

Alfons Heck was a 16 year-old leader in the Hitler Youth. It took him years after the war before he recognized that he was a victim of mass-indoctrination in hatred, while a member of the Hitler Youth. He refers, in fact, to the Hitler Youth organization's control over Germany's youth as a form of child abuse. What do you think? Consider the fact that adult abusers were often themselves abused as children.

Now read the following excerpt from a speech entitled, "The Political Consequences of Child Abuse" by Swiss Psychotherapist Alice Miller. Then Answer the questions at the end of the reading.

The hypothesis that German anti-Semitism was the real reason for the Holocaust has been rightly criticized by urging a comparison with the First World War. At that time anti-Semitism was just as strong in Germany but no organized genocide resulted. And why no Holocaust in the other anti-Semitic countries such as Poland, Russia and other parts of Europe? The argument that in the Weimar Republic unemployment and poverty caused immense general frustration that was discharged via the mass murder of the Jews is hardly convincing, given that Hitler was quickly successful in getting unemployment under control.

There must have been other factors at play which have hitherto been ignored, factors going some way to explaining why the Holocaust happened in Germany and why it happened at this particular time rather than another. In my view, one possible operative factor is the destructive child-rearing style practiced widely on infants around the turn of the century in Germany, a style I have no hesitation in referring to as a universal abuse of infants.

Of course children in other countries have been and still are mistreated in the name of upbringing or care-giving, but hardly already as babies and hardly with the systematic thoroughness characteristic of the Prussian pedagogy. In the two generations before Hitler's rise to power, the implementation of this method was brought to a high degree of perfection in Germany. With this foundation to build on, Hitler finally achieved what he wanted: "My ideal of education is hard. Whatever is weak must be hammered away. In the fortresses of my militant order a generation of young people will grow to strike fear into the heart of the world. Violent, masterful, unafraid, cruel youth is what I want. Young people must be all that. They must withstand pain. There must be nothing weak or tender about them. The free-magnificent predator must flash from their eyes again. I want them strong and beautiful...That way I can fashion things anew." This education program revolving on the extermination of everything life-giving was the forerunner of Hitler's plans for the extermination of an entire nation. Indeed it was the prerequisite for the ultimate success of his designs.

The numerous and widely-read tracts by Dr. Daniel Gottlieb Moritz Schreber, the inventor of the Schrebergärten (the German world for small allotments) are of major interest here. Some of them ran to as many as 40 editions, and their central concern was to instruct parents in the systematic upbringing of infants from the very first day of life. Many people motivated by what they thought to be the best of intentions complied with the advice given them by Schreber and other authors about how best to raise their children if they wanted to make them into model subjects of the German Reich. They did this without even remotely suspecting that they were exposing their children to a systematic form of torture with long-term effects.

Germany sayings and catch--phrases like "Praise be to the things that make us tough" and "What doesn't kill us will strengthen us," still to be heard from educationists of the old school, probably originated in this period.

Contrary to received opinion prevalent as recently as 15 years ago, the human brain at birth is not fully developed. The abilities a person's brain develops depend on experiences in the first three years of life. Studies on abandoned and severely mistreated Romanian children revealed striking lesions in certain areas of the brain and marked emotional and cognitive insufficiencies in later life. According to very recent neurobiological findings, repeated traumatization leads to an increased release of stress hormones that attack the sensitive tissue of the brain and destroy existing neurons. Other studies of mistreated children have revealed that the areas of the brain responsible for the "management" of emotions are 20 to 30 percent smaller than in normal persons.

The children systematically subjected to obedience drill around the turn of the century were not only exposed to corporal "correction" but also to severe emotional deprivation. The upbringing manuals of the day described physical demonstrations of affection such as stroking, cuddling and kissing as indications of a doting, mollycoddling attitude. Parents were warned of the disastrous effects of spoiling their children, a form of indulgence entirely incompatible with the prevalent ideal of rigor and severity. As a result, infants suffered from the absence of direct loving contact with the parents. The best they could hope for was to find some kind of substitute from the servants, who in numerous cases used and exploited them as objects of pleasure, thus frequently adding to the children's emotional confusion.

Since the experiments conducted on monkeys by Dr. Harlow in the Fifties, we know that animals raised by artificial "robot" mothers later turned aggressive and showed no interest in their own offspring. New research on macaque monkeys revealed that they kill even members of their own species if they were brought up without appropriate care. John Bowlby's studies on the absence of early attachment in delinquents and René Spitz' descriptions of small children dying of hospitalism following emotional neglect during hospitalization under extremely hygienic conditions are indications that not only animal but also human babies require reassuring sensory contact with their parents if socialization is to take a normal course.

These findings presented by Bowlby and Spitz almost 40 years ago are corroborated by recent neurobiological research. The studies in question suggest that not only active battering but also the absence of loving physical contact between child and parent will cause certain areas of the brain, notably those responsible for the emotions, to remain underdeveloped. Hence the children "subjugated by looks" suffered emotional harm that was only to develop its full destructive potential in the next generation....

Present--day neurobiological research makes it easier for us to understand the way Nazis like Eichmann, Himmler, Höss and others functioned. The rigorous obedience training they underwent in earliest infancy stunted the development of such human capacities as compassion and pity for the sufferings of others. They were incapable of emotion in the face of misfortune, such feelings were alien to them. Their total emotional atrophy enabled the perpetrators of the most heinous crimes imaginable to function "normally" and to continue to impress their environment with their efficiency in the years after the war without the slightest remorse. Dr. Mengele could

perform the most cruel experiments on Jewish children in Auschwitz and then live for 30 years like a "normal," well--adjusted man.

In the absence of positive factors, affection and helping witnesses, the only course open to the mistreated individual is the disavowal of personal suffering and the idealization of cruelty with all its devastating after--effects. Undergoing an exceedingly humiliating and cruel upbringing at the preverbal stage, usually without helping witnesses, may instill into the victim admiration of this cruelty if there is no one in the immediate vicinity of the child to query those methods and stand up for humane values. People subjected to mistreatment in childhood may go on insisting all their lives that beatings are harmless and corporal punishment is salutary although there is overwhelming, indeed conclusive evidence to the contrary. Vice versa, a child protected, loved and cherished from the outset will thrive on that experience for a lifetime.

Binjamin Wilkomirski, the author of a harrowing and intensely illuminating book about his childhood in the concentration camps, once confided to me in a personal encounter some observations made with the eyes of an imprisoned but extremely wide--awake child on the behavior of the female camp guards. He said that it had taken him 50 years to inquire who those "blokawas" really were, those women who had so openly and unreservedly relished the job of tormenting and humiliating Jewish children and subjecting them to every conceivable variety of mental and physical cruelty.

To his astonishment, perusal of the trial records revealed that most of them were young women between 19 and 21 who had formerly had quite ordinary jobs as seamstresses or sales clerks and whose biographies contained nothing in any way unusual. During the trial they unanimously claimed that they had not been aware that Jewish children were human beings. The conclusion that immediately suggests itself is that ultimately propaganda and manipulation are sufficient to transform people into sadistic executioners and mass murderers.

This is not an opinion I share. On the contrary. It is my belief that only men and women who had experienced mental and physical cruelty in the first weeks and months of life and had been shown no love at all could possibly have let themselves be made into Hitler's willing executioners. As Goldhagen's archive material shows, they needed next to no ideological indoctrination because their bodies knew exactly what they wanted to do as soon as they were allowed to follow their inclinations. And as the Jews, young or old, had been declared non--persons, there was nothing to stop them indulging those inclinations. But no amount of indoctrination alone, at school or wherever, will unleash hatred in a person who has no preconditions in that direction. It is well known that there were also Germans, like Karl Jaspers, Hermann Hesse or Thomas Mann, who immediately recognized the declaration that Jews were non--persons as an alarm signal and the rallying cry of untrammelled barbarism.

For people like the "blokawas," exposed to emotional confusion in their early childhood, the declaration was a highly convenient expedient. All they needed to do was refuse the children water to wash themselves and that gave them sufficient reason to hate them for being dirty and coal--black. They could toss lumps of sugar to starving children and then despise them for the alacrity with which they scrambled to pick them up. Those young women could turn the children into precisely what they needed to feel powerful and could thus vent on their victims the old, unconscious rage slumbering within them....

What is hatred? As I see it, it is a possible consequence of the rage and despair that cannot be consciously felt by a child which has been neglected and mistreated even before he or she has learned to speak. As long as the anger directed at a parent or other first caregiver remains unconscious or disavowed, it cannot be dissipated. It can only be taken out on oneself or stand-ins, on scapegoats such as one's own children or alleged enemies. Sympathetic observation of the cries of an infant brings home forcibly to the onlooker how intense the feelings involved must be. The hatred can finally work as a life-saving defense against the life-threatening powerlessness.

The studies at my disposal already in 1980 and referred to in my book *For Your Own Good* confirmed my conjecture that, both in Nazi Germany and among the professional American soldiers who voluntarily served in Vietnam, brutally-raised children figured prominently among the most vindictive war criminals. Further confirmation was brought by study of the childhood biographies of those exceptional people who in times of terror had the courage to rescue others from extermination.

Why were there people brave enough to risk their lives to save Jews from Nazi Persecution? Much scientific inquiry has been expended on this question. The usual answers revolve around religious or moral values such as Christian charity or a sense of responsibility instilled in them by parents, teachers and other caregivers. But there is no doubt that the active supporters of the extermination and the passive hangers-on had usually also been given a religious upbringing. So this can hardly furnish a sufficient explanation.

I was convinced that there must have been some special factor in the childhood of the rescuers, in the prevailing atmosphere of their childhood, that made it so fundamentally different from what the war criminals had experienced, but at first I couldn't prove my hypothesis. For years I sought in vain for a book that would give this subject adequate coverage. Finally, thanks to Lloyd deMause's help, I found an empirical study by the Oliners, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe*, based on interviews with more than 400 witnesses of those dark days. It confirmed my hypothesis. The study concluded that the only factor distinguishing the rescuers from the persecutors and hangers-on was the way they had been brought up by their parents.

Almost all rescuers interviewed reported that their parents had attempted to discipline them with arguments rather than punishment. They were only rarely subjected to corporal punishment, and if they were it was invariably in connection with some misdemeanor and never because their parents had felt the need to discharge some uncontrollable and inexplicable feeling of rage on them. One man recalled that he had once been spanked for taking smaller children out onto a frozen lake and endangering their lives. Another reported that his father had only ever hit him once and apologized afterwards. Many of the statements might be paraphrased thus: "My mother always tried to explain what was wrong about whatever it was I had done. My father also spent a lot of time talking to me. I was impressed by what he had to say."

What a different picture we get from the reports of the persecutors and hangers-on: "When my father was drunk he took the whip to me. I never knew what I was being beaten for. Often it was for something I had done months before. And when mother was in a temper she tore into anyone who got in her way, including me."

Unlike such uncontrolled affective discharges subjectively felt to be justified, explaining what the parent feels is wrong is synonymous with trust in the otherwise good intentions of the child. Such a course is motivated by respect and faith in the child's ability to develop and change its behavior for the better.

People given early affection and support are quick to emulate the sympathetic and autonomous natures of their parents. Common to all the rescuers were self-confidence, the ability to take immediate decisions and the capacity for empathy and compassion with others. Seventy percent of them said that it only took them a matter of minutes to decide they wanted to intervene. Eighty percent said they did not consult anyone else. "I had to do it, I could never have stood idle and watched injustice being done."...

Naturally, my references to Schreber and his methods are not sufficient to explain the history of the Holocaust. Countless books have been written about it, but the enormity of those crimes still defies comprehension. Much more research needs to be done before we can even start to truly understand. Given what we know today, attempting to build an explanation around any one single factor would result in crass over-simplification. It leaves too many other things out of account. Also, such a monocausal explanation might lead to an exoneration of the perpetrators, relieving them of their responsibility by declaring them sick. No upbringing, however cruel, is a license for murder. But blaming the whole thing on a defective genetic blueprint is just as unsatisfactory. Why should there have been so many people born 30 or 40 years before the Holocaust in Germany with such a fateful genetic disposition? I do not know of any gene researcher who would have tried to answer this question.

My references to the systematic humiliation of children around the turn of the century and the torture small infants were exposed to (tragically never recognized as such by the parents) seem to me, however, to be an important element within the complex concatenation of causes. Unfortunately it has yet to be given the attention it deserves. The reasons for this neglect are probably closely connected with the general taboo that has been imposed on the subject of childhood. But for quite hard-headed pragmatic reasons, notably a concern for the future, it is important to break with this taboo and venture onto this largely unexplored territory.

The total neglect or trivialization of the childhood factor operative in the context of violence and the way it evolves in early infancy sometimes leads to explanations that are not only unconvincing and abortive but actively deflect attention away from the genuine roots of violence. The abstract term "anti-Semitism" contains an infinite number of meanings and frequently only serves to blur the complicated psychological processes involved, processes that need to be identified and called by name. Only in this way can we hope to change anything.

In my view, a close comparison of parenting methods today and in the past can bring about such a change. It can open up new vistas and encourage the formation of new and healthier structures in raising children. Many new enlightening books on parent-child relations are instances of concrete help for parents in incorporating the information at our disposal into the practice of childrearing. Parents who are able to integrate this new information are likely to find it easier to respect, encourage, understand and love their

children and to learn from them.

But working toward a better, more aware future cannot be done in isolation from the ongoing attempt to understand our history in all its facets, for us as individuals and as society. The work started by Lloyd deMause and continued by him and other psychohistorians is to my knowledge the first systematic research in this direction. The history of childrearing might be more illuminating than many others in illustrating the dangers for society at large attendant on willful ignorance about child development. The ongoing research on babies from birth to three might be helpful for eventually overcoming this ignorance. It may enable some historians to raise more frequently the question raised for the first time by Lloyd deMause: what does it feel like to be an abused infant, without any enlightened witness? Unfortunately, the early childhood of people who recently mercilessly killed in Rwanda has not yet become an issue for psychological or sociological investigation. But should empathic psychohistorians once become interested in finding out and describing the atmosphere of the first years of the killer's life, they could probably be able to explain some of the events that still seem inexplicable.

1. Miller quotes Hitler's philosophy of child rearing. Do you agree with her that this philosophy is a form of child abuse? Give reasons for your answer.
2. How does Alice Miller explain that Dr. Mengele who conducted some of the most terrible "medical experiments" on Jewish children could live a so-called normal life after the war? (Mengele escaped to South America and was never captured; he died in a drowning accident off the coast of Brazil)
3. What did Benjamin Wilkomirski observe in the concentration camp regarding the female guards? How does Miller explain the cruelty of the female guards?
4. What is Miller's definition of hatred? Do you agree with her?
5. How does she explain the noble, self-sacrificing actions of rescuers—people who put their own lives in danger to save Jews during the Holocaust?
6. How would you describe your own upbringing?

Josef Mengele was the sadistic Nazi doctor at Auschwitz who conducted so-called scientific experiments on Jewish prisoners, especially on young twins. Read the following account of Mengele's parents; pay particular attention to the description of his mother. You will discover information confirming Alice Miller's theory on child raising practices in Germany.

# Josef Mengele: The Angel of Death

## The Mengeles of Gunzburg

Josef Mengele was the eldest of three sons born to Karl and Walburga Mengele in the Bavarian village of Gunzburg. Karl was a local industrialist who owned a plant that manufactured farming equipment. He was known as a stern but fair employer and a hard worker. It was his wife Walburga, however, whom his employees feared the most. An immense woman with a terrible temper, she was often known to storm onto the floor of her husband's factory and publicly chastise individual employees for laziness and poor workmanship. Warnings were hurriedly passed down the production line whenever Walburga was seen approaching the factory, and workers scrambled to stay clear of her wrath.

Walburga ruled her home with an equal amount of firmness, demanding respect and obedience from her three sons, Josef, Alois, and Karl, Jr. A devout Catholic, Walburga saw to it that her boys strictly practiced the faith of the Church. She was equally as cold and demanding in her relationship with her husband, Karl. One afternoon, Karl arrived home in a new automobile he had purchased in order to celebrate the growing success of his factory. However, instead of thrilling and impressing his wife with this purchase, Karl was greeted with spiteful admonishments for having so foolishly spent money on something as frivolous as a car without first consulting with her. It was a moment that exemplified the extent to which Walburga sought total control over her household and the lives of those who lived in it.

It is clear from his memoirs that his mother's behavior and the relationship she shared with Karl left a lasting impression on young Josef. He describes his father as a cold man, distant and preoccupied with his work at the factory. Walburga is described as someone incapable of loving. While she may have indeed been able to mold a disciplined, respectful son in Josef, her cold-hearted methods may well have contributed to her son's capacity for murder and bloodlust as an SS doctor at Auschwitz.

Despite the lack of love and affection in his home, young Josef is remembered as a bright, cheerful boy in Gunzburg. Peers and adults alike greeted him as "Beppo," an affectionate nickname for the handsome, engaging young child. While never the top student in his classes, Josef nevertheless did well, and was recognized as a bright, ambitious student. He was the model of a well-behaved student, earning verbal compliments from his otherwise strict teachers, and high marks for conduct and punctuality.



**Josef as a young man**  
(Corbis)

As Beppo matured into adolescence, he continued to refine his social skills, becoming a strikingly handsome young man. Mengele is remembered as someone who exuded a natural self-confidence, a charming and articulate speaker who was much sought after by the village's young women. His perfectly-styled dark hair, the carefree light in his eyes, and his winsome smile, combined with his extraordinary social graces, imbued Mengele with a Kennedyesque charisma. It was at this early age that Mengele acquired the habit of dressing exclusively in hand-tailored clothing and sporting what would become his trademark, white cotton dress gloves, gloves that have been used by Auschwitz survivors to distinguish him from other SS doctors.

It was during this period that Josef and his ambition came into direct conflict with the wishes of his father, Karl. Josef's father wished for his eldest son to work for the family factory in Gunzburg, perhaps as an accountant. However, young Josef dreamt of a career far beyond the confining realm of business, and far beyond the boundaries of his provincial Bavarian home. Throughout his youth Josef dreamt of leaving Gunzburg and pursuing a career in science and anthropology. Making no secret of the scope of his ambitions, Josef once prophetically boasted to a friend that his name would one day appear in the encyclopedia. In 1930 Josef graduated from the Gunzburg *gymnasium*, or high school, and passed his *Abitur*, the preliminary college entry examination. While his score was unremarkable, it was good enough for him to be accepted to the University of Munich. Munich is the Capital of Bavaria, and at the time was the heart of the growing National Socialist movement, and led by a political revolutionary named Adolf Hitler.