

Race Science and Nazi Germany: Its Influence on Hitler's Ideology and Euthanasia Program

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Introduction:

“When we study the human species as distributed in space and time on the surface of the globe...we find differences everywhere and at all times... The question now arises as to the significance of these differences between individuals and groups.”¹

Since the 18th century, scientists, anthropologists, and intellectuals have speculated and researched about the significance of racial differences throughout the world. In fact, “it was primarily natural scientists who, in the age of the Enlightenment, attempted to explain the many faces of the human genus by means of scientific categories and to separate them from religious dogma.”² By the beginning of the 20th century, many discriminatory theories had been established concerning the significance of racial differences. Furthermore, these theories were generally accepted as scientific fact throughout the majority of the western medical world. Such theories branded certain groups as inferior and others superior. The ‘inferior’ groups were described as being innately mentally and physically challenged while the ‘superior’ races were believed to possess a higher intelligence and stronger physical capabilities simply due to their outward appearance and anatomical evidence.

As one can imagine, given the advances made in contemporary science to debunk such racist claims, the evidence that was cited to defend these theories was ambiguous at best. Perhaps the most popular evidence scientists cited to support these claims was the measurement of the skull. Indeed, the field of phrenology, defined to be the study of the shape and protuberances of the skull based on the belief that they reveal character and mental capacity, was incredibly popular during this time period. According to the German scientist Eugen Fischer, “no part of the human body has been more exhaustively

¹ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 113

² Marten, *International Journal of the History of Sport: Racism, Social Darwinism, Anti-Semitism and Aryan Supremacy*, Antony Rowe Ltd. 1999, vol 16, II, pg. 25

studied by anthropologists than the skull.”³ What anthropologists had initially noted was that, in general, “the skulls of every race manifest a large number of plainly recognizable characters peculiar to that race.”⁴ Then, using this observation, anthropologists and scientists in this field concluded which races were more inferior due to how “narrow” and “squat” their skulls were because they more closely resembled those of primates.⁵ These skull measurements, scientists believed, clearly indicated a lack of human intelligence and physical capability found in other races which had “upright” skulls with more “strongly developed chins.”⁶ While skull measuring to determine racial inferiority or superiority has been exposed as illegitimate science in the contemporary world, what is important to note here is that these theories on race did exist and were, for the most part, accepted by the scientific community during the early 20th century. Furthermore, the existence of these racial theories served as a foundation for a more radical race science to evolve during the early decades of the 1900’s, and it is this radical form that serves as the main focus of this paper. Specifically, this paper will attempt to determine the extent to which radical race science influenced the ideology and euthanasia policy of Hitler’s Nazi Germany.

There was a clear and distinct starting point at which the radical race science movement was born. This starting point occurred at the end of the 19th century when scientists and intellectual theorists conjectured the racial theory of Social Darwinism. This well-known theory argues that there exists a strong “correlation between positive cultural progress and inherited biological cleanliness of a race ‘chosen’ to be the social

³ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 114

⁴ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 117

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

elite.”⁷ The important word to note here is ‘biological.’ What differentiated the previously mentioned anatomical race science from the more extreme strain was this newfound importance placed on the biological nature of race. The more radical race scientists attempted to determine whether or not the theory of Social Darwinism was corroborated or refuted by scientific evidence by analyzing the specific biological characteristics inherent to each race. Furthermore, their findings proved to be so popular and emotionally potent that they affected governmental decision making and ideological propaganda of this time period for many different countries in the western world.

Perhaps the western nation that was more affected than any other, and most intensely committed to researching this extreme race science, was Germany. In the early 1930s, Ian Kershaw noted that “the supremacy of the nation over the individual, the stress on order and authority, opposition to internationalism and equality, became increasingly pronounced features of German national feeling” and “with them grew demands for ‘racial consciousness.’”⁸ Furthermore, after Hitler had come to power, “Germany differed from other countries” in the sense that “license was provided from the highest leadership in the land to every agency of control and power to look for radical solutions to ‘cleanse’ society.”⁹ Indeed, “in contrast to England and the United States, Social Darwinism in Germany...became virulent in a racial-anthropological dimension.”¹⁰ Clearly, this proposes the logical question: Why was this extreme race science more attractive to Germany as opposed to other western nations?

⁷ Marten, *International Journal of the History of Sport: Racism, Social Darwinism, Anti-Semitism and Aryan Supremacy*, Antony Rowe Ltd. 1999, vol 16, II, pg. 30

⁸ Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris*, W.W. Norton and Company 1998, pg. 78

⁹ Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945 Nemesis*, W.W. Norton and Company 2000, pg. 234

¹⁰ Marten, *International Journal of the History of Sport: Racism, Social Darwinism, Anti-Semitism and Aryan Supremacy*, Antony Rowe Ltd. 1999, vol 16, II, pg. 33

In answering this question, one should first compare the cultural climate in Germany to other western countries. In fact, contrary to the Anglo-Saxon countries where Social Darwinism “was understood as the survival of the fittest *individual*,” in Germany it “meant the survival of the fittest race.”¹¹ In addition, what distinguished Germany from other nations, in regards to emphasis placed on race science, is the fact that these types of endeavors were “state-financed, and organized centrally and autocratically.”¹² Thus, this radical race science was not limited to the private sector, but was extensively researched, studied, and even financed by the public sector. This high degree of involvement from the German government in these racial matters suggests that Germans would already be more racially minded than other western nations and corroborates the hypothesis that Germany was more amenable to this newly modified form of race science. Since the period in which Germany acted upon its racial intuitions most aggressively was during the Nazi period, the most effective analysis of just how much race science affected Germany should be focused on this political period, with specific emphasis placed on studying Hitler’s ideology and the social and scientific developments of the euthanasia program enacted during the Third Reich.

A thorough analysis begins with an analysis of the conclusions and findings of this radical race science, a study of these relations to the tenets of National Socialist ideology, and finally examples of the affects, if any, on the Nazi’s euthanasia policy during the pre-war and WWII periods. In order to comprehend this new radical form of race science one must evaluate and analyze the work of Eugen Fischer, the leading race scientist in Germany during the 1920’s and 1930’s. The findings of Eugen Fischer serve

¹¹ Krüger, *International Journal of the History of Sport: Breeding, Rearing and Preparing the Aryan Body: Creating Supermen the Nazi Way*, Antony Rowe Ltd. 1999, vol 16, II, pg. 42

¹² Prüll, *Science in the Third Reich: Pathology and Politics in the Metropolis, 1900-1945: London, Berlin and the Third Reich*, Berg 2001, vol XII, pg.164

as a microcosm of German radical race science as a whole since he was the foremost expert on the subject. From these, one can then evaluate just how influential radical race science was on Nazi ideology during this period as well as how it influenced Hitler's actual execution of his euthanasia and racial hygiene programs. An analysis of Hitler's speeches and *Mein Kampf* as well as other historical records concerning the euthanasia program will shed light upon the extent of the impact of these theories on German society and illustrate just how large a role radical race science actually played in determining German eugenic policy and ideology.

Eugen Fischer and Race Science:

In order to understand how influential race science was in the formulation of Hitler's National Socialist ideology, one must first take a look at the findings of Eugen Fischer, the leading race scientist in the 1920's and 30's in Germany. Not only was Fischer Hitler's leading medical expert in the Third Reich, but many of his younger pupils had infamous roles in carrying out Hitler's T-4 euthanasia program and racial medical experiments on prisoners in the concentration camps. The most notable example is Dr. Fritz Lenz, the "first professor for race hygiene in Germany," and a key player "in the attempt to legalize the killing of handicapped people."¹³ Thus, Fischer's findings and conclusions on the subject of race science are incredibly valuable and significant since his views and beliefs were not only supported by himself, but also by his students who were key players in Nazi Germany's euthanasia program.

¹³ Kühl, *Science in the Third Reich: The Relationship between Eugenics and the so-called 'Euthanasia Action' in Nazi Germany*, Oxford. 2001, pg. 186

Of all of Fischer's works, perhaps the most important for the means of this discussion is his essay originally published in 1927 on the eve of Hitler's rise to power, entitled *Racial Differences in Mankind*. This hundred page scientific paper appears in a larger volume entitled *Human Heredity* and contains the work of other German scientists, such as Fischer's apprentice Lenz, dealing with the question of which racial characteristics are hereditarily determined. More specifically, in Fischer's work, he presents a detailed discussion concerning the physical differences of human beings based on race and then attempts to explain the significance of these differences through a rationale based on racial biology and hereditary factors. Fischer stresses the importance of studying racial differences from a biological standpoint in his section entitled *Preliminary Considerations*. He points out that "hitherto systematic anthropology has regarded such racial distinctions almost exclusively from the anatomical standpoint" but "the characters in question must also be regarded biologically."¹⁴ The difference between a biological analysis of racial differences and an anatomical one is that a biological study defines racial differences to be innate to the individual on a cellular level and places more emphasis on the importance of one's blood whereas an anatomical study is more concerned with the racial differences in the physical structure of the body and its organs. Despite his emphasis on biology Fischer does not completely exclude anatomical research from the discussion. He strongly believes that "biological knowledge as well as anatomical must provide the foundation for racial hygiene."¹⁵ However, his emphasis is definitely on the biological and hereditary nature of racial characteristics. He stresses that "observation of shapes and sizes does not suffice" as a comprehensive racial study,

¹⁴ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 113

¹⁵ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 113

and it is imperative to “know which among these outwardly recognizable characters are hereditarily transmissible.”¹⁶ Therefore, the value of this book rests solely with the fact that Fischer stresses the biological aspect as the more important of the two factors for determining the significance of racial differences. This newfound emphasis placed on the biological nature of differentiation in racial characteristics marks the radical change from the old race science into the more extreme field.

Fischer stresses the importance of the biological distinctions between races throughout this entire work. At one point in the text he comments that, “every classification based, not only upon physical characters, but upon such matters as language, is radically unsound.”¹⁷ Here, he makes a clear point that any exterior characteristic of a race, such as physicality or language, is not sufficient to prove a racial difference. In fact, it “has already been shown” that “language and nationality can change without any corresponding change in the race.”¹⁸ The example Fischer cites deals with former slaves in America. He bluntly states that “the Negroes of the United States have lost all memory of their Bantu language and have adopted English as their mother tongue, but racially they remain Negroes none the less.”¹⁹ Thus, it is clear that this new radical race science takes racial differences to a deeper level. No longer does physical appearance and outwardly ‘superficial’ characteristics determine race, now race is biologically determined. By stressing the importance of considering racial differences through a biological lens, Fischer creates a foundation for racial hygiene. Since racial hygiene is crucial to understanding Hitler’s National Socialist ideology and its

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 185

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

catastrophic consequences, there is great significance in the theoretical tenets of this newfound radical race science.

Since racial distinctions are now determined by biological factors, then the way in which each race passes on these biological characteristics from generation to generation is through heredity. Thus, in addition to this newly placed emphasis on biology as the determining factor in one's race, Fischer and his colleagues also stress the importance of hereditary as maintaining the biological racial structure of various peoples. That is, if a person is conceived from two members of an inferior race, than that person will be a member of that inferior race because their biological makeup is predetermined by hereditary factors. Even if this offspring has a complete change of environment and physically and intellectually adapts accordingly, they will always remain racially inferior due to their hereditarily predetermined biological makeup.

The way in which Fischer attempts to prove the claim that biological racial characteristics are predetermined by hereditary factors and therefore unavoidable is by first proving a lemma to it. This lemma states that, "as man developed, almost simultaneously, or at any rate at an early stage of his development, a separation into varieties occurred" and "the formation of species is at the same time the formation of races."²⁰ He proves this lemma by arguing that a process of extreme selection occurred during the Ice Age which separated man into distinct biological groupings, while at the same time separating animals into different species. Any life form that was unable to adapt became extinct and the ones who survived evolved into different biological species, and in the case of man different races, due to their surrounding environment. One

²⁰ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 171

problem with this argument is that Fischer assumes that during the Ice Age environment did affect the biological race of man, which he so zealously denies for contemporary man. Therefore, his entire argument is faulty because it relies upon a contradictory assumption. Nevertheless, it is not the purpose of this paper to investigate the veracity and logical soundness of Fischer's claims. What is important, however, is the significance of this assumption. The fact that Fischer assumes that "the formation of species is at the same time the formation of races" implies that all men should not be considered as members of the same species. Instead, only the different *races* of man should be considered when trying to delineate and separate the different types of life forms on Earth. According to Fischer, "there is no such generalized being as 'man'; there are only men and women belonging to particular races or racial crossings."²¹ Furthermore, since these races were distinct from the very beginning, then all future offspring will carry the same biological racial characteristics as the original members of each race. Therefore, not only should each race be viewed as an entirely separate grouping of man, but all important racial characteristics are determined by heredity, proving Fischer's original claim.

Since Fischer believes race is clearly the most accurate and best way to categorize man, the question arises as to what are some of the inherent characteristics of different races? An anthropologist of the 19th century would definitely answer that skull measurements are the most telling feature. However, under this new biological rubric, an anatomical feature such as the size and shape of the skull proves to be insufficient in determining the true racial characteristics of an individual. Fischer deals with this

²¹ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 209

question by analyzing only the characteristics that he had proven to be biologically inherent to each race. These characteristics were labeled “idiotypical,” in contrast to “paratypical” which are characteristics affected by outside influences such as the environment, and were precisely defined as the “only ones which can be hereditarily distinguished from others and classified as peculiar to genealogically associated groups.”²² It is these characteristics alone that show “beyond the possibility of dispute that plainly inheritable differences exist among human beings which enable us to divide them into the groups termed races.”²³ For example, even the peculiar patterns on the skin are determined by hereditary factors. Fischer notes that “in many parts of the surface of the skin we find folds and wrinkles, and in some parts much deeper furrows.”²⁴ To prove that these papillary ridges, folds and wrinkles in the skin, are caused by hereditary factors, Fischer cites evidence that “once the ridges have appeared in early intra-uterine life, there is no subsequent change in their number and arrangement.”²⁵ Thus, these wrinkles and folds in the skin have to be the result of hereditary biological factors since they are not affected by their surrounding environment. Therefore, “speaking generally, these characters are determined by inheritance, so that the flexion-folds of the skin are hereditarily transmissible” and thus, by Fischer’s previous proof which concluded that race is determined by heredity, these “particular kinds of patterns, of spirals, arches, etc., form a racial character.”²⁶

²² Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 165

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 148

²⁵ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 150

²⁶ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 148-149

Another example of an idiotypical characteristic, that is less visible and, yet, more racially significant from Fischer's standpoint, is the weight of the brain. Fischer discovered that "the average weight of the brain is considerably greater in Europeans, Chinese, and Japanese, than in Negroes and Australian Blackfellows."²⁷ This fact on its own seems to be worthless in helping draw a worthwhile distinction between the different races because what importance is the size of one's brain? However, Fischer immediately follows this statement by claiming that, "within any one race, we find on the average (despite a number of individual exceptions) that persons with high intellectual capacities have heavier brains than the average of their national stock."²⁸ Therefore, these two statements taken together clearly imply that 'Negroes' are intellectually inferior to Europeans, Chinese, and Japanese due to their physically smaller brains. Thus, "there can be no doubt whatever that mental aptitudes and capacities are inheritable" and brain size does indeed imply the extent of one's intellectual capabilities.²⁹

It should be noted that based on Fischer's scientific theory many discriminatory claims can be made concerning the physical and mental capabilities of other races. However, the claims mentioned above deal only with the biological and hereditary differences of 'pure' races, and beg the question: what effect does racial mixing have on these aforementioned biological and hereditary characteristics? Furthermore, it should be noted that since the question of racial mixing is a crucial concept that is ubiquitous in the ideology of Nazi Germany, a discussion of Fischer's theory on the matter is definitely relevant. Therefore, an in depth look into Fischer's theory on mixed races is necessary.

The first observation Fischer makes concerning the mixture of races is that "it is proved

²⁷ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 130

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

that all the races of man can interbreed, and that the hybrid offspring remain fertile.”³⁰

The fact that Fischer even makes this comment suggests that he had doubts before he conducted his research and study on the matter that different races could not interbreed. Also, he most likely believed that even if they could successfully mate, their offspring might not be capable of reproduction. While this may seem completely ludicrous, it is significant in the sense that it was completely logical to Fischer since he firmly believes that different races of man are just as distinct as different species of animals. Once Fischer concedes that it is in fact possible and, biologically speaking, natural for two humans from different races to interbreed, he then researches the effect of this interbreeding.

Most notable and surprising of his conclusions is the denial of a popular belief concerning racial mixing during this time period. Fischer refutes the theory that if a person belonging to an uncivilized, inferior race mated with a civilized, superior racial being, then the inferior racial characteristics would try to ‘break through’ and corrupt the superior racial characteristics. In fact, he clearly states that “the assumption that when certain so-called savage races (here people think also of the Negroes) are crossed with the so-called civilized races, the savage type will always tend to ‘break through’ in the mixed breeds, is certainly erroneous.”³¹ The significance of this result is that it directly contradicts a tenet of Nazi ideology to view the interracial offspring of a ‘pure’ Aryan German and a Jew to be ‘infested’ by the ‘weaker’ and ‘inferior’ Jewish racial characteristics. In fact, Fischer argues that “there is no such thing as a general

³⁰ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 175

³¹ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 175

predominance of the hereditary characters of one race or another.”³² Fischer believes that this theory came about purely because people have a tendency “to overlook all these instances in which, conversely, only non-Jewish characters are obvious,” because they are so intensely focused on trying to find Jewish racial characteristics in an interracial offspring.³³ He continues on in this vein, pointing out that to be “logical, people ought to talk of a breaking-through of the non-Jewish elements,” just as much as they talk about a breaking through of the Jewish elements.³⁴ His precise investigations discovered that creating interracial offspring with Jews and Aryans showed that the ‘break through’ elements are merely the result of the inferior partner having particularly “dominant characteristics.”³⁵ The fact that Fischer clearly admits that inferior races can have dominant racial characteristics is quite interesting and will be a focal point in the comparison between Hitler’s ideology and these scientific conclusions.

Another surprising conclusion from Fischer is that “disharmony in the mental domain” of an interracial offspring is “brought about by a failure of the hereditary mental equipment of the two (parent) races to adapt themselves properly to each other.”³⁶ Thus, he does not blame the ‘inferior’ race for the mental weakness, but rather describes it as simply a problem with the incompatibility between the two races and distributes the blame equally. However, his remarks upon a case study done in Swedish mental institutions indicate that there is a greater majority of cross-breeds in these asylums. A larger majority of the inmates, in relation to Sweden’s general population, have

³² Ibid.

³³ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 176

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 176

³⁶ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 178

abnormally colored eyes and hair which indicates they are not ‘pure’ Swedes. Since abnormally colored eyes and hair represent weaker and more inferior racial characteristics, this result suggests that interracial breeding in Sweden results in a higher percentage of mental illness. However, instead of jumping to this conclusion, Fischer writes that while this fact “affords a very important indication...of course it does not amount to strict proof.”³⁷ The significance of this example is that it illustrates how Fischer attempted to corroborate all of his claims with what he believed to be scientific proof and hard evidence. Since this example only dealt with a study from one nation, he could not make a generalization concerning the mental capacity of interracial offspring. This demonstrates how Fischer’s sometimes erroneous findings were given such legitimacy; this science was taken very seriously and its findings were considered to be the truth. This legitimacy allowed political figures and ruling governments to make certain ideological claims concerning the racial hygiene of their country with scientific backing. A forthcoming analysis will demonstrate precisely how influential these findings actually were for the creation of National Socialist ideology.

Hitler’s Racial Ideology

In order to determine just how influential race science was in helping to formulate Hitler’s National Socialist ideological tenets, it suffices to analyze various writings and speeches of the dictator to see if there exist any parallels between the science and the ideology. A starting point is Hitler’s first book *Mein Kampf*, formally published in 1927, which was written while he served his prison sentence for attempting a putsch during the mid-1920s. It is important to note that this book was, in fact, published around the same

³⁷ Fischer, *Human Heredity: Section II - Racial Differences in Mankind*, Unwin Brothers Ltd. 1931, pg. 178

time that Fischer's essay was officially published in *Human Heredity*, perhaps suggesting that Fischer's conclusions could not have had influence on Hitler's theories. However, this fact is of little consequence because Fischer had been working on his findings prior to this date and his theories are more representative of the general thought and trends of the time period. Therefore, Hitler was certainly aware of the biological theory behind this race science and it would be impossible to discount its influence on his own ideology.

In the preface of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler sets out to explain the purpose of the book and the importance of its message. He claims to have decided to "set forth...the aims of our movement" and to "draw a picture of its development."³⁸ Instead of simply writing out the aims of his fascist movement in a bullet point format, he makes it clear that he would rather describe them in a more fluid and narrative style because in this way "it will be possible to learn more than from any purely doctrinaire treatise."³⁹ Furthermore, Hitler acknowledges that even though "men are won over less by the written than by the spoken word" and "that every great movement on this earth owes its growth to great orators and not to great writers," he concedes that "for a doctrine to be disseminated uniformly and coherently, its basic elements must be set down for all time."⁴⁰ Thus, the writing found in *Mein Kampf* acts as the most pure theoretical artifact of Hitler's ideology for his National Socialist movement, and an analysis of its contents will speak volumes towards an explanation of the connection between race science and Nazi ideology.

After reading through the appropriate and relevant sections for this discussion, it becomes clear that the salient feature of Hitler's National Socialist ideology was the

³⁸ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, preface

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

incredible amount of emphasis placed on race as *the* determining factor in the health and strength of a nation. The racial purity of a nation was of the utmost importance in Hitler's mind because it equipped that country and its people to better withstand, and perhaps even become victorious in, the world-wide apocalyptic racial struggle that he believed had been continuously raging since the dawn of mankind. He writes that this racial "struggle is always a means for improving a species' health and power of resistance and, therefore, a cause of its higher development."⁴¹ Therefore, since race was the most important facet of human existence, all other aspects of human societies either acted as components in this overarching racial struggle or merely played a backup role. For example, politics was described as "nothing more than the struggle of a people for its existence"⁴² while economics was depicted as "a secondary matter" since "world history teaches us that no people became great through economics" and that decline in a certain people occurs specifically when "its race was disintegrated."⁴³ In fact, race plays such an important role in determining the outcomes of this world-wide continuous struggle that "all occurrences in world history are only the expression of the races' instinct of self-preservation, in the good or bad sense."⁴⁴

Since it is clear that Hitler places an exorbitant amount of importance on race, any parallels that can be drawn between Fischer's biologically centered race science and Nazi ideology would suggest that Hitler's world views and ideological tenets were influenced by these scientific findings. It must be realized, however, that Hitler never directly cites scientific conclusions when making his racial claims. In fact, according to verbal testimony by Hermann Rauschning, a Nazi party member who eventually fled the

⁴¹ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 285

⁴² Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris*, W.W. Norton and Company 1998, pg. 289

⁴³ Hitler, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler April 1922-August 1939*, Oxford University Press 1942, vol I, pg. 42

⁴⁴ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 296

country and became an outspoken opponent of Nazism, Hitler has been quoted as saying “that in the scientific sense there is not such a thing as race.”⁴⁵ Yet in a seemingly contradictory fashion, Hitler is initially very unsatisfied with the lack of scientific rationale present in the blatantly racist anti-Semitic pamphlets that he was exposed to during the early 1920s. In reference to such racist literature, he describes the accusations made in them as “boundless” and comments that the tone was “such that doubts again arose in me, due in part to the dull and amazingly unscientific arguments.”⁴⁶

Furthermore, during Hitler’s Third Reich regime, Lanz von Liebenfels, the author of the anti-Semitic racist publication *Ostara*, is “far from being held up to praise” and was “accused of ‘falsifying racial thought through secret doctrine,’” implying there existed a significant lack of scientific evidence to corroborate his racist claims.⁴⁷ Lastly, the fact that Rauschnig makes this claim that Hitler refutes the idea that race is a science indicates, based on his opinions towards Nazism, that it could be a possible exaggeration or inconsistency. Since Rauschnig dedicated the later part of his life to warning the world of the evils of Nazism, it follows that he might attempt to discredit it in any way possible, such as depicting Hitler as a complete reactionary who refuses to acknowledge or use any scientific background to support his extreme claims. Therefore, whether or not Hitler believes that race is in fact a *full fledged* scientific field is uncertain. What is certain is that he does respect science, including its racial conclusions, to a reasonably high degree since he claims to use a logical and scientific rationale in laying out his own

⁴⁵ Yahil Leni, “The Double Consciousness of the Nazi Mind and Practice” in *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism: German Society and the Persecution of the Jews, 1933-1941*, ed. David Bankier, 36-53. Israel: Berghahn Books, 2000, p. 38.

⁴⁶ Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris*, W.W. Norton and Company 1998, pg. 51

⁴⁷ Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris*, W.W. Norton and Company 1998, pg. 52

thoughts and racial theories. Thus, the analysis of the similarities and differences between Nazi ideology and Fischer's brand of race science is relevant.

The most striking and significant similarity between the two is the fact that Hitler uses biological language when discussing race. Hitler, like Fischer, strongly believes that race is not just determined by anatomical characteristics and physical features, but is due to differences on a biological level. He writes that in addition to the "outward delimitation of the various races" there exists a "uniform character" specific to each different race.⁴⁸ This 'uniform character' must be due to hereditary and biological factors. The first example Hitler gives to corroborate this claim is an analogy with animals. He 'proves' that there exists this uniform character by noting that one "will never find a fox who in his inner attitude might, for example, show humanitarian tendencies toward geese, as similarly there is no cat with a friendly inclination toward mice."⁴⁹ This demonstrates that Hitler viewed distinct races as distinct species, which is significant because it partially mirrors Fischer's initial observations on the subject. Furthermore, Hitler notes on numerous occasions that environment has no real bearing on the innate characteristics of certain races. In fact, he even seems to imply that if a race has a strong enough character, then this character will not only remain unchanged due to its environment, but it will change the environment itself. In one such instance, Hitler states that "the inner nature of peoples is always determining for the manner in which outward influences will be effective... what leads the one to starvation trains the other to hard work," implying that one's living environment will effect one in a certain way, either positively or negatively, purely based on their inherent racial characteristics.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 285

⁴⁹ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 285

⁵⁰ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 289

Thus, Hitler is suggesting that the way in which one will be able to respond to their surrounding environment is due solely to the inherent characteristics of their race.

Another example of how Hitler demonstrates his belief that racial characteristics are biologically inherent and unchangeable occurs when he writes that “the spark of genius exists in the brain of the truly creative man from the hour of his birth.”⁵¹ This statement not only clearly supports the above claim, but also implies that ‘genius’ is a biological characteristic. Hitler says this explicitly in the following sentence which reads that “true genius is always inborn and never cultivated, let alone learned.”⁵² It is important to note, however, that this example only proves that ‘genius,’ as defined by Hitler, is a biological characteristic and not a biologically *racial* characteristic. To see that genius is, in fact, considered to be a racial characteristic it suffices to analyze Hitler’s views on the Aryan race. He claims that “everything we admire on this earth today – science and art, technology and inventions – is only the creative product of a few peoples and originally perhaps of *one* race.”⁵³ That is, all human genius and invention can be attributed to one race strongly suggesting that genius is a racial characteristic. Furthermore, this ‘one race,’ in Hitler’s mind, is the Aryan race. In fact, “all the human culture, all the results of art, science, and technology that we see before us today, are almost exclusively the creative product of the Aryan.”⁵⁴ Indeed, since “everything we admire on this earth today” can be credited to the Aryan race then if they were to perish, “the beauty of this earth will sink into the grave with them.”⁵⁵ Therefore, it is clear that since one race is responsible for all the genius present in the 20th century world, then this

⁵¹ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 293

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 289

⁵⁴ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 290

⁵⁵ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 289

genius is considered to be a biologically racial characteristic. Furthermore, even though Hitler cites no evidence to corroborate this claim and, unlike Fischer makes no attempt to use scientific evidence to support his findings, the fact remains that Hitler's use of biological language when discussing race implies that he shares Fischer's and the racial scientist community's view that racial characteristics are determined on a biological level.

In contrast to human genius, which was considered to be biologically inherent to the Aryan race, the innate biological characteristics of the Jewish race were considered to be of the complete opposite type. Firstly, it is important to note that Hitler considered Jews to be a distinct race and not just a religious denomination. He devotes much time and energy in attempting to reason this fact with convoluted logic and an ambiguous rationale. He calls "the opinion that" the Jews are "not a people but a 'religious community,'" the "first great lie" of the Jews, of which there are many more.⁵⁶ He continues in this vein, stating bluntly, "the Jew has always been a people with definitely racial characteristics and never a religion."⁵⁷ The rationale Hitler gives to support this absurd claim (since Judaism has clearly been a religion for the previous two thousand years and was one of the most ancient religions still practiced in the 20th century western world) is that Jews have always remained the same despite the fact that they live in the Diaspora. He notes that no other people "in the last two thousand years has been exposed to so slight changes of inner disposition, character, etc., as the Jewish people" and that this implies that Jews are a separate race because they have "gone through greater

⁵⁶ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 305

⁵⁷ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 306

upheavals” than any other group of people and yet, have emerged “from the mightiest catastrophes of mankind unchanged.”⁵⁸

Hitler even makes specific mention that Jews are a race in his public speeches. In one such speech, he asks the question to those people who “hold that the Jews are not a race,” whether or not there is “a second people anywhere in the wide world which is so determined to maintain its race?”⁵⁹ Of course this was meant to be a rhetorical question, since Hitler firmly believes the Jewish people are a race because their inner biologically founded characteristics have remained unchanged despite varying outward influences. Nevertheless, the fact that he comments specifically on the racial nature of Jews in both *Mein Kampf* and in his public speeches, and believes that one’s inner nature is due entirely to the biological makeup of one’s race, clearly demonstrates that, for Hitler, Jews have a unique racial constitution.

Furthermore, the way in which Hitler describes the ‘Jewish race’ utilizes biological similes and metaphors, suggesting a connection between the dictator’s ideology and Fischer’s scientific research. In perhaps the most lurid and shocking example, Hitler directly refers to Jewish people as “eternal bloodsuckers.”⁶⁰ The fact that he uses the word ‘bloodsucker’ implies that Jews possess a leach-like quality since their purpose is to extract and biologically alter the blood and purity of race of others. Also, Jews are described as “only and always” being “a *parasite* in the body of other peoples,” and Jewish immigration to various different countries “is a typical phenomenon for all parasites; he always seeks a new feeding ground for his race.”⁶¹ The key word to notice here is ‘parasite.’ The fact that the Jews are considered to be parasites attributes a

⁵⁸ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 300

⁵⁹ Hitler, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler April 1922-August 1939*, Oxford University Press 1942, vol I, pg. 59

⁶⁰ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 310

⁶¹ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 305

negative biological nature to their race. Furthermore, the claim here is that the Jewish race cannot exist independently of other races because they are incapable of doing so. Hitler continues with this parasite theme when he writes that the Jews are “the typical parasite” and “a sponger,” “who like a noxious bacillus keeps spreading as soon as a favorable medium invites him.”⁶² More key biological words to note here is the term ‘bacillus,’ and the descriptive verb ‘spreading.’ Bacillus is defined to be a certain type of bacteria, and the fact that this bacteria is spreading clearly demonstrates the biological and even an insidious nature of the Jewish race. In a speech given on May 1st, 1923, Hitler publicly states that the Jew “is the demon of the disintegration of peoples” and “the symbol of the unceasing destruction of their life.”⁶³ While this is not a direct biological metaphor, the phrase ‘unceasing destruction’ is exactly what a parasite’s function is, implying an indirect biological reference. Another instance occurs when he describes the Jews as “cankers of economic life,” commenting that it is always the fundamental “disregard of the racial needs of our own people or failure to see a foreign racial menace.”⁶⁴ Thus, not only are Jews considered ‘cankers,’ a clear biological reference, but Hitler also blames the German people for not recognizing this cankerous menace.

In fact, Hitler comments on the specifics of what being a parasitic race entails for the host nation throughout the relevant section in *Mein Kampf*. He explains that “in order to carry on his existence as a parasite on other peoples, he is forced to deny his inner nature” so much so, that “the host people will end by seriously believing that the Jew is really a Frenchman or an Englishman, a German or an Italian, though of a special religious faith.”⁶⁵ We can recall that this view of the Jews as a religious group was

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Hitler, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler April 1922-August 1939*, Oxford University Press 1942, vol I, pg. 68

⁶⁴ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 328

⁶⁵ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 305-306

deemed by Hitler to be their first great lie, and thus the parasitic biological nature of the Jewish race is so strong that it convinces the minds of other peoples of the veracity of this lie. Furthermore, there are more negative consequences for the country which houses the parasitic race and continues to believe the first greatest lie. In fact, “on this first and greatest lie, that the Jews are not a race but a religion, more and more lies are based in necessary consequence.”⁶⁶ One such lie is “in regard to the language of the Jew.”⁶⁷ Hitler claims that even though the Jewish people might speak the language of the nation they reside in, they still “think Jewish...and while he turns out German verses, in his life he only expresses the nature of his nationality.”⁶⁸ By ‘nature of his nationality,’ Hitler is referring to the Jewish racial characteristics since he often interchanges the word nationality with race. In fact, this word interchange was a very common practice during this time period since race and nationality were considered by many world leaders and intellectuals to be synonymous. Hitler also propagates this anti-Jewish message in his public speeches. In a speech delivered on April 20th, 1923, he orated that “the Jew can never become a German” because in order to do so he “must surrender the Jew in him,” a feat that, according to biological racial theory, would be impossible.⁶⁹ Therefore, it is clear that the Jewish people were not only considered a race, but also that their characteristics and significance as ‘guests’ in other countries were described in negative biological terms.

Another way in which Hitler utilizes biological language to describe a racial group occurs when he discusses the racial makeup of the nation-state. In one speech he makes the specific reference that “the State, however, is not an economic organization, it

⁶⁶ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 306

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Hitler, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler April 1922-August 1939*, Oxford University Press 1942, vol I, pg. 59

is a 'volkic' organism."⁷⁰ Thus, every nation is an 'organism' based on the culture of its inhabitants. Furthermore, since it has already been mentioned that the culture and characteristics of a people are determined solely by their biological racial makeup, this suggests that all aspects of a national organism are determined by race. To make such a national organism strong and biologically superior to other nations, Hitler believes that one must rid that organism of all foreign peoples or "cankers."⁷¹ This will strengthen the national organism since "it is fundamentally the disregard of the racial needs of our own people...to see a foreign racial menace" and not act accordingly which weakens a nation-state.⁷² In this way, the German national organism will not only be capable of "halting the decline of the German people," but will be able to successfully create "the granite foundation" for a biologically and racially strong "national organism: *A Germanic State of the German Nation*."⁷³ From these passages it is clear that Hitler applies biological language to describe a nation state, using key words like 'organism' to denote a nation and 'cankers' to depict negative foreign influences, demonstrating just how pervasive biological racial ideas were throughout National Socialist ideology.

However, there exist other aspects of Nazi ideology that do not mirror Fischer's scientific findings and conclusions. The most prominent and significant aspect concerns racial mixing, of which there exists a major difference in opinion between the two men. It has been previously mentioned that Fischer rejected the commonly held notion that if two different races were to mate, that the offspring would somehow be racially weakened by the inferior of the two. Yet, despite the existence of scientific evidence and observation to help support Fischer's claims, Hitler vehemently disagrees with him on

⁷⁰ Hitler, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler April 1922-August 1939*, Oxford University Press 1942, vol I, pg. 85

⁷¹ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 328

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 329

this point. Ironically enough, the basis for Hitler's argument that racial mixing is not only hazardous for the racial makeup of the offspring, but also unnatural, is mirrored completely by Fischer's work. We recall that Fischer claimed that all races were differentiated from the beginning. That is, at the dawn of human existence, all different races were formed and separated as if they were different species. Hitler places much importance on this initial species differentiation, calling it "one of the most patent principles of Nature's rule."⁷⁴ However, instead of attempting to corroborate his racial mixing claims with scientific evidence like Fischer, he immediately jumps to the conclusion that since races and species have been distinct from the outset, their reproductive habits concerning intermixing must be the same. Furthermore, even though Fischer initially had reservations concerning the possibility of different races to successfully breed, because he too equated them to different species, he was able to disprove this notion by conducting research. However, Hitler never attempts these types of scientific studies and seems to ignore Fischer's in this instance, thus demonstrating an inconsistency between Nazi ideology and race science. Hitler notes that "even the most superficial observation shows that Nature's restricted form of propagation" exists and since "every animal mates only with a member of the same species...the titmouse seeks the titmouse, the finch the finch" then it follows logically that it is unnatural for different races to reproduce.⁷⁵ Furthermore, Mother Nature herself is explicitly against it. Indeed, "no more than Nature desires the mating of weaker with stronger individuals, even less does she desire the blending of a higher with a lower race."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 284

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 286

Thus, not only does Hitler think that interracial mixing is unnatural, but he also believes that, if it were to occur, it would have devastating consequences for the superior race. In fact, “any crossing of two beings not at exactly the same level produces a medium between the level of the two parents” such that “the offspring will probably stand higher than the racially lower parent, but not as high as the higher one.”⁷⁷ What is the significance of this racial dilution? The significance is that if Mother Nature allowed this to happen, “her whole work of higher breeding, over perhaps hundreds of thousands of years, might be ruined with one blow.”⁷⁸ The implication of this passage is that even *one* occurrence of interracial mixing could prove to have the most catastrophic and disastrous consequence of ruining the superior race’s racial purity. Hitler claims that “historical experience offers countless proofs” of this fact, showing “with terrifying clarity that in every mingling of Aryan blood with that of lower peoples the result was the end of the cultured people.”⁷⁹ He then proceeds to give an historical example of this phenomenon. He compares the racial status in North America, where the Germanic elements “mixed but little with the lower colored peoples,” to the corresponding racial status in South America where the “predominantly Latin immigrants often mixed with the aborigines on a large scale.”⁸⁰ The observation Hitler makes is that “the Germanic inhabitant of the American continent, who has remained racially pure and unmixed rose to be master of the continent,” whereas the Latin did not, therefore ‘proving’ by example that racial mixing has disastrous consequences for the strength of the superior race.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 284

⁷⁸ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 286

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Hitler then takes this notion of catastrophic consequences resulting from racial mixing to another more historically minded level when he notes that “blood mixture and the resultant drop in the racial level is the sole cause of the dying out of old cultures.”⁸² In fact, “all great cultures of the past perished only because the originally creative race died out from blood poisoning.”⁸³ Thus, there exist severe consequences for this racial mixing such that once a superior race has been infected with this ‘blood poisoning’ it will only be a matter of time before their entire culture and racially motivated accomplishments will disappear off the face of the earth. To summarize, “the result of racial crossing is therefore in brief always the following;” firstly, there is an extreme case of “lowering the level of the higher race” and secondly, there exists a “physical and intellectual regression,” which marks “the beginning of a slowly but surely progressing sickness” that will eventually destroy the once superior race.⁸⁴ This apocalyptic attitude toward racial mixing stands in stark contrast to Fischer’s views on the subject since, in reference to interracial mixing between Jews and Aryans, he commented that people only believed that the inferior Jewish characteristics were poisoning the Aryan blood pool because they overlooked the instances where non-Jewish characteristics were more prevalent. Fischer believed that since people are so intensely focused on trying to find Jewish racial characteristics in interracial offspring and because their minds were clouded by a certain degree of anti-Semitism, then many would agree with statements like Hitler’s.

Therefore, it is clear that there existed both similarities and differences between Nazi ideology and Fischer’s race science. Since Fischer was instrumental in creating the foundation for racial hygiene and certain key aspects of Hitler’s ideology mirror Fischer’s

⁸² Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 296

⁸³ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 289

⁸⁴ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Houghton Mifflin Company 1943, pg. 286

findings, it follows that Hitler's radical theories could be more easily digested and accepted by the German public since there existed a legitimate scientific field that corroborated them. Furthermore, even though there did exist differences between the science and the ideology, the fact that both Fischer and his students were highly involved in the governmental structure of the Third Reich suggests that these differences were increasingly ignored as Hitler continued to gain more power. This helps to demonstrate how Hitler was able to be so terribly successful in executing his racial plans with such a radical platform. In the final section, an analysis of Hitler's euthanasia program will determine how influential a role race science played in the creation and execution of this program and what responsibility these scientific studies had in aiding the mass murder of the 'undesirables.'

Race Science and the Euthanasia Program

There is no doubt that the incredible loss of life as a result of both the euthanasia program and the wartime execution of Jews and other 'undesirables' would not have happened without Hitler's rise to power. However, certain key components of Nazi ideology were influenced by the existence and the conclusions of race science symbolized by the findings of the well-respected and leading German scientist Eugen Fischer. Therefore, the natural question arises: How significant were these scientific conclusions in the creation of the euthanasia program and obtaining support for it from both the medical community and the public? This is an incredibly detailed question, yet, even a brief explanation is extraordinarily relevant. Furthermore, the ensuing discussion

will serve as a more tangible and physical barometer of how influential race science was in the Nazi state.

First, was there support from the scientific community for such a euthanasia program? According to the historian Ian Kershaw, in order “to serve their own organizational vested interests, those agencies most directly involved,” including the “medical and health bureaucracy” and “legal authorities,” “did not hesitate to exploit the general remit of the Nazi state’s philosophy to lead the drive to rid society of ‘racial undesirables.’”⁸⁵ Indeed, amongst the scientific community during the mid 1930s “sterilization and eugenics programmes gained in attraction.”⁸⁶ Also, when the official euthanasia plan was finalized in 1938, “a sizeable number of doctors were summoned to a meeting in the Reich Chancellery to seek their views on such a programme” and “they were overwhelmingly in favour and ready to cooperate.”⁸⁷ Thus, it is clear that throughout the 1930s there existed support for this euthanasia action from the scientific community. However, this support was not limited to the scientific and medical fields. Many lawyers and legislators publicly gave their support as well. In fact, some bureaucratically prominent German citizens did not even consider euthanasia to be a state or moral crime. A specific example of this occurs in 1933 when the Prussian Minister of Justice, Hanns Kerrl “did not classify voluntary euthanasia, certified by two doctors, as a criminal offence.”⁸⁸ Rather, he stated that the German government has the prerogative to legally “order the elimination from life of incurably mentally sick by official organs.”⁸⁹ Thus, early on in the Third Reich, one only needed the certification from two doctors to

⁸⁵ Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945 Nemesis*, W.W. Norton and Company 2000, pg. 234

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945 Nemesis*, W.W. Norton and Company 2000, pg. 260

⁸⁸ Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945 Nemesis*, W.W. Norton and Company 2000, pg. 256

⁸⁹ Ibid.

kill a mentally ill patient. Since it has already been noted that many doctors exploited Nazi ideology to rid society of these ‘undesirables,’ this suggests that it would not have been very difficult to get two doctors certification. Further, it demonstrates that, by the mid 1930s, a foundation had been laid amongst the medical and scientific community for the creation of a formal euthanasia program to be enacted in the near future.

The influence of race science on the eugenics program in Nazi Germany continued to grow throughout the decade. By the latter half of the 1930s, many “health and welfare authorities” were becoming increasingly “dominated by Nazi ‘euthanasia’ enthusiasts.”⁹⁰ Since a majority of doctors and scientists did consent to help run this machinery of death, it demonstrates just how solidified the opinions of the scientific community had become towards this project of racial cleansing. Incredibly significant is the fact that “the attitudes of influential eugenicists like...Eugen Fischer...towards the mass killing” was positive since he “saw the necessity not only for an economic... mobilization, but especially for a biological one.”⁹¹ Thus, Eugen Fischer consented to aid Hitler in his project of mass killing and this illustrates a personal commitment and connection between Fischer and the euthanasia program. Yet, it is important to note that in contrast to this immense support from the scientific community given to Hitler, “doctors had, however, overwhelmingly rejected euthanasia during the Weimar era.”⁹² Therefore, it was not until the 1930s that “radical suggestions for reducing the cost of institutionalized support of the mentally ill gained ground.”⁹³ The fact that this solidarity

⁹⁰ Burleigh, *Contemporary European History: Between Enthusiasm, Compliance and Protest: The Churches, Eugenics and the Nazi ‘Euthanasia’ Programme*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, vol 3 part III November 1994, pg. 257

⁹¹ Prüll, *Science in the Third Reich: Pathology and Politics in the Metropolis, 1900-1945: London, Berlin and the Third Reich*, Berg 2001, vol XII, pg. 203-204

⁹² Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945 Nemesis*, W.W. Norton and Company 2000, pg. 255

⁹³ Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945 Nemesis*, W.W. Norton and Company 2000, pg. 255

amongst the medical and scientific community did not exist during the Weimar government implies that Nazi ideology, partially based on race science, was crucial in this conversion. Therefore, it is now clear that during the 1930s there was a substantial amount of support from the scientific community for a eugenics program and, more significantly, that race science fully supported the euthanasia program as demonstrated by both Fischer's personal support and, more indirectly, its influence on Nazi ideology.

However, it should be noted that due to the immoral aspects of eugenics, such a euthanasia program could not be kept completely secret from the German public. Therefore, the consent of the German people was also a necessary precondition to the creation and success of such a morally questionable program. While it is impossible to determine with a high degree of accuracy the thoughts of the entire German population towards euthanasia, one can get a general sense of public opinion by analyzing certain studies done during this time. Only one such study will be analyzed here. The study in question was conducted by the director of the Katharinenhof asylum at Grosshennersdorf in Saxony, Ewald Meltzer. Meltzer was not a proponent of euthanasia by any standard. In fact, he was one of the outspoken advocates against euthanasia and "hotly disputed the claim that people with mental handicaps had lost the last vestiges of human personality," strongly believing that "many social problems could be resolved by a greater sense of community."⁹⁴ In order to denounce euthanasia, he distributed a formal survey to the parents of his asylum patients. The following is the first question on the survey: "Would you agree to the painless curtailment of the life of your child if experts had established that it was suffering from incurable idiocy?"⁹⁵ In addition to the responses to his poll

⁹⁴ Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: 'Euthanasia' in Germany 1900-1945*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pg. 21-22

⁹⁵ Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: 'Euthanasia' in Germany 1900-1945*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pg. 22

being “virtually unrelated to political affiliation,” they were also quite shocking.⁹⁶ What he found was that, of the 162 people who responded to the survey, 73% said yes to question one and 27% said no.⁹⁷ These numbers are incredibly significant when one considers that it was the *parents* of these children that were condoning euthanasia. If such a high percentage of parents condone it, then it follows that all other Germans who do not have children in an asylum, and have almost no emotional attachment to the patient, would be even more likely to condone the ‘mercy killing.’ Therefore, the significance of this study is that, at least in Saxony, there *existed* a significant number of Germans who were not opposed to euthanasia and would be willing to support the Nazis in their eugenic endeavors.

Yet, there were some components of German society, most notably the Catholic Church, which continued to protest the creation of such a program. In order to silence the voice of these protesting Germans, Hitler waited to implement the euthanasia program during World War II instead of during peace-time. He correctly believed that the war would serve as a legitimate distraction for those dissenting elements of the population, since it is generally true that any situation where killing is involved is more easily manageable during a time of war. Indeed, Hitler has been quoted as saying that “such a problem could be more smoothly and easily carried out in war.”⁹⁸ Hitler instinctively believed that if he executed his euthanasia program during a time of war, then the predicted resistance “from the Churches, would then have less of an impact than in peacetime,” and this would allow the program to run more smoothly and be more

⁹⁶ Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: ‘Euthanasia’ in Germany 1900-1945*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pg. 23

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945 Nemesis*, W.W. Norton and Company 2000, pg. 256

efficient.⁹⁹ Thus, Hitler had the full support of the scientific community and most of the public since he was able to sufficiently quell the dissenters by enacting the program during wartime. Furthermore, there existed an intimate relationship between the German government and race science, implying that the support given from race science was significant and did indeed play a considerable role in the creation of the euthanasia program.

Both the scientific and medical fields in Germany were viewed in high regard as important areas of study and, in most instances, were fully supported with funding from the state. For example, even the more radical scientific fields such as the Aryan physics movement were “strongly promoted by the state.”¹⁰⁰ Interestingly enough, this Aryan physics movement was “led by two former Nobel Prize winners, Philipp Lenard and Johannes Stark” and its basic philosophy “denounced Einstein’s theory of relativity as a Jewish intrigue and rejected modern physics as a whole.”¹⁰¹ The significance of this movement, besides the fact that two Nobel Prize winning scientists actually refuted Einstein’s well-renowned theory due to their anti-Semitic tendencies, was that it demonstrated that any scientific field that was congruent with Nazi ideology could and would be supported by the German government, no matter how radical. This clearly illustrates that there existed a close relationship between science and the German government. Therefore, since Fischer was regarded as one of the most respected and famous of the German race scientists, and it has already been shown that Nazi ideology mirrors certain key aspects of his research, it is clear that his findings and conclusions

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Szöllösi-Janze, *German Historical Perspectives – Science in the Third Reich: National Socialism and the Sciences – Reflections, Conclusions and Historical Perspectives*, Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King’s Lynn 2001, vol. XII, pg. 6

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

were supported by the German government. This suggests that Fischer and the scientific theories he represented should be held partially responsible for the creation and execution of Hitler's euthanasia program.

Conclusion:

For Hitler and the National Socialists, the significance of racial differences between individuals and groups, the question that Eugen Fischer had attempted to answer scientifically in *Racial Differences in Mankind*, was of the utmost importance. It was central to the ideology of the party and ultimately led to the planned and systematic murder of millions of innocent civilians. Hitler imposed a racist slant on all aspects of the world. Every type of struggle in life, big or small, was seen to be a test of the strength of your race and any weakness was seen to be a product of racial delinquency. For Hitler, the superior races were in a state of constant jeopardy from the possible infiltration of inferior races into their bloodstream and the only way for the superior race to ensure its longevity was to eradicate the disease, i.e. rid the world of the inferior races by any means necessary. Since Hitler's ideas were definitely radical and came from the far right of the political spectrum, it is surprising that, while he did not cite any specific scientific evidence to corroborate his claims, there was a legitimate scientific field of study that at least partially supported them. The fact that this race science existed and was studied by highly respected leaders in the scientific field allows us to better understand the context with which Hitler was able to carry out his catastrophic crimes against humanity. The conclusions of race science were therefore, not only valuable and intriguing from a scientific standpoint, but also incredibly important in understanding the

political developments and the prevalent racial ideology of this time period. It is clear that during this time period, especially in Germany, many people strongly believed that inherent biological differences existed between the races. And, while this by no means exonerates the scientists and various other types of people who aided Hitler in his euthanasia program, it serves as a reminder of what atrocities can be accomplished if one takes racist scientific ideas to their radical conclusions.

Therefore, it may be asserted that race science played an important role in both the formulation of National Socialist doctrine and the creation of Germany's euthanasia program, which officially began in 1939 and continued until the end of the war, and was partially responsible for the deaths of thousands of mentally ill and handicapped persons. Of course, there were other factors at play that should be considered and the conclusions of Fischer's scientific research project cannot be held responsible for all the unnecessary deaths caused by Hitler's Third Reich. Clearly, the most important catalyst for these deaths was Hitler's appointment to chancellor in January 1933. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that an understanding of the existence and findings of this specific scientific field, geared solely toward determining the significance of the differences between races, is *fundamental* in achieving a complete and comprehensive understanding of the historical developments which took place in Germany during the first half of the 20th century.

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