

# **The Logic of Mass Murder**

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### INTRODUCTION

The Nazis called it the “Final Solution to the Jewish problem.” We now refer to this event as the Holocaust. Whatever one calls it, the systematic murder of 6 million Jews was one of the most horrific events in history. It is difficult to comprehend why a seemingly civilized nation would—with brutal determination—kill millions of people simply because they were members of a particular religious or racial group.

Since the Second World War ended in 1945, thousands of books have been written about Hitler, National Socialism, and the Holocaust. We are beginning to understand how and why the Final Solution came into being. I wish to propose a “solution” to the problem or puzzle of the Holocaust: to provide an explanation. I will attempt to articulate Hitler’s mindset: to reveal what Hitler was thinking when he decided to exterminate the Jewish race.

In 1933, the population of Germany was 66 million. There were 550,000 Jews in Germany at that time, which meant that Jews constituted less than one percent of the population. The Jewish people posed no threat to Germany. Nonetheless, Hitler experienced Jews as a profound threat—and decided that the Jewish race had to be destroyed. By what logic did Hitler conclude that Germany had to exterminate the Jewish people?

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Hitler believed that the essence of morality lay in the willingness of an individual to sacrifice his life for the community. He defined nationalism as the willingness to act with a “boundless and all-embracing love for the people and, if necessary, to die for it.” Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* that in the First World War thousands and thousands of young Germans had stepped forward with self-sacrificing resolve to “sacrifice their young lives freely and joyfully at the altar of the fatherland.”

According to Hitler’s theory propounded in *Mein Kampf*, what was unique about the Aryan was his willingness to abandon self-interest and transcend egoism in the name of surrendering to the community. What was most strongly developed in the Aryan, Hitler said, was the self-sacrificing will to “give one’s personal labor and if necessary one’s own life for others.” The Aryan according to Hitler willingly subordinates his own ego to the life of the community and “if the hour demands it even sacrifices himself.”

The Jew by contrast, Hitler claimed, represented the “mightiest counterpart to the Aryan.” Whereas the Aryan willingly sacrificed himself for the community, in the Jewish people the will to self-sacrifice did not go beyond the individual’s “naked instinct of self-preservation.” The Jew lacked completely, Hitler said, the most essential requirement for a cultured people, the “idealistic attitude.” The Jew’s “absolute absence of all sense of sacrifice” manifest itself as “cowardice.”

Hitler’s theory about the sacrificial willingness of Aryans and sacrificial unwillingness of Jews grew out of his experience of the First World War. Hitler claimed that while German men had died in great numbers, Jews survived

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because they avoided military duty. Hitler identified Jews as “shirkers” who refused to go into battle: to sacrifice for Germany.

Historical studies show that German-Jewish men died in the First World War in the same proportion as other German men. Nonetheless, Hitler fanatically embraced and promulgated his theory that Jewish men had not sacrificed their lives during the First World War. He became enraged contemplating the idea that some men had sacrificed their lives during the First World War, while others had escaped military duty.

Believing that Jews had shirked their duty to fight and die in the First World War, Hitler was determined that things would be different in the Second World War. Again, German soldiers would be required to die in battle. This time, however, Jews too would be compelled to forfeit their lives. They too would be obligated to submit—to give their bodies over—to the German nation-state.

### **THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

The First World War—like the Holocaust—was an instance of mass slaughter generated by nation-states. The war began in 1914 and ended in 1918—23 years before the beginning of the Holocaust. Hitler was among 65 million men who fought in this war—truly a world war involving over 100 countries. Nine million men were killed. Casualties (dead, injured and missing in action) are estimated at 37 million.

The war was fought by Germany on the Eastern Front against Russia and on the Western Front against France,

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Great Britain and the United States. By the end of the war in November 1918, 11 million German soldiers had been mobilized. It is estimated that 2 million Germans were killed; 4 million were injured and over 1 million reported missing in action. For Germany, the First World War was a catastrophe.

Hitler fought in the war for four years—from its inception in 1914 to 1918. Although most of the troops in his regiment were killed, Hitler miraculously survived. Near the end of the war, he was injured in a poison-gas attack and temporarily blinded. He was lying in a hospital bed recovering when—in November 1918—he learned that Germany had surrendered.

Hitler deeply identified with the German cause and experienced Germany's defeat as a traumatic blow. He claimed in *Mein Kampf* that upon learning that Germany had surrendered, he wept for the first time since the death of his mother. Hitler never accepted the fact of Germany's loss. He felt that had the war continued, Germany would have emerged victorious. He blamed Germany's defeat on the Social Democratic government that took power upon the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm.

Determined to avenge Germany's defeat, Hitler entered politics. He became leader of the National Socialist party—and Chancellor of Germany in 1934. The Second World War began when Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939—nearly 21 years after Germany had been defeated in the First World War. For Hitler, the Second World War was a continuation of the First. He was determined that—this time—Germany would not surrender.

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The First World War is remembered not only for the massive number of casualties suffered, but for the strange way in which battles were fought. After a few months of fighting that produced no decisive results, troops dug miles and miles of trenches north to south in France. British and French troops settled down in trenches on the western side, while German troops settled into trenches on the eastern side. The two lines of trenches sometimes were separated by distances of only 100-300 yards.

A typical battle occurred when soldiers on one side got out of their trench and moved forward to attack the opposing trench. The attacking troops hoped to survive the artillery shelling and machine-gun fire that they encountered, cut through the barbed wire protecting the enemy trench, and break through the enemy line.

Attackers moved forward usually without seeking cover—and were mowed down by machine-gun bullets and artillery shells before reaching the enemy's trench. In the following passage (Eksteins 1989), a German machine-gunner describes the British attack at the Somme that occurred on July 1, 1916:

We were surprised to see them walking. Officers went in front. One of them was walking calmly, carrying a walking stick. We started firing. We just had to load and reload. They went down in the hundreds. We didn't have to aim. We just fired into them.

In another battle, the British attacked Loos in 1915. British troops crossed a road and approached the German

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line. Their numerical superiority was considerable, but several dozen machine-guns faced them. The German regimental diary describes what happened:

Ten columns advanced, each column with more than a thousand men offering such a target as had never been seen before. Never had the machine-gunners such straightforward work to do nor done it so effectively. The machine-gunners stood and fired triumphantly into the mass of men advancing across open grassland. The enemy infantry could be seen falling literally in hundreds.

A similar method of attack—with similarly disastrous results—was used by the French and Germans. In spite of its futility, this battle strategy continued to be employed day after day, month after month, year after year. After four years and hundreds of battles, little had changed and nothing had been accomplished from a military or political standpoint—apart from the fact that now millions of young men were dead or maimed.

What was going on? Why did generals continue to employ a battle strategy that consisted of asking soldiers to get out of trenches and to run into machine-gun fire and artillery shelling? Why were young men being sent to die so promiscuously? To this day, historians cannot adequately explain the endless carnage of the First World War.

I began to study this war after having researched the Holocaust for over 20 years. My initial reaction upon reading about the First World War was similar to the reaction of some people when they first learn about the

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**Holocaust: incomprehensible. Why were “civilized” nations such as France, Great Britain and Germany acting to murder their own people?**

**The British initiated the Battle of the Somme on July 1, 1916, desperately hoping to break through the German lines. They failed miserably. British casualties were 60,000 on the first day, with over 20,000 soldiers killed—most in the first hour of the attack. Historian John Keegan (1976) compares British soldiers at the Battle of the Somme to Jewish Holocaust victims, describing the “long docile lines of young men, shoddily uniformed, heavily burdened, plodding forward across a featureless landscape to their own extermination inside the barbed wire.”**

### HITLER AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

**Hitler was among millions of men who fought in the First World War. He suffered in the trenches, endured the wet and cold and mud, scarcity of food, rats and bedbugs, and the endless artillery barrages that reigned down upon men huddled in holes beneath the ground. Hitler witnessed the death and dismemberment of hundreds of his comrades—and experienced the stench of their decaying bodies. Over 4,000 men in his regiment were killed, but Hitler survived. He was a dedicated and decorated soldier. On August 4, 1918, Hitler was awarded the Iron Cross, First Class.**

**As I’ve noted, Hitler experienced his nation’s defeat as a profound trauma. He reflected on Germany’s loss of the war in *Mein Kampf*:**



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And so it had all been in vain. In vain all the sacrifices and privations; in vain the hunger and thirst of months which were often endless; in vain the hours in which with mortal fear clutching at our hearts, we nevertheless did our duty; and in vain the death of the two millions who died. Was this the meaning of the sacrifice which the German mother made to the fatherland when with sore heart she let her best-loved boys march off, never to see them again?

What had been the purpose and meaning of the monumental sacrifices made by German soldiers and the German people? Over 2 million soldiers had died and well over 4 million were wounded. People at home were starving. Women suffered from the absence or loss of husbands; children from the absence or loss of a father.

The quantity of suffering was matched by the horrific experience of war. One German soldier wrote about the rotting bodies of men who had been killed (Whalen, 1984):

Hair fell in clumps from skulls like rotting leaves. Flesh fell from bones like reddish-brown gelatin. In humid nights, cadavers awoke to ghastly life as gas, sputtering, escaped from wounds. The worst was masses of countless worms oozing from corpses.

Hitler must have observed disgusting sights like these hundreds of times. Having witnessed the hideous nature of war—its loathsomeness—up close, one might have expected Hitler to become a pacifist. At least he might have

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condemned Germany for the slaughter. Or he could have criticized German Generals Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg—whose military leadership and strategies led to millions of casualties and the loss of the war.

Hitler did blame and condemn the German parliamentary government (controlled, he claimed, by Jews) for the loss of the war. Because of these “misleaders of the people,” he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, the nation had lost millions of crippled and dead. Nevertheless, Hitler continued to idealize warfare and the German nation that had waged war. He did not condemn his country.

Rather, he persisted in glorifying the idea of sacrificial death. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler asserted that the most “precious German blood” during the First World War had sacrificed itself “joyfully.” Though “death snatched so many dear comrades and friends from our ranks,” Hitler explained, nevertheless it would have seemed to him a “sin to complain” because—after all—were they not “dying for Germany?”

In spite of the horrors that he had experienced and witnessed—and the tragic results of the war for the German people—Hitler refused to complain. He could not bear to perform a critique of his beloved nation. He could not abandon the idea of warfare because he would not abandon his attachment to “Germany.”

Nevertheless, we may assume that Hitler continued to be disturbed by the horrible things he had experienced and witnessed during the First World War. A close reading of *Mein Kampf* reveals how Hitler responded to his wartime experience. An extraordinary psychological shift occurred.

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This shift—the source of everything that followed—contained the seeds of the Holocaust.

Instead of expressing revulsion—and blaming Germany and its leaders for what had occurred—Hitler tried to deal with doubt and ambivalence by deflecting his psychic energy into another issue. He posed the question: Why during the First World War had some men died—sacrificed their lives—while others had not? More precisely: Why during the First World War had the best young men died while the worst had survived?

Writing in *Mein Kampf* about the First World War, Hitler claimed that while the “best human material was being thinned on battlefields,” the worst people “wonderfully succeeded in saving themselves.” For each German hero who made the “supreme sacrifice,” Hitler said, there was a shirker who “cunningly dodged death” on the pretense of being engaged in “business at home.”

Hitler described the German soldiers who died in the First World War—the “best elements of the population”—as heroes who had “sacrificed themselves almost to a man.” Those who survived, according to Hitler, were the “worst elements of the population”: men who had preserved themselves by “taking advantage of absurd laws.”

Hitler thus avoided or evaded the question of why so many German men had died in the First World War. Instead, he focused on the question: “Why had some men died during the First World War whereas other men had not died?” More specifically: “Why had the best men died during the First World War while the worst had survived?”

The best men in Hitler’s view were those who volunteered for military service and willingly went into

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battle. Such men—of course—were more likely to be killed. The worst men, Hitler said, were those who avoided military service and shirked their duty to go into battle. These men naturally were less likely to be killed. Hitler was deeply disturbed by this unfairness.

Although Jewish German soldiers died in the First World War in the same proportion as non-Jewish German soldiers, Hitler nevertheless accused Jewish men of having shirked their duty to fight. He claimed in *Mein Kampf* that upon returning home from the frontline he discovered that the offices were “filled with Jews.” According to Hitler, “nearly every clerk was a Jew and nearly every Jew a clerk.” Hitler was amazed at this “plethora of warriors of the chosen people” at home and could not help comparing them with their “rare representatives at the front.”

Hitler’s question—why had the best men died in the First World War while the worst men had survived—thus mutated into the question: “Why had German men died in the First World War while Jewish men had not died? Why were German soldiers suffering at the Front while Jews were safe and comfortable at home?”

Contemplating the idea that Jews had acted to escape or evade their sacrificial obligation during the First World War, Hitler became enraged. Why should German soldiers be dying and not Jews? If the best men were dying at the front, Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*, “The least we could do was to wipe out the vermin.”

In late 1941, Hitler would exact revenge. Once again, the best men—German soldiers—were dying in battles. This was to be expected. This time, however, Jews would not be allowed to shirk the sacrificial obligation. As German

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soldiers were dying, so Jews would be compelled to die. Hitler created the Final Solution in order to make certain that they too would “die for Germany.”

### THE EUTHANASIA PROGRAM

In their 1920 book—*Permission for the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life*—lawyer Alfred Hoche and psychiatrist Karl Binding proposed that the state consider killing mental patients—people who, they said, were barely human beings and could not contribute to society. The authors posed the question: “Why should the state spend valuable resources maintaining mental hospitals in order to preserve the lives of people who are fundamentally ‘useless’?”

The ideas of Hoche and Binding—developed by German scholars, scientists and doctors—were put into practice when the Nazis took power. The “Euthanasia Program” began in 1939 with the killing of defective children (Lifton, 1986). According to a Directive of August 18, 1939, Hitler authorized doctors to consider euthanasia for children under three in whom “serious hereditary diseases were suspected,” including mental retardation, mongolism and congenital malformations of all kinds. This was the first instance of Nazi mass-murder.

The next step of the Euthanasia Program extended the killing of children to the killing of the adult mentally ill (Lifton, 1986). Hitler enunciated a “Fuehrer decree” in October 1939, charging Reich leaders with responsibility for “expanding the authority of physicians to the end that patients considered incurable according to the best available human judgment of their state of health can be

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granted a mercy death.” Killing mental patients involved the entire German psychiatric community.

The decision to kill or not to kill was in the hands of physicians, who studied records, examined patients, and filled out forms. If two of three doctors agreed on a diagnosis of “incurable,” the patient was selected for “special treatment.” Killing was the personal responsibility of the physician and was accomplished through fatal injections, druggings, and starvation—eventually giving way to the more “humane” treatment of killing by carbon monoxide gas. By August 1941—according to meticulously kept records—70,272 patients had been killed.

Selections took place in hospitals. Scholars agree that while Hitler gave the “OK,” the program was developed by physicians—and executed voluntarily and enthusiastically. The procedure became quite ordinary. Hospital personnel were not squeamish. In 1941, the psychiatric institution Hadamar celebrated the cremation of the 10,000th mental patient in a special ceremony. Psychiatrists, nurses, and secretaries attended and everyone received a bottle of beer for the occasion (Procter, 1988).

Eventually the killing of mental patients was extended into concentration camps. This was the crucial bridge between the Euthanasia Program and the Final Solution. Several passages from *Permission for the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life* are cited again and again by scholars tracing the evolution of Nazi mass murder. Hoche and Binding pose the question: “Are there humans who have lost their human characteristics to such an extent that their continued existence has lost all value both for themselves and for society?”

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The authors state that those who assess the value of individual lives to the community are painfully aware of “how wasteful we are with the most valuable and self-sufficient lives—full of energy and vigor—and what labor, patience and resources are squandered simply to try to sustain worthless lives.” The following passage (see Noakes & Pridham, 2001) is crucial:

If one thinks of a battlefield covered with thousands of young corpses and compares them with our institutions for idiots—with the care devoted to their inmates—one is deeply shocked by the discrepancy between the sacrifice of man’s most precious resource and the tremendous care devoted to creatures that are completely worthless.

Why is the state unconcerned with the lives of its most valuable citizens—soldiers—yet devotes so much care to the lives of its least valuable citizens—idiots and inmates of mental hospitals? This question posed by Hoche and Binding is not unlike the question posed by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*: “Why are the nation’s best people—German soldiers—so promiscuously sacrificed in battle, while its worst people—shirkers and war deserters—are allowed to survive?”

In his article “Healing by Killing” (2006), Dr. Sheldon Rubinfeld reports that Alfred Hoche—one of the authors of *Permission for the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life*—lost his first and only son in the First World War. Hoche used this to argue that if healthy people can make

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such sacrifices, then why should sick and inferior people not make similar sacrifices?

One may suggest that Hoche and Binding's treatise—like *Mein Kampf*—represented a response to the German experience of the First World War—the trauma of mass death. Like Hitler, these authors sought to comprehend the meaning of the slaughter that had occurred; to understand why the German state had sacrificed the lives of so many young men.

Hoche and Binding, however—like Hitler—are unable to renounce the idea or ideology of warfare. They are unable to condemn the German nation or to hold its leaders accountable for the slaughter that occurred. Rather, Hoche and Binding perform a critique obliquely by commenting upon the discrepancy between how the state treats soldiers and how the state treats mental patients.

Anyone who witnessed a First World War battlefield—“covered with thousands of young corpses”—could observe how wasteful Germany was with its “most valuable and self-sufficient lives—full of energy and vigor.” On the other hand, anyone who spent time in one of Germany's mental hospitals could observe how so many resources and so much energy were devoted to sustaining “worthless lives.” Why was Germany so reckless with its “most precious resource”, while dedicating tremendous care to creatures that were “completely worthless.”

The Euthanasia Program—the starting point for Nazi mass murder—would appear to have grown out of ideas like these put forth by Hoche and Binding as well as other German scholars. The reasoning is as follows: if the nation-state can sacrifice (kill) its most valuable citizens—



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**soldiers—should it not also have the right to sacrifice (kill) citizens who make no useful contribution to society—for example, incurable mental patients?**

### **OBEDIENCE (UNTO DEATH)**

**The most important organizations in Nazi Germany took an oath of absolute allegiance to Hitler. When boys entered Hitler Youth at age 10 they swore: “I will devote all my strength to the savior of our country, Adolf Hitler. I am willing and ready to give up my life for him, so help me God.” Upon entering the army, German soldiers vowed: “I swear this sacred oath by God that I will render absolute obedience to the Fuehrer of the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler, and will be prepared as a courageous soldier to offer my life at any time.”**

**The oath of the SS-man went as follows: “I swear to you, Adolf Hitler, loyalty and bravery. I vow to you and to those you have named to command me, obedience unto death, so help me God.” According to an SS manual, every SS-man had to be prepared to “carry out blindly every order issued by the Fuehrer or given by his superior, irrespective of the heaviest sacrifices involved.”**

**German Soldiers and SS-men have been viewed as the epitome of masculine aggression and virility. In reality, the state-of-being of the German soldier and SS-man was precisely the opposite: These men were compelled to submit absolutely—to become slaves for Hitler and Himmler. The condition of the German soldier and SS-man actually was worse than that of a slave. These men were required to die when the Nazi leadership asked them to do so.**

### HITLER GOES TO WAR

Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1934 after a long struggle to achieve power and immediately began thinking about—gearing up for—war. This seemed the natural thing to do. Germany's leaders had sent Hitler and his comrades into battle when he was a young man. Now he was Germany's leader. It was his turn to send young men into battle.

There was no reason for Germany to go to war. After Hitler had been in power for several years, the nation had begun to revive. The economy was doing well. Political strife had diminished. It seemed that Hitler had achieved his goal of uniting the German people and resurrecting his nation.

However, Germany's loss of the First World War still weighed heavily upon Hitler. Further, he experienced Soviet communism as a mortal threat. If Europe was infected with the disease of communism, Hitler believed that this would spell the downfall of Western civilization. Hitler felt he had no other choice. He could not help himself. He felt compelled to take Germany into war.

In conversations with Hermann Rauschning in the mid-Thirties (1940), Hitler discussed the war he eventually would wage. He said that when the time was ripe, he would be prepared for the "blood sacrifice of another young German generation." Hitler declared that he would not hesitate to take the deaths of 2 or 3 million German soldiers on his conscience, "fully aware of the heaviness of sacrifice."

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Few had criticized German Generals Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg—though their leadership in the First World War led to Germany’s defeat and the death of 2 million German soldiers. Indeed, after the war these two generals became national heroes. Von Hindenburg was elected second President of the Weimar Republic in 1925 and re-elected in 1932. Hitler knew that these Generals had sacrificed the lives of millions of young Germans, yet still were idolized. Why then should Hitler have compunctions about waging war and sending millions of young Germans into battle? Was he not commander-in-chief of the army? Why should he—leader of a great nation—hesitate to take Germany into war?

Hitler stated that it was his duty to wage war “regardless of losses.” He declared (Rauschning, 1940): “We all know what world war means. We must shake off all sentimentality and be hard. Some day when I go to war I shall not hesitate because of ten million young men I shall be sending to their deaths.” Hitler was preparing for the slaughter of German soldiers.

### THE EXPLANATION

Having participated in the First World War, Hitler had experienced the horrors of battle and witnessed the death and dismemberment of hundreds of his comrades. Yet he was unable to renounce warfare—to say that war is disgusting and loathsome. Rather, he continued to idealize and glorify warfare. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler declared: “Any man who loves his people proves it solely by the sacrifices which he is prepared to make for it.”

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Unwilling to condemn the German nation and its leaders for what had occurred during the First World War, Hitler instead focused upon another issue. He became obsessed with the question: “Why had some men died in the First World War—sacrificed their lives—while others had not?” Hitler became enraged when contemplating the idea of “shirkers”—people who had evaded their duty to fight. In Hitler’s mind, Jews by their very nature were shirkers: people who refused to sacrifice their lives for a national community.

On June 22, 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union with 3 million troops. Hitler declared that this would be a “war of annihilation.” In late 1941—as German and Soviet soldiers were dying in vast numbers—Hitler initiated the Final Solution. The Holocaust began—not in the gas chambers, but in the Soviet Union. Small groups of murderers—*Einsatzgruppen*—operated in the territories captured by German armies during the invasion. With the cooperation of the army, Jewish men, women and children were identified and massacred.

By mid-1942, approximately 1.5 million Jews had been killed in the Soviet Union. Hitler claimed to be undisturbed by the murder of men, women and children, declaring (Meltzer, 1976):

If I don’t mind sending the pick of the German people into the hell of war without the slightest regret over the spilling of precious German blood, then I naturally also have the right to eliminate millions of an inferior race that multiplies like vermin.

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Genocide grew out of Hitler's thinking about warfare. Hitler knew that—as commander-in-chief of the army—he was permitted to send German soldiers to die in battle. Indeed, Hitler claims he doesn't mind “sending the pick of the German people into the hell of war” and doesn't have the slightest regret over the “spilling of precious German blood.”

If Hitler had the right to send his own soldiers into the hell of war, why would he not also have the right to send Jews—an “inferior race that multiplies like vermin”—to their deaths? If he had no regrets about spilling precious German blood, why then should Hitler regret or feel guilty about the shedding of inferior Jewish blood?

Historian Ronald Hayman (1997) provides a report of an encounter between Hitler and his friend Henny von Schirach—who had returned to Germany from occupied Amsterdam in 1943 after she had become aware that helpless women were being transported to concentration camps. After dinner, Hitler turned to his friend: “You've come from Holland?” “Yes,” she said, “That's why I'm here; I wanted talk to you. I've seen frightful things. I can't believe that's what you want.”

Hitler said: “You're sentimental, Frau von Schirach.” Then he jumped to his feet and formed two bowls with his hands. He moved his hands up and down like scales, declaring loudly and insistently:

Look—every day ten-thousands of my most valuable men are killed—men who are irreplaceable, the best. The balance is wrong; the equilibrium in Europe has been upset. Because the others aren't being killed. They survive—the ones in camps—the

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inferior ones. So what's it going to look like in Europe in a hundred years? In a thousand?

What would the world of the future be like if the most valuable people died while inferior people survived? Since German soldiers were dying, Jews would have to die too—to balance the scales of death.

### CONCLUSION

True to words spoken before the war, Hitler did not hesitate to send millions of German soldiers to battle—where they were slaughtered. True to their oaths of allegiance, German soldiers honored their vows. They were obedient unto death. Insisting that the German people would never surrender, Hitler continued the war that he initiated right until he committed suicide on April 30, 1945. He fought on until the bitter end—even though by early 1943 military leaders realized that the war had been lost.

Over 4 million German soldiers were killed, many of them in the last year of the war when the situation was hopeless. Michael Geyer (2002) reports that more German soldiers were killed in action during the last year of the war than in the entire previous five years. During the last month of the war—told that 15,000 German officers had died in a futile attempt to defend Berlin—Hitler declared: “But that’s what young men are for!”

Nazi genocide—the killing of mental patients and Jews—grew out of Hitler’s understanding of the logic of warfare: his recognition that national leaders have the right to sacrifice—kill—their own soldiers. Nazi genocide proceeded

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based on the following reasoning: “If Germany has the right to sacrifice (kill) its most valuable members—its soldiers—then certainly it also has the right to sacrifice (kill) its least valuable members—mental patients and Jews.”

Victims of the Holocaust—like German soldiers—were required to submit absolutely to Germany. The Holocaust came into being according to the logic: If Germany can require that its soldiers be obedient unto death, Germany also can require that Jews be obedient unto death.

Hitler imagined that during the First World War, Jews had been shirkers—people who refused to sacrifice their lives for the community. Hitler decided that he would not permit a recurrence of this situation in the Second World War. Jews would not be allowed to get off scot-free. This time, they too would forfeit their lives.

Upon the death of a German soldier in the Second World War, newspapers carried the obituaries or farewells of men killed in action (Sorge, 1986). These announcements provided the name of the soldier, stating that the husband, father, brother, or uncle had died “For the Fuehrer, the German people and the fatherland.” The Holocaust victim also died for Fuehrer and fatherland. The Holocaust enacted a perverted, degraded version of dying for the country—sacrificial death at the hands of the nation-state stripped of words like honor, heroism and glory.