THE PSYCHOLOGY OF NAZISM: METHOD AND THEORY

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War, revolution, inflation and depression within the space of fifteen years might seem sufficient explanation for the emergence of any political movement, no matter how bizarre. Yet the National Socialist Party defies understanding in these terms alone. The qualities which set it off from the ordinary run of political parties have suggested to many people that an adequate interpretation demands psychological methods. Their attempts have ranged from the insightful to the ridiculous; they have met with ambivalence among professional historians. There is room for a careful analysis of what such interpretations consist of and what they can contribute to a historical reconstruction of the Nazi movement.

From the many psychological or partly psychological interpretations of Nazism, I have chosen three of the best and most readily available for detailed comment. These are in Erich Fromm's *The Fear of Freedom*, Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society*, and two articles by Talcott Parsons, "Democracy and Social Structure in Pre-Nazi Germany" and "Some Sociological Aspects of the Fascist Movements*. Fromm and Erikson write in the tradition of psychoanalytic thought about character and motivation; Parsons uses a combination of structural sociology and an eclectic psychology of insecurity.

With these main examples, the following sections of this article deal with five aspects of the reasoning involved in constructing a psychological explanation of the pattern of support received by the Nazi Party before 1933. The first two sections discuss how the social location of Nazi support is interpreted, and how personal affiliation with the Nazi Party is conceptualized. The next two sections deal with more abstract questions of the character of evidence which may be used, and the analysis of the relations between individual personality and the social system. The final section considers the interpretation of Nazism as a case of interdisciplinary reasoning.

Nazi propagandists never tired of presenting their movement as a resurgence of the whole German nation: but in practice they received markedly different support from different areas of German society. This fact is of basic importance. Many psychological interpretations fall down on it, including the extensive social psychological study by Cantril and the immensely detailed psychoanalytic theory of German character advanced by Kecskemethi and Leites. An explanation explains too much, if it gives good reasons why virtually every section of the German population should have supported Hitler.

From the statistics of party membership, and the distribution of voting support, it is possible to identify certain categories in the population of Weimar Germany who showed a particular responsiveness to the Nazis. Protestant religion, middle-class occupational status, and youthfulness, for instance, were all loosely related to support of Nazism. Psychological hypotheses can be set up to explain the responsiveness of such groups. This can be done at least in two ways. In the first, the correlates of Nazism are thought to define sections of the population who,
before contact with the movement, have certain traits and attitudes similar to those emphasized in Nazi propaganda, and who, under certain social conditions, will respond to this propaganda. In the second, the variables of age, religion, etc., are thought to define groups among whom there is a relatively high incidence of personality disorganization susceptible of a drastic resolution by the adoption of Nazi attitudes and values.

Erikson and Parsons take the second of these approaches. It is a more elegant solution of the problem, explaining the enthusiastic allegiance of the Nazi following without assuming a wide distribution of psychopathic traits in the population. But it proves difficult to assemble evidence for such interpretations. It is also difficult to say why it should have been the Nazi party rather than some other which received support in this way, without assuming the existence of certain traits or attitudes as well as a lack of personality integration; which Erikson and Parsons are obliged to do.

Fromm's interpretation is wholly of the first kind. He describes a set of traits which go to make up "authoritarian character" and asserts that these were typical of the German lower middle class. Fromm is refreshingly explicit in this argument, as in his identification of the social conditions which made persons of authoritarian character susceptible to Nazism: the collapse of established structures of authority and the loss, or threatened loss, of middle-class social and economic status. Besides being explicit, however, Fromm's argument is seriously over-simplified. The argument that support of the Nazis was precipitated by downward social mobility, loss of status, is very commonly and very confidently advanced. Yet an examination of two middle-class groups who showed a particular susceptibility to Nazism, young white-collar employees and self-employed professional men, reveals a high proportion who were upwardly mobile. Their support of a radical-right movement can well be explained by bitterness against entrenched privilege which denied them the increased social recognition and political power they expected, but it cannot be explained in Fromm's terms. It is, of course, still likely that downward mobility was an influence in other cases.

To show that a given psychological hypothesis is in fact the correct interpretation of the connection between Nazism and a variable such as age, economic status, or area of residence, requires a demonstration that the psychological condition described was more prevalent among the groups, defined by that variable, which were the more susceptible to Nazism. This is the principle of the control group in statistical reasoning. Indirect evidence can be found for Parsons' hypothesis of greater anomic disturbance among the groups most susceptible to Nazism, but there is also indirect evidence against it. Fromm is almost unique in being able to cite direct evidence with a control group in favour of his interpretation. The evidence is from a questionnaire survey carried out in 1929-30 on the character of German employees.

He reports that authoritarian character was "typical" for lower middle class respondents, and present but less common among working class respondents; apparently the higher occupational strata were not sampled. Even this, however, is not satisfactory proof of his case. Research since that time, with improved methods, indicates that authoritarian traits as measured by questionnaires do not hang together to form a unified "authoritarian character" as Fromm proposes. The questionnaire used in the 1929-30 study was probably lumping together a number of distinct traits and attitudes related to conservatism and prejudice. It does provide evidence that some attitudes corresponding to Nazi
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propaganda themes were more prevalent in one group the Nazis appealed to strongly than in one they appealed to less: but not evidence for Fromm's particular conception of this relationship.

Psychological interpretations have generally carried the dual burden of hypotheses about the location of Nazi support and hypotheses about the explanation of this location. It is more satisfactory to work from concrete, detailed evidence about which sections of the population were involved, but correspondingly difficult to construct satisfying explanations afterwards. One reason for this is that the social and economic variables defining sections of the population may only partially correspond to the distribution of the characteristic or characteristics which did make people susceptible to Nazi appeals. If, for example, difficulty in achieving ego identity was an important determinant, as Erikson argues, this is indicated by age level in part but not in whole. Conversely, a suggested interpretation cannot be ruled out because the distribution of Nazi support over a related variable is unfavourable. To take the age variable again, there are reasons for believing that authoritarian traits and anti-semitism were more prevalent among older age-groups than among younger; and Nazism had a greater appeal to the younger groups. This weakens the case for regarding pre-existing attitudes of prejudice and authoritarian conservatism as the general psychological foundations of Nazism; but because age is only a partial indicator of these traits, it cannot rule this interpretation out.

II

What did support of the Nazi party actually consist of? Many writers have represented affiliation with the party as a form of “displacement”. They argue that potential followers developed acute personal needs which were resolved by “displacing” emotional responses from figures in their immediate personal situation on to figures in the Nazi drama, particularly the figure of Hitler. The first full-blown psychoanalytic interpretation of the movement, advanced in 1935 by Schuman, is based on argument of this kind, as are the many later and cruder interpretations of Hitler’s role as a “father figure”. Much more sophisticated interpretations, such as that of Mannheim, depend on the idea of Nazi symbols providing substitute goals for masses of people cut off from the attainment of realistic life-goals. Erikson’s argument hangs on the ability of Hitler’s images to induce people to displace emotions to the extent of identifying themselves with the leader, and feeling that his struggle, in a deep sense, was their own.

The idea of affiliation with the Nazi party as displacement is not improbable; but it is the kind of interpretation for which it is impossible to find fully satisfactory evidence. There are indeed some indications of it from postwar psychological examinations of known Nazi supporters. A report on one such case reads:

E. is a highly intellectualized, gifted writer, inclined toward abstract, mystic formulations. Although he makes bold statements along political lines, he is primarily a philosopher, aesthetic, and occasionally a sophist. In his social relations, he is dogmatic, tense, and suffers from strong feelings of inferiority. When he identifies himself with a mystic “Germany,” he becomes domineering, aggressive, proud.

This kind of evidence, confined to a few cases, can be only suggestive. It becomes more cogent if it can be supplemented with other indications of “displacement” operating in the German population at the time when many were going over to Nazism. Such evidence can be found, for instance, in the statistics of enrolment in German universities and technical schools: just in the periods of high unemployment and rapid gains, enrolment for higher education increased substantially. If this is taken as, in part, a product of another kind of displace-
ment, then the probability that affiliation with Nazism represented displacement is increased. Yet it is difficult to pin down the mechanisms involved. In Abel's study of 600 life-histories of Nazi party members and sympathizers, only 8% reported being unemployed at the time of joining the party; the great majority reported themselves as economically secure, and substantial majorities had never changed their jobs or their place of residence in the period 1919-32. The finding strongly suggests that unemployment per se was less influential in producing the mass membership of the Nazi party than were fear of unemployment and the less drastic effects of the economic crises. In this case we may begin to suspect that the psychological explanations via displacement may be too strong to apply to the bulk of the Nazi following.

There are alternative ways of looking at affiliation. Parsons conceives of it as a process of resolution of personality disorganization without invoking the psychoanalytic concept of displacement. Fromm's account contains an element of the displacement idea, but goes beyond it. He observes that entry into the Nazi following was entry into a system of power relationships: with superiors, especially Hitler; with inferiors, in the party and among the party's enemies. As a general account of the pattern of relationships within the party, Fromm's description is too simple. There are many instances in the life-histories of party members who, left without supervision, devoted themselves to active party work on their own initiative, particularly in the provinces remote from the main centres of the Nazi organization. The creative vigour of the party's propaganda work, too, can scarcely be reconciled with a pattern of authoritarian submission. But Fromm's account is of value in pointing to features of affiliation other than the resolution of private personality difficulties. If affiliation were simply this, it would be hard to account for the movement of voters into and out of the Nazi orbit: particularly the two million voters lost in the Reichstag election of November 1932. On the other hand, the failure of the "Black Front" secession under Otto Strasser in 1930 points to the stability of affiliation for party members.

This suggests that meaningful distinctions can be made between levels or stages of affiliation, and that somewhat different explanations might be given for different levels. The large group of voters who came into the Nazi following only in 1932, and many of whom drifted out again, hardly require high-powered depth-psychological interpretation. The longer-term voters who did not take an active part in party work must be approached differently. Here we must bear in mind the extraordinary activity of the Nazi organization and propagandists: as the party grew, as the intensity of its activity increased, and new means of agitation such as the Hugenberg communications network and mechanical amplification at meetings became available, passive support could be created among large groups of people for whom Nazi ideology was no revelation and Hitler no redeemer. It may be noted that the proportion of Nazi voters to party members was much larger in 1930-32 than in 1928. Then there are the lower-echelon party members, who entered the party through diverse contacts and for whom party membership may well have had some of the meanings suggested by Erikson and Fromm. Finally there are the hard-core, long-term committed Nazis, who remain something of a mystery.

Differentiation along these lines should not be wholly equated with the hierarchy of party organization: a person remaining at much the same level of the organization, such as Goebbels in 1925-6, could pass through several stages of affiliation to become a personal devotee of Hitler. Analysis of such variations is of considerable importance in understanding any political party; its relevance in
the case of Nazism was recognized quite early by Mannheim. Later interpreters who have neglected differences in levels of affiliation have too easily been misled by the Nazis' own self-images.

III

The character of the evidence required to solve a problem is determined by the type of theory used as well as the specific content of hypotheses. In assessing an interpretation based on a theory of unconscious motivation, such as Fromm's, the most appropriate evidence is obviously evidence about unconscious motivation. Unfortunately, the major technique for acquiring such evidence, the technique of psychiatric interviewing, is extremely complex and difficult; the absence of depth-interview material from Weimar Germany is a shortcoming which can never be fully overcome. Attempts by modern psychologists to develop substitute techniques for tapping unconscious motives, such as projective tests and detailed personality questionnaires, have met with only qualified success. The necessity of using even less satisfactory kinds of evidence about Nazi supporters places a low ceiling on the confidence with which Fromm's hypotheses may be accepted.

Similarly, the confidence with which Erikson's and Parsons' interpretations may be accepted is limited by the absence of the most appropriate kind of evidence for testing them. It is not only direct evidence in favour which is lacking: direct evidence against is almost impossible to come by as well. For interpretations such as Erikson's and Mannheim's, which propose that affiliation with Nazism took the form of a major change in the internal economy of the person, evidence gathered after the event must be unsatisfactory as it will be affected by the personality changes which have taken place. The autobiographies collected by Abel, and the post-war case studies by Schaffner and others, are contaminated in this way as evidence for these interpretations.

For lack of direct evidence about the personal make-up of Nazi supporters, most writers have fallen back on substitute evidence. Very often this is evidence, not about actual patterns of behaviour, but about cultural "norms" for behaviour — evidence of what was expected of people in certain areas of German society. Thus Schaffner and Erikson set out to describe norms for relationships within the German family; Fromm and Parsons set out to specify norms for the values held by people in certain social positions. In a carefully-reasoned argument, Inkeles and Levinson stress the importance of distinguishing "socially required" personality structures — those personality structures which function optimally in a given social setting — from the actual personality structures that are to be found most commonly among the members of the society. These two things are not necessarily equivalent: indeed, the differences between them may be of particular importance in the genesis of social change. The study of collective policies and products, through which interpreters of Nazism have attempted to specify actual personality structures, is actually the method for specifying socially required personality structures. Besides confusing two logically distinct entities, this may obscure one of the sources of the motivation to adhere to Nazism. If, for instance, cultural norms among certain rural groups prescribed strong nationalistic sentiments and deference to social superiors, individuals who were moderately nationalistic yet resentful of the arrogance of upper-class groups might well adhere to a party which was nationalistic but not dominated by landowners and businessmen; and such a pattern can be found among the case histories collected by Abel.

For these reasons, it can be seen that there are several logical difficulties
inherent in the commonest form of argument to be found in psychological interpretations of Nazism — the argument from Nazi propaganda themes to the motives of Nazi supporters. It has been seriously doubted whether the content of Nazi propaganda was of much importance at all. Most interpreters assume that it was; but are left with the problem of specifying which of the many themes of Nazi agitation were the really effective ones, and why. Parsons, for instance, assumes that the effective themes were the violent attacks on the symbols of “rationalization” in German society — the capitalist economic system, the socialist movement, intellectualism — and the corresponding affirmation of traditional values. This is implied by his idea that Nazi support came principally from those areas of society affected by anomie dislocation but not emancipated from traditional values. Yet the lack of direct evidence, and the fact that Parsons specifies social norms rather than modal personality characteristics, allow alternative interpretations to be advanced with equal cogency. For another theme in Nazi propaganda was the glorification of modernity: Hitler’s speeches make great play with this, and one of the most effective and most publicized of Nazi publicity devices was Hitler’s election tour by aeroplane in the second presidential campaign of 1932. Abel’s life-history data testify to the extent to which party members were conscious of the campaign for a new order in Germany. Thus an interpretation diametrically opposed to Parsons’ could be constructed according to which the effective themes of Nazi thought and propaganda were the modernistic ones, and the source of motivation the inability of masses of people to conform to social norms of traditionalism in a time of economic upheaval.

In general, the lack of the most appropriate kind of evidence for psychological interpretations means that none can be accepted with anything approaching full confidence. This cannot be overcome by the use of substitute evidence, for the logical difficulties involved permit a number of alternatives to be asserted with a confidence virtually equal to that of any one interpretation proposed.

IV

The nature of the relations between individual personality and social environment is a problem common to all forms of social enquiry. An investigation which cuts across more than one discipline is likely to come up against this issue in an acute form. Most psychological interpretations of Nazism contrive to evade it with a few loose generalizations. Fromm, Erikson and Parsons stand out from most other writers in having reasonably definite ideas about it.

One approach is to investigate how closely personal expectations match the actual products of social processes. This is straightforward: it requires little analysis of either the person or the social process. It is the form of reasoning involved in Fromm’s argument that authoritarian middle-class persons were made susceptible to Nazism by the breakdown of established structures of authority in the state, the class system, and the family. It is also the form of reasoning involved in the assertion that Nazism was a response to a threat to middle-class status. The dangers of the approach are suggested by this example: since social processes are referred to only through their results, both process and result may be seriously misconceived.

This may be avoided by increasing the complexity of analysis, in an approach which examines cultural influences on the development of personality, and the reciprocal influence of developed personality on culture. Erikson works out such an approach with great subtlety in Childhood and Society, applying it to the case of Nazism through the conceptions of ego identity and its anchoring in
cultural identity. But there is still a danger of distorting social processes through oversimplification: Erikson's conception of the German "cultural identity" is close to stereotype.

The great merit of Erikson's theory is the recognition of differences between stages in the life cycle. It is all too easy to think of cultural influences on personality as a constant pressure in one direction. In fact, depending on the state of the culture or subculture at the time, there may be major discontinuities in cultural expectations of a person's behaviour between one stage of growth and the next, and there may be contradictory expectations at the same stage. There was probably a good deal of incoherence in cultural pressures in Germany: contradictions between the patterns of home life and school life, evocatively described for the period just before the war in the film *Maedchen in Uniform* and more bitterly for the period after in some of the Nazi life histories; radical changes in social expectations of boys at the time of leaving school; contrasts between past and present expectations brought about by social mobility. Such discontinuities and incoherencies, rather than one-way cultural pressures, are the most likely sources of patterns of personal development which resulted in affiliation with a movement that cut across the established boundaries of political allegiance.

Translated into the language of action systems analysis, this is very much what Parsons argues. The points of strain which he identifies in the society of Weimar Germany are those where the direction of social change imposed demands upon persons incompatible with the patterns of values they had already acquired. Mannheim has proposed a converse argument, that individual resistance to Nazi appeals was dependent on the social support provided by group membership. These interpretations are compatible with the pictures in Abel's life histories of men whose patterns of life had been disrupted by foreign occupation, family quarrels, failure to find settled employment, and the like, and who drifted until caught up in the Nazi movement. They are also compatible with the negative evidence that two sections of the population which showed low susceptibility to Nazism were Catholics of the South and the Rhineland, and working-class groups in urban areas dominated by the Social Democrats. In both cases, these were people whose predominantly anti-Nazi attitudes received continuous social support in a network of formal groups such as parish churches, lay associations, trade unions, and cultural organizations.

But this is not the whole story. The statistical analysis of Abel's life histories already referred to does not support the idea of a major disruption of patterns of life or a major loss of social support as a common factor in the background of party members. Further, the detailed research by Heberle into the growth of the Nazi movement in Schleswig-Holstein shows that in some rural communities affiliation with the Nazi party could actually be a product of group cohesion, communities going over en bloc when some of their influential members decided to support the movement. This throws an altogether different light on the problem. There are obvious possibilities for an investigation of the social processes behind group affiliation with Nazism, which have been much neglected in the literature on the movement before its accession to power, though given some attention in research on the processes of Nazification afterwards.

A shift of emphasis from a consideration of personality in the society at large to a consideration of personality in concrete group settings holds the promise of answering a question which most approaches to Nazism leave in the air. Given the kinds of personality organization or the kinds of personality disruption specified
by these theories, why should they have produced political action? As Mannheim has observed, this is a problem of social organization rather than individual psychology. Detailed study of the way in which households, village communities, and work groups were integrated with the political system of Weimar Germany is the only path to an adequate solution.

A historical explanation based on common-sense notions of human motivation, as Marc Bloch has observed, is often weak because there is no guarantee that the common-sense maxims involved are actually true. Psychological theory offers the possibility of constructing explanations on principles of motivation whose truth can be tested in psychological research. But the use of psychological theory in historical argument imposes certain obligations.

The first obligation is that the theory used should in fact be good current psychological theory. Fromm's original conception of a unitary "authoritarian character," for instance, has not held up under later research: his account of the dynamics of Nazism thus becomes suspect as a historical explanation.

A second obligation is that the psychological theory invoked should be shown to be really appropriate to the situation being discussed. It is no use applying a high-powered Freudian theory of neurosis to the German middle class in the Weimar Republic, as Schuman does, if there is no good evidence that the mass of the middle class suffered from neurotic disturbance: and there is no such evidence. Put in another way, this means that the explanation offered must be a good historical explanation as well as a good psychological explanation. It must be based on the same detailed and critical examination of source material that would be expected of a straightforward historical account. There is no psychological interpretation of the Nazi movement which approaches this.

There are no general canons for the testing of psychological interpretations in history. Different theories or elements of theories may have different logical functions. Fromm's theory of authoritarian character makes substantive assertions about the nature of middle-class German personalities; Erikson's theory of ego identity and Parsons' theory of anomie, though containing some substantive assertions, are principally analytic schemes which aid in the meaningful arrangement of data, in the one case about individual experiences, in the other about social stresses. Thus Fromm's interpretation can be directly confirmed or refuted, while the other two can only be judged more or less adequate as aids to analysis. Different theories may have different applications: one may seem appropriate for one element in the historical situation, and another appropriate for a different element. The idea of pre-existing conservative and authoritarian traits seems better fitted to explain the support of Nazism among older age-groups than among younger, the idea of a struggle for ego identity seems better fitted to younger age-groups than older, the idea of a fundamentalist reaction to anomie seems better fitted to inhabitants of country towns than urban areas. There is no logical objection to the use of incompatible psychological theories in dealing with different pieces of evidence; but there is a strong aesthetic objection. One of the major functions of a historical explanation is to order a mass of evidence into a convincingly coherent pattern. The use of diverse psychological theories, couched in different terms and based on different kinds of research, orders the material in one way only by throwing it into disarray in another.

It should not be thought that psychological theory adds new evidence which can be used in a historical explanation. Psychological evidence remains evidence
for psychological problems: it cannot be exported to another discipline. What I have called a "psychological interpretation" in history is actually a special form of reasoning by analogy, in which a historical interpretation is constructed whose principles are designed to be as closely analogous as possible to the principles of a certain variety of psychological argument. The value of the analogy obviously depends on the value of the psychological argument as a psychological argument, but the correctness of the interpretation is a matter of historical reasoning alone. The fact that more professional psychologists than professional historians have attempted such interpretations should not blind us to their logical character.

Despite the critical tone of this article, I believe that psychological and sociological theory has a lot to contribute to historical thought. Because it can be valuable, we are entitled to set high standards for its use: higher standards than those for straightforward historical interpretation, for the undertaking demands technical excellence in two disciplines and imagination in moving from one to the other. Interpretations of Nazism, even the three relatively sophisticated ones discussed, do not yet measure up to these standards: which is not a check, but a challenge.

NOTES


4. This argument requires more elaboration than can be given here. For the data on which it is based, see Gerth, op. cit., Abel, op. cit., and the following works. H. Speier, "The Salaried Employee in Modern Society", Social Research, vol. 1, 1934, p.126. R. H. Samuel and R. Hinton, The Psychology of Fascism, London, 1949, pp.112, 135. That upward mobility is higher in Protestant than in Catholic areas is based on the background of a radical-right movement is shown by the contemporary John Birch Society in the United States.

5. The suicide rate, one possible indicator of extent of anomie, rises in the years of Nazi gains, and is higher in Protestant than in Catholic areas. But the Nazi autobiographies collected by Abel report a relative stability of residence and employment.

6. There is a vast literature on authoritarian personality. For a convenient review, now somewhat dated, see K. Christie and P. Cook, "A critique to published literature relating to the authoritarian personality through 1956", J. Psychol., vol. 48, 1958, pp.171-190.

7. On antisemitism, Abel, op. cit., p.164. For the argument that the younger generation which fell to Nazism was least likely to have been brought up in an authoritarian way, see M. Horkheimer, "Social-psychological Forschungen zum Problem der Autoritarismus, Nationalismus und Antisemitismus" in Autoritarismus und Nationalismus — ein deutsches Problem., Frankfurt a.M., 1963, p.61.


10. B. Schaffner, Father Land, N.Y., 1945, p.194.

11. Samuel and Thomas, op. cit., p.112.


13. Life histories of Nazis are available from four sources. First are the orthodox biographies of Nazi leaders such as Hitler, Goering, Goebbels, and Himmler. These symbolize and dramatise elements in the make-up of their followers, but can be very misleading: in particular, when the life-history of Hitler is taken as representative of his followers.

Second are the studies made of Nazi leaders captured during and after the war, of which the most important is J. R. Rees (ed.) The Case of Rudolf Hess: A Problem in Diagnoses and Forensic Psychiatry, N.Y., 1948. Such material is subject to the same restrictions on generalization as the orthodox biographies.

Third are the psychological studies of Nazi followers made in prisoner-of-war camps and in Germany during the witch-hunt which followed the Allied occupation. B. H. Diner, "Psychological Trains and National Socialist Ideology", Human Relations, vol. 5, 1950, pp.111-154, reports interviews of Nazi and non-Nazi prisoners of war. Schaffner, op. cit., and D. M. Levy, "Anti-Nazi: Criteria of Differentiation", Psychiatry, vol. 11, 1948, pp.155-165, present material from the screening centres established by the Occupation forces. All report data compatible with an authoritarian personality interpretation of Nazism: all had a theoretical outlook which would make this result
likely. Their evidence, collected in the mid-1940's, is suggestive but not conclusive about the psychological make-up of Nazi supporters in the period before 1933.

Fourth are the six hundred autobiographical essays collected by Abel, op. cit., in a prize competition for Nazi party members and supporters held after Nazi accession to power. Abel's book contains an excellent summary of their contents with copious quotations. The persons who contributed autobiographies reflect the diversity of the Nazi party, but their representativeness must remain suspect. For this reason, and because there is no guarantee that the respondents gave full details of their personal histories, Abel's unique statistics and qualitative conclusions are not fully reliable. Abel attempts little psychological analysis of motivation, with good reason: positive interpretation of the information volunteered, not supplemented by the kinds of information which personality psychologists usually gain from interviews and tests, would be very chancy.

For these reasons life-history data, potentially the most satisfactory kind of evidence about the psychology of Nazism, are not adequate to establish solid conclusions. They may give good grounds for rejecting interpretations with which they are strongly at variance. But their positive value, like that of data on cultural norms, is only to suggest hypotheses.