved towards the optimal goal of ensuring that *every* German link in the wider organizational chain became *seemingly* banal “minor middle men.” The greater every Germans’ structural “remoteness from reality”—the horrific perceptual consequences of their contributions—the more likely they could or would argue they “*never realized*” in reality “*what [they were] doing*” (Arendt 1992, pp. 287–288, as cited in Lozowick 2002, p. 4). Armed with this excuse, all knew, as Eichmann himself put it, they were “covered.” This, it seems to me, is the insightful meaning behind Arendt’s controversial phrase *the banality of evil*.
  40. Quoted in von Lang and Sibyll (1983, p. 76, as cited in Winters 2010, p. 59).
  41. Browning (2004, p. 419).
  42. Quoted in Fleming (1984, p. 74).
  43. Quoted in Schelvis (2007, p. 246).
  44. Höss (2001, p. 69).

45. Quoted in Porpora (1990, p. 17).
46. Quoted in Arendt (1984, p. 135).
47. Milgram (1974, pp. 175, 11).
48. Quoted in Arad et al. (1999, p. 420).
49. Quoted in Hilberg (1961a, p. 628).
50. Höss (2001, p. 198).
51. Some descriptions conflict with Höss's. For example, one surviving member of the Jewish Sonderkommando, Filip Müller, argued, "The gas took about ten to fifteen minutes to kill. The most horrible thing was when the doors of the gas chambers were opened—the unbearable sight: people were packed together like basalt, like blocks of stone. [...] But near the Zyklon gas, there was a void. There was no one where the gas crystals went in. An empty space. Probably the victims realized that the gas worked strongest there. The people were battered. They struggled and fought in the darkness. They were covered in excrement, in blood, from ears and noses. [...] It was awful. Vomit. Blood—from the ears and noses, probably even menstrual fluid. I'm sure of it" (quoted in Lanzmann 1995, p. 125). Based on the affidavit of a person named Nyiszli, "The corpses were pink in color, with green spots. Some had foam on their lips; other bled through the nose" (quoted in Hilberg 1961a, p. 627).
52. Browning (1998, p. 155).
53. Quoted in Piper (1998, p. 170).
54. Piper (1998, p. 167).
55. Höss (2001, p. 147). It is no coincidence that the leading Nazi's preferred and most "humane" methods of killing civilians coincided with their most preferred methods of suicide: Cyanide capsules and firearm wounds to the head. More research on this similarity is required.
56. Wellers (1993, p. 207).
57. Hilberg (1961a, pp. 571–572).
58. Quoted in Hilberg (1961a, p. 572).
59. Hilberg (1961a, p. 649).
60. Hilberg (1961a, p. 649). As Headland so perceptively observes, "The killings [...] had to be disguised. Disguised—but for whose benefit? No outsider would ever see the reports (or so it was believed). And so if the obscuring and justification were there only for the Germans themselves, for the Einsatzgruppen officials, the Kommando leaders, for the RSHA officials, for the typists who typed the reports, and for the recipients of the reports, one still must ask certain questions" (1992, p. 77).
61. Mommsen (1997, p. 31).
62. Hilberg (1961a, p. 572).
63. The logic of Bernhard Lösener, who helped frame the 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws, was similarly flawed. In 1950, he argued that these laws

“were meant to bring order into what had become a chaotic situation and to mark the end of the persecution of the Jews” (Lösener 1961, pp. 262–313, as cited in Koonz 2003, p. 190). Although these laws likely reduced violent attacks on German Jews and *seemed* to usher in a new period of civility, they also made possible this enemy’s disenfranchisement, impoverishment, and eventual extermination. As Koonz (2003, p. 224) argued with respect to all Germans: they “found it hard to grasp the reality that lawful, orderly persecution would turn out to be more deadly than random cruelty.”

64. For Höss, it seems his hardness came by way of desensitization: “Flogging, too, was to be exercised in front of and under the control of the comrades.” As Rudolf Höss recalled, “Eicke had issued orders that a minimum of one company of troops must be present during the infliction of these corporal punishments.” Initially Höss felt “compelled to watch the whole procedure” and to listen to the screaming prisoner. “When the man began to scream, I went hot and cold all over.” However, he managed to rid himself of empathy. “Later on, at the beginning of the war, I attended my first execution, but it did not affect me nearly so much as witnessing this corporal punishment.” Afraid of being shamed for being a “weakling,” Höss would never have admitted any “sympathy” for prisoners. “Outwardly cold and even stony, but with most deeply disturbed inner feelings,” he fulfilled his duties no matter what. Precisely this dutifulness made him an exemplary SS man. “My stony mask” convinced the superior “that there was no need to ‘toughen me up’” (Kühne 2010, pp. 67–68).
65. Quoted in Dawidowicz (1976, p. 133).
66. Goldhagen (1996, pp. 259, 307) and Schelvis (2007, p. 113).
67. Quoted in O’Reilly (2008, p. 165).
68. Quoted in Arluke and Sax (1992, p. 20).
69. Kühne (2010, p. 127). Kühne (2010, p. 67) continues: “‘Decent’ torture and murder were required, not torture with relish. Obvious sadism was even prosecuted, although only rarely. [...] Never, though, was murder to be justified as a consequence of ‘hate, blindness, or ambition’—that is, of individual dispositions. Establishing a culture of brutality did not mean satisfying the needs of psychological pathologies but engineering a totalitarian community.”
70. Höss (2001, p. 135).
71. Having said all this, Himmler was not always able to find a Höss-type figure for every gruesome yet “necessary” task. As a result, the SS-Reichsführer was always open to lowering his bar and hiring a sadistic psychopath and convicted pedophile like Oskar Dirlwanger.
72. Hayes (2017, p. 148).
73. Neitzel and Welzer (2012, p. 149).

74. Bauman (1989, p. 26).
75. After Elias (2000) [1939] wrote about civilizing processes across the early modern era in Western Europe, "In later work, Elias (1996) introduced the idea of a 'decivilizing process' with which he explained the Nazi period and its regression from civilization into barbarism. [...] the concept of 'decivilization' emphasizes the contingent and reversible nature of the process..." However, as Ray also notes, "there would be ... problems if it could be shown that the Holocaust presupposed not so much a decivilizing process but"—as Volume 2 of the present book would suggest—"the very attributes of civilized habitus—planning, forethought, technical sophistication and a state monopoly over the means of violence." (Ray 2011: 52–53). Thus, Ray adds, "The question for Elias, then, is whether civilization overcomes violent passions or whether they metamorphose into more calculated forms." (2011, p. 57). More research is required to tease out this potentially fruitful yet no doubt complicated dialectical link between Elias (long-term civilizational processes), Bauman (rationalization and modernity), and the Holocaust.
76. Padfield (1990, p. 333).
77. Weitz (2003, p. 110, as cited in Kühne 2010, p. 34). See also Aly (2006, pp. 156–164).
78. Hilberg (1961a, p. 606).
79. According to Breitman (1991, p. 153) in December 1941 Theo Lang, a Swiss doctor working in Germany, told a British Secret Service agent "that Himmler's staff had been considering 'for a long time' the sterilization of all adult Poles. Himmler's later expression of interest in the process was not for a solution to the Jewish question; Hitler had already refused to consider it for that purpose, according to Brack."
80. Hilberg (1961a, p. 604).
81. Quoted in Berenbaum (1997, pp. 347–348).
82. Hilberg (1961a, p. 604).
83. Quoted in Trial of War Criminals Before the Nuremberg Military Tribunal, 1949–1952 (p. 50, as cited in Glass 1997, p. 91).
84. Rees (2005, p. 178) and Hilberg (1961a, p. 607).
85. Quoted in Hilberg (1961a, p. 605).
86. Hilberg (1961a, p. 607).
87. Quoted in Aly and Heim (2002, p. 269).
88. According to Hilberg (1961b): "In consequence of an agreement between Himmler and Justice Minister Thierack, so-called asocials were transferred from prisons to concentration camps. On November 16, 1944, after the transfer of the 'asocials' had largely been completed, the judiciary met to discuss a weird subject: ugliness. The phrase on the agenda was 'gallery of outwardly asocial prisoners [*Museum äusserlich asozialer Gefangener*].'"

The summary of that conference states: “During various visits to the penitentiaries, prisoners have always been observed who – because of their bodily characteristics – hardly deserve the designation human [*Mensch*]; they look like miscarriages of hell [*Missgeburten der Hölle*]. Such prisoners should be photographed. It is planned that they too shall be eliminated [*auszuschalten*]. Crime and sentence are irrelevant. Only such photographs should be submitted which clearly show the deformity” (pp. 642–643). Alluding to the potential danger of such policies for the Nazis themselves, the Gauleiter of Danzig-West Prussia Albert Forster once said of Himmler: “If I looked like Himmler, I would not talk about race!” (Levine 1969, p. 350, as cited in Rutherford 2007, p. 67).

89. Hilberg (1961a, p. 699).
90. The application of the Nazi regime’s “most perfect” method of killing without killing on “unworthy women” continues in other colonized lands. In the Canadian context, for example, one recent lawsuit alleges that the federal government of Saskatchewan coerced Indigenous women—as recently as 2017—into being sterilized; see, for example, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/18/canada-indigenous-women-coerced-sterilization-class-action-lawsuit>. Interestingly, this notion of who is deemed unworthy within the Canadian colonial context is, much like the Nazis did with the Jews and Romani Gypsies, premised on the racist association of Indigenous Canadians being inherently “criminal” and dysfunctional. For an example from Saskatchewan of a settler explicitly expressing such insults—and of the police in this province occasionally relying on distancing killing techniques when dealing with the local Indigenous population—see [https://www.nfb.ca/film/two\\_worlds\\_colliding/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/two_worlds_colliding/). In my view, the Nazi approaches when dealing with unwanted peoples are far from something that can be filed away as that which occurred during some antiquated bygone era with no applicability to the modern world.
91. Arendt (1984, p. 190).
92. Quoted in Hughes (1962, p. 5, as cited in Berger 2002, p. 16).
93. Koonz (2003, p. 220).
94. Quoted in Neitzel and Welzer (2012, p. 125). Oskar Gröning felt the same way: He endorsed the extermination of the Jews and only disagreed with the acts of brutality he observed at Auschwitz (Hayes 2017, pp. 142–143). More specifically, Gröning “draws a line between individual excesses and mass murder committed by the society as a whole. He believes the excesses are barbaric, but the mass murder legitimate” (Geyer 2005). Another similar example was the brutal Karl Frenzel, who worked in the T4 program and at Sobibor. After the war he was asked of his opinion of Hitler, upon which he replied, “I’m still backing him, except for the *Juden-Aktionen*.”



They should have thought of a different solution" (quoted in Schelvis 2007, p. 254). Many Germans, even decades after the war, continued to long for the Nazis because as one woman pointed out: "During the war we didn't go hungry. Back then everything worked. It was only after the war that things turned bad" (quoted in Aly 2006, p. 179).

95. Hayes (2017, p. 141). Römer actually says Germans were "always" capable such violence, but as I have shown, this is probably a (very) slight exaggeration.
96. Elias (1991, pp. 146–147).

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