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**Gary James Jason**

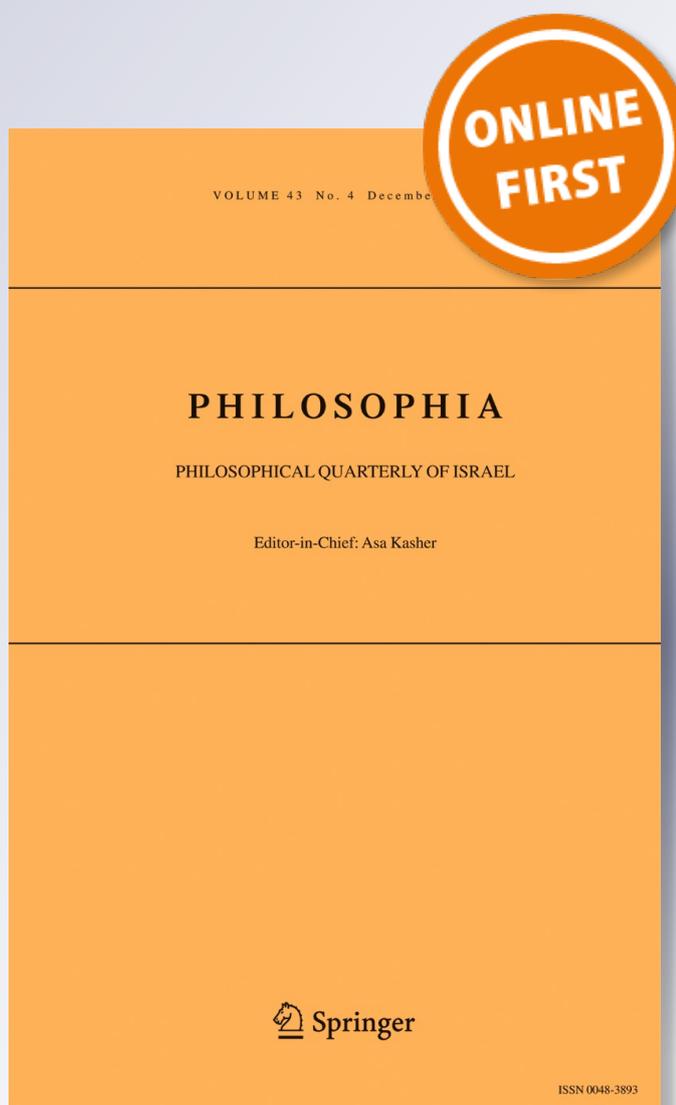
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## Are We All Little Eichmanns?

*The Killing Compartments: The Mentality of Mass Murder*

**Author:** Abram de Swann New Haven, CT: Yale University  
Press, 2015, 332 pp

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**Abstract** In this review essay, I review in detail Abram de Swann's fine new book, *The Killing Compartments*. The book is a theoretical analysis of the varieties and causes of genocides and other mass asymmetrical killing campaigns. I then suggest several criticisms of his analysis.

**Keywords** Genocide · Mass murder · Situationism · Milgram · Arendt · Democide

As the number of people who experienced the Nazi regime and WWII directly diminishes rapidly, there is renewed interest in the regime's crimes and other cases of mass annihilation. There is now a masterful contribution to this renewed inquiry. Abram de Swann, emeritus professor of social science at the University of Amsterdam, has written a highly original and richly insightful book on genocide, a topic rarely analyzed theoretically as a general phenomenon. It is a fascinating work, indeed.

De Swann begins by pointing out just how widespread the phenomenon is. In the 20th century alone, he estimates that organized mass murders of civilians killed roughly 100 million people, or about four times as many people as died in wars (by which he means "direct military combat"). The paradigm case of these genocides is the Holocaust—the extermination of 6 million Jews by the Nazis—but he explores numerous other cases as well, from King Leopold's extermination campaign against the Congolese early in the century to the Hutu slaughter of the Tutsis in the latter part of it. And by "mass killing" he means not small group killing, or even (as in the case of the

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9/11 terrorist attacks upon New York's World Trade Center) the killing of several thousands, but killing "...from many thousands to tens of millions" (p. 87).

The author notes that these mass murders are carried out by numerous individuals—anywhere from thousands to hundreds of thousands of perpetrators—in every case. These killers (whom he terms "genocidaires") are unlike ordinary murderers, in that the genocidaires work together, and with the knowledge, support and under the direction of the authorities; moreover, they do so in a context of social support. He also makes clear throughout the work that the genocidaires don't kill out of normal motives (jealousy, anger, revenge, or in an act of theft), but kill essentially strangers, whom they typically humiliate, torment, torture, rape, and murder up close.

De Swann observes that these mass killings have another distinctive feature. Unlike regular warfare, in which the combat is typically more or less symmetric (i.e., the participants on both sides have similar weaponry), genocidal campaigns are always radically asymmetric (e.g., while the concentration camp guards have the guns and grenades, the inmates have nothing).

De Swann concedes that these two sorts of mass violence (viz., war and genocide) are not conceptually exhaustive. For example, a third form of mass violence is the bombardment of civilian centers (as done by all sides in WWII). Yet a fourth form of mass violence is murder by withholding of assistance, i.e., the decision to allow mass starvation of civilian populations (such as the British refusal to aid the Irish during the 1840s famine). De Swann's focus, however, is on mass asymmetric killings at close range.

De Swann gives a detailed analysis of cases of asymmetrical mass annihilation in chapter 7. He distinguishes four "modes" or types of mass annihilation.

The first is "conqueror's frenzy," which is the mass killing often committed by soldiers who conquer and occupy the enemy's territory. A victorious army, usually brutalized and vengeful, faces a defenseless population. These soldiers very often proceed to rape, kill, and plunder. De Swann reviews historically a number of conquerors' frenzies. He includes imperialist mass annihilations, such as: the decimation of the American Indians by the Spanish Conquistadores; the savaging of the Congolese by the Belgium army (on behalf of King Leopold II); the extermination of the Herero tribe (in Southwest Africa) by German troops on behalf of the German settlers who had taken over Herrero land—later, many of those troops went became Nazi officials; the slaughter committed by the Russian Imperial army during WWI; and the Rape of Nanking by the Japanese Imperial army in WWII. De Swann also includes in the concept of "conquerors' frenzy" what he terms 'settlers' massacres,' that is, cases in which civilians from a better-armed nation move into lands occupied by worse-armed natives and proceed to kill the indigenous people *en masse*. He includes here the immigrant wars against native peoples in Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, and the United States. Another category comprised under conquerors' frenzies is the various massacres in the Mexican revolution. He also includes as conquerors' frenzy the Nazi Einsatzgruppen killings of Soviet Jews in the initial invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 (about which more below).

The second mode of asymmetric mass killing is "rule by terror," in which an established regime uses "death squads" with members from the military, paramilitary, and police agencies to intimidate and exterminate perceived potential enemies of the regime. Here De Swann includes the "classicides," which are cases of the extermination

of the economic middle classes—e.g., the “bourgeoisie” and the “kulaks”) carried out by both Stalin’s Soviet Union and Mao Zedong’s Communist China. As he rightly observes, these mass killings lasted longer than the Nazi ones—mainly because the Nazi Reich didn’t last as long as those communist regimes did. He includes here the Great Famine inflicted by Stalin on Ukraine to force collectivization, and Mao’s similar famine induced by the Great Leap Forward. (De Swann tells us that Mao and his associates studied closely all of Stalin’s policies, so must have known that famine would follow China’s forced collectivization as well). He also includes here the slave labor camp system both regimes ran for decades. He also includes a mass killing campaign unique to Mao’s China, namely, the Cultural Revolution. And in addition to the Soviet Union and Communist China, he also discusses in detail the terror killings in North Korea throughout its existence, as well as Indonesia in 1965, and the mass killings of native peoples by the Guatemalan government.

The third mode of asymmetric mass murder is what De Swann calls “losers’ triumph,” in which a regime, facing defeat in a war against an external foe, wages a war of extermination against an internal minority. As he points out, this is to say the least counterintuitive: why would a regime facing imminent defeat divert scarce resources to annihilate an internal group? Here he suggests that it is a psychological motive, one of “turning passive into active”—focus on the fight against the internal group, so that at least one of the regime’s core goals can be met.<sup>1</sup> As examples of the form of mass killings, he cites: the Turkish genocide of the Armenians as the Turks were losing WWI; the Nazi regime’s furious implementation of the genocide of the Jews from 1942 on; Pakistan’s mass killing of the Bangladeshis in the early 1970s; the Khmer Rouge and their mass murders in Cambodia in the second half of the decade of the 1970s; the Serbian slaughter of the Bosnians (and others) following the final collapse of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s; as well as the Hutu genocide of the Tutsis in the latter half of the decade of the 1990s..

The fourth mode of asymmetrical mass annihilation De Swann terms “mega-pogroms,” in which the central state is less of the dominant actor, instead, local leaders (politicians, clerics, or gangsters) as the major players. Mega-pogroms are synchronized local riots targeted against a specific group. He includes among these: the mass ethnic cleansing of ethnic Germans by the Poles and Czechoslovaks after WWII; along with the communal massacres that occurred during the partition of India and Pakistan after the liberation of the subcontinent in 1947. Here he makes an astute point that while the religious mega-pogroms on the Indian subcontinent were globally symmetric (meaning that continent wide, there were roughly as many Hindu mass attacks on Muslims as vice versa), it was locally asymmetric (meaning that in any specific locale, the religious group attacking was far more numerous than the group victimized). By contrast, the mega-pogroms against ethnic Germans in Central Europe at the end of WWII were both globally and locally asymmetric (p. 189).

Regarding mega-pogroms, De Swann further adds that in the 1980s the received view among social scientists was that these were spontaneous outbreaks of mass

<sup>1</sup> I would counter by suggesting that De Swann here could well employ the theory of cognitive dissonance (developed by psychologist Leon Festinger in the 1950s). Faced with a defeat by an external “inferior foe,” the self-regarded “superior group” rationalizes away the defeat by re-characterizing the fight as really being against the internal “inferior” group, which is working with the external group as traitors.

violence resulting from some kind of temporary madness in the participants rather than the deliberate policy of a government or regime. But modern scholarship, he avers, suggests that there is a great deal of state support of such outbreaks. Typically, the “spontaneous” outbreaks of mass violence are in reality organized by local leaders, to which the police conveniently turn a blind eye, and the state prosecutors almost never hold the perpetrators to account.

De Swann traces (in chapter 2) the origin of the highly emotional divisions between large groups of people to “widening circles of identification and dis-identification” (p. 49). That is, when people engage in mass murder, they obviously target some out-group (or groups), which involves identifying the out-group, and feeling antipathy towards it. “The killers must be ready to rob, torture, rape, or murder those victims, but first of all must be able to identify them” (p. 50).

Moreover, the identification of the in-group and dis-identification of the out-group (i.e., distinguishing or differentiating one’s in-group from the out-group) may well lie dormant for long periods of time with no mass violence directed at the target group; genocides are triggered by the deliberate action of a *state*, in the sense of a government—a “genocidal regime.” This is another of De Swann’s great insights: *genocides are initiated and controlled by genocidal regimes*. And among other things, he observes, this involves the regime using propaganda to get the regime’s people (the in-group) to hate the targeted out-group, and view it as evil. This point is consistent with Goebbels’ view that propaganda is most effective when it confirms pre-existing beliefs, and more modern theories that hold that effective propaganda is thus a kind of exercise in confirmation bias.

De Swann observes that from prehistoric times, humans have naturally identified with their families. And since at least the rise of agriculture, people have identified with their villages (or towns, or local communities). Also, in predominantly agrarian societies, kinship clans could expand into coalitions called “tribes” or “peoples.” In feudal times, people formed a wider sort of identity, “brotherhoods,” such as guilds. The obvious basis for these various forms of identity was individual survival. But it has only been the last few centuries that people have moved beyond the ties of kinship and neighborhood to the much larger circles of identification, such as nation, race, class, ethnic group, and religion. He links this major widening of individual identification with the rise of the industrial economy and widespread urbanization, which brought along with it economic interdependence way beyond that of kinship and village.

Even though these new identities are shared among many individuals who have never met each other, much less interacted, in person, the new identities are not emotionally attenuated. This is because these broader ties carry emotional connotations of primary kinship—as when people speak of the Father-(or Mother-) land, or of being brethren in Christ. This is no surprise, De Swann says, because we derive our identification with the wider circles of association primarily in our family and neighborhood settings (school, local church, local boys’ clubs, and at home), as opposed to large mass meetings or propagandistic entertainment.

De Swann nicely summarizes his point by observing, “Citizens of contemporary nation-states have over centuries learned to share and care in huge networks of identification. By the same token, they have learned to exclude and despise equally vast human conglomerates in complementary networks of disidentification. This sets the stage, not only for the rule of law and the welfare state, but also for rare but catastrophic episodes of mass annihilation” (p. 68).

De Swann says relatively little about the motives of the leaders of genocidal regimes for instigating genocides. He says that, “Although the radical policies of an annihilationist regime rarely follow from a rational, maximizing, informed, and planned project, there are great advantages in store for its leaders...” (p.133). He briefly mentions four such advantages.

First, the targeted out-group is forced to surrender assets (jobs, home, money, land or such like), which the regime can use to fund itself and reward its supporters. (I will suggest shortly that he should have explored this point to its logical conclusion). Second, the humiliation of the targeted group makes the majority of the regime’s supporters feel superior. (De Swann doesn’t elaborate on exactly how this would benefit the regime’s leaders, but I would suggest that it is a powerful tool in distracting the public’s attention from their own unsatisfactory lives). Third, the simplicity of the conspiratorial worldview—which explains evil as being caused by the machinations of the targeted group—is comforting to the regime’s supporters. (Again, he doesn’t elaborate here, but I would suggest that this is a powerful tool for deflecting blame from the regime and its leaders for their failures. Is our 5 year plan not working? Blame the “wreckers.” Has England declared war on us for our invasion of Poland? Blame the Jewish-controlled British media and financial institutions). Fourth, by strongly disidentifying with (i.e., demonizing) the out-group, the regime’s supporters feel more solidarity.

But as De Swann notes, oftentimes the regime’s leaders really do feel that the world would be better off without the targeted out-group in it. I would add here that the regime’s leaders may have multiple motives that work together and even reinforce for engaging in the genocide. There is no doubt that Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, and Eichmann were virulently anti-Semitic long before achieving power. After achieving power, they targeted the Jews because of their convictions (specifically, their race theory), but for those other advantages as well.

De Swann focuses most on the analysis of the psychology of the genocidaires. His analysis is intriguing and perhaps controversial. He notes at the outset that investigating genocidal killers is difficult, because while engaged in their killings, they are generally inaccessible to outside investigations, and—unlike terrorists—they desire to keep what they do hidden from public view. After committing their murders, they have a natural tendency to not discuss their deeds, and when the genocidal regime collapses, the subsequent regime usually does not conduct investigations.

De Swann suggests that there are that there are two simple answers—both widely believed, and both of which he rejects—for the question why people become genocidal perpetrators. The first is that these coldly vicious killers are simply psychopaths, i.e., those people found in every population (in amounts estimated at between 3 and 5 %) who completely lack compassion or even empathy. Who better to serve as genocidaires?

To this suggestion, De Swann has compelling objections. He cites studies of genocidaires that show that among the killers, the incidence of psychopathy is no greater than that for society at large. As he puts it, “No reputable scholars believe that even a sizeable minority of mass murderers were severely disturbed at the outset.” (p. 13) He discusses the study of one battalion of Einsatzgruppen done by Browning and Goldhagen (pp. 220–221) that suggests that the group was initially made up of men recruited from the ordinary German police force, and by the time the battalion was in

action shooting Jews in occupied Poland, the ex-police had been replaced by essentially randomly selected men from the remaining military-eligible adults who had not already been drafted into the military.

Also compelling is De Swann's observation that most genocidaires have no prior history of violence, and after the genocide is over, they typically go on to lead non-violent lives. They are usually normal in terms of levels of violence, family ties, and friendship ties before an after—and often during—their participation in the mass murders.

This is not to say that De Swann is dismissive of the effort to understand the psychological characteristics of the people who engage in mass killings. Quite the contrary: he has much to say, as we will soon see. He simply opposes what one might call “naïve reductionism,” which says that genocidal killers are always simply sociopaths, i.e., that their ability to perpetrate such crimes reduces to a complete lack of empathy.

An issue concerning sociopathy and genocidal personality De Swann doesn't address is the matter of prior criminality. Specifically, it appears that a high percentage of ordinary habitual criminals are sociopaths. Some researchers have estimated that upwards of 35 % of prisoners are sociopaths, and they are responsible for 80–90 % of all crimes.<sup>2</sup> In Nazi Germany, as in most countries, people chosen for military and police service were screened for physical ailments and criminal history. Career criminals were rarely chosen for service. But the SS *did* employ career criminals as “capos” or inmate trustees in charge of the other prisoners in the concentration camps. So even if studies of SS troops show no unusual percentage of sociopathy, it may be the case that there was a higher percentage of sociopathy among the capos than the rest of the population.

The second simple answer to the question why people become genocidal perpetrators De Swann rejects is one he believes is the most widely accepted to this day, a view he calls the “situationist” view. This view holds that the people who engage in mass killings are just normal people caught up in extraordinary situations. This view holds that almost anybody in the same position as the genocidaires will act the same way. He attributes the prevalence of this view (in chapter 2) to the work of two thinkers, philosopher Hannah Arendt and psychologist Stanley Milgram.

Arendt wrote her famous book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, after witnessing Eichmann's trial for war crimes in 1961. De Swann says her book led to the widespread belief that the Nazi genocide was the work of a soulless, bureaucratic apparatus, i.e., simply a machine. She presents Eichmann, De Swann says, as a “pompous idiot” (p. 22), who couldn't speak well or think critically and simply obeyed orders mindlessly. And she dismissed as mere bragging his repeated statements that he regretted nothing except that he didn't kill all 10.3 million Jews in occupied Europe, and “...the fact that I have the death of five million Jews on my conscience gives me extraordinary satisfaction.”

<sup>2</sup> Strent, T. and Hassel, C. V. “Sociopath—A Criminal Enigma,” in the *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, Vol. 6, Issue 2, pp. 135–140, abstract link: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=47546>.

De Swann is dismissive of this view. He rightly points out that Eichmann was a passionate anti-Semite from his youth, joined the Nazi Party early on, rose to nearly the top of the SS, and did indeed organize the logistically challenging task of shipping millions of Jews from all over Europe to the extermination centers. As to Eichmann merely being a follower of orders, De Swann points out that Eichmann exceeded all his orders, and continued sending Jews to their deaths until the very last days of the war, even when Heinrich Himmler had ordered the abandonment of the project. These are not the actions of a mindless order-obeying bureaucrat, but those of a fanatical murderer who fully and with vicious skill pursued a regime policy which he supported to his core.

De Swann here makes a tart observation, “The isolation, deportation, extreme exploitation, and final extermination of millions of people is not banal. Calling it that is frivolous” (p. 23).

Milgram, of course, conducted a legendary psychological experiment in the 1960s that explored the tendency of ordinary people to obey authority. In the experiment,<sup>3</sup> Milgram invited volunteers to his lab (at Yale University). The volunteers were told they would be in an experiment on learning, with another volunteer, and would be randomly selected to be either the “teacher” or the “learner.” In reality, the learner was a ringer—an actor playing the role. The learner was strapped in a chair, and seemingly wired to a machine that could administer shocks. Under the direction of Milgram or his assistant—dressed in a white lab coat—the teacher/volunteer would ask the learner/actor a series of questions, and whenever the learner made an (apparent) mistake, the teacher would be instructed to increase the voltage and administer a shock—whereupon the learner would feign pain in increasing intensity.

To Milgram’s surprise (and that of his colleagues), two-thirds or so of the volunteers would administer the highest shocks, even when the voltage was labelled “dangerous.” Most subjects protested—some even cried—but still complied with the orders of the experiment’s supervisor, giving even the highest voltage shocks to the learner even as the learner screamed or even (apparently) slumped unconscious. But about a third of the volunteers refused to carry out shocks to the highest level.

This experiment has been extensively replicated, with similar results every time. De Swann, however, believes Milgram’s experiment isn’t as dispositive as it commonly believed. He first points out that roughly a third of the participants refused to carry out the instructions—Milgram, “...the star witness for situationism, also supplied the evidence for its partial refutation” (p. 25).

His point is hardly compelling as it stands. For one thing, the fact that upwards of 1/3 of those tested would not go all the way to the seemingly highest voltage doesn’t negate the fact that they did go along much of the way of directing the directions to administer shocks.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, even if we accept that roughly 1/3 of the volunteers refused to inflict what they perceived as harm, 2/3 did, and that numerically is overwhelming. The Holocaust was primarily executed by the SS, which had a membership of approximately 250,000. But Germany at the time had 80 million citizens,

<sup>3</sup> For a good historical discussion of Milgram’s experiment, see chapter 2 of Lauren Slater, *Opening Skinner’s Box: Great Psychology Experiments of the Twentieth Century*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to my colleague Professor Ryan Nichols for making this observation in personal correspondence.

and supposing that roughly half of them were adults that would mean about 13 million Germans likely would have complied with Milgram's directions—more than enough to fill the ranks of the SS fifty times over.

But De Swann's criticism is stronger and subtler than this. Once again, he is arguing against a naïve reductionism that says all or most people are disposed to obey authority, and that by itself explains why genocidaires do what they do. He makes his point plausible by pointing to the details of Milgram's own work, together with the disanalogies between the experimental setting and real-life genocidal settings.

De Swann points out that while Milgram did some brief interviews with his experimental subjects, he didn't really explore why the resisters refused to administer the highest voltage shocks, or why some obeyed but protested or cried, or why some went along with no apparent discomfort. More importantly, De Swann adds that Milgram varied his experiment, and noticed some fascinating points, but didn't raise an obvious question.

Milgram, De Swann reports, varied his experiment by reducing the presentation of authority, such as by having the experiment supervisor not wear a lab coat, or having the experiment take place in an ordinary room (rather than a lab), or having no supervisor present. In those variations, the percentage of refusers increased. And when Milgram varied the experiment by increasing the opportunity for empathy (in the teacher), for example, by putting the teacher in the same room as the learner, or letting the teacher hold the hand of the learner, again the number of refusers increased. De Swann says this suggests strongly that what is going on in these experiments is that the participants typically struggle "...the opposing tendencies of compliance and empathy" (p. 26). De Swann adds that we may well expect that people have personalities that vary on both characteristics independently, producing: high empathy, high obedience personalities (the ones presumably who display the most torment obeying the instructions to administer the highest voltage shocks); low empathy, high obedience personalities (the ones presumably who readily administer what appear to be dangerous shocks without any sign of discomfort); high empathy, low obedience personalities (the ones presumably who refused to continue to obey somewhere along the way); and all manner of degrees in between.

In sum, De Swann suggests, Milgram and those who followed him confused absence of evidence with evidence of absence: "Milgram's finding that there was no evidence for a difference between naysayers and compliers was constructed as evidence for their similarity" (p. 28).

Add to this the very real differences between what the Milgram compliers and the genocidaires faced, and the naïve reduction of the latter to the former is even less tenable. De Swann trenchantly states that no sane person would believe that anybody would be allowed to be electrocuted in a supervised lab in Connecticut—at Yale, no less! The reply that perhaps some of the participants were temporarily convinced that it was real because they cried meets the equally quick reply that people cry at the movies without being convinced that "it's all real." And he adds that any participant who thought it was real and obeyed instructions would also realize that they themselves faced electrocution—for that was the death penalty in Connecticut at the time. De Swann's conclusion was that while the experiment doesn't show that the majority of people would torture and kill if someone told them to, it does show that they can get so carried away by the experimental situation that they play along with it rather than antagonize the authorities who set it up.

De Swann also reviews later psychological work in this vein, such as Philip Zimbardo's "prison experiment," in which student volunteers were randomly assigned "prisoner" or "warden" roles. After a few days, the "prisoners" did indeed start to be more submissive, while the "wardens" started to be more domineering. At a certain point Zimbardo called the experiment off lest it "go too far." Zimbardo drew the most radical situationist conclusion from it, but again De Swann suggests that the experimental results don't fully support that conclusion, though it does underscore another aspect to understanding the mindset of the genocidaires: the role of group conformism or social acceptance in what they do.

De Swann closes with a third approach to a situationist view: the work by Christopher Browning (and following up on the same data set, Daniel Goldhagen). As mentioned earlier, Browning studied a reserve police battalion serving in occupied Poland, whose members were called upon to carry out mass executions. The battalion's initial ranks were filled by German policemen, but eventually they were replaced by German males who were military eligible, but not enlisted in other German forces—meaning that they were too old for battle or SS service, but were otherwise normal men—or perhaps better, normal German men.

These recruits didn't know ahead of time what they would be ordered to do, but participated in murdering thousands of Jews, with some of them exceeding orders and showing and showing deep-seated anti-Semitism. Here De Swann notes a major element in German culture of the time: the virulent anti-Semitism, which while certainly not unique to Germany, was unique in being an explicit cornerstone of the regime's ideology. But here again, De Swann notes, even while the men in the battalion all went along with the mass killing, some did so enthusiastically, others did so only grudgingly under orders, and some tried to avoid participation wherever possible. De Swann does note that men who refused to obey orders faced reprisals, but could have also made an historical point not typically noted by situationists: in fact, at least one of the concentration camps had a special section for former SS guards who didn't kill as ordered or showed sympathy for the prisoners. This suggests that not all were perfectly obedient, even in the SS.

De Swann's view is thus much nuanced. "Situation" (social setting and processes) and "disposition" (personality traits) are in his view not opposites. Rather, dispositions are shaped by social processes and settings, and in turn social processes result from the interaction of people with various personalities. Central to genocidal killings is one particular kind of shared disposition, namely, that ingrained identification with some large groups of human being, and the ingrained disidentification of others (discussed earlier). Moreover, this inclusion of some and exclusion of others ties in with both societal and mental compartmentalization.

This leads to De Swann's own detailed account of the shaping of genocidaires, which he discusses in detail in Chapter 8. His account is very richly layered and detailed, so I will only briefly sketch it out. He suggests that to truly understand what creates genocidal situations and the genocidaires, we need four levels of social scientific analysis: the macro-sociological; the meso-sociological; the micro-sociological; and the psycho-sociological.

At the macro-sociological level, we see that certain social transitions or upheavals stamp most of a society with "collective mentalities," meaning shared memories and dispositions (with considerable variation among the people, of course). The macro-

sociological conditions that produce a genocidal situation include: recent major upheavals (war, revolution, economic crisis, and so on); a rising popular disidentification with a target group; a regime that has gained command over the necessary resources to destroy the target group; that regime forcing the separation and compartmentalization of the target group; that regime waging a propaganda campaign aimed at dehumanizing the target group; and that regime inculcating in the populace the idea that the society is at a unique point in history.

At the meso-sociological level, we see a regime create the institutions needed to support the killing campaign, and use the educational system and media to indoctrinate, i.e., to change people's mindsets and dispositions, to enable the killing. These meso-sociological conditions include: structuring the situation so that people work in unified groups within which the dispositions of obedience and loyalty become of supreme value; and structuring the media so that no opinions or information contrary to the regime's perspective reaches the populace—what you might call epistemic compartmentalization.

At the micro-sociological level, we see how people function in those regime institutions (schools, prisons, camps, and so on). Regarding the functioning of the perpetrators in the killing compartments, De Swann observes: the perpetrators are not told beforehand what exactly they will be doing; their actions in the institution are not spoken of or are spoken of euphemistically; they are led to believe they are doing a difficult but necessary job; they are assured of immunity from prosecution; the perpetrators are rewarded with material goods, promotions, and access to sex; they are encouraged to view the victims as dirty and beneath contempt; and are often given copious amounts of alcohol.

At the psycho-sociological level, we ask about how individual particular personality traits enter into perpetrators' (and non-perpetrators') conduct in the genocidal situation. De Swann here observes that the genocidaires are: almost always young men; usually have a background in the police, military or paramilitary; usually supported the regime early on in their lives; and were immersed in the regime's indoctrination campaign.

As well-reasoned and well-researched De Swann's book is, there are a few issues regarding it that are worth considering.

The first regards his use of the term "genocide" as more or less synonymous with "asymmetric mass killings committed up close" throughout the book. He himself concedes that this is rather inaccurate. The concept of "genocide" has a specific meaning in international law that includes the intent to destroy a "national, ethnic, racial or religious group" (p. 6). But in many of the mass murders he discusses, the focus is on killing members of an economic class or the political enemies of the regime. Certainly, this was the aim of Stalin's and Mao's concentration camp systems. Later in the book, De Swann he employs the neologisms "classicide" and "politicide" for such cases. But he notes that some mass killings are done with the regime's apparent intent being simply to terrorize a population. He then employs Rudolf Rummel's term "democide" to mean broadly any regime-sanctioned mass killing of targeted groups. One wishes that De Swann had used only "democide" for the sorts of mass killing he seeks to analyze. Not only would that have been more semantically consistent, but—as I will explain below—it would enable him to explain more about the etiology of the mass killings.

A second issue concerns his categorization of the paradigm case of genocide, the Holocaust. De Swann admits that even in 1933, the Nazi regime put the SS in charge of the camp system and it moved by 1935 from a system for terrorizing the regime's political opponents to a system where targeted groups were worked to death or (later) killed outright. But he holds that it was only in 1941 when the mass extermination of Jews began, and it started as a conquerors' frenzy with the Einsatzgruppen operating in the east, and then as the regime began to lose in 1942 or so, it used the killing camps to achieve a loser's triumph—we can't win the war, but we can win the genocide.

This analysis seems questionable on numerous grounds. To begin with, the Einsatzgruppen were just as much the province of the SS as were the camps. And, in the decision to exterminate European Jewry—surely decided by 1941, and fully formalized at the Wannsee Conference in 1942—the tally of Jews killed was monitored, with the totals of the Einsatzgruppen and killing camps being combined. This suggests that the SS viewed this early on as one distinct mission: the elimination of the Jews—separate from the other missions it had. The other missions the SS had included: the ruthless suppression of all domestic political dissent, with which it concerned itself throughout the war; the battle against espionage; the internment of POWs captured from the Western Allies; the protection of Hitler and the other high-ranking members of the regime (from which mission it derived its name); and monitoring (indeed, providing a counter-balance to) the military.<sup>5</sup>

This suggests compartmentalization of a sort not mentioned by De Swann. He uses the term to refer to the *physical* separation of the killing sites from the rest of society, and the *psychological* separation in the genocidaires minds of what they do on a daily basis to the regime's targeted groups from the rest of their personal lives. But it is arguable that there is a third sort of compartmentalization: *regime mission* compartmentalization. A genocidal regime usually has several goals or missions which it pursues more or less independently. The Nazis wanted to: recapture lands lost in WWI and get retribution for the Treaty of Versailles, which accounts for much of its actions leading up to and including the conquest of France in 1940; seize much of Eastern Europe to use as “living space,” which is why it first invaded Poland, then (later) the Soviet Union; but also to rid Europe of Jews (as part of its program of keeping its “race” pure), which goal it pursued from the first day it was in power to its last day.

These separate goals are clearly outlined even in *Mein Kampf*. And the attack on the Jews commenced early in 1933 when the regime took over. Two months after it took power, it opened the first concentration camp, Dachau. A month later, it organized a national boycott of Jewish businesses. Later that same year, it stripped resident Polish Jews of their German citizenship, and stripped all Jews of the right to own land. The next year, it kicked Jews out of the German Labor Front. The following year (1935), it prohibited Jews from serving in the military, and passed the infamous Nuremberg Racial Laws. In 1938, the regime stripped all Jews of their wealth. From 1933 to 1939, the focus was on getting the Jews to emigrate. As late as 1939, Eichmann was pushing for the mass resettlement of Europe's Jews to the island of Madagascar. But the rapid conquest of Poland, with the sudden control of 3 million Polish Jews, meant that

<sup>5</sup> In this regard, we need to remember that the SS was *not* part of the regular military, and that it was the military that was primarily tasked with winning the war.

emigration was now out of the question, so the Jews were forced into ghettos, as a holding and isolation measure. Then (probably the next year), the policy changed to the physical liquidation of Jews. The overall policy of eliminating Jews (as a matter of racial purity) was there all along, in a separate compartment of the regimes policy matrix, and it mutated and grew in scope as conditions evolved.

A third issue worth discussing is also brought up by the Nazi concentration camp system. De Swann's division of the "modes" of mass killing—conquerors' frenzy, rule by terror, losers' triumph, and mega-pogroms—seem to leave out a key feature of the Nazi system, viz., its economic side.

The SS, which ran the camp system, extracted enormous wealth from it. Jews would be arrested, and their major assets—businesses, homes, investments—would be seized. Early on (in the period from 1933 to 1941), when Jews were allowed to and even encouraged to emigrate, they had to pay a large exit tax (the "Reich flight tax" or Reichfluchtsteuer) based on everything they owned. Then the system got more brutal. Jews would lose all their assets, and be shipped to a concentration camp, where immediately their clothes, watches and jewelry would be taken by the camp guards and stored for sale. Those healthy enough to work would be put to work as slaves. The major camps often had factories owned by major German companies, which paid the SS for the labor supplied. The inmates were literally worked to death—fed insufficiently, crammed into inadequate housing, and denied reasonable medical care. Upon death—whether they were killed outright or worked to death—the bodies had any gold teeth extracted and melted down, and the women's hair was cut off and sold to companies that used it to make felt for uniforms. After their bodies were cremated, the ashes were sold as fertilizer. From the initial sale of prisoners' assets to the sale of their ashes, the SS reaped many hundreds of millions of Reich marks. This not only directly funded the regime, but by "recycling" housing and consumer goods from the Jews who had been killed to the domestic Germans, factories were freed up to manufacture more military materiel.

Economic historian Andrei Znamenski, who has explored this aspect of Nazism, calls this "socialism at the expense of non-Germans."<sup>6</sup> The Nazis in effect ran the ultimate redistribution program: all the assets of "non-Germans" (as defined by the regime) were seized, down to the gold in their teeth, and used to fund the German state.

Certainly Stalin utilized the Soviet concentration camp system—the Gulag complex—in a similar way. Enemies of the state, or people that might become enemies, including over a million captured German POWs, were forced to work for no compensation for up to 14 h a day, fed barely enough to live, and denied proper medical care. They worked in mines or on massive construction projects, such as the White Sea-Baltic Sea Canal, built by over 100,000 prisoners (using mainly shovels and pickaxes) between 1931 and 1933.<sup>7</sup>

So I would suggest that there may be another mode of mass killing which could be called "redistributionist frenzy," for in truth, that seems to have been a major—or even in some cases *the* major—motive in running work camps in several regimes.

<sup>6</sup> Znamenski, Andrei, "From 'National Socialists' to 'Nazi,'" in *The Independent Review*, v. 19, n. 4, Spring 2015, p. 545.

<sup>7</sup> See the entry "Stalin's Gulag" in the GulagHistory.org website, <http://gulaghistory.org/nps/onlineexhibit/stalin/work.php>.

One last issue concerns the nature of the propaganda and indoctrination a genocide regime uses. *That* a genocidal regime will use propaganda as a tool to condition genocidaires—and, I would add, to condition the rest of the public to support or tolerate the genocidaires—De Swann claims repeatedly throughout the book. He suggests that the central function of this propaganda is to reinforce the identification with the in-group and the disidentification with the out-group, specifically, by demonizing the target group.

But he gives no description of *how* this is done, and by what institutions. What does he encompass by the term “propaganda”? Just print and broadcast media or all means if indoctrination, including school textbooks and youth group handbooks?

Most importantly, does the propaganda always push same message, or are there different messages for the different modes of mass killing? For example, to prepare a populace to support (and some of its members to participate in) a true genocide, targeting a racial or ethnic group, the sort of emotions the regime would push in the disidentification propaganda would be ones of fear, disgust and contempt. But if a regime were conditioning the populace to support a classicide, wouldn't it push the emotions of envy and injustice (victimization) instead? And how, for that matter, did propaganda figure in to a conquerors' frenzy such as the Spanish Conquistadores inflicted upon the Native Americans.?

However, none of the issues I have raised should be taken to mean that De Swann has written anything less than a superb book. It is deeply learned, clear in exposition, and deals with immensely important issues. It should be on the bookshelf of everyone interested in political and social philosophy, the philosophy of social science, as well as critical thinking and the analysis of propaganda.