

# Behavior in Extreme Situations

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THE author spent approximately one year in the two biggest German concentration camps for political prisoners, at Dachau and at Buchenwald. During this time he made observations and collected material, part of which will be presented in this paper. It is not the intention of this presentation to recount once more the horror story of the German concentration camp for political prisoners.

It is assumed that the reader is roughly familiar with it, but it should be reiterated that the prisoners were deliberately tortured.<sup>1</sup> They were inadequately clothed, but nevertheless exposed to heat, rain, and freezing temperatures as long as seventeen hours a day, seven days a week. They suffered from extreme malnutrition, but had to perform hard labor.<sup>2</sup> Every single moment of their lives was strictly regulated and supervised. They were never permitted to see any visitors, nor a minister. They were not entitled to any medical care and when they received it, it was rarely administered by medically trained persons.<sup>3</sup> The prisoners did not know exactly why they were imprisoned, and never knew for how long. This may explain why we shall speak of the prisoners as persons finding themselves in an "extreme" situation.

The acts of terror committed in these camps arouse in the minds of civilized persons justified and strong emotions, and those emotions lead them sometimes to overlook that terror is, as far as the Gestapo is concerned, only a means for attaining certain ends.<sup>4</sup> By using extravagant means which fully absorb the investigator's interest, the Gestapo only too often succeeds in hiding its real purposes. One of the reasons that this happens so frequently in respect to the concentration camps is that the persons

most able to discuss them are former prisoners, who obviously are more interested in what happened to them than in why it happened. If one desires to understand the purposes of the Gestapo, and the ways in which they are attained, emphasis on what happened to particular persons would be erroneous. According to the well-known ideology of the Nazi state the individual as such is either nonexistent or of no importance. An investigation of the purposes of the concentration camps must, therefore, emphasize not individual acts of terror, but their trans-individual purposes and results.

Anticipating the results of this discussion and of further investigations, it may be said that the results which the Gestapo tried to obtain by means of the camps are varied; the author thinks that he was able to recognize some of them: . . . *to break the prisoners as individuals* and to change them into docile masses from which no individual or group act of resistance could arise; *to spread terror among the rest of the population* by using the prisoners as hostages for good behavior, and by demonstrating what happens to those who oppose the Nazi rulers; *to provide the Gestapo members with a training ground* in which they are so educated as to lose all human emotions and attitudes and learn the most effective ways of breaking resistance in a defenseless civilian population; *to provide the Gestapo with an experimental laboratory* in which to study the effective means for breaking civilian resistance, the minimum food, hygienic, and medical requirements needed to keep prisoners alive and able to perform hard labor when the threat of punishment takes the place of all other normal incentives, and the influence on performance if no time is allowed for anything but hard labor and if the prisoners are separated from their families.

In this paper, which, considering the complexity of the problem with which it is dealing, is comparatively short, an effort will be made to deal adequately with at least one aspect of it, namely, with *the concentration camp as a means of producing changes in the prisoners which will make them more useful subjects of the Nazi state.* . . .

If we thus assume that what happens in the camp has, among others, the purpose of changing the prisoners into useful subjects of the Nazi state, and if this purpose is attained by means of exposing them to extreme situations, then a legitimate way to carry on our investigation is by an historical account of what occurred in the prisoners from the moment they had their first experience with the Gestapo up to the time when the process of adaptation to the camp situation was practically concluded. In analyzing this development different stages can be recognized, which will furnish us with appropriate subdivisions. The first of these stages centers around *the initial shock of finding oneself unlawfully imprisoned*. The main event of the second stage is *transportation into the camp and the first experiences in it*. The next stage is characterized by a slow process of changing the prisoner's life and personality.

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<sup>1</sup> For an official report on life in these camps see: *Papers concerning the treatment of German nationals in Germany*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1939.

<sup>2</sup> The daily food the prisoners received yielded approximately 1800 calories, whereas for the labor they were forced to perform the average caloric requirement is from 3000 to 3300 calories.

<sup>3</sup> Surgical operations, for instance, were performed by a former printer. There were many M.D.'s in the camp, but no prisoner was permitted to work in the camp in his civilian capacity because that would not have implied a punishment.

<sup>4</sup> The concentration camps for political prisoners are administered by the "Elite" formations of the "SS" groups, called "Deathhead" regiments. Every member of these regiments has to spend at least three months of his training as a guard in these camps. If he does not perform satisfactorily in this capacity, he is transferred back to the non-elite formations of the "SS."

There are many types of concentration camps in Germany. If the author speaks of concentration camps, the meaning is always camps for political prisoners. Up to the time of the war there was three big camps of this type and a few smaller ones, all for men, and one small camp for women. Up to that time the total of prisoners in these camps never exceeded 60,000. Contrary to widespread opinion, only a small minority of them were Jews.

The many other German concentration camps, such as those for forced labor, were not administered by the Gestapo, and the conditions in them were very different.

It occurs step by step, continuously. It is *the adaptation to the camp situation*. During this process it is difficult to recognize the impact of what is going on. One way to make it more obvious is to compare two groups of prisoners, one in whom the process has only started, namely, the "new" prisoners, with another one in whom the process is already far advanced. This other group will consist of the "old" prisoners. The final stage is reached when *the prisoner has adapted himself to the life in the camp*. This last stage seems to be characterized, among other features, by a definitely changed attitude to, and evaluation of, the Gestapo.

### Why the Material Was Collected

Before discussing these different stages of a prisoner's development a few remarks on *why and how the material* presented in this paper *was collected* seems advisable. At this moment it seems easy to say why it was collected, because it is of sociological and psychological interest and contains observations which, to the author's knowledge, have rarely been published in scientific fashion. To accept this as an answer for the "why" would constitute a flagrant example of *logification post eventum*. The former training of the writer and his psychological interests were helpful in collecting the material and in conducting the investigation; but he did not study his behavior, and that of his fellow prisoners, in order to add to pure scientific research. The study of these behaviors was a mechanism developed by him *ad hoc* in order that he might have at least some intellectual interests and in this way be better equipped to endure life in the camp. His observing and collecting of data should rather be considered as a particular type of defense developed in such an extreme situation. It was individually developed, not enforced by the Gestapo, and based on this particular prisoner's background, training, and interests. It was developed to protect this individual against a disintegration of his personality. It is, therefore, a characteristic example of a private behavior. These private behaviors seem always to follow the path of least resistance; that is, they follow the individual's former life interests closely.

Since it is the only example of a *private behavior* presented in this paper, a few words on why and how it was developed may be of interest. The writer had studied and was familiar with the pathological picture presented by certain types of abnormal behavior. During the first days in prison, and particularly during the first days in the camp, he realized that he behaved differently from the way he used to. At first he rationalized that these changes in behavior were only surface phenomena, the logical result of his peculiar situation. But soon he realized that what happened to him, for instance, the split in his person into one who observes and one to whom things happen, could no longer be called normal, but was a typical psychopathological phenomenon. So he asked himself, "Am I going insane, or am I already insane?" To find an answer to this urgent question was obviously of prime importance. Moreover, he saw his fellow prisoners act in a

most peculiar way, although he had every reason to assume that they, too, had been normal persons before being imprisoned. Now they suddenly appeared to be pathological liars, to be unable to restrain themselves, to be unable to make objective evaluations, etc. So another question arose, namely, "How can I protect myself against becoming as they are?" The answer to both questions was comparatively simple: to find out what had happened in them, and to me. If I did not change any more than all other normal persons, then what happened in me and to me was a process of adaptation and not the setting in of insanity. So I set out to find what changes had occurred and were occurring in the prisoners. By doing so I suddenly realized that I had found a solution to my second problem: by occupying myself during my spare time with interesting problems, with interviewing my fellow prisoners, by pondering my findings for the hours without end during which I was forced to perform exhausting labor which did not ask for any mental concentration, I succeeded in killing the time in a way which seemed constructive. To forget for a time that I was in the camp seemed at first the greatest advantage of this occupation. As time went on, the enhancement of my self-respect due to my ability to continue to do meaningful work despite the contrary efforts of the Gestapo became even more important than the pastime. . . .

### The Initial Shock

In presentation, the initial psychological shock of being deprived of one's civil rights and unlawfully locked into a prison may be separated from the shock of the first deliberate and extravagant acts of torture to which the prisoners were exposed. These two shocks may be analyzed separately because the author, like most of the prisoners, spent several days in prison without being exposed to physical torture before being transported into the camp. This transportation into the camp, and the "initiation" into it, is often the first torture which the prisoner has ever experienced and is, as a rule, physically and psychologically the worst torture to which he will ever be exposed. This initial torture, incidentally, is called by the Gestapo the prisoner's "welcome" to the camp.

The prisoners' reactions on being brought into prison can best be analyzed on the basis of two categories: the socio-economic class to which they belonged and their political education. These categories are obviously overlappings and can be separated only for the purposes of presentation. Another factor of importance in respect to the prisoners' reactions to finding themselves in prison was whether they had been previously acquainted with prisons, due either to criminality or to political activities.

Those prisoners who had previously spent time in prisons, or who expected to be imprisoned due to political activities, resented their fate, but somehow accepted it as something which happened in accordance with their expectations. It may be assumed that the initial shock of finding oneself imprisoned expressed itself—if at all—in a change in self-esteem. But it might be said that the self-

esteem of the former criminals, as well as that of the politically educated prisoners, was rather heightened by the circumstances under which they found themselves in prison. They were, as a matter of fact, full of anxieties as to their future, and as to what might happen to their families and friends. But, despite this justified anxiety, they did not feel too badly about the fact of imprisonment itself.

Persons who had formerly spent time in prison as *criminals* showed their glee openly at finding themselves on equal terms with political and business leaders, with attorneys and judges, some of whom had been instrumental earlier in sending them to prison. This spite, and the feeling of being equal to these men who up to now had been their superiors, helped their egos considerably.

The *politically educated prisoners* found support for their self-esteem in the fact that the Gestapo had singled them out as important enough to take revenge on. The members of different parties relied on different types of rationalizations for this building-up of their egos. Former members of radical-leftist groups, for example, found in the fact of their imprisonment a demonstration of how dangerous for the Nazis their former activities had been.

Of the main socio-economic classes, the lower classes were almost wholly represented either by former criminals or by politically educated prisoners. Any estimation of what might have been the reaction of noncriminal and non-political members of the lower classes must remain conjecture and guesswork.

The great majority of the *nonpolitical middle-class prisoners*, who were a small minority among the prisoners of the concentration camps, were least able to withstand the initial shock. They found themselves utterly unable to comprehend what had happened to them. They seemed more than ever to cling to what up to now had given them self-esteem. Again and again they assured the members of the Gestapo that they never opposed Naziism. In their behavior became apparent the dilemma of the politically uneducated German middle classes when confronted with the phenomenon of National socialism. They had no consistent philosophy which would protect their integrity as human beings, which would give them the force to make a stand against the Nazis. They had obeyed the law handed down by the ruling classes, without ever questioning its wisdom. And now this law, or at least the law-enforcing agencies, turned against them, who always had been its staunchest supporters. Even now they did not dare to oppose the ruling group, although such opposition might have provided them with self-respect. They could not question the wisdom of law and of the police, so they accepted the behavior of the Gestapo as just. What was wrong was that *they* were made objects of a persecution which in itself *must* be right, since it was carried out by the authorities. The only way out of this particular dilemma was to be convinced that it must be a "mistake." These prisoners continued to behave in this way despite the fact that the Gestapo, as well as most of their fellow prisoners, derided them for it.

Although the guards used them for their own self-aggrandizement, they were not free from anxieties when doing so. They realized that they, too, belonged to the

same socio-economic stratum of society.<sup>5</sup> The insistence on legality of the official German internal policy may find its explanation in an effort to dissolve the anxieties of the middle-class followers who feel that illegal acts destroy the foundation of their existence. The height of this farce of legality was reached when prisoners in the camp had to sign a document stating that they agreed to their imprisonment and that they were well pleased with the way they had been treated. It did not seem farcical to the Gestapo, which put great emphasis on such documents as a demonstration that everything happened according to law and order. Gestapo members were, for instance, permitted to kill prisoners, but not to steal from them; instead they forced prisoners to sell their possessions, and then to make a "gift" of the money they received to some Gestapo formation.

The great desire of the middle-class prisoners was that their status as such should be respected in some way. What they resented most was to be treated "like ordinary criminals." After some time they could not help realizing their actual situation. Then they seemed to disintegrate. The several suicides which happened in prison and during the transportation into camp were practically confined to members of this group. Later on, members of this group were the ones who behaved in the most antisocial way; they cheated their fellow prisoners, a few turned spies in the service of the Gestapo. They lost their middle-class characteristics, their sense of propriety, and their self-respect; they became shiftless and seemed to disintegrate as autonomous persons. They no longer seemed able to form a life-pattern of their own, but followed the patterns developed by other groups of prisoners.

Members of the *upper class* segregated themselves as much as possible. They, too, seemed unable to accept as real what was happening to them. They expressed their conviction that they would be released within the shortest time because of their importance. This conviction was absent among the middle-class prisoners, who harbored the identical hope for a near release, not as individuals, but as a group. The upper-class prisoners never formed a group, they remained more or less isolated, each of them with a group of middle-class "clients." Their superior position could be upheld by the amount of money they could distribute, and by a hope on the part of their "clients" that they might help them once they had been released. This hope was steadily kindled by the fact that many of the upper-class prisoners really were released from prison, or camp, within a comparatively short time.

A few upper-upper-class prisoners remained aloof even from the upper-class behavior. They did not collect "clients," they did not use their money for bribing other prisoners, they did not express any hopes about their release. The number of these prisoners was too small to permit any generalizations.<sup>6</sup> It seemed that they looked down on all other prisoners nearly as much as they de-

<sup>5</sup> Most soldiers and noncommissioned officers of the "SS" were very young, between 17 and 20 years old, and the sons of farmers, of small shopkeepers, or of the lower class of the civil servants.

<sup>6</sup> The author met actually only three of them, a Bavarian prince, member of the former royal family, and two Austrian dukes, closely related to the former emperor. It is doubtful whether there were at any time more than three of these prisoners in the camps.



spised the Gestapo. In order to endure life in the camp they seemed to develop such a feeling of superiority that nothing could touch them.

As far as the political prisoners are concerned, another psychological mechanism became apparent at a later time, which might already have played some part in the initial development and which, therefore, ought to be mentioned. It seems that many political leaders had some guilt-feeling that they had fallen down on their job, particularly the job of preventing the rise of Nazi power either by fighting the Nazis more effectively or by establishing such watertight democratic, or leftist class rule that the Nazis would not have been able to overcome it. It seems that this guilt-feeling was relieved to a considerable degree by the fact that the Nazis found them important enough to bother with them.

It might be that so many prisoners managed comparatively well to endure living under the conditions imposed on them in the camp because the punishment which they had to endure freed them from much of their guilt-feeling. Indications of such a process may be found in the frequent remarks with which prisoners responded when reprimanded for any kind of undesirable behavior. When reprimanded, for instance, for cursing or fighting, or for being unclean, they would nearly always answer: "We cannot behave normally to one another when living under such circumstances." When admonished not to speak too harshly of their friends and relatives who were free, whom they accused of not taking care of their affairs, they would answer: "This is no place to be objective. When once I am again at liberty, I shall again act in a civilized way, and evaluate the behavior of others objectively." . . .

### **The Transportation into the Camp and the First Experience in It**

After having spent several days in prison, the prisoners were brought into the camp. During this transportation they were exposed to constant tortures of various kinds. Many of them depended on the fantasy of the particular Gestapo member in charge of a group of prisoners. Still, a certain pattern soon became apparent. Corporal punishment, consisting of whipping, kicking, slapping, intermingled with shooting and wounding with the bayonet, alternated with tortures the obvious goal of which was extreme exhaustion. For instance, the prisoners were forced to stare for hours into glaring lights, to kneel for hours, and so on. From time to time a prisoner got killed; no prisoner was permitted to take care of his or another's wounds. These tortures alternated with efforts on the part of the guards to force the prisoners to hit one another, and to defile what the guards considered the prisoners most cherished values. For instance, the prisoners were forced to curse their God, to accuse themselves of vile actions, accuse their wives of adultery and of prostitution. This continued for hours and was repeated at various times. According to reliable reports, this kind of initiation never took less than 12 hours and frequently lasted 24 hours. If the number of prisoners brought into the camp was too large, or if they came from nearby places, the ceremony took place during the first day in camp.

The purpose of the tortures was to break the resistance of the prisoners, and to assure the guard that they were really superior to them. This can be seen from the fact that the longer the tortures lasted, the less violent they became. The guards became slowly less excited, and at the end even talked with the prisoners. As soon as a new guard took over, he started with new acts of terror, although not as violent as in the beginning, and he eased up sooner than his predecessor. Sometimes prisoners who had already spent time in camp were brought back with a group of new prisoners. These old prisoners were not tortured if they could furnish evidence that they had already been in the camp. That these tortures were planned can be seen from the fact that during the author's transportation into the camp after several prisoners had died and many had been wounded in tortures lasting for 12 hours, the command, "Stop mistreating the prisoners," came and from this moment on the prisoners were left in peace till they arrived in the camp when another group of guards took over and started anew to take advantage of them.

It is difficult to ascertain what happened in the minds of the prisoners during the time they were exposed to this treatment. Most of them became so exhausted they were only partly conscious of what happened. In general, prisoners remembered the details and did not mind talking about them, but they did not like to talk about what they had felt and thought during the time of torture. The few who volunteered information made vague statements which sounded like devious rationalizations, invented for the purpose of justifying that they had endured treatment injurious to their self-respect without trying to fight back. The few who had tried to fight back could not be interviewed; they were dead.

The writer can vividly recall his extreme weariness, resulting from a bayonet wound he had received early in the course of transportation and from a heavy blow on the head. Both injuries led to the loss of a considerable amount of blood, and made him groggy. He recalls vividly, nevertheless, his thoughts and emotions during the transportation. He wondered all the time that man can endure so much without committing suicide or going insane. He wondered that the guards really tortured prisoners in the way it had been described in books on the concentration camps; that the Gestapo was so simple-minded as either to enjoy forcing prisoners to defile themselves or to expect to break their resistance in this way. He wondered that the guards were lacking in fantasy when selecting the means to torture the prisoners; that their sadism was without imagination. He was rather amused by the repeated statement that guards do not shoot the prisoners but kill them by beating them to death because a bullet costs six pfennigs, and the prisoners are not worth even so much. Obviously the idea that these men, most of them formerly influential persons, were not worth such a trifle impressed the guards considerably. On the basis of this introspection it seems that the writer gained emotional strength from the following facts: that things happened according to expectation; that, therefore, his future in the camp was at least partly predictable from what he already was experiencing and from what he had read; and

that the Gestapo was more stupid than he had expected, which eventually provided small satisfaction. Moreover, he felt pleased with himself that the tortures did not change his ability to think or his general point of view. In retrospect these considerations seem futile, but they ought to be mentioned because, if the author should be asked to sum up in one sentence what, all during the time he spent in the camp, was his main problem, he would say: *to safeguard his ego in such a way, if by any good luck he should regain liberty, he would be approximately the same person he was when deprived of liberty.*

He has no doubt that he was able to endure the transportation, and all that followed, because right from the beginning he became convinced that these horrible and degrading experiences somehow did not happen to "him" as a subject, but only to "him" as an object. The importance of this attitude was corroborated by many statements of other prisoners, although none would go so far as to state definitely that an attitude of this type was clearly developed already during the time of the transportation. They couched their feelings usually in more general terms such as, "The main problem is to remain alive and unchanged," without specifying what they meant as unchanged. From additional remarks it became apparent that what should remain unchanged was individually different and roughly covered the person's general attitudes and values.

All the thoughts and emotions which the author had during the transportation were extremely detached. It was as if he watched things happening in which he only vaguely participated. Later he learned that many prisoners had developed this same feeling of detachment, as if what happened really did not matter to oneself. It was strangely mixed with a conviction that "this cannot be true, such things just do not happen." Not only during the transportation but all through the time spent in camp, the prisoners had to convince themselves that this was real, was really happening, and not just a nightmare. They were never wholly successful.<sup>7</sup>

This feeling of detachment which rejected the reality of the situation in which the prisoners found themselves might be considered a mechanism safeguarding the integrity of their personalities. Many prisoners behaved in the camp as if their life there would have no connection with their "real" life; they went so far as to insist that this was the right attitude. Their statements about themselves, and their evaluation of their own and other persons' behavior, differed considerably from what they would have said and thought outside of camp. This separation of behavior patterns and schemes of values inside and outside of camp was so strong that it could hardly be touched in conversation; it was one of the many "taboos" not to be discussed. The prisoners' feelings could be sum-

<sup>7</sup> There were good indications that most guards embraced a similar attitude, although for different reasons. They tortured the prisoners partly because they enjoyed demonstrating their superiority, partly because their superiors expected it of them. But, having been educated in a world which rejected brutality, they felt uneasy about what they were doing. It seems that they, too, had an emotional attitude toward their acts of brutality which might be described as a feeling of unreality. After having been guards in the camp for some time, they got accustomed to inhuman behavior, they became "conditioned" to it; it then became part of their "real" life.

med up by the following sentence: "What I am doing here, or what is happening to me, does not count at all; here everything is permissible as long and insofar as it contributes to helping me to survive in the camp."

One more observation made during the transportation ought to be mentioned. No prisoner fainted. To faint meant to get killed. In this particular situation fainting was no device protecting a person against intolerable pain and in this way facilitating his life; it endangered a prisoner's existence because anyone unable to follow orders was killed. Once the prisoners were in the camp the situation changed and a prisoner who fainted sometimes received some attention or was usually no longer tortured. The result of this changed attitude of the guards was that prisoners who did not faint under the more severe strains during the transportation, in the camp usually fainted when exposed to great hardships, although they were not as great as those endured during the transportation. . . .

### The Adaptation to the Camp Situation

It seems that camp experiences which remained within the normal frame of reference of a prisoner's life experience were dealt with by means of the normal psychological mechanisms. Once the experience transcended this frame of reference, the normal mechanisms seemed no longer able to deal adequately with it and new psychological mechanisms were needed. The experience during the transportation was one of those transcending the normal frame of reference and the reaction to it may be described as "unforgettable, but unreal."

The prisoners' dreams were an indication that the extreme experiences were not dealt with by the usual mechanisms. Many dreams expressed aggression against Gestapo members, usually combined with wish fulfillment in such a way that the prisoner was taking his revenge on them. Interestingly enough, the reason he took revenge on them—if a particular reason could be ascertained—was always for some comparatively small mistreatment, never an extreme experience. The author had had some previous experience concerning his reaction to shocks in dreams. He expected that his dreams after the transportation would follow the pattern of repetition of the shock in dreams, the shock becoming less vivid and the dream finally disappearing. He was astonished to find that in his dreams the most shocking events did not appear. He asked many prisoners whether they dreamed about the transportation and he was unable to find a single one who could remember having dreamed about it.

Attitudes similar to those developed toward the transportation could be observed in other extreme situations. On a terribly cold winter night when a snow storm was blowing, all prisoners were punished by being forced to stand at attention without overcoats—they never wore any—for hours.<sup>8</sup> This, after having worked for more than

<sup>8</sup> The reason for this punishment was that two prisoners had tried to escape. On such occasions all prisoners were always punished very severely, so that in the future they would give away secrets they had learned, because otherwise they would have to suffer. The idea was that every prisoner ought to feel responsible for any act committed by any other prisoner. This was in line with the principle of the Gestapo to force the prisoners to feel and act as a group, and not as individuals.

12 hours in the open, and having received hardly any food. They were threatened with having to stand all through the night. After about 20 prisoners had died from exposure the discipline broke down. The threats of the guards became ineffective. To be exposed to the weather was a terrible torture; to see one's friends die without being able to help, and to stand a good chance of dying, created a situation similar to the transportation, except that the prisoners had by now more experience with the Gestapo. Open resistance was impossible, as impossible as it was to do anything definite to safeguard oneself. A feeling of utter indifference swept the prisoners. They did not care whether the guards shot them; they were indifferent to acts of torture committed by the guards. The guards had no longer any authority, the spell of fear and death was broken. It was again as if what happened did not "really" happen to oneself. There was again the split between the "me" to whom it happened, and the "me" who really did not care and was just an interested but detached observer. Unfortunate as the situation was, they felt free from fear and therefore were actually happier than at most other times during their camp experiences.

Whereas the extremeness of the situation probably produced the split mentioned above, a number of circumstances concurred to create the feeling of happiness in the prisoners. Obviously it was easier to withstand unpleasant experiences when all found themselves in "the same boat." Moreover, since everybody was convinced that his chances to survive were slim, each felt more heroic and willing to help others than he would feel at other moments when helping others might endanger him. This helping and being helped raised the spirits. Another factor was that they were not only free of the fear of the Gestapo, but the Gestapo had actually lost its power, since the guards seemed reluctant to shoot all prisoners. After more than 80 prisoners had died, and several hundred had their extremities so badly frozen that they had later to be amputated, the prisoners were permitted to return to the barracks. They were completely exhausted, but did not experience that feeling of happiness which some of them had expected. They felt relieved that the torture was over, but felt at the same time that they no longer were free from fear and no longer could strongly rely on mutual help. Each prisoner as an individual was now comparatively safer, but he had lost the safety originating in being a member of a unified group. This event was again freely discussed, in a detached way, and again the discussion was restricted to facts; the prisoners' emotions and thoughts during this night were hardly ever mentioned. The event itself and its details were not forgotten, but no particular emotions were attached to them; nor did they appear in dreams.

The psychological reactions to events which were somewhat more within the sphere of the normally comprehensible were decidedly different from those to extreme events. It seems that prisoners dealt with less extreme events in the same way as if they had happened outside of the camp. For example, if a prisoner's punishment was not of an unusual kind, he seemed ashamed of it, he tried not to speak about it. A slap in one's face was embarrassing, and not to be discussed. One hated individual

guards who had kicked one, or slapped one, or verbally abused one much more than the guard who really had wounded one seriously. In the latter case one eventually hated the Gestapo as such, but not so much the individual inflicting the punishment. Obviously this differentiation was unreasonable, but it seemed to be inescapable. One felt deeper and more violent aggressions against particular Gestapo members who had committed minor vile acts than one felt against those who had acted in a much more terrible fashion.

The following tentative interpretation of this strange phenomenon should be accepted with caution. It seems that all experiences which might have happened during the prisoner's "normal" life history provoked a "normal" reaction. Prisoners seemed, for instance, particularly sensitive to punishments similar to those which a parent might inflict on his child. To punish a child was within their "normal" frame of reference, but that they should become the object of the punishment destroyed their adult frame of reference. So they reacted to it not in an adult, but in a childish way—with embarrassment and shame, with violent, impotent, and unmanageable emotions directed, not against the system, but against the person inflicting the punishment. A contributing factor might have been that the greater the punishment, the more could one expect to receive friendly support which exerted a soothing influence. Moreover, if the suffering was great, one felt more or less like a martyr, suffering for a cause, and the martyr is supposed not to resent his martyrdom.

This, incidentally, raises the question as to which psychological phenomena make it possible to submit to martyrdom and which are those leading others to accept it as such. This problem transcends the frame of this presentation, but some observations pertinent to it may be mentioned. Prisoners who died under tortures *qua* prisoners, although martyrs to their political conviction, were not considered martyrs. Those who suffered due to efforts to protect others were accepted as martyrs. The Gestapo was usually successful in preventing the creation of martyrs, due either to insight into the psychological mechanisms involved or to its anti-individualistic ideology. If a prisoner tried to protect a group, he might have been killed by a guard, but if his action came to the knowledge of the camp administration then the whole group was always more severely punished than it would have been in the first place. In this way the group came to resent the actions of its protector because it suffered under them. *The protector was thus prevented from becoming a leader, or a martyr, around whom group resistance might have been formed. . . .*

### Differences in the Psychological Attitudes of Old and New Prisoners

In the following discussion we refer by the term "new prisoners" to those who had not spent more than one year in the camp; "old" prisoners are those who have spent at least three years in the camp. As far as the old prisoners are concerned the author can offer only observations but no findings based on introspection.



It has been mentioned that the main concern of the new prisoners seemed to be to remain intact as a personality and to return to the outer world the same persons who had left it; all their emotional efforts were directed towards this goal. Old prisoners seemed mainly concerned with the problem of how to live as well as possible within the camp. Once they had reached this attitude, everything that happened to them, even the worst atrocity, was "real" to them. No longer was there a split between one to whom things happened and the one who observed them. Once this stage was reached of taking everything that happened in the camp as "real," there was every indication that the prisoners who had reached it were afraid of returning to the outer world. They did not admit it directly, but from their talk it was clear that they hardly believed they would ever return to this outer world because they felt that only a cataclysmic event—a world war and world revolution—could free them; and even then they doubted that they would be able to adapt to this new life. They seemed aware of what had happened to them while growing older in the camp. They realized that they had adapted themselves to the life in the camp and that this process was coexistent with a basic change in their personality.

The most drastic demonstration of this realization was provided by the case of a formerly very prominent radical German politician. He declared that according to his experience nobody could live in the camp longer than five years without changing his attitudes so radically that he no longer could be considered the same person he used to be. He asserted that he did not see any point in continuing to live once his real life consisted in being a prisoner in a concentration camp, that he could not endure developing those attitudes and behaviors he saw developing in all old prisoners. He therefore had decided to commit suicide on the sixth anniversary of his being brought into the camp. His fellow prisoners tried to watch him carefully on this day, but nevertheless he succeeded.

There was, of course, considerable variation among individuals in the time it took them to make their peace with the idea of having to spend the rest of their lives in the camp. Some became part of the camp life rather soon, some probably never. When a new prisoner was brought into the camp, the older ones tried to teach him a few things which might prove helpful in his adjustment. The new prisoners were told that they should try by all means to survive the first days and not to give up the fight for their lives, that it would become easier the longer time they spent in camp. They said, "If you survive the first three months you will survive the next three years." This, despite the fact that the yearly mortality was close to 20 per cent. This high death rate was mostly due to the large number of new prisoners who did not survive the first few weeks in the camp, either because they did not care to survive by means of adapting themselves to the life in camp or because they were unable to do so. How long it took a prisoner to cease to consider life outside the camp as real depended to a great extent on the strength of his emotional ties to his family and friends. The change to accepting camp life as real never took place before spending two years in camp. Even then

everyone was overtly longing to regain freedom. Some of the indications from which one could learn about the changed attitude were: scheming to find oneself a better place in the camp rather than trying to contact the outer world,<sup>9</sup> avoiding speculation about one's family, or world affairs,<sup>10</sup> concentrating all interest on events taking place inside of the camp. When the author expressed to some of the old prisoners his astonishment that they seemed not to be interested in discussing their future life outside the camp, they frequently admitted that they no longer could visualize themselves living outside the camp, making free decisions, taking care of themselves and their families. The changes in attitudes toward their families and to events taking place in the outside world were not the only ones which could be observed in old prisoners; other differences between old and new prisoners could be recognized in their hopes for their future lives, in the degree to which they regressed to infantile behavior, and in many other ways. When discussing these differences between old and new prisoners it should be borne in mind that there were great individual variations, that all statements are only approximations and generalizations, and that the categories are interrelated.

### Changes in Attitudes toward One's Family and Friends

The new prisoners were usually those who received most letters, money, and other signs of attention. Their families were trying everything to free them. Nevertheless they consistently accused them of not doing enough, of betraying and cheating them. They would weep over a letter telling of the efforts to liberate them, but curse in the next moment when learning that some of their property had been sold without their permission. They would swear at their families which "obviously" considered them "already dead." Even the smallest change in their former private world attained tremendous importance. They might have forgotten the names of some of their best friends, but once they learned that the friends had moved they were terribly upset and nothing could console them. This ambivalence of the new prisoners in relation to their families seemed to be due to a mechanism which was mentioned before. Their desire to return exactly the person who had left was so great that they feared any change, however trifling, in the situation they had left. Their worldly possessions should be secure and untouched, although they were of no use to them at this moment.

It is difficult to say whether the desire that everything remain unchanged was due to their realization of how

<sup>9</sup> New prisoners would spend all their money on efforts to smuggle letters out of the camp or to receive communications without having them censored. Old prisoners did not use their money for such purposes. They used it for securing for themselves "soft" jobs, such as clerical in the offices of the camp or work in the shops where they were at least protected against the weather while at work.

<sup>10</sup> It so happened that on the same day news was received of a speech by President Roosevelt, denouncing Hitler and Germany, and rumors spread that one officer of the Gestapo would be replaced by another. The new prisoners discussed the speech excitedly, and paid no attention to the rumors, the old prisoners paid no attention to the speech, but devoted all their conversations to the changes in camp officers.

difficult it might be to adjust to an entirely changed home situation or whether it finds its explanation in some sort of magical thinking running approximately along the following lines: If nothing changes in the world in which I used to live, then I shall not change, either. In this way they might have tried to counteract their feeling that they were changing. The violent reaction against changes in their families was then the counterpart of the realization that they were changing. What enraged them was probably not only the fact of the change, but the change in standing within the family which it implied. Their families had been dependent on them for decisions, and now they were the ones to be dependent. That created in them a feeling of dependency. The only chance they saw for becoming again the head of the family was that the family structure remain untouched despite their absence. Also they knew the attitudes of most persons toward those who have spent time in prisons of any kind.

As a matter of fact, although most families behaved decently to those family members who were in the camp, serious problems were created. During the first months they spent a great deal of money in efforts to free the prisoner, quite often more than they could afford. When pleading with Gestapo members to set their relatives free—an unpleasant task at best—they were repeatedly told that it was the prisoner's own fault that he was imprisoned. Later on, they found difficulties in finding employment because a family member was suspect; their children had difficulties at school; they were excluded from public relief. So it was only natural that they came to resent having a family member in the camp. Their friends did not have much compassion for them, because the German population at large developed certain defense mechanisms against the concentration camp. The Germans could not stand the idea of living in a world where one was not protected by law and order. They just would not believe that the prisoners in the camps had not committed outrageous crimes since the way they were punished permitted only this conclusion. So actually a slow process of alienation took place between the prisoners and their families, but as far as the new prisoners were concerned this process was only beginning. The question arises as to how they could blame their families for changes which actually occurred in them, and whose cause they were. It might be that the prisoners took so much punishment, had to endure such hardships, that they could not accept any blame. They felt that they had atoned for any past shortcomings in their relations to their families and friends, and for any changes which might occur in them; in this way they were free from accepting any responsibility in this respect, and free from any guilt-feelings; and so they felt freer to hate other people, even their own families, for their defects.

This feeling of having atoned for all guilt had some real foundation. When the concentration camps were first established the Nazis detained in them their more prominent foes.<sup>11</sup> Pretty soon there were no more prominent

<sup>11</sup> The concentration camp, being an integral part of the Nazi system, has an interesting history, reflecting the changes which this system underwent. The author hopes sometime to be able to present the camp in its historical development. This paper is based on the conditions which could be observed during the year 1938-39.

enemies available, because they were either dead, in the jails, the camps, or had emigrated. Still, an institution was needed to threaten the opponents of the system. Too many Germans became dissatisfied with the system. To imprison all of them would have interrupted the functioning of the industrial production, the upholding of which was a paramount goal of the Nazis. So if a group of the population got fed up with the Nazi regime, a selected few members of this group would be brought into the concentration camp. If lawyers became restless, a few hundred lawyers were sent to the camp, the same happened to physicians when the medical profession seemed rebellious, etc. The Gestapo called such group punishments "actions" and this new system was first used during the year 1937-38, when Germany was first preparing to embark on the annexation of foreign countries. During the first of these "actions" only the leaders of the opposition group were punished. That led to the feeling that just to belong to a rebellious group was not dangerous, since only the leaders were threatened. Soon the Gestapo revised its system and selected the persons to be punished so that they represented a cross-section through the different strata of the group. This new procedure had not only the advantage of spreading terror among all members of the group, but made it possible to punish and destroy the group without necessarily touching the leader if that was for some reason inopportune.<sup>12</sup> . . .

Old prisoners did not like to be reminded of their families and former friends. When they spoke about them, it was in a very detached way. They liked to receive letters, but it was not very important to them, partly because they had lost contact with the events related in them. It has been mentioned that they had some realization of how difficult it might be for them to find their way back, but there was another contributing factor, namely, the prisoners' hatred of all those living outside of the camp, who "enjoyed life as if we were not rotting away."

This outside world which continued to live as if nothing had happened was in the minds of the prisoners represented by those whom they used to know, namely, by their relatives and friends. But even this hatred was very subdued in the old prisoners. It seemed that, as much as they had forgotten to love their kin, they had lost the ability to hate them. *They had learned to direct a great amount of aggression against themselves so as not to get into too many conflicts with the Gestapo, while the new prisoners still directed their aggressions against the outer world, and—when not supervised—against the Gestapo.* Since the old prisoners did not show much emotion either way, they were unable to feel strongly about anybody.

Old prisoners did not like to mention their former social status or their former activities, whereas new prisoners were rather boastful about them. New prisoners seemed to try to back their self-esteem by letting others know how important they had been, with the very obvious implication that they still were important. Old prisoners seemed

<sup>12</sup> At one time a movement opposed to the Nazis' regimentation of cultural activities centered around the person of a famous conductor, who, in general, was favorably inclined towards Nazism. He was never punished, but the group was destroyed by the imprisonment of a cross-section of it. So he found himself a leader without followers and the movement subsided.



to have accepted their state of dejection, and to compare it with their former splendor—and anything was magnificent when compared with the situation in which they found themselves—was probably too depressing. . . .

### Regression Into Infantile Behavior

The prisoners developed types of behavior which are characteristic of infancy or early youth. Some of these behaviors developed slowly, others were immediately imposed on the prisoners and developed only in intensity as time went on. Some of these more or less infantile behaviors have already been discussed, such as ambivalence to one's family, despondency, finding satisfaction in daydreaming rather than in action.

Whether some of these behavior patterns were deliberately produced by the Gestapo is hard to ascertain. Others were definitely produced by it, but again we do not know whether it was consciously done. It has been mentioned that even during the transportation the prisoners were tortured in a way in which a cruel and domineering father might torture a helpless child; here it should be added that the prisoners were also debased by techniques which went much further into childhood situations. They were forced to soil themselves. In the camp the defecation was strictly regulated; it was one of the most important daily events, discussed in great detail. During the day the prisoners who wanted to defecate had to obtain the permission of the guard. It seemed as if the education to cleanliness would be once more repeated. It seemed to give pleasure to the guards to hold the power of granting or withholding the permission to visit the latrines. (Toilets were mostly not available). This pleasure of the guards found its counterpart in the pleasure the prisoners derived from visiting the latrines, because there they usually could rest for a moment, secure from the whips of the overseers and guards. They were not always so secure, because sometimes enterprising young guards enjoyed interfering with the prisoners even at these moments.

The prisoners were forced to say "thou" to one another, which in Germany is indiscriminately used only among small children. They were not permitted to address one another with the many titles to which middle- and upper-class Germans are accustomed. On the other hand, they had to address the guards in the most deferential manner, giving them all their titles.

The prisoners lived, like children, only in the immediate present; they lost the feeling for the sequence of time, they became unable to plan for the future or to give up immediate pleasure satisfactions to gain greater ones in the near future. They were unable to establish durable object-relations. Friendships developed as quickly as they broke up. Prisoners would, like early adolescents, fight one another tooth and nail, declare that they would never even look at one another or speak to one another, only to become close friends within a few minutes. They were boastful, telling tales about what they had accomplished in their former lives, or how they succeeded in cheating foremen or guards, and how they sabotaged the work. Like children they felt not at all set back or ashamed when it became known that they had lied about their prowess.

Another factor contributing to the regression into childhood behavior was the work the prisoners were forced to perform. New prisoners particularly were forced to perform nonsensical tasks, such as carrying heavy rocks from one place to another, and after a while back to the place where they had picked them up. On other days they were forced to dig holes in the ground with their bare hands, although tools were available. They resented such nonsensical work, although it ought to have been immaterial to them whether their work was useful. They felt debased when forced to perform "childish" and stupid labor, and preferred even harder work when it produced something that might be considered useful. There seems to be no doubt that the tasks they performed, as well as the mistreatment by the Gestapo which they had to endure, contributed to their disintegration as adult persons.

### The Final Adjustment to the Life in the Camp

A prisoner had reached the final stage of adjustment to the camp situation when he had changed his personality so as to accept as his own the values of the Gestapo. A few examples may illustrate how this acceptance expressed itself. . . .

The prisoners found themselves in an impossible situation due to the steady interference with their privacy on the part of the guards and other prisoners. So a great amount of aggression accumulated. In the new prisoners it vented itself in the way it might have done in the world outside the camp. But slowly prisoners accepted, as expression of their verbal aggressions, terms which definitely did not originate in their previous vocabularies, but were taken over from the very different vocabulary of the Gestapo. From copying the verbal aggressions of the Gestapo to copying their form of bodily aggressions was one more step, but it took several years to make this step. It was not unusual to find old prisoners, when in charge of others, behaving worse than the Gestapo, in some cases because they were trying to win favor with the Gestapo in this way but more often because they considered this the best way to behave toward prisoners in the camp.

Practically all prisoners who had spent a long time in the camp took over the Gestapo's attitude toward the so-called unfit prisoners. Newcomers presented the old prisoners with difficult problems. Their complaints about the unbearable life in camp added new strain to the life in the barracks, so did their inability to adjust to it. Bad behavior in the labor gang endangered the whole group. So a newcomer who did not stand up well under the strain tended to become a liability for the other prisoners. Moreover, weaklings were those most apt eventually to turn traitors. Weaklings usually died during the first weeks in the camp anyway, so it seemed as well to get rid of them sooner. So old prisoners were sometimes instrumental in getting rid of the unfit, in this way making a feature of Gestapo ideology a feature of their own behavior. This was one of the many situations in which old prisoners demonstrated toughness and molded their way of treating other prisoners according to the example set by the Gestapo. That this was really a taking-over of Gestapo attitudes can be seen from the treatment of traitors.

Self-protection asked for their elimination, but the way in which they were tortured for days and slowly killed was taken over from the Gestapo.

Old prisoners who seemed to have a tendency to identify themselves with the Gestapo did so not only in respect to aggressive behavior. They would try to arrogate to themselves old pieces of Gestapo uniforms. If that was not possible, they tried to sew and mend their uniforms so that they would resemble those of the guards. The length to which prisoners would go in these efforts seemed unbelievable, particularly since the Gestapo punished them for their efforts to copy Gestapo uniforms. When asked why they did it they admitted that they loved to look like one of the guards.

The identification with the Gestapo did not stop with the copying of their outer appearance and behavior. Old prisoners accepted their goals and values, too, even when they seemed opposed to their own interests. It was appalling to see how far formerly even politically well-educated prisoners would go in this identification. At one time American and English newspapers were full of stories about the cruelties committed in the camps. The Gestapo punished the prisoners for the appearance of these stories true to their policy of punishing the group for whatever a member or a former member did, and the stories must have originated in reports of former prisoners. In discussions of this event old prisoners would insist that it is not the business of foreign correspondents or newspapers to bother with German institutions and expressed their hatred of the journalists who tried to help them. The writer asked more than one hundred old political prisoners the following questions: "If I am lucky and reach foreign soil, should I tell the story of the camp and arouse the interest of the cultured world?" He found only two who made the unqualified statement that everyone escaping Germany ought to fight the Nazis to the best of his abilities. *All others were hoping for a German revolution, but did not like the idea of interference on the part of a foreign power.*

When old prisoners accepted Nazi values as their own they usually did not admit it, but explained their behavior by means of rationalizations. For instance, prisoners collected scrap in the camp because Germany was low on raw materials. When it was pointed out that they were thus helping the Nazis, they rationalized that through the saving of scrap Germany's working classes, too, became richer. When erecting buildings for the Gestapo, controversies started whether one should build well. New prisoners were for sabotaging, a majority of old prisoners for building well. They rationalized that the New Germany will have use for these buildings. When it was pointed out that a revolution will have to destroy the fortresses of the Gestapo, they retired to the general statement that one ought to do well any job one has to do. It seems that the majority of the old prisoners had realized that they could not continue to work for the Gestapo unless they could convince themselves that their work made some sense, so they had to convince themselves of this sense.

The satisfaction with which some old prisoners enjoyed the fact that, during the twice daily counting of the prisoners, they really had stood well at attention can be ex-

plained only by the fact that they had entirely accepted the values of the Gestapo as their own. Prisoners prided themselves of being as tough as the Gestapo members. This identification with their tortures went so far as copying their leisure-time activities. One of the games played by the guards was to find out who could stand to be hit longest without uttering a complaint. This game was copied by the old prisoners, as though they had not been hit often and long enough without needing to repeat this experience as a game.

Often the Gestapo would enforce nonsensical rules, originating in the whims of one of the guards. They were usually forgotten as soon as formulated, but there were always some old prisoners who would continue to follow these rules and try to enforce them on others long after the Gestapo had forgotten about them. Once, for instance, a guard on inspecting the prisoners' apparel found that the shoes of some of them were dirty on the inside. He ordered all prisoners to wash their shoes inside and out with water and soap. The heavy shoes treated this way became hard as stone. The order was never repeated, and many prisoners did not even execute it when given. Nevertheless there were some old prisoners who not only continued to wash the inside of their shoes every day but cursed all others who did not do so as negligent and dirty. These prisoners firmly believed that the rules set down by the Gestapo were desirable standards of human behavior, at least in the camp situation.

Other problems in which most old prisoners made their peace with the values of the Gestapo included the race problem, although race discrimination had been alien to their scheme of values before they were brought into the camp. They accepted as true the claim that Germany needed more space ("Lebensraum"), but added "as long as there does not exist a world federation," they believed in the superiority of the German race. It should be emphasized that this was not the result of propaganda on the side of the Gestapo. The Gestapo made no such efforts and insisted in its statements that it was not interested in how the prisoners felt as long as they were full of fear of the Gestapo. Moreover, the Gestapo insisted that it would prevent them from expressing their feelings anyway. The Gestapo seemed to think it impossible to win the prisoners for its values, after having made them subject to their tortures.

Among the old prisoners one could observe other developments which indicated their desire to accept the Gestapo along lines which definitely could not originate in propaganda. It seems that, since they returned to a childlike attitude toward the Gestapo, they had a desire that at least some of those whom they accepted as all-powerful father-images should be just and kind. They divided their positive and negative feelings — strange as it may be that they should have positive feelings, they had them — toward the Gestapo in such way that all positive emotions were concentrated on a few officers who were rather high up in the hierarchy of camp administrators, but hardly ever on the governor of the camp. They insisted that these officers hide behind their rough surfaces a feeling of justice and propriety; he, or they, were supposed to be genuinely interested in the prisoners and even

trying, in a small way, to help them. Since nothing of these supposed feelings and efforts ever became apparent, it was explained that he hid them so effectively because otherwise he would not be able to help the prisoners. The eagerness of these prisoners to find reasons for their claims was pitiful. A whole legend was woven around the fact that of two officers inspecting a barrack one had cleaned his shoes from mud before entering. He probably did it automatically, but it was interpreted as a rebuff to the other officer and a clear demonstration of how he felt about the concentration camp.

After so much has been said about the old prisoners' tendency to conform and to identify with the Gestapo, it ought to be stressed that this was only part of the picture, because the author tried to concentrate on interesting psychological mechanisms in group behavior rather than on reporting types of behavior which are either well known or could reasonably be expected. These same old prisoners who identified with the Gestapo at other moments defied it, demonstrating extraordinary courage in doing so.

### Summary

In conclusion it should be emphasized again that this essay is a preliminary report and does not pretend to be exhaustive. The author feels that the concentration camp has an importance reaching far beyond its being a place where the Gestapo takes revenge on its enemies. It is the main training ground for young Gestapo soldiers who are planning to rule and police Germany and all conquered nations; it is the Gestapo's laboratory where it develops methods for changing free and upright citizens not only into grumbling slaves, but into serfs who in many respects accept their masters' values. They still think that they are following their own life goals and values, whereas in reality they have accepted the Nazis' values as their own.

*It seems that what happens in an extreme fashion to the*

*prisoners who spend several years in the concentration camp happens in less exaggerated form to the inhabitants of the big concentration camp called greater Germany. It might happen to the inhabitants of occupied countries if they are not able to form organized groups of resistance. The system seems too strong for an individual to break its hold over his emotional life, particularly if he finds himself within a group which has more or less accepted the Nazi system. It seems easier to resist the pressure of the Gestapo and the Nazis if one functions as an individual; the Gestapo seems to know that and therefore insists on forcing all individuals into groups which they supervise. Some of the methods used for this purpose are the hostage system and the punishment of the whole group for whatever a member of it does; not permitting anybody to deviate in his behavior from the group norm, whatever this norm may be; discouraging solitary activities of any kind, etc. The main goal of the efforts seems to be to produce in the subjects childlike attitudes and childlike dependency on the will of the leaders. The most effective way to break this influence seems to be the formation of democratic groups of resistance of independent, mature, and self-reliant persons, in which every member backs up, in all other members, the ability to resist. If such groups are not formed it seems very difficult not to become subject to the slow process of personality disintegration produced by the unrelenting pressure of the Gestapo and the Nazi system.*

Inasmuch as the concentration camp is the laboratory of the Gestapo for subjecting not only free men, but even the most ardent foes of the Nazi system, to the process of disintegration from their position as autonomous individuals, it ought to be studied by all persons interested in understanding what happens to a population subject to the methods of the Nazi system. It is hoped that by understanding what happens to the unhappy persons under Nazi domination it will be possible to devise methods by means of which they will be helped to resurrect within a short time as autonomous and self-reliant persons.

## ***The Homosexual in Society***

Something in James Agee's recent approach to the Negro pseudo-folk (*Partisan Review*, Spring 1944) is the background of the notes which I propose in discussing yet another group whose only salvation is in the struggle of all humanity for freedom and individual integrity; who have suffered in modern society persecution, excommunication; and whose "intellectuals", whose most articulate members, have been willing to desert that primary struggle, to beg, to gain at the price if need be of any sort of prostitution, privilege for themselves, however ephemeral; who have been willing rather than to struggle toward self-recognition, to sell their product, to convert their deepest feelings into marketable oddities and sentimentalities.

Although in private conversation, at every table, at every editorial board, one *knows* that a great body of modern art is cheated by what almost amounts to a homosexual cult; although hostile critics have opened fire in a constant attack as rabid as the attack of Southern senators upon "niggers"; critics who might possibly view the

homosexual with a more humane eye seem agreed that it is better that nothing be said. Pressed to the point, they may either, as in the case of such an undeniable homosexual as Hart Crane, contend that they are great despite their "perversion"\*—much as my mother used to say how much better a poet Poe would have been had he not taken dope; or where it is possible they have attempted to deny the role of the homosexual in modern art, the usual reply to unprincipled critics like Craven and Benton in painting being to assert that modern artists have not been homosexual. (Much as *PM* goes to great length to prove that none of the Communist leaders have been Jews—as if, if *all*

\*Critics of Crane, for instance, consider that his homosexuality is the cause of his inability to adjust to society. Another school feels that inability to adjust to society causes homosexuality. What seems fairly obvious is that what society frustrated in Crane was his effort to write poetry and to write what he wanted to in the way he wanted to. He might well have adjusted his homosexual desires within society as many have done by "living a lie". It was his desire for truth that society condemned.