Elie Wiesel writes with such power and poignancy of the Holocaust that he commands and deserves the most profound respect. Two of his themes have particular meaning for this essay: that the Holocaust, the dominant genocide of the modern era, defies all explanation; and that the drive to kill all European Jews is central to the event, defining its mystery and horror.

In his writings about Claude Lanzmann's monumental documentary, Shoah, and other cinematic treatments of the Holocaust, Wiesel has said that none "could encompass this tragedy comparable to no other. Certainly, in one sense, it is the most documented tragedy in history, but in spite of the testimonies, memoirs and superhuman efforts of survivors, we will never know how Auschwitz and Treblinka were possible—for the killers as well as for the victims" (Wiesel 1985, II, p. 1).

As chairman of the (American) President's Commission on the Holocaust, Wiesel has reported that commission members discussed the special issue of "how to reconcile the especially Jewish victims with the universality of all victims" (Wiesel 1979, p. 39). Members of the commission raised questions about the genocide of gypsies, homosexuals, Slavs, and Armenians, "As if, by speaking of Jews, we were somehow turning our backs on the millions of non-Jews the Nazis slaughtered which, of course, is not the case" (Ibid.). Yet, Wiesel concluded, "The universality of the Holocaust must be realized in its uniqueness. Remove the Jews from the Holocaust, and the Event loses its mystery" (Ibid.).

Four years later, having just seen the film, Sophie's Choice, Wiesel wrote with obvious anger at what he saw was the fading centrality of Jewish victimhood in the tragedy.

The Holocaust has turned out to be the latest attraction; it is "in," as far as show business is concerned. There are docudramas, plays, musicals. Adolf Eichmann? An inoffensive officer with courteous manners. Hitler? Crazy.
The butcher of Rome, Herbert Kapler, is to be pitied: a man with a keen sense of duty, he converts to Catholicism. All of a sudden the emphasis has shifted from victims to their executioners. They are being analyzed, dissected, explained: they are being shown to be "human," sensitive to art and ideas; everything is done to understand them.

As for the victims, they recede into the background in supporting parts only. The Jews, pitiful characters, usually. Eternally afraid, weeping, sentimental, melodramatic; at times, even irritating. "They are not the only ones who suffered," seems to be the general comment about them. Some go even further, saying, "Others suffered more than the Jews." (Wiesel 1983, H, p. 12).

It would seem that Wiesel is justified in his anger and suspicions. Are there not, after all, gentiles—"Christian" gentiles, really—who have published books that purport to prove the fraudulence of the reports of the murder of six million Jews? Perhaps less obvious, but equally outrageous and possibly even more sinister for the Jews, are the occasional but persistent signs of gentile fatigue over the continual memorialization of the Holocaust, as if to resolve the "Jewish problem"—the dilemma posed by the will to survive books that purport to prove the fraudulence of the reports of the murder of "aberration." The Jewish collective memory is rightly conscious of this, especially because there have been Christian tendencies throughout the centuries to resolve the "Jewish problem"—the dilemma posed by the will to survive of a people supposedly made obsolete by the establishment of Christianity. There is ample evidence to show that anti-Semites are the most angered by the remembrance of the Holocaust because it makes Christian hatred of Jews look to be in bad taste.

As a lifetime student of the Arab–Israeli conflict as well as the psychology of Jewish–Gentile relations, and as a Christian, I understand and accept Elie Wiesel's position. I have written elsewhere of the awesome absence of Christian consciousness of their (our) millennial moral debt to the Jewish people, and thus the failure to date of Christians to put an end to Jewish fears that "it can happen again" (Montville 1989). But I have also focused on the psychodynamics of malignant anti-Semitism as being unique and impossible to understand. Yet, the Holocaust is an analyzable and, ultimately, scientifically explicable event in humankind's tragic history. Furthermore, I believe deeply—with moral as well as intellectual conviction—that the most effective defense against it "happening again" is the harsh light of clinical analysis, exposure, and relentless treatment of racial, religious, and ethnic hatred whenever and wherever it occurs.

The goal of this essay is, in effect, to dissect the anatomy of evil and to set out the broad outlines of a system to deter it. The subject is the pathology and prevention of genocide because genocide is the most profound example of evil. As I hope to prove, ultimate evil, if not "inspired" by "normal" minds, has been historically abetted by normal human beings.

II

Hanna Arendt was much maligned because she remarked on the "banality of evil" in her classic account of Adolf Eichmann's career as master worker in Hitler's genocide plan (Arendt 1977). Systematic analysis of individual and small-group psychology on the making of the torturer and professional political murderer has revealed, however, just how susceptible the ordinary human mind is to instruction in the profession of doing personalized violence to helpless victims.

In Sanctions for Evil, psychologists Nevitt Sanford and Craig Comstock characterize the phenomenon with disturbing simplicity:

Most social destructiveness is done by people who feel they have some kind of permission for what they do, even to the point of feeling righteous, and who commonly regard their victims as less than human or otherwise beyond the pale. (Sanford and Comstock 1973, p. ix).

We will be examining the key phenomenon of the dehumanization process throughout this essay, but to underscore the theme of emotional normality in most of the salaried personnel who carried out violence against their human victims, one can cite Robert J. Lifton's (1986) research published in The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide, in which he wrote that, "Nazi doctors in Auschwitz did all kinds of things they never did before and never even imagined before. . . Many Nazi doctors had very strong consciences, but their responsibility was to their group. They experienced guilt only when they violated the group norm" (p. 87).

In his interviews with twenty-eight Nazi physicians and eighty camp survivors, Lifton found that the doctors—and especially the psychiatrists—had accepted the rationalization for ridding Germany and then Europe of the deformed, the diseased, and entire categories of peoples thought to constitute a threat to healthy Aryan society. One of the earliest examples of this phenomenon was a book published in Germany in 1920, written by psychiatrists and entitled The Permission to Destroy Life Unworthy of Life. The Nazi extermination campaign began in earnest in 1938 with the murder of some five thousand sick and deformed children. Thereafter, Lifton reports, six killing centers were established as psychiatric hospitals and nursing homes to put to death some one hundred thousand adult syphilitics, schizophrenics, epileptics, etc. Doctors were in the lead in the extermination process. "Jewishness" came to be rationalized as yet another disease to be eliminated.

In his review of The Nazi Doctors, psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey wrote,

The cast of characters assembled by Lifton is terrifying not because of their evilness but rather because of their lack of it. There is, of course, Josef Mengole, who once killed twins just to settle an argument about diagnosis. . .
Much more common were physicians motivated by altruism, who believed that "National Socialism is nothing but applied biology." (Torrey 1986, pp. 78-79)

Psychologically sensitive political analysts use the word dehumanization to describe discernible mental processes in leaders and groups that are used ultimately to justify the abuse, torture, and killing of other human beings. One of the classic analyses of the dehumanization process was published by three psychiatrists in 1965 (Bernard, Ottenberg, and Redl). Viola W. Bernard and her coauthors described dehumanization as a composite psychological defense made up selectively of other familiar defenses—such as unconscious denial, repression, isolation of affect, depersonalization, and compartmentalization, which is the elimination of meaning by disconnecting related mental elements and walling them off from each other. This latter category would seem to include Lifton's process of "doubling," to describe the Nazi doctors whose consciences appeared to be separated into the half that accepted systematic murder and the other half that enjoyed a quiet evening at home with wife, children, and dog.

Bernard, et al. identify two forms of dehumanization: self-directed and object-(or other) directed. The self-directed version "empties the individual of human emotions and passions" (Sanford and Comstock 1973, p. 105). Object-directed dehumanization can be partial or complete. Partial dehumanization, which is immediately recognizable to the layman, . . . includes the misperceiving of "out-groups," en masse, as subhuman, bad human, or superhuman; as such it is related to the psychodynamics of group prejudice. It protects the individual from the guilt and shame he would otherwise feel from primitive or antisocial attitudes, impulses, and actions that he directs—or allows others to direct—toward those he manages to perceive in these categories: if they are subhumans they have not yet reached full human status on the evolutionary ladder and, therefore, do not merit being treated as humans; if they are bad humans, their maltreatment is justified since their defects in human qualities are their own fault. . . . In its more complete form, object-directed dehumanization entails a perception of other people as nonhumans—as statistics, commodities, or interchangeable pieces in a vast "numbers game." Its predominant emotional tone is that of indifference, in contrast to the (sometimes strong) feelings of partial dehumanization, together with a sense of noninvolvement in the actual or foreseeable vicissitudes of others. (Sanford and Comstock 1973, pp. 105-106)

The authors offer various familiar categories of victims of dehumanization at the hands of white Aryans—blacks, Orientals, and Jews. A more up-to-date example could include the attitudes of some gentiles and Jews toward Arabs. A survey of Jews in New York during the West Bank/Gaza uprising quoted a woman saying, "In the Arab world, if there's someone somebody doesn't like, they knock them off. It's just beyond us to comprehend some of these things. We just come from a different civilization than the Arabs" (Howard Kurtz, Washington Post 24 February 1988, p. A3).

III

More than twenty-five years ago, the late American psychologist, Stanley Milgram, conducted experiments with normal, healthy adults that demonstrated the capacity and willingness of such people to willfully inflict pain on their fellow human beings as long as they were instructed to do so by others who were in authority. The subjects, who believed themselves to be "research assistants," were told by men in white laboratory coats that the experiment was to test the effect of punishment on the learning process. Unknown to the subjects, the victims of what were represented as increasingly strong electric shocks (administered by the subjects) were only pretending to be in pain. While there was an increasing disinclination to inflict the shocks as the "subjects" moved physically closer to the "victims," one third of the former continued to inflict pain even when they were close enough to the victims to touch them. Lest anyone conclude that this early experiment in the training of the torturer was a peculiarly American phenomenon, psychologists in several other countries repeated Milgram's experiment with similar results.

Moving from the experimental to the real world, two psychologists—Janice Gibson, an American, and Mika Haritos-Fatouros, a Greek—reported on their extensive research into the preparation of professional torturers in the Greek military police during the reign of the "Colonels" from 1967-74 (Gibson and Haritos-Fatouros 1986). In so doing they made comparisons with experiments in the development of authoritarian, proto-fascist, small-group psychology in an American high school, at Stanford University, and even in the American college social fraternity system. In each case the surrender of individual will and moral judgment to higher authority and the creation of exclusive "ingroup" bonds were the psychosocial goals of those in authority.

Starting with the Greek Army Police Corps (ESA), the authors reported the results of their analysis of the trial records of twenty-one former soldiers, and they provided in-depth interviews with sixteen of them. Many had served prison sentences for their offenses as torturers under the military regime. They were all consequently leading normal lives. Only one was limited to a primary school education; six were graduates of universities or higher technical institutes. All had been drafted. None had records of disturbed behavior, but they shared certain preselection characteristics.
The most important criterion was that you had to keep your mouth shut. Second, you had to show aggression. Third, you had to be intelligent and strong. Fourth, you had to be "their man," which meant that you would report on the others serving with you, that [the officers] could trust you and that you would follow their orders blindly. (Ibid., p. 52)

Intense loyalty to the group was generated through violent initiation rituals. The recruits' personal sense of integrity was broken down when they themselves were punched, whipped, and insulted. They were subject to exhausting exercises and were refused permission to urinate for long stretches. Ultimately, they were made to swear allegiance on their knees to the commander-in-chief and to a symbol of authority represented by the image of a soldier superimposed on a phoenix rising from its ashes.

While their spirit of individuality was being destroyed through physical abuse, the recruits were told how much they were to be members of an elite group with awesome power. They learned to use euphemisms to describe torture with fists—"a tea party"—or with clubs—"a tea party with toast." As the new men emerged from this process, they began to speak of anyone not of the group, including their relations, as outsiders. There was also a deliberate dehumanization training for the recruits who were told that communists and opponents of the military regime were "worms" who had to be crushed. To overcome normal inhibitions against inflicting violence on helpless victims, ESA manipulated recruit behavior through a combination of special privileges, harassment, and punishment. In the interim the recruits were introduced incrementally to professional torturer status first as passive witnesses, then as apprentices invited by veteran teachers to strike the victims, then as participants in group torture exercises, and finally as full-fledged chief torturers. A former Greek military policeman told the researchers, "Torturing became a job. . . . If the officers ordered you to beat, you beat. If they ordered you to stop, you stopped. You never thought you could do otherwise" (Ibid., p. 58).

Based on their analysis of the experiment involving an American high school history teacher, Gibson and Haritos-Fatouros strengthened their conviction that normal human beings can easily be trained to submit to authoritarian order and become active abusers of human rights. Starting with a class of twenty students, teacher Ronald Jones generated a rally of two hundred people in just five days, by using proto-fascist salutes and slogans like "Strength through Discipline." The authors also reported on another experiment, at Stanford University, in which a group of students who had no special behavior modification to prepare them, assumed and absorbed roles as abusive prison guards who defeated and humiliated prisoners in only six days. Some of the role-playing guards later reported a (subsequently) dismaying pleasure in having power, status, and elite group membership. Others said they had not believed they could behave in such an abusive way. Most interestingly, the student guards, like the Greek torturers and Robert J. Lifton's Nazi doctors, were able to lead normal social lives after a day's work of dehumanizing their victims in the prisons and camps. They all were capable of degrees of "doubling."

Another team of American psychologists—Amado Padilla, of the University of California at Los Angeles, and Lillian Comas-Diaz, of George Washington University in the District of Columbia—have reported on the role of torture and systematic human rights abuse in enhancing the power of Chilean President Agusto Pinochet (Padilla and Comas-Diaz 1986). They wrote, "By mid 1975, just two years into the Pinochet regime, 1 in every 125 adult Chileans had been detained for more than one day. The Chilean Commission on Human Rights . . . reported 2 political killings, 4 kidnappings, 114 arrests, 24 complaints of torture and 22 complaints of cruel or degrading treatment," during the [typical] month of January 1986 (Ibid., p. 62).

The foregoing accounts of the recruitment and training of normal citizens to commit acts of violence against helpless victims as sanctioned by higher authority and of the routine application of government intimidation today in Chile and many other countries are discouraging if familiar. What is important to recognize for the purpose of a preventive, early-warning system against genocide is that these "banal" processes are the first phase of a greater process that can easily degenerate into genocide. Once the social values and political institutions that are supposed to protect human rights are eroded, the pathology of organized aggression can be very difficult to check. The stage is set for externalization of violence through war and, in the extreme cases of Nazi Germany, Stalin's U.S.S.R., and Pol Pot's Cambodia, the aggression can also be directed against internal groups.

IV

Before continuing our discussion of the transition from political systems that indulge in "ordinary" violations of human rights and the use of torture to the more socially complex process of mass killing, it is important to have a working definition of genocide.

The more or less internationally accepted definition of the word genocide can be found in the 1948 United Nations Convention on Genocide: "Genocide means (specified) acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such." But Columbia University researchers John L. P. Thompson and Gail A. Quets (1987) find
the UN concept inadequate and offer a substitute, emphasizing that geno-
cide, regardless of intent, is behavior:

Genocide, [they write] is . . . the destruction of a group by individuals who
are in control of their own agency. This allows for the fact that the peculiar
motives and intentions of actors engaged in it, or the ones that they admit
to or are aware of, range widely. They may include economic exploitation,
gaining political security for one’s own group, seizing state power to con-
struct a new social order, establishing legitimacy in a newly created state,
removing a communist conspiracy, revenge, or whatever. (Thompson and
Quets 1987, p. 7)

The authors put special weight on a condition for genocide: the trans-
formation of the moral order. Such transformation is characterized by
dehumanization of the other—e.g., the use of terms like “vermin” and
“cancer”; implications of international conspiracy; and open approval of
genocidal measures, such as expressions of pleasure when members of the
“other” group are blown up by a bomb. They write:

The proposition that the transformation of the moral order facilitates
escalation in genocidal destruction may . . . apply at very different levels of
severity. A distinctive feature of the Holocaust was the existence of the
genocidal plan and its systematic implementation. Northern Ireland lacks
such a plan and the state-controlled bureaucracy that would implement it.
But just as the transformation of the moral order was a necessary precondi-
tion for the implementation of the plan for the Holocaust, so the killing in
Northern Ireland requires and is facilitated by a similar moral transforma-
tion. (Ibid., p. 28)

I have already described the use of the scientific method to rationalize
an ideology of killing in Nazi Germany. Leo Alexander (1948–49) has
reported the use of a widely used high school text book in applied mathe-
matics to promote the benefits of mass killing: “Pupils were asked to com-
pute how much phosgene would be needed to poison a city of a certain area
and of a specified population, with special attention to the average rate of
breathing in relation to the atmospheric concentration of gas” (Alexander

Lifton (1987) offers a persuasive explanation of the role of ideology in the
facilitation of genocide:

Powerful ideological currents can sweep through societies in ways that make
contact with the always-existing individual potential for fiercely destructive
kinds of behavior—all as part of a vision of higher purpose. In psychological
terms, such ideologies hold out the promise of reintegrating the shattered or
deeply conflicted self—or, in terms I use, of overcoming feelings of disinte-
gration, separation, and stasis, all of which can be understood as death
equivalents. The danse macabre between self and ideology can form a truly
vicious circle: death equivalents create ideological hunger; ideologies of
revitalization take shape; the self is partly relieved of these death equivalents
as it immerses itself in the ideology; but further affiliation with the ideo-
logical project (including its contradictions and possible murderousness) re-
stimulates the death equivalents, especially feelings of threatened disinte-
gration; and the self (unless it has the possibility and inclination to dis-
engage itself from the project) seeks to hold on to its coherence by adapting
to the ideological program and in some cases embracing it all the more
passionately. (Lifton 1987, pp. 52–53)

Lifton’s research in Germany revealed that the promise of revitaliza-
tion in the Nazi program was a major component of its ideology. This went
beyond an immediate sense of new life to an implication, at least symboli-
cally, of immortality in the “Thousand Year Reich.” Mao Tse-tung’s Cultural
Revolution aimed at revolutionary immortality as did the “purifying” doc-
trine of violent revolution enounced by the leadership of Cambodia’s Khmer
Rouge.

In his study of doctors, Lifton found that while the tradition of Christian
anti-Semitism played a heavy role in the ideology of the Nazis at large—
although as we know, Hitler was personally obsessed with a hatred of
Jews—it was combined with elements of other belief systems in a complex
ideology. Less important than implied Jewish responsibility for Christ’s death
was—for Christians as a whole—the issue of which of the rival immortality
systems deserved to survive. “The stubborn persistence of Judaism and
Jews . . . throws into constant question the Christian claim of superseding
Jewish origins with a new immortality dogma” (Ibid., p. 55). Nazi theorists
supplemented the Christian assumption of God-ordained succession to
Judaism—which then, in all decency, should have disappeared—with theories of
“scientific racism,” which provided secular rationalization for eliminating the
Jewish “contaminant” in Aryan society as the quest for revitalization
surged ahead.

V

Among the best known cases of genocide in the twentieth century—the
destruction of kulaks, the starvation of peasants and the later purges in the
Soviet Union, the Nazi Holocaust, and the Cambodian “auto-genocide”—the
principal motivator in each was the destructive rage of a charismatic leader
driven to punish his “enemies.” An essential task in understanding the path-
Lenin, he had to carry out another “October Revolution.” The manipulated crisis was caused by Stalin’s brutal repression of peasants who had been holding back grain from the cities for better prices. Instead of raising prices, Stalin decreed the requisitioning of grain and established a reign of terror. He seized supplies and forcibly transferred the supposedly wealthy kulaks—farmers with property—to the northern provinces and to Siberia. Continuing to resist orders to collectivize, peasants all over the U.S.S.R. willfully destroyed livestock in protest. Famine set in in the countryside as the death struggle continued. The Ukraine was hardest hit, but starvation was spread throughout the U.S.S.R. With the forced transfer of so-called kulak families and the rural starvation, Stalin presided over the death of seven to ten million Soviet citizens between 1931–33. He called this period of ruthless discipline and extermination his “rural October,” the successor to Lenin’s October revolution.

With his idealized image of warrior-savior established in perverse fact, Stalin turned on those in the civilian party and military leadership who had in the past dared to criticize his “perfect” leadership. His objects of hatred (projected self-hatred) spread rapidly to entire categories of perceived enemies in the great terror of 1934–39. By 1939, four to five million people had been arrested and, in contemporary usage, “disappeared.”

While Hitler’s life has not been treated with the sustained dedication Robert Tucker has given to his biography of Stalin, there have been significant attempts at psychological analysis of the making of the greatest leader-directed genocide of all time. One simplistic, and incorrect, version of Hitler’s motivation to destroy European Jewry has been the reported fact that Hitler’s mother, Klara, died of breast cancer in Linz, Austria, while under the care of Dr. Edward Bloch, a Jewish physician: supposedly, Hitler, then eighteen, came to hate Bloch and all Jews. In fact, Hitler admired Bloch and arranged for his emigration to the United States in 1940 to escape the Holocaust.

Surface fact quickly dissolves into psychohistorical analysis, however; and the theory has emerged that Hitler unconsciously and covertly blamed Bloch in helpless, retaliatory fury, as his mother’s poisoner. Apparently at Hitler’s urging, Bloch used a topical antiseptic (“poison”) on Klara after the removal of one breast failed to arrest the spread of the disease. The theory of Hitler’s unconscious targeting has been developed by the historian Rudolph Binion (1973). He contends that eleven years after his mother’s death, Hitler then eighteen, came to hate Bloch and all Jews. In fact, Hitler admired Bloch and arranged for his emigration to the United States in 1940 to escape the Holocaust.

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remove the Jews with poison gas, was normally used to kill bugs and parasites and that Hitler spoke of excising the "Jewish cancer from the German flesh."

(It is worth noting at this point that the Columbia University sociologists, Thompson and Quets, cited above, remark in a footnote to their unpublished paper that the use of cancer metaphors in political rhetoric is implicitly genocidal. This should be kept in mind as the importance of spotting dehumanizing terminology in public and private speech is examined as an early warning indicator.)

The attempt to discover Hitler's unconscious motivations has been undertaken in greater complexity in the work of Helm Stierlin (1976), a psychoanalyst who has headed the Family Studies Section at the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, Maryland. In Dr. Stierlin's treatment, Hitler had developed extraordinary rage, destructiveness, and desire for revenge as a result of unresolved conflicts resulting from painful family relationships. Like Stalin, Hitler's father frequently beat him. The greatest burden may have come from his mother, Klara, however, who bound him to her with intense emotional dependency that enraged him but which he could not acknowledge to himself. His resultant guilt feelings were projected on "suitable objects" outside of himself, and the words he used for Jews—parasites, schemers, profiteers, poisoners, traitors—could, in fact, be attributed to himself. During late adolescence, Hitler was a vagrant in Vienna; he lived on family allowances, and, later, barely supported himself selling hand-painted postcards. He was a "traitor" to his mother for leaving home, and she failed rapidly after he left. It was at his urgings that Dr. Bloch used iodoform, a harsh drug, to arrest his mother's cancer. In Dr. Stierlin's view, Dr. Bloch and, ultimately, the Jews of Europe, were stand-ins for the psychologically destructive struggle between Hitler and his mother.

For the purpose of developing mechanisms with which to discover language and temperament in political leaders that might suggest a potential for genocide, the question of which psychobiographical analysis of the roots of Hitler's evil is correct, is really irrelevant. If nothing else, however, the work to date on men like Stalin and Hitler would seem to suggest that the individual psychology of political leaders is a critical element and clearly deserving of study. When the destructive neurotic needs of a leader enter into symbiosis with the neurotic needs of the led—that is, when political, economic, and social systems are greatly stressed—the potential for regressive and destructive mass behavior grows significantly.

In the case of Pol Pot, there is no information on his family background; nor are there any documents, letters, or interviews with friends or relatives from early childhood. We do have the assessment of David Hawk—an American who is a research fellow at Columbia University and a former participant in a nongovernmental refugee relief organization along the Cambodian–Thai border after the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975. Considered by many to be a ranking authority on the Khmer Rouge era (Puddington 1987), Hawk has characterized Pol Pot, on the basis of limited sources, as megalomaniacal, conceited, chauvinist, xenophobic, and paranoid (Waite 1986). Assessments of Pol Pot include a strong sense of internalization of Cambodian victimhood at the hands of foreigners over the centuries: Hawk reports a statement credibly attributed to Pol Pot that small Cambodia could defeat large Vietnam if each Cambodian killed thirty Vietnamese. The cost would be two million Cambodians, but those who survived would reclaim the parts of Cambodia that Vietnam, the traditional hegemonic power in the region, had absorbed in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. (This writer has interviewed a Cambodian refugee in the United States whose passionate anti-Vietnamese feelings tend to validate the reported intensity of Pol Pot's xenophobia.) Reports of Pol Pot's statements in the early 1950s in Paris, where he was strongly influenced by French Stalinists, reveal an absorbing preoccupation with the racial purification of Cambodia. Hawk supported the view of Pol Pot's paranoia, citing numerous incidents of arrests and executions even of Khmer Rouge cadres who were seen as failing to meet rice production quotas. Pol Pot saw enemies everywhere. One wonders if he is yet another example of an intensely narcissistic leader, who is persuaded of his worthlessness at an unconscious level and is able to project his sense of personal inadequacy on hundreds of Khmer Rouge cadres as well as hundreds of thousands of other Cambodian victims. Since, at this writing, Pol Pot is alive, though in hiding, there may some day be an opportunity to examine him directly. David Hawk has launched a worldwide campaign to bring Pol Pot and his collaborators to trial for genocide (Puddington 1987).

VI

The personality of the genocidal leader—described by Volkan (1988) as "destructive, charismatic, narcissistic”—is critical if such a person comes to power in a highly stressed, political, economic, and social environment (war, postwar devastation, revolution, or depression). It is important, therefore, to develop some sort of model of the systemic stress that generates in a people a regressive psychology, a strong need for a man on horseback, and, thus, a vulnerability to a potentially destructive narcissistic leader.

Professor Richard Stites, a protean student of Soviet history at Georgetown University, described the environment in which Stalin came to power as akin to that of the Thirty Years' War in seventeenth-century Europe, except that it took place in one country (Stites 1986). This period starts with World War I in 1914 and includes the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the Russian Civil War until 1921, a period of political and economic flux during the New
Economic Policy (NEP) of the twenties, the brutal and forced collectivization of the early thirties, the purges of the late thirties, and the onslaught of World War II.

During the civil war and afterwards, a war between the cities and the countryside was taking place in Russia. Bolshevik intellectuals despised the primitiveness of the peasantry. They had a vision of a monumental city, filled with machines and well-dressed, clean, modern workers, hauling Russia into the industrial twentieth century. Party cadres were sent from the cities to the farms to collect food, but the peasants resisted, fiercely. Their idea of revolution was to be left alone to enjoy the land that was newly seized from landlords.

In Moscow, the party oligarchy was the scene of predictable power struggles after Lenin died in 1924. Ten to twenty men jostled for position over a period of five years. The context of the struggle was the NEP, characterized by a double polarization: a state economy run by Bolsheviks—major factories and electric power—in uneasy symbiosis with a private manufacturing sector. Then there was the urban-rural polarity. If Bolshevik power was patchy in the cities, it was almost nonexistent in the countryside, so that scatterings of party cadres had little clout.

The result of this uncertainty in the distribution of authority was a growing anxiety, anger, and fear among urban Party members, students, and even some workers that the revolution was vulnerable to peasant uprisings that could smother it in contemptible backwardness.

In terms of social indicators, the period of the NEP was rife with high-stress indicators. In the cities and towns one found unusually high levels of venereal disease, suicide, promiscuity, moral breakdown, divorce, and social conflict between urban and rural migrant workers. This collection of social and structural conflict was unfocused at the time. Stalin was able to harvest this anxiety and aggression and direct it toward the "suitable object" of the Russian peasantry.

What we see is a convergence of Stalin's determination to continue a political crisis so that he could save the Revolution and thus achieve his idealized self-image as well as the need of urban Bolsheviks to target their hitherto unfocused frustration and aggression. There was, in fact, a destructive symbiosis of the pathological needs of the leader and the led that was generated by an intensely stressed set of political, social, and economic systems.

The situation that brought Hitler to power in postwar Germany was not quite as wrought with tension as the one in the U.S.S.R. There was severe economic distress in Germany, related to the worldwide depression that began in the early 1930s and the ludicrous and crushing inflation of the Weimar Republic. There was also deep and broad political malaise.

Robert Waite notes that when Hitler came to power in 1933, it was not as a savior. It was more by default (Waite 1986). In fact, Hitler never received more than thirty-seven percent of the vote in a free election, but he became chancellor legally, and legality carried great weight with the authority-inclined German public.

Among other political parties, the Communist party of Germany was not a serious contender. It put its energies, under Stalin's direction, toward fighting the majority Socialists. The conservative parties had lost their followings, and the centrist parties, rather than trying to stop Hitler, developed (fatuous) plans to "use" him for their own purposes.

In general, the public had lost faith in democratic politics by 1932, and no government could deal with the economic calamity. In 1932 there were five elections either to the national parliament or for president. The people were tired of voting. Hitler promised to bring order out of chaos and won electoral support from the petit bourgeoisie and from the middle and upper classes. Professionals, academics, bureaucrats, and foreign service officers supported him.

Hitler's political genius was to offer the German people anticommunist nationalism and a form of socialism for the working class. In his call for a Thousand Year Reich he promised a return to Germany's grandeur to a people who felt collectively humiliated by their defeat in World War I and by the terms of the Versailles Treaty. By providing vigorous, animated leadership that "struck back" against the authors of humiliation and that "struck out" against other "enemies," and especially by solving economic problems with huge state investments in a war machine, Hitler had become a savior who won one plebiscite after another. The ultimate systemic stress, under cover of which the genocide campaign began in earnest, came with the commencement of World War II in September 1939.

In Cambodia, political, economic, and social upheaval seems to have been the rule for decades if not centuries. David Hawk (Waite 1986) has pointed out that Cambodia may never have been the gentle society romantic Frenchmen described, for Khmer history and mythology is heavy with violence. The society that built the beautiful monuments at Angkor Wat was blood-thirsty, with torture, beheading, and disembowelling routine occurrences. The killing of entire families, not just the male warrior, was traditional retaliation. There was also a tradition of Khmer warriors eating the livers of their defeated opponents.

The intensity of Khmer chauvinism had been generated by centuries of warring with foreigners: foremost among them were the Vietnamese, but the list of enemies also included the Thai, Chinese, French, and, finally, the Americans. This historical theme of contamination by foreigners was a matter of obsessive concern among Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge colleagues during their student days in Paris in the early 1950s. They used Nazi-like concepts in discussing the need to purify the Khmer race of all foreign attributes.

The "auto-genocide," which had been underway before Pol Pot finally came to power in 1975, was unleashed with full force thereafter. It aimed to purge every reactionary and unpure person in a radical Maoist "great leap
forward" from feudalism to pure communism, bypassing intermediate stages. The instruments of the genocide were young twelve-to-fifteen-year-old boys and girls from the poorest, most culturally backward parts of the country, who were turned into robotic killing machines. Interestingly, they were first softened up for their tasks by being made to torture and kill small, domestic animals—a dehumanization process not unlike that undergone by Greek military police recruits. Furthermore, the Khmer word the Khmer Rouge used to describe doctrinally justified death was the word for the death of an animal. There is another word for the death of a human, which was not used.

VII

Our efforts so far have been geared toward building a case for the hypothesis that genocide results from a combination of factors: political, economic, and social breakdown with resultant group regression under stress; sometimes the pressure of a destructive charismatic, narcissistic, leader; and, often, the existence of an ideology that rationalizes mass killing. If the case that has been made is sound, the next step should be to develop a set of indicators that could serve as an early-warning device in a program of genocide prevention. Since we began with an exploration of the psychology of dehumanization, we will now turn to specifically psychological guidelines.

Bernard, Ottenberg, and Redl (1965) suggest five general characteristics that signal the development of maladaptive dehumanization.

1. Increased emotional distance from other human beings. We stop seeing shared human qualities in others. Attitudes toward others become rigid and stereotyped. Out-groups are considered en bloc; feelings toward them are anesthetized.

2. Diminished sense of personal responsibility for the consequences of one's actions. Recall the Greek military policeman's "Torturing became a job" or Adolf Eichmann's "I was only following orders."

3. Increasing involvement with procedural problems to the detriment of human needs. This is characteristic of large bureaucratic organizations. The state, the corporation, the five-year plan assume an existence and dynamics of their own. The individual becomes a means to a larger end.

4. Inability to oppose dominant group attitudes or pressures. In contemporary society, the growing sense of alienation creates feelings of vulnerability and dependency on one's profession or job. The fear of losing occupational security inhibits speaking out on actions that threaten existential human values. We compromise our integrity. Lifton found an extreme example of group loyalty at the expense of human values among the Nazi doctors.

5. Feelings of personal helplessness and estrangement. This characteristic is evident in sentiments such as "Who am I to question the government?" or "What's the use? No one will listen to me." This phenomenon is particularly useful in identifying the attractiveness of potentially destructive social movements:

The more inwardly frightened, lonely, helpless, and humiliated people become, the greater the susceptibility of many of them to the seductive, prejudiced promises of demagoguery: the award of spurious superiority and privilege achieved by devaluing the full humanness of some other group—racial, religious, ethnic, or political. Furthermore, as an added advantage of the dehumanization "package," self-enhancing acts of discrimination and persecution against such victim groups can be carried out without tormenting or deterrent feelings of guilt since these are absorbed by the "rightness" of the demagogic leader. (Waite 1986, pp. 112-16)

There are many more explicit psychological indicators for a genocide early-warning system that could be suggested. Certainly, where there are grounds for suspicion that a political leader may fit or evolve into the category of destructive charismatic, careful content analysis of public and private statements and documents should be undertaken to determine any sociopathological orientation.

For example, Robert Waite has reported on a document that is available in archives in Munich, in which a person recalls a conversation with Hitler in 1922. According to the source, when the word "Jew" was mentioned, Hitler went into a paroxysm and promised the destruction of the Jewish people. He reportedly said,

As soon as I have power, I shall have gallows after gallows erected. For example, in Munich, in the Marianplatz, the Jews will be hanged one after the other and they will stay hanging until they stink. They will stay hanging as long as hygienically possible, and as soon as they are untied, then the next group will follow and we'll continue until the last Jew in Munich is destroyed. Exactly the same procedure will be followed in other cities until Germany is cleansed, purified of the last Jew. (Montville 1987)

Of course, Hitler was far from power in 1922, and it might not be realistic in retrospect to expect his companion in the conversation to run to a newspaper and reveal what was said. But one could anticipate remedial action in a more informed public environment in which citizens, journalists, scholars, and public servants understand as part of the conventional wisdom that language like that attributed to Hitler is a "red alert" to the potential danger of the politician. Any dehumanizing language about a real or perceived enemy or out-group such as "cancer," "disease," "parasite," or other unhuman or degrad-
ing animal or insect-like references are serious warning bells that ideally should launch editorialists, politicians, nongovernmental organizations, and international civil servants into counterattack.

This essay will not attempt to design a comprehensive structure for a genocide early-warning system, but it will offer some guidelines from efforts that are already under way. The overall purpose of such a structure, which should be global in scope, would be to acquire whatever information is available and necessary to signal the possibility of mass violence anywhere in the world. I propose that the first evidence to qualify would be signs of human rights violations as defined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. One could start by reviewing the annual reports to the U.S. Congress by the Department of State and the reports of the UN Commission on Human Rights. However, there would be a critical role for nongovernmental organizations in this function.

One such organization offers an impressive model and record in this regard. Amnesty International won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977 for its work on behalf of prisoners of conscience and victims of torture. Its principal tool is publicity and the resultant embarrassment of offending regimes either on ethical or practical grounds. AI has what it calls an Urgent Action Network that is made up of volunteers who are on call to send letters and telegrams on behalf of prisoners of conscience within hours of notification. There are about fifty thousand members of the network, and AI reports that forty to forty-five percent of the prisoners are either released or treated better when the network is mobilized on their behalf. The organization also lobbies governments, urging that human rights practices be factored into foreign policy decisions, and it has affiliate relationships with various UN and regional organizations around the world.

There are drawbacks in AI’s operation, however. The method of operation is for AI headquarters, in London, to send missions to countries after receiving documented evidence of human rights abuses of detainees, but only after informing and receiving the permission of the host governments. If admitted to the country, the mission interviews family members, clergy, teachers, military, and current and past members of the government, among others, in its attempt to get the facts about the case. If AI is impeded in conducting its meetings, the mission is terminated. Such a policy reflects the limits on the ability of a nongovernmental organization to deal with sovereign states.

Moving to the level of human rights violations that include potential mass violence and genocide, there are at least two other nonofficial organizations that are actively attempting to save entire peoples and cultures from destruction. Cultural Survival, founded by Harvard University anthropologists in 1972, works to help indigenous people and ethnic minorities survive in the face of private and public economic development schemes. Many of these people are killed resisting the developers. Those who survive are often decimated by diseases against which they have little resistance and, in any case, are deprived of political representation.

Cultural Survival, which had forty-five projects going on five continents in 1987, aims to see that the victims of modernization receive the educational, technical, and legal skills needed to prevent them from permanent poverty, political marginality, and cultural alienation. Of particular importance to those interested in a genocide early warning system, the staff of Cultural Survival have developed skills in interviewing real and potential victims in the field that has enabled them to report and analyze evidence with a high degree of accuracy. The organization wisely points out that charges of mass violence and genocide must be carefully evaluated in light of independent evidence and the varieties of motives respondents may have. A sloppy job of reporting and publicity based on false evidence can do serious harm to an organization’s reputation for reliability and to the effectiveness of its efforts to save lives.

A second, active nongovernmental organization at work in the battle against ethnic and sectarian violence and genocide is International Alert, also headquartered in London. Established in an effort to deal with the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka, IA focuses on conflicts within countries. Its goals are to help bring peace to countries at war with themselves, alleviate human suffering, protect human rights and promote human development, and alert public opinion to danger areas and conflicts. In 1987, IA undertook a major new effort at conflict resolution in Sri Lanka through promoting dialogue, seminars, publications, and petitions to governments. It also helped organize an international conference on internal conflict at the invitation of the government of Uganda, and it held a seminar on “New Expressions of Racism in Europe.” It sent research missions to areas of internal conflict and made presentations to the relevant governments. It issued a report on a seminar entitled, “Ethnic Conflict, Human Rights and Development,” in collaboration with the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo. One of the active members of IA is Professor Leo Kuper of the University of California at Los Angeles, one of the most widely respected scholars in genocide studies.

As may be inferred the organizations just reviewed are conducting important work on behalf of victims and potential victims and in raising consciousness throughout the world on the threat of mass violence and potential genocide. But each has a specialized approach, very limited resources, and no real authority in dealing with offending governments beyond the pressure publicity might bring. Clearly, a more comprehensive and official structure is needed to establish an effective genocide early warning system. Israel W. Charny has provided a detailed and extremely well thought out design for such an international system in, How Can We Commit the Unthinkable?
Genocide: The Human Cancer. The plan is spelled out in chapter 13, “Toward a Genocide Early Warning System.” Only the highlights of this proposal can be mentioned here.

Charny and his collaborator, Chanan Rapaport (1982), outline three levels of information to be monitored in a genocide early-warning system: ongoing genocides; violations of basic human rights; and predicting buildups of possible genocidal violence.

Under ongoing genocides, there would be a multisource information-gathering system, including news service reports, international health, environmental and legal agencies, interviews of travelers and refugees, and official field investigation teams sent to scenes of reported mass murders. Under basic human rights violations would be reports of torture, imprisonment without due process, denial of the right to emigrate, and denial of the right to free speech, according to rights defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And under the category of predicting buildups of possible genocidal violence, there would be a broad list of social indicators, such as cultural attitudes toward human life as being expendable, prejudices and dehumanization of a minority, societal allowance of violence, and acceptance of a fantasy or folk theme of genocide.

While Charny deals for the most part with social and structural phenomena as his proposed indicators, as a psychologist he would most likely support the idea of psychobiographical analysis of narcissistic, destructive charismatic leaders to the extent it is possible. The analytical concepts were not available when Hitler and Stalin were rising to power, but in theory at least, they were available to track Idi Amin, Pol Pot, and the Ayatollah Khomeini in their intertribal or revolutionary class genocides.

Charny is also cognizant of the systemic-stress components of a potentially genocidal situation. As he puts it,

Life is marked by never-ending problems and changes that demand major readjustments; from without, by way of natural forces of climate, ecology, biology, and so on; from within, by way of momentous historical events and definitive transitions in maneuverings for power. These major forces and events, interpreted within the prevailing value system of the group, generate powerful dynamics, which greatly influence the subsequent collective process. (Charny 1982, p. 322)

One of the most tragic examples of a situation that could be said to have a structural bias toward genocide is the small, central African country of Burundi. With a population of just under five million and a per capita GNP of $130 annually, Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world. It was colonized by Germany in the 1890s, taken over by Belgium in 1916, and given its independence in 1962.

Burundi is ruled by Tutsis, a Hamitic warrior people who have traditionally dominated the subservient Hutus, a Bantu people. But the Tutsis are only fifteen percent of the population, with the Hutus making up most of the eighty-five percent balance. In an added twist of fate, Tutsis average a foot taller than Hutus. In 1972, there was a significant drop in world coffee prices on which eighty-five percent of Burundi’s foreign exchange earnings depend. Thus, in addition to the tension generated by the political asymmetry, new stress was added to a people already living at the margin. In April 1972, a group of Hutus tried to forcibly overthrow the Tutsi regime. Outgunned, they failed, and the Tutsis undertook a Pol Pot-like purification campaign to eliminate all educated Hutus, who were considered a permanent threat to continued Tutsi domination. Up to two hundred thousand Hutus were killed in a genocide that did not “require” a destructive charismatic leader. Burundi, in fact, is a country that cries out for therapeutic intervention in the form of a psychologically sensitive, conflict-resolution strategy of the sort this writer has described elsewhere (Montville 1987).

There remains the question of how the information derived in a genocide early warning system is to be used effectively. An answer may be at hand. On March 1, 1987, the Secretary-General of the United Nations announced the establishment of a new Office for Research and the Collection of Information (ORCI) with the following specific functions:

1. To assess global trends;
2. To prepare country, regional, and issue-related profiles in close consultation with officers dealing with negotiation and conflict-resolution functions;
3. To provide early warning (emphasis mine) of developing situations requiring the Secretary-General’s attention;
4. To maintain current information in data systems, consulting with inside and outside data banks as appropriate;
5. To monitor factors related to possible refugee flows and comparable emergencies;
6. To carry out ad hoc research and assessments for the immediate needs of the Secretary-General;
7. To receive, consolidate, and distribute political information from the media and from the UN information centers on developments related to peace and security, for use by the Secretary-General and his senior staff;
8. To prepare and edit drafts of the Secretary-General’s public statements, messages, and reports.

ORCI is headed by an assistant secretary-general, currently Dr. James O. C. Jonah of Sierra Leone. While it is common knowledge that UN agencies are
vulnerable to political pressures, it seems more than plausible that the permanent representatives in the UN Security Council should be able to agree on guidelines for ORC's mission to include early warnings of potential mass violence and genocide. Such a development would reflect the level of current discussion among the United States, the Soviet Union, and China on the responsibilities of superpowers in assuring international security in the nuclear age.

References


