NO MIDDLE GROUND FOR
THE *EICHMANN MÄNNER*?

Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil,* Translated by Haim Watzman, London and New York: Continuum, 2002. xx + 297 pp.[1]

Reviewed by

GEORGE C. BROWDER

The translation into English of Yaacov Lozowick's study of Adolf Eichmann's machinery of death provides an excellent opportunity to review this provocative work in the context of the rapidly evolving field of Holocaust perpetrator literature. In the half decade since the completion of the original manuscript, the literature has expanded into broader perspectives, and the book, therefore, should be reevaluated from those perspectives.[2]

Lozowick did not offer a collective biography of Adolf Eichmann and his fellow perpetrators. He also considered it unnecessary to rewrite Hans Safrian's study.[3] Instead, he "delved

---

1 First published as *Hitlers Bürokraten: Eichmann, seine willigen Vollstrecker und die Banalität des Bösen* (Zurich: Pendo Verlag, 2000).
2 For a complete and most current historiography, Gerhard Paul, "Von Psychopathen, Technokraten des Terrors und 'ganz gewöhnlichen' Deutschen. Die Täter der Shoah im Spiegel der Forschung," in idem, ed., *Die Täter der Shoah. Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* (Göttengen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), pp. 13–90.
3 Hans Safrian, *Die Eichmann Männer* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1993).

into what Safrian had not addressed: the bureaucracy" (p. 8). However, the book is more than simply a history of Eichmann's bureaucracy — Section II 112 of the SS Sicherheitsdienst (SD) and the subsequent Bureau IV B 4 of the Gestapo with its "Jewish experts" in occupied countries. As Christopher Browning has observed, "It is in essence a polemic, in the classic sense of a rigorously argued refutation of a presumed error."[4]

As chief archivist at Yad Vashem, Lozowick has, of course, the advantage of total accessibility to the highly relevant documentary contents of the research institution; but beyond that, he argues, he is also familiar with the bureaucratic process, having experienced that environment first hand. Thus, he feels fully equipped to refute Hannah Arendt's arguments about the nature of Eichmann's evil.[5]

THESIS — ANTITHESIS

On the use of the word "evil," Lozowick welcomes Arendt's forthright use of the very language that has generally been shunned by scholars. Yet he accuses her of defusing its meaning. The point of debate is whether Eichmann and the others had an evil mind-set. Lozowick attacks Arendt's theory that ordinary people serving as functionaries in a totalitarian state lost touch with the standards of the non-totalitarian world; that they lost sight of right and wrong as more normally perceived and, therefore, suffered no pangs of guilt or sense of evil-doing. Eichmann "never realized what he was doing."[6]

In contrast, Lozowick concluded:

> [T]his was a group of people completely aware of what they were doing, people with high ideological motivation, people of initiative and dexterity who contributed far beyond what was necessary.

4 Christopher R. Browning, review of *Hitlers Bürokraten* in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 16 (Spring 2002), 1, p. 126.
5 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Viking Press, 1965).
6 Quoting Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 288. Arendt herself apparently had some second thoughts; see her introduction to Bernd Naumann, *Auschwitz* (New York: Praeger, 1966), pp. xx-xxiv.

And there can be no doubt about it: they clearly understood that their deeds were *not* positive except in the value system of the Third Reich. They hated Jews and thought that getting rid of them would be to Germany's good. They knew that not everyone thought this way, and they deliberately hid information that might have deterred others from cooperating (p. 8).

If they were not abnormal, they were "unusual," "aberrations," and men with monstrous tendencies even *prior* to their involvements.

Lozowick based his study on the relevant primary sources and the best secondary literature available. He was inspired by the then recent work of respected scholars who had focused on tendencies among a very large number of Germans who "were predisposed to carry out a policy (or policies) built on killing those who obstructed the Aryan progress towards a glorious destiny" (p. 60). To this he applied Saul Friedländer's concept of "redemptive antisemitism."[7] Michael Wildt's documentary study of the evolution of the *Judenpolitik* of the SD up to 1938,[8] provided a solid base for building his case for evil intent. He thus saw a consensus that supported his interpretation. However, as he was completing the manuscript, a new wave of *Täterforschung* was emerging, especially in Germany, and that has left Lozowick only partially in tune with what there now is in the way of a consensus.[9] Nevertheless, the book presents an arguable alternative among contending theories about perpetrator character and motivation.

The first chapter covers the emergence of the Jewish experts of Section II 112 and their commitment to increasingly radical solutions to the "Jewish problem." The chapter on "Executing the Final Solution" describes in depth the evolution of the subsequent Gestapo Bureau IV B 4, its personnel, and their specific jobs. The

7   Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), vol. I.
8   Michael Wildt, *Die Judenpolitik des SD 1935 bis 1938: Eine Dokumentation* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1995).
9   Paul, "Täter der Shoah."

following chapters focus on the field offices in Holland, France, and Hungary as case studies. In the Netherlands, despite their distance, the Jewish experts were just as self-starting, creative, and remorseless as in Berlin.

The chapter on France, which argues for the uniqueness of German bureaucrats, is occasionally puzzling. He cites the replacement of a rabid antisemite like Theodor Dannecker with a nonentity who did the job so well that his performance in no way indicated that there had been any change of personnel. Yet we are told that the replacement's first act was to cancel a deportation train in the face of difficulties. Eichmann had to bolster the man's determination with threats and trickery.

Lozowick argues that, had they been normal, the attitudes of the Jewish experts with regard to the handling of children should have aroused some misgivings. Then he tells us that, indeed, they did dither and look for higher authorization. He notes that some of the Frenchmen who were involved were even ahead of the Germans on the subject of the deportation of children. The complex story of the on-again off-again French cooperation and their efforts to preserve some sovereignty supposedly demonstrates that they lacked the German's "meta-historical objective" (p. 217).

In the case study of Hungary, he focuses on the cynical dissimulation employed in fooling the Jewish community. That and similar behavior in dealing with others who did not share their mission allegedly proves that the Jewish experts knew what they were doing was wrong. Perhaps, but there also seems to be a more simple explanation. As Lozowick rightly notes, they saw themselves as an elite. Just as adults do not hesitate to trick children into doing "what is good for them," just as they avoid explaining disturbing reality to children, so the SS tricked and lied to anyone whose cooperation or indifference they needed. With regard to the Jews, who doesn't feel justified in outmaneuvering an enemy?

To this reader, lying is less convincing proof of the

perpetrators' sense of guilt than their psychosomatic problems and even some of their own words. For instance, we are told of Otto Hunsche, known as "an absolute enemy of the Jews," who acted out dominance and hate. Yet he became very emotional while dictating something about exterminating children. "Whoever has children of his own cannot do this to someone else's children." He also said that the department's staff would have to commit suicide if Germany lost the war, and he didn't want his wife to know what he was doing (p. 130). Also, as Lozowick put it,

> even hard-hearted bureaucrats found it easier at times to make use of the ambiguity and euphemisms that were part of their craft in order to hide from themselves the full significance of their actions, precisely because of the dissonance between their comprehension deep down that their work was fundamentally wrong, and their duty to perform it (p. 208).

In conclusion, Lozowick has reminded us of how far Arendt erred in her perception of Eichmann's evil. He has not, however, convinced this reviewer that much post-Arendt scholarship has been equally mistaken. Readers who are convinced that such monsters could never have been "ordinary men" will find his exposition reinforcing. Those like me who prefer a middle way toward understanding the perpetrators will find a stimulating challenge to their efforts.

DIALOGUE TOWARD SYNTHESIS

Lozowick's description of the Jewish experts' hate-filled, aggressively proactive antisemitism is unquestionable. There are, however, two problems. First, although he analyzes only the Jewish experts of the SD and Gestapo, he often implies that his conclusions extend beyond this very narrow group within the full range of perpetrators. Second, what is missing in his "polemic" is the possibility for any middle ground — most perpetrators were *originally* normal or not unusual men, but they *became* unusually evil. Instead, one is being asked to side with one extreme or the

other on a spectrum of perpetrator analysis that has divided scholars for decades — inherently hate-filled monsters versus unemotionally obedient cogs in the machinery of death.

Every position on that spectrum is rooted in an ideological or philosophical perception of human nature. Lozowick argues that the perpetrators were "unusual," not ordinary people. Ordinary people might drift into acts of evil, often with good intentions, through indifference or out of selfish motives. They cannot easily participate in self-generated, premeditated acts of evil. In contrast, those monsters of evil strove consciously toward the heights of extraordinary evil. Although he frequently alludes to their *early* acculturation in evil belief systems, he does not pretend to be able to explain why they were such "aberrations."

The advocates of any middle ways that Lozowick seems to lump together as "Arendt's disciples" do begin with her convictions about the normality of the perpetrators. Yet they also accept the presence of a significant *minority* severely infected with the evil ideologies of antisemitism and pseudoscientific racism, a minority that served as both leaders and competitor/colleagues who goaded emulation.[10] For the rest, they see only a very few psychopathic perpetrators as fundamentally "unusual," and perhaps even fewer as the helpless products of deterministic forces.

Since any position on the spectrum of perpetrator analysis is a matter of one's philosophical or ideological predispositions, none of these constructs may ever be sufficiently overwhelming to dissuade those with different beliefs. Therefore, my preference for a different theory precludes labeling Lozowick's analysis as wrong-headed. He takes an arguable position in the ongoing dialectical process. This dialogue has already produced sophisticated theses on all sides, and Lozowick's book is valuable for its critique of analyses that might obscure the nature of the evil or

---

10 For example, Christopher R. Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 166–169, 175.

that might preclude asking the kinds of questions he poses about the roots of that evil.

To integrate his argument, one must first focus the analysis. In this case, it has to be entirely limited to the mid-level planners and managers of the Holocaust among the personnel of the Sicherheitspolizei (Sipo) and SD. Beyond them, those Germans and their collaborators involved directly in killing operations represent a much more heterogeneous group with far more diverse motivations. The same is also true of the many mid-level planners and managers of population policy in the occupied Eastern territories who were involved in the evolution of genocidal programs among which the "Final Solution" was a central theme.[11]

In reference to the Jewish experts, Lozowick effectively demonstrates the transparency of the Eichmann defense — that he was neither an antisemite nor did he ever feel hatred for Jews. From Arendt on, such defenses have often been taken too literally. On the other hand, one should not neglect the deeper psychological significance of such defenses, merely dismissing them as self-deluding denial if not outright lies. Instead, these "defenses" may also offer insight into the processes by which these perpetrators arrived at antisemitic commitments and still thought of themselves as somehow being above "antisemites."

Lozowick correctly noted that the workers in SD II 112 consciously distanced themselves and their work from "'those termed antisemites' (the reference is apparently to Julius Streicher and his like)" (p. 22). Their understanding of the "Jewish threat" in all its complexity and sophistication had to be "based on facts." Rather than antisemites, they would perhaps have labeled themselves "Judeologists," for their "research" was to be fully scientific. Of course, they began this "research" with a totally antisemitic construct in which they had a vested interest, and, from such a perspective, the evidence that they uncovered always

11 Paul, "Täter der Shoah," pp. 50–66.

proved and reinforced that construct. Such a mindset was not very different from that of the highly credentialed, academic "racial scientists." It simply carried down to the laboratory researchers of SD II 112 from their more highly educated superiors, like Werner Best and Alfred Six. Scientists who delude themselves, believing that they only work with objective facts through objective processes, are always susceptible to self-deception — a trap of their own intellectual creation.

The difference is that the Eichmann *Männer* may have operated from a more intellectually immature, "dualistic" mind-set. In this mind-set, they accepted "truth" as revealed by authority, something to be mastered, not questioned or tested. Research was the process of gathering and analyzing the evidence to prove this "truth." Being able to do so successfully was central to one's recognition as being educated, and, in this case, essential to being a SD "Jewish expert."

Lozowick suggests that we should look to psychologists, among others, for explanations for these aberrational men. Rather, I would suggest looking at educational psychology for insights into normal intellectual and ethical development.[12] Such theory parallels social-psychological theory about political acculturation that makes people susceptible to involvement in sanctioned violence in different ways that correlate with one's

12 A massive body of theory and research on intellectual and ethical development has emerged largely since the 1960s. One school of post-Piagetian theory involving a stage-development process is that of William G. Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), and research growing from it, such as Carol Gilligan, "Moral Development," in Arthur W. Chickering, ed., *The Modern American College* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), which has offered different approaches to ethical development from those of Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stage and Sequence: The Cognitive-developmental Approach to Socialization," in David Goslin, ed., *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969). The dialectical-development theory of Michael Basseches, *Dialectical Thinking and Adult Development* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1984) offers an alternative approach to stage theory, but, unfortunately, has not stimulated much subsequent research.

socio-economic and educational opportunities.[13] Although some critics charge that such theory reduces the responsibility of the less privileged, or even excuses them, actually it only argues that the privileged have greater responsibility for their society's evils. Such research has been stimulated by the need to understand *individual* susceptibility to involvement in the massive acts of inhumanity during the past century. Rather than providing monocausal and generic explanations, these theories offer insight into the entire range of human "personality types" as potential perpetrators.

Contrary to the inflated self-image of SD Jewish experts, Lozowick correctly defines an antisemite as anyone who "sees a Jewish conspiracy everywhere and who hates the Jews for this" (p. 25). He describes their evolution from self-indoctrinating researchers, through indoctrinators and advocates of increasingly radical policy, to the managers of ever-more radical policy. This unfortunately begs the question of how they achieved that mind-set. Lozowick merely asserts that they were dedicated antisemites *before* they assumed their offices, even coming "equipped with their ideological identification from *home*" (pp. 231, 271, emphasis added).

It is almost sufficient to know that they were Germans. For instance, his first conclusion after a short analysis is that "they were all young, male, Christian, and nationalist-minded Germans; they had all voluntarily joined the SS. Isn't this, from the start, too narrow a group to be indicative of all humanity?" (p. 7). Being young, male, Christian, nationalistic or German hardly seems grounds for being "unusual." As for having voluntarily joined the SS, scholars have frequently argued that the well-known antisemitism of this group meant that all those who joined at least accepted that worldview.

On the contrary, I argue that the SS these men joined was an

---

13 Herbert C. Kelmann and V. Lee Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience: Toward a Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

organization any "typical" young man might have seen *primarily* as the wave of the future. By typical, I mean young men more interested in action, image, and status than in morals that might get in the way. Their evolution into ideological soldiers in a crusade against Judeo-Bolshevism took many different tracks and was not always complete.

Antisemitism was one of many components of a SS identity, especially in the earlier years. To outsiders being drawn in, the *undeniable preeminence* of its antisemitism did not necessarily hit one in the face. One identified with the SS primarily because of its image and only secondarily out of a conjuncture with its causes. There was not necessarily a complete consensus with all of them. Antisemitism was *for many* simply one element in a complex of causes advocated by Nazis.[14] All institutions have negative, even ridiculous, elements. One expects any organization that one embraces to slough them off. Because of its broad appeal, the SS drew in and later had to release or expel such noncompliant members for ideological unsuitability.[15] Among them were men

14 Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) argues this concerning the appeal of Nazism in general. Nevertheless, one must acknowledge Peter Longerich's argument that there was a consensus among Nazis about the goal of achieving a *Volksgemeinschaft* that explicitly involved purging all alien and degenerative elements, among whom the Jews were preeminent; *Politik der Vernichtung: Eine Gesamtdarstellung der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung* (Munich: Piper, 1998). Embracing the "higher goal" of *Volksgemeinschaft* did not, however, always require *immediate* recognition of Jews and others as *hateful threats* requiring physical extermination; becoming involved in its implementation did.

15 For the entire SS in 1937 alone, fifty-four were expelled for having contact (*Verkehr*) with Jews, five for racial shame (*Rassenschande*), thirty-six were released for ideological unsuitability; and 160 withdrew on their own accord, often giving ideology as the grounds; *SS-Statistisches Jahrbuch*, 1937. As for early SD members, 1.5 percent would be released and 2.8 percent expelled for political unsuitability or other causes; based on quantitative analysis of early SD members, George C. Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers: The Gestapo and the SS Security Service in the Nazi Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), Appendix C, pp. 259–281.

who openly rejected the persecution of Jews, including men who had even held officer's ranks in the Gestapo and SD.[16]

Thus, it seems that among SS, Security Police and SD men, some either were or quickly became convinced antisemites, thoroughly internalizing the evil ideology. Some, perhaps most (according to some social-psychological theories[17]), simply wore the ideology as part of their role in the SS, police, or SD. As long as they were totally immersed in that SS or Security Police identity, they could act on antisemitic principles as proactively and creatively as true believers. Only afterward, removed and confronted with the full reality of what they had done, would they seek psychological escape (as well as legal defense) in blaming their superiors for having tricked or betrayed them.

Unfortunately, only a minority would sufficiently reject the course of development to remove themselves from their more direct involvement, often only to be drawn back to "doing their duty" with the outbreak of war. [18] Most of them would continue to try to minimize their involvement, sabotage some of the evil actions, or save or succor just enough victims to salve their consciences. Afterward they would proclaim their "opposition" as part of their legal defense.

Although all three categories of perpetrators played roles essential to the Final Solution, among the Jewish experts of the SD/Gestapo there was no room for the latter category. One either internalized the ideology or wore it very successfully. They might later refuse to call such beliefs "antisemitism," because their scientific "Judeology" was essential to their claim of uniqueness as "experts" among mindless Jew-haters. This was their claim to preeminence in developing "rational" solutions to the "Jewish

---

16　For example, the records of Albert Reinke, (born October 29, 1877) Geheime Staatsarchiv Berlin-Dahlem, 90P/7/221–51; and former U.S. Document Center Berlin, SSO and RuSHA files.
17　Kelmann and Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience*.
18　Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers*, pp. 151–152.

problem" and, increasingly, their *raison d'être*. It also made their later acts of hate "righteous."

What remains is the question of whether they had internalized antisemitism *before* their involvement in SD II 112 and were, therefore, perhaps *unusually* predisposed to monstrous evil because of their German upbringing. Although recent scholarship continues to recognize the importance of antisemitism in Imperial Germany and its radicalization in the Weimar era, no consensus has emerged to support the idea that German antisemitism, *prior* to Hitler, is sufficient cause for explaining much perpetrator behavior. As for scientific racism, the United States and Britain led in the eugenics movement before Hitler, and the United States applied such theory and racial prejudices in legislation and immigration control — to Hitler's envy.[19] There is no convincing basis for explaining uniquely evil, predisposed perpetrators among German bureaucrats alone. Nevertheless, Lozowick repeatedly suggests that there were (pp. 18, 200).

On this issue, it would seem that the author's own rhetorical question indicates an explanation for any differences in behavior. "Did they, from the moment they were given operational authority (almost unlimited, it should be noted), abandon ideology, or did they act consistently under its influences?" (p. 35). When they became Jewish experts, antisemitism became an essential ingredient of their identity and status. During the II 112 phase of "research" that "proved" their antisemitic construct, they deeply absorbed the evil mid-set that compelled their monstrous behavior. The bureaucrats of other nations shared in no such process.

Another perspective requires consideration of differences in degree and type of prejudice against Jews. Only the mind-set that Lozowick himself defines as antisemitic deserves that label — one

19 Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and W.H. Tucker, *The Science and Politics of Racial Research.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

who "sees a Jewish conspiracy everywhere and who hates the Jews for this" (p. 25). Before the Holocaust, almost all non-Jews in most western countries shared ambivalent attitudes about Jews, including mixed stereotypes. The *majority* held predominantly negative stereotypes. There was an almost universal "consensus reality" that the Jews were an *alien* element — *different*. This produced occasional expressions of hostility, but recoil from anyone else's overt expressions of hatred. Only the overtly hating minority were true antisemites. The significance of that minority has varied over time and from country to country. Antisemites, combined with demagogic elites, have propagated pogroms and lynchings.

Wherever any political movement has sought to exploit prejudices, it has always had to build on those embraced by the majority. The negative generalizations about Jews accepted almost everywhere in the western world provided a platform for evolving an antisemitic consensus reality. It took the Nazi regime, however, to move full-scale antisemitism from outside the pale and firmly into one nation's consensus reality.[20]

Among the Jewish experts, a good case in point is Theodor Dannecker. Since Lozowick cites him so frequently as an example, he seems worthy of detailed analysis. "An acquaintance *from that period* (1936–37) remembered that Dannecker was a 'fanatical Jew-hater'" (p. 31, emphasis and date added). The source for this observation is Claudia Steur's biography of Dannecker. [21] Yet Lozowick does not mention that Dannecker's first serious love

20 Saul Friedländer, "Ideology and Extermination: The Immediate Origins of the Final Solution," in Ronald Smelser, ed., *Lessons and Legacies,* vol. V, *The Holocaust and Justice* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2002), pp. 31–48. Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) has most recently demonstrated how the public media was used to "sell" the police state and the persecution of Nazism's ideological enemies to the general public by building upon widely held fears and prejudices.
21 Claudia Steur, *Theodor Dannecker. Ein Funktionär der "Endlösung"* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 1997).

was a Jewish neighbor. The two families had been close, and the teenage sweethearts were only separated in *1930* when her family moved away. Clearly, he did not "come from home" as a fanatical Jew-hater. The full transition may not have begun until March 1936, when he was assigned the position of Jewish expert at SD-Superior Region South West in Stuttgart. A year later he was called to serve in the Berlin offices of SD II 112, apparently because of the impression he had made during training sessions.[22] By the following autumn, he was giving briefings that conformed fully to SD Judeology. He had either internalized or thoroughly dressed himself in the requisite mind-set and begun to channel his hate toward the authorized target.

Lozowick quotes a November 1937 briefing that Dannecker gave about the role of the SD in solving the "Jewish problem." "We should reach a state of affairs in which German Jewry will always be facing the recognition that ... in the end any Jewish attempt to remain in Germany is entirely without prospect." ... "This will be the Security Police's (Gestapo) method of dealing with the Jews: never give them a moment's peace, ... repeated interrogations, always respond in the sharpest way to any infraction...." (p. 30).

Lozowick then relates that, prior to entering the SD, Dannecker had served for six months as a SS guard at the infamous Columbia House, and a friend allegedly recalled "how much enjoyment he had gotten out of torturing prisoners" (p. 31), because he later joked about the sadistic tricks the guards played on inmates. As a result, Lozowick argues, "When such a man proposed keeping Jewish leaders in constant tension, or responding severely to any violations, he did not have in mind administrative measures — he meant *torture and terror*. It is reasonable to assume that his colleagues in the audience believed the same" (p. 31, emphasis added).

The reasonableness of the assumption is not only questionable,

22 Ibid., pp. 15, 17–21, 153.

but so is the argument about what Dannecker intended to communicate. Of course the Gestapo was expected to get tough with Jews as part of the escalating pressure to encourage emigration. The Jews were certainly being subjected to intimida-tion, but it does not necessarily follow that Dannecker proposed *torture and terror* in 1937.

One can read Dannecker's evolution in several ways. Steur, for example, is certainly more circumspect than Lozowick. Dannecker lost his father as a result of World War I. His death cut the family off from its social connections and undermined the family business. In order to take over the family business when his mother's health failed, Dannecker had to interrupt an education that could have restored his traditional middle-class status. Then, when the business was on the verge of failure, at the tender age of seventeen, he lost his intended. It was hardly *aberrational* for a German boy with such experiences to be bitter, nationalist-minded to the point of xenophobia, and suffer from ego damage over the loss of social and economic status and security. His first act of hostility toward a Jew was a 1930 attack directed at the Jewish businessman who bought out his sweetheart's family business, which led to their separation. This act seems more personally motivated than ideological, but he was abetted by two neighbors, who were members of the SA.

Falling in with a couple of Nazi youths, it hardly seems *unusual* that he would get involved in an act of vandalism directed at a Jew whom he might see as responsible for his pain, especially if he was also a rival to the crumbling family business. With a Jew as a target of personal animosity, and other strong connections with Nazi appeals, he would seem to have been an easy recruit. Although the records about his party and SS entry conflict, his first approaches to both were no earlier than two years later, in 1932.[23] The transition, therefore, took at least two years. By then,

23 Ibid., pp. 16, 151–152; and Dannecker's SS officer and RuSHA files in the former U.S. Document Center, Berlin, now held by the Bundesarchiv Berlin.

it was hardly *unusual* to join the Nazi movement as it was coming to power. Furthermore, Steur suggests that he was drawn to National Socialism, like most, by the frustrations of the economic crisis, and to the SS in order to insure himself a respectable career.

His complete initiation into the SS did not come for another two years: it was only in 1934, when he began serving first with an armed SS commando (Politische Bereitschaft) and then as part of the SS camp guards (Wachverbinde). He became "dehumanized," in the sense of becoming inured to brutality. This was not a passive process. Steur describes his loss of inhibitions about violence as gradual and suggests he fell into this role because being a SS superman who could lord over "subhumans" salved his damaged ego. Nevertheless, it hardly seems that he found all this work fulfilling, for he immediately developed a drinking problem. This in turn led to dereliction of duty (a subconscious rejection of role?) and expulsion from the camp guards. Thereafter, a position in the SD was his last hope to regain his honor and some position of respect.

In 1936, he was *assigned* the duty of Jewish expert at his SD regional office. At that time, regional- and district-level assignments to any given desk (*Referent*) were usually determined by what personnel was available, rather than qualifications or inclinations.[24] More significantly, this transpired at just the moment when the SD set out to become the preeminent "think tank" for solving the "Jewish problem." His new status hinged entirely on either fully internalizing "scientific" antisemitism and playing the role of SD Jewish expert to the hilt.

Having a character insufficiently strong to handle the problems that life threw at him was not an *unusual* failing. Whether he truly internalized scientific antisemitism or merely "wore" it, he would have believed in the rightness of what "he had to do." Yet he would have suffered from what SS men liked to describe as the "awful burden" of their "distasteful" work. Joking about cruelty

24 Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers*, pp. 180–181, 189–192.

in 1935, or anytime subsequent, would be *normal* acting-out for the benefit of peers or for self-assurance, but, taken together with alcoholic escape, this indicates someone hardly comfortable with the rightness of what he was doing.

"Hate" is a different problem in explaining such behavior. It is *not* an abnormal phenomenon. It is an inherent capacity of the *normal* human psyche. We do not have to be taught to hate! Rather we learn what are suitable targets for that emotion. Authority sanctions and encourages the hating of certain targets. Such authority can be one's peer environment, political or religious leadership, superiors within any institution with which one tightly identifies, or even something as abstract as "science." In the twentieth century, "racial science" laid "rational" foundations, defining serious threats to everything one held as good and right.[25]

Hate is also an emotion that one easily "forgets." It is not that the targets of hate easily forget, but rather the bearers. If it ceases to be "righteous," it is apparently too intense an emotion to maintain. When the perceived threat dissipates, the hater forgets its intensity. In the postwar context of shock at what the Nazis did, those who had not internalized a truly antisemitic hate, but merely embraced its righteousness as part of their mission, could forget that they ever really hated. Those who did internalize true antisemitism would deny their hate as a legal and/or psychological defense.

Lozowick is undoubtedly correct in arguing that there were many points at which Dannecker had to *decide* to continue beyond the antisemitism that he shared with French counterparts who lacked his zeal. "The decision to become murderers was not a one-time matter.... It was a long steep climb, lined with red lights and black flags" (p. 279). But many such points occurred before

25 Ulrich Herbert, *Best. Biographische Studien über Redikalismus, Wletanschauung und Vernunft, 1903–1989* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996), on the influence of this thinking among the leaders and shapers of the SD and Gestapo.

his arrival in France and continued as unique to his office; that and not significant national differences in their antisemitism is what separated him from the Frenchmen. By the time he arrived there, "He was a man who was perpetually under pressure, perpetually in a rage" (p. 233). Soon he could propose separating children from their mothers to facilitate deportations. From this, Lozowick concludes that such a bureaucrat belongs to an unusual group, that most of us could never do such a thing (p. 204).

Monstrous behavior can be a normal human failure, but a *failure* it certainly is. We can understand it, but not excuse it. I share Lozowick's belief that instinctual moral impulses are inherent in human beings. Despite Foucault's argument for there being only cultural conventions, I argue that cultures merely reinforce, direct or divert and defuse such impulses.

It is an oversimplification to say that these men did not know that what they were doing was wrong. It is more accurate to say that they tried to bury that awareness. To understand how social systems encourage such burials when one is involved in sanctioned violence is an awareness essential to all modern citizens in any type of society. Pursuing such understanding is a moral responsibility.

Part of a more sophisticated thesis is the acceptance of Lozowick's argument that these men knew what they were doing had no approval outside the context of their system of beliefs; that under normative circumstances, their actions would be considered immoral. To prepare them for this problem, the SS, especially the SD, had imbued them with a sense of supra-normative moral responsibility. In his personal indoctrination of early SD experts, Reinhard Heydrich had admonished them that what they would never think of doing for personal advantage could be a positive virtue if done in the service of the "higher goals of society."[26] This

---

26 "Bericht des SS-Scharf. Kaulard ...," February 15, 1935, Landes Hauptarchiv Koblenz, 662.6./45/3.

was the SS ethics of morality. And it was this context that Arendt rightly thought *blinded* them to evil.

Nevertheless, Lozowick is right: that was not enough for total blindness. The records of many perpetrators indicate that they suffered psychosomatic consequences, the least of which was retreat into alcohol. For some, another consequence was giving themselves over wholly to demonic behavior, as if to prove that absolutely any extreme directed against their victims was "normative" or "righteous." Bashing a baby's head against a wall demonstrated that such acts were as morally insignificant as stomping on a swarm of ants. Yet at some level these men knew what they were doing was so wrong that it was evil. Their continual suppression of conscience in favor of whatever else was motivating them was their ultimate moral failure.

One can only fathom the dichotomy between their "righteous" ideological convictions and their nagging sense of guilt if one can recall having to do something that harmed others or made one look bad. One's bridge to understanding these "unusual" perpetrators is not only insight into one's own moral failures, but also experiences in our "normal and usual" world that often demand choices between the lesser of evils, practicing what managers call "cost assessment," or calculating "collateral damage." Of course, Lozowick rightly argues that they were unusual in how far they went in their evil acts. Yet it does not follow that they were abnormal or even unusual people for having done so.

If Arendt was really saying that we are helplessness before the entrapments of modern technology and bureaucracy, she was wrong. I am not sure that she defused the meaning of evil and released "us from the requirement of coping with non-academic and irrational concepts such as hatred and evil." Perhaps she diminished "the humanity of the murderers, while minimizing their crime" (p. 278). Nevertheless, Lozowick is right that "rational explanations are shallow and unpersuasive," but only *if* "they remove from the SS officers their chief characteristic — their evil"(p. 274).

Since the Holocaust is without precedence, it is impossible to test the theory that ordinary non-German bureaucrats could have done the same things under similar circumstances. As Lozowick put it, "Do we have enough data to state that each of us could potentially act in this way, were we to be placed in the appropriate circumstances?" (p.204). I counter: do we have any data to prove the contrary?

ANOTHER IDEOLOGICAL DIVIDE

Although one cannot "disprove" the validity of Lozowick's argument for the unusual nature of these perpetrators, one can point to some consequences of such theory. In a subsequent piece, he elaborates on his concern about Arendt's legacy:

> [M]any people today fully accept that all of us have the potential to become Eichmann-like.... Our ability to make moral distinctions between right and wrong can rather easily be over-ridden by such banal things as peer pressure, careerism, narrow-minded concentration on the task at hand rather than its contribution to a larger policy, and so on. Furthermore, there is no ... "proportionality": The power of these banal motivations is total, and can bring us to minor infractions or to mass murder with equal ease. [27]

As for those "banal things," certainly they were not sufficient for the *total* blinding of a functionary. Few would argue that. They were contributing factors, and, even then, had to operate collectively to be significant.[28] Perhaps it would also be more accurate to say we all *have had* the potential to commit equal evil.

---

27 Yaacov Lozowick, "Reflections on the Historical Significance of Adolf Eichmann," presented at the Tagung, "Rolle und Politik des SD im NS-Regime," October 11–13, 2001, at the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung.

28 For a critique of the strengths and weaknesses of monocausal versus complex, interactive analyses, see Thomas Blass, "Psychological Perspectives on the Perpetrators of the Holocaust: The Role of Situational Pressures, Personal Dispositions, and their Interactions," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 7 (1993), 1, pp. 30–50.

One hopes maturity and experience have raised many of us above that potential. But adolescents and young adults will always be the cannon fodder for crusades — both righteous and evil. Even worse, not even maturity seems sufficient to prevent one from letting tasks-at-hand become blinders to moral responsibility. Far more dangerous is the moral dilemma of the "higher cause." When the cause is high enough, the ends justify the means. Like the "revealed truths" of religion, the "laws of science," "economic reality," and "national interest" seem to place infinite demands upon us in direct proportion to our "commitments," maturely made or otherwise.

This critic prefers a middle way to either extreme for understanding evil behavior, because of its effects on our own behavior when confronted with the *higher cause* of fighting such evil. At each extreme the perpetrators are either monsters or automatons, respectively, bent on doing serious harm. One cannot share the world with such total threats. To quote Nietzsche, "Whoever battles with monsters had better see that it does not turn him into a monster."[29]

What is worse, however, Lozowick concludes that democratic societies cannot commit the kind of serious evil committed by totalitarian or dictatorial societies. I hope so, but that seems to mean that one need not worry so much about one's national policies in a democracy. Specifically, Lozowick finds too much solace in Rudolf Rummel's study of governments responsible for the murder of millions in the twentieth century.[30] "[D]emocratic regimes do not commit genocide." Allegedly, "Arendt and her followers blur this distinction. Having identified universalist traits in the Nazis, they wish us to accept that in spirit we are all potential accomplices: there but for the grace of circumstance, go we" (p. 8).

29   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1955), aphorism 146, p. 85.
30   Rudolf J. Rummel, *Death by Government* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1994).

Such universalist perspectives do not "blur" Rummel's conclusion. Instead, one should understand the consequences of Rummel's definitions and parameters and the resultant exclusion of modern slavery and pre-twentieth century, racist and imperialist "population policies" and "ethnic cleansings" from his study. Thus, Britain and the United States rank at the bottom of the list of offenders (as they should in the past century). However, in excusing their fire storming of cities as a consequence of having to fight *non-democratic* regimes he ignores the human capacity to blur distinctions between real (Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan) and fictitious ("international Jewry") threats. Fire storming was also the product of a war against monsters.

By exaggerating the differences between an overtly manipulated public media, as was the case in Nazi Germany,[31] and the more complex relation between the "free press" and ethnocentric and xenophobic sentiments in any society — democratic or otherwise — also lulls us into a false sense of security. The overt prejudices of an authoritarian society may be no more dangerous than the covert prejudices of a "liberal" society, especially if they produce complacency and self-righteousness. Democracies are undoubtedly more likely than dictatorships to avoid overt evil, but they may also be more adept at masking their evil. Fortunately, masking usually sets limits on the extent of the evil; however, demagogues can be as evil as dictators, and "democratic" populations as prejudiced or as paranoid as any other. Perhaps Thucydides' account of the fate of the Megarans at the hands of the Athenians in *The Peloponnesian War* should remain in the canon of essential readings for a democratic people.

---

31 Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, demonstrates involvement by the non-Nazi press that looks more "universal" than unique to a dictatorship.