

Detlef Garz

Lives Interrupted – The Nazi Takeover and Autobiographical Testimonies from the 1939 Harvard Prize Competition

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For the purely scientific purpose of collecting materials which will be used to study the *social and psychological effects of National Socialism on German society and on the German people*, one thousand dollars has been made available to be offered as prizes for the best unpublished personal life-histories (autobiographies) on the theme —

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Psychologist

Historian

Detlef Garz

Lives Interrupted – The Nazi Takeover and
Autobiographical Testimonies from the 1939
Harvard Prize Competition

In memory of the friends from the youth: 'When we were young'.

Manfred Berkard (1947-2010)

Dieter Chladek (1948-2021)

Hans Günter Ehrengard (1944-1998)

Karl Heilhecker (1950-2024)

*Dedicated to my Doktorvater, friend and colleague Micha Brumlik
(1947-2025) and my colleague and friend David Kettler (1930-2024)*

Detlef Garz

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Takeover and Autobiographical
Testimonies from the 1939
Harvard Prize Competition

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Prologue

Books have their history.¹ I first learned from the book ‘Biographical Research’ by Werner Fuchs, published in 1984, that in 1939/1940 a ‘scientific prize competition’ was held by scholars at Harvard University to collect autobiographies centering on persons who had emigrated from National Socialist Germany as well as Austria. And I wondered what came of it. The answer was surprisingly easy to find: The documents are housed at Harvard University’s Houghton Library (previously the Houghton Archives) – and they have been, and continue to be, little used. The corpus is largely untapped. Neither was the potential of the submitted autobiographies exploited in the original project, nor have later generations of scholars, with a few exceptions, systematically engaged with the documents. To this day I cannot understand why this ‘treasure’, which is immensely instructive not only for historians but also, among others, for sociologists, psychologists, educationalists and, perhaps especially, for biographical research, has remained untapped.

Since the 1990s, together with Sylke Bartmann, Ursula Blömer, Stefanie Bretschneider, who unfortunately passed away much too early, Axel Fehlhaber, Stefan Kanke, Sandra Kirsch, Wiebke Lohfeld, Claudia Thiede, and Nicole Welter, I set out to bring this corpus out of the darkness of an archive into the light of the scientific community and a wider public. Numerous trips to the archive were made, applications for external funding were written, approved, but some were rejected, doctoral theses were completed, and publications, mostly in journals, were submitted as a result (cf. ‘Publications following the Harvard University Scientific Prize Competition’, in this volume). This book, aimed at a wider audience, is intended to be another building block, perhaps a foundation, both for accessing the autobiographical record and for understanding some (exemplary) life histories, as well as the concept of (moral) misrecognition.

I wrote this book on ‘interrupted lives’ to give those affected by the ‘Nazi takeover’ a voice, those persons threatened, persecuted, and finally murdered in the sense of anamnestic, i. e. remembering, “solidarity with the victims of history for their own sake” (Micha Brumlik).

1 I was able to begin work on this book during a stay as a member of the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton from September 2007 to July 2008. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung for their financial support. The translation is the work of David Kettler. Any errors are my responsibility. I also wish to thank my friends Wolfgang Althof, Hans Joachim Barth, and Jérôme Prieur, as well as Claudia Thiede and Nicos Karydis, for helping me to turn many manuscript pages into a readable book.

“On the streets you could see legs in black shank boots stomp like machine parts; looking upward, one saw the disgusting brown of the shirts, interrupted by the red arm stripes with the vicious black spider in the white circle, a black belt, a black leather strap across the upper body; the shirt collar and the edge of the brown cap left just enough of the face free, that you could recognize these dully staring automatons as people”.

Ms. Franziska Schubert, 205, p. 59f.

Introduction

At the beginning of his autobiographical notes, the physician Martin Andermann reflects on why he writes his memoirs in early adulthood for a ‘scientific competition’. His central insight is that

“those 35 years of my life ... are a self-contained unity, they are perhaps all that I will one day look back on as ‘my’ life; for their conclusion – my emigration from Germany – may well have meant the end of what I had hitherto been accustomed to regard as ‘my life’. Today, I am faced with the problem of how far I will be able to continue, be allowed to continue, in the new country my life up to now as what it seemed to me and made my own – an immensely difficult question which makes it seem justified to stop for a moment and to ask retrospectively: What was?” (Ms. Andermann 6, p. 1).²

In the following lines I will refer to the manuscript submitted by Martin Andermann and take up the question ‘What was’ and give a brief answer. At the end of the book, in the final section, I will then deal with ‘what became’; how could, how was Martin Andermann allowed to continue his life: What became of him?³

First of all: What was? Martin Andermann was born into an educated middle-class household in Königsberg on October 17, 1904. Martin Andermann’s father, Max, was a well-known lawyer in East Prussia, a long-standing member of the Königsberg City Parliament, and for a short time a member of the Prussian Parliament for the left-liberal ‘Progressive People’s Party’ (FVP); in addition, he was a “respected member of the Kant Society” (Lichtenstein 1985, p. 10). Martin Andermann’s childhood and especially his youth were accordingly shaped by the ‘spirit of the city’, the morally emphasized ‘Königsberg Kantianism’. For his father, “Kant, Schiller, and Goethe ... formed the ‘house-

2 The spelling as well as the punctuation of the autobiographical manuscripts were largely retained and only occasionally slightly corrected.

3 The manuscript by Martin Andermann was published in German, supplemented by several articles on his life and work (Garz/Welter 2024).

hold spirits and gods,”” and “through (his) mother (Beethoven and Mozart, Schubert and Schumann, and Brahms and Wolff) found a place of worship” (Ms. 6, p. 8).

Now, one might think that such an educated bourgeois socialization would make school life, especially high school life, easier. But not in the case of Martin Andermann. He was isolated within the class community. And there was a very specific reason for this: Martin Andermann was Jewish.

“Probably my comrades felt it to be an insolence that I, with my much better knowledge of German literature and intellectual education, had, as it were, usurped German culture in their eyes” (ibid., p. 12).

He himself saw no contradiction between Judaism and the German classics.

“The Jewish traditions in which I grew up seemed to marry most harmoniously with the German spirit as it became known to me; there seemed to be no breach, let alone opposition, between these two worlds. It was a delightful unity, and the love of Germanness that was planted in the boy at that time, even the storm of the last years has not been able to uproot” (ibid., p. 8).

This storm of the last years was the time of National Socialism.

Andermann describes how his orientation to the “humanist-German tradition” (ibid., p. 18) led him to turn to “the young republic” (ibid.), while this was (not) the case for his “classmates and also for the majority of the teachers” (ibid., p. 19).

“The experience of the Revolution and the collapse of the monarchy was ultimately incomprehensible to these people, for it did not mean the disappearance of a political form or a system of government. For these people, as they stand vividly before my eyes, all these sons of burghers, officers, pastors’ children, for them Germany was first and foremost the Prussian Germany, the military career was the visible expression of the moral hierarchy, and the emperor was the pope of this Prussian-Protestant worldview” (ibid.).

Andermann, for whom the end of the First World War coincided with the transition to adulthood as “a shaking of my naïve belief in values” (ibid.), assumes,

“that my ‘crisis’ at that time was a very typical expression of my generation, of my time, just as the ‘Weltschmerzlebnis’ was an expression of the Werther generation. What I was going through at that time was a ‘nihilistic existential crisis’⁴, and it was actually this crisis that made my medical studies seem to me to be a relatively unimportant bread-and-butter study, while my philosophical interests seemed to be the only essential one. ... These students of philosophy, who often enough, like myself, belonged to another faculty as their main subject, but who were driven by

4 By nihilism, Andermann understands, following Nietzsche’s determination that ‘the highest values devalue themselves’, “a definitely outlined psychological situation ... One could also say that nihilism is that state in which existence is experienced as absolute meaninglessness” (ibid., p. 23).

the problems of the time to occupy themselves with the basic questions of knowledge, these students were certainly as characteristic an expression of Germany after the revolution as my reactionary classmates. In the years that followed, they were the real Germany for me" (ibid., p. 22).

After Andermann had attended philosophical lectures with Husserl and Heidegger in Freiburg alongside his medical studies, he continued his studies in Berlin, where he took courses with Romano Guardini. He finished his medical studies in Marburg – he had gone there to continue listening to philosophy with Martin Heidegger. He spent his years as an assistant in Heidelberg and Berlin before settling down as a doctor in Berlin and finally moving his practice to Königsberg in 1934 – in the (vain) hope of being able to build up a larger base of private patients there, since as a Jewish doctor he no longer had a license to practice in Berlin.

In his memoirs from 1940, Martin Andermann not only describes his Königsberg childhood, which was influenced by Kant, but there are also reflections on his apolitical behavior, on Heidegger's relationship to National Socialism – which, according to Andermann, "gave the deepest expression to the essence of his time" (ibid., p. 57) – and there is an extraordinary, an extraordinarily ambivalent view of the period between 1933 until his emigration in 1937. "That for all the terrible things I experienced in Germany, I never got rid of that feeling: it is a great time, and I am glad to experience it – despite everything" (ibid., p. 117). – It is unlikely that Martin Andermann would have formulated this assessment, written at the beginning of 1940, in the same way after 1945.

In his autobiographical manuscript, however, he is still optimistic. He wants to pause,

"to ask in retrospect: what was? ... To find, perhaps, from the revival of the past, the answer to the question: Whether a path to a real, humanly founded future is possible from the contemporary emergency construction of the present?" (ibid., p. 1).

Already these few details about Martin Andermann draw attention to various aspects that can be found in a similar way, perhaps less explicitly, perhaps less eloquently presented, but in a large number of the autobiographical manuscripts presented here. They are narratives and reports,

- central to life before and after 1933 and (especially) to life before and (less so) after emigration;
- which show the insecurity or the ambivalent attitude towards the emerging and for some 'abruptly', for others gradually asserting National Socialism;
- that address the difficult childhood, which was nevertheless often perceived as not oppressive, and
- which repeatedly illustrate the problematic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans.

These and a number of other problem areas are the focus of this book. I want to illuminate them, discuss them, and shed light on them as far as possible. This will be done in three larger sections.

In the first part of the book, my aim is to show where these extraordinary materials came from, how they were obtained, and what results they have yielded.

In a second part, I will present four particular life stories in more detail; the selection is oriented toward presenting as contrastive a sample as possible from the abundance of autobiographical manuscripts submitted, so that experiences of life, of suffering, of resistance, of emigration that took place, and of arrival and 'readjustment' in the country of emigration become visible. The life stories of two men and two women are presented: Alfred Fabian emigrated to Shanghai and subsequently to the USA, Hilde Rosa Stern went to the United States and then 'returned' to the GDR, Carl Paeschke emigrated to Switzerland and stayed there, Rudolfine Menzel went to Palestine, later Israel. Went? Had to go – could go. A merchant, a social worker, a journalist, and a chemist with a doctorate who worked as a scientist and dog breeder. These were the professions practiced before emigration – after that we will see.

In the third part of the book, I will unfold the autobiographical developments, the educational stories, under the anthropological or moral aspect of recognition by others, but even more so that of deprivation, non-granting, and finally the deprivation of solidarity, right, and the love of neighbor or humanity, by combining theoretical considerations and case studies.

I. How it Came About: Scientific Prize Competitions as a Data Basis

Martin Andermann's manuscript, as well as the other autobiographical manuscripts that are the focus of this book, are the result of a scientific prize competition initiated by three Harvard University scholars in 1939. In order to better understand this project, I must first discuss another, a predecessor prize competition from 1934, which was directed at members of the NSDAP ('Old Fighters', i. e. 'Alte Kämpfer').

The following chapter therefore discusses two extensive research projects in which written autobiographical records from the years 1934 and 1939/40, respectively, were collected and analyzed on the basis of scientific prize competitions. On the one hand, they were written by persons who placed themselves in the service of National Socialism at an early stage, and on the other hand, by persons who became the target of this ideology – men and women who had to or were able to emigrate from National Socialist Germany (and from Austria) (the 'Harvard Project').

While the Harvard prize competition is the focus of this book, the references to the prize competition aimed at members of the NSDAP are intended to point to an important precursor study whose methodological orientation guided the researchers in 1939/40. Both projects were carried out during the period of National Socialism, so that they were able to reveal essential aspects of life in this era in a timely manner on the basis of (auto-)biographical documents.

However, the autobiographical research carried out by US scholars and the resulting manuscripts have not received and still do not receive the attention they deserve.⁵ This applies both to the studies and the autobiographical manuscripts themselves and to the concrete social-historical circumstances in which they were embedded and of which they bear witness.

The research projects presented here are on the one hand

- a) the study conducted in 1934 by sociologist Theodore Abel (1896–1988) under the working title 'The Hitler Movement, an interpretation based upon 600 autobiographies' (Abel 1937, p. 348), which was eventually published as 'Why

5 Even though only a few publications have emerged from the Harvard project that can be built upon, the autobiographical manuscripts in the Houghton Library at Harvard University could be viewed and edited. The manuscripts on the 'Old Fighters' archived at Stanford University have even been fully accessible on the Internet since 2017 and can be downloaded (for sources, see the next chapters). – For a detailed overview of the Harvard project materials available in the Houghton Library, see the very commendable overview and listing of manuscripts in Liebersohn/Schneider (2001).

- Hitler Came into Power. An Answer based on the Original Life Stories of Six Hundred of His Followers' published in 1938 and reprinted in 1966 and 1986;
- b) on the other hand, the research 'My Life in Germany before and after January 30, 1933', which was jointly initiated by the psychologist Gordon W. Allport (1897–1967), the historian Sidney B. Fay (1876–1967), and the sociologist Edward Y. Hartshorne (1912–1946), was initiated at Harvard University in August 1939.

It should be emphasized that both studies are presented and analyzed in their own right, i. e., not from a later perspective (see this emphasis also in Wünschmann 2015): The participants in the prize competitions formulated their contributions, and the scholars involved edited and published them with the knowledge they had at their disposal in the mid- or late 1930s.

I will first present both projects as uniformly structured as possible for better understanding and comparability: (1) the (scientific) framing is followed by (2) the research procedure, again divided into the data collection and the data analysis. The research project of the Harvard scholars that is of interest here will then be described in more detail.

1 'Old fighters': Biographies of 'Hitler Germans' – the Research of Theodore Abel⁶

1.1 *About the Framing*

What research interest guided Abel? The question he wanted to answer in his case study was primarily directed at how to determine the power and influence of social movements, which he assumes on the one hand are indispensable for political change ('the emergence of the new'),⁷ but whose development, shape, and impact are difficult to conceptualize on the other (for the project as a

6 The original papers are in the Hoover Institution Library & Archives at Stanford University (Collection Number: 50000). <https://digitalcollections.hoover.org/advancedsearch/Objects/archiveType:Item%3BcollectionId:58225>.

7 Thus, in the 1966 republication, Abel emphasized in his new preface: "Social movements appear to be indispensable means for the achievement of change which bypasses the Establishment" (Introduction, o.p.). Even more, he assumed that his thoughts and interpretations could be applied to other social movements; he named among others the 'Gandhi Movement' and the 'Civil Rights Movement' in the USA. To clarify these ideas and emphasize the thrust of his arguments, he even changed the title of the book to 'The Nazi Movement' and only then added the subtitle 'Why Hitler came to Power'. Primacy, consequence and consistency should thus be clearly stated.

whole, for methodological and ethical problems, and for contacts with other researchers, see Halas 2001, 2002).

It is particularly important for the preliminary methodological understanding of this study to at least briefly discuss the biographical background of the researcher Theodore Abel. Abel was born in Lodz, Poland, in 1896 and migrated to the United States in 1925. He began his studies at Columbia University in New York and received his Ph.D. there in 1929. Abel taught and conducted research at his alma mater as a professor of sociology from 1929 to 1950. Because of his Polish-American life history, he was able to place his work in the tradition of two scholarly directions, which in turn were linked in almost inextricable ways. The first influence came from the practice-oriented approach of the Chicago School, here especially from William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's seminal 1918–1920 study 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America', which strongly influenced Abel. Znaniecki, who like Abel was from Poland, returned to his homeland in 1919, and at the University of Poznan further developed the biographical methodology already in use in Chicago (cf. Messerschmidt 2013). Abel, and this brings us to the second connection, had not only studied with Znaniecki (for a short time) around 1920 (cf. Halas 2002, p. 174), but had never lost contact. Thus, in the summer of 1934, i. e. at the time of his data collection, he repeatedly visited him in Posen (see Abel, *Journal of Thoughts and Events*, June to September 1934). It can be assumed that Abel and Znaniecki exchanged ideas about the planned study. Both, like many other scholars in the "golden age" of personal documents" (Wrightsmen 1981, p. 377), i. e., roughly the period between the two world wars, were strongly interested in the study of personal documents, i. e., diary entries, letters, life narratives, and so on.

With regard to dealing with (auto)biographies, Abel has developed a plausible proposal. In the sense of a systematization, he divides life-stories again into three types: It distinguishes

- a) Autobiographies from
- b) Biograms and
- c) Life-histories.

While autobiographies (and memoirs) are "written on the initiative of the author (Abel 1947, p. 113), biograms and life histories require the (scholarly) impetus from outside. Thereby, according to Abel, the collection of life histories focuses on a specific person. And although biograms are also created following a prompt with the intention of obtaining research materials, here the characteristic that the data collection refers to a specific group of individuals who share a common characteristic (e. g., early members of the NSDAP) is added. In addition, these individuals are expected to follow a set of guidelines in writing their biograms. Accordingly, Abel defined, "biograms are life-stories written on request by persons who are members of a selected social group,

and in compliance with specific directions as to content and form for the purpose of obtaining mass data” (ibid., p. 114). And in a later text he emphasized, “Biograms are the equivalent of open-ended, free-association interviews which often provide much more information than do questionnaires or guided interviews” (Abel 1966, introduction, o.p.).

1.2 The Research Procedure

Data Collection

Abel conducted his ‘written survey’ as a prize competition with the support of the relevant offices of the NSDAP in the summer of 1934, inspired by his positive experiences in 1933, when the people he had spoken to in Germany were unreservedly willing to discuss ‘their political experiences’ (Abel 1938, p. 2). His general interest was directed toward ‘the pattern of successful political movements’ (cf. Abel 1937), so it was natural to examine ‘Alte Kämpfer,’ i. e., those individuals who had joined the NSDAP before January 30, 1933, or had a membership number that was less than 300,000 (or that subset who had already been members between 1919 and 1923, i. e., the ‘Old Guard’). Specifically with regard to their biographical development, he formulated the following questions, among others. “Who were the people who joined the Hitler movement? By what earlier experiences or by what factors in their development can membership be explained? On what basis did they justify their participation? ... In what did the activities of the particular member consist?” (Abel 1938, p. 2).

Since statements about the data collection process are inconsistent in the literature, a brief overview follows here. Abel recorded the following information in his diary entries.

Information on the course of the field research from June to September 1934

Tuesday, June 26, 1934: "I went to see Mr. Seyferth, I presented my case briefly. He read my announcement for the prize contest".

Before 30.6.1934: "Went to see Frl. Dr. Unger in Abt. VII, Ministerium für Propaganda." Wednesday, July 4, 1934: "Paid 400 R.M. to the Gauschatzmeister DeMars for the prize money."

Tuesday, August 28: "Went to Voßstrasse (presumably to the 'Gauleitung Groß-Berlin' of the NSDAP; DG) in the morning. Found that several hundred life-histories have come in, but that there is a question whether I shall get them, for the content is not considered satisfactory." Wednesday, August 29: "Called up Schulze-Wechsungen's (Gaupropaganda- und Gauschulungsleiter der NSDAP Groß-Berlin; DG) secretary who told me not to worry about the documents and that I shall get them on the 10th."

Monday, September 10: "A frantic day in Berlin, trying to get the life-histories. Goebbels passed an order cancelling the prize contest, I was told (this information cannot be confirmed; DG).

Wednesday, September 12 to Thursday, September 20: "On board Washington ... Had a good time, did not work much, tried not to think on what to do next after my failure in Berlin" (cf. Abel, *Journal of Thoughts and Events*, June to September 1934).

In fact, the manuscripts were not passed on to Theodore Abel until more than two years later, so that his book could not appear until 1938 (cf. Abel 1938, p. 4).

Scientific prize competitions as a special form of data collection were used in the USA⁸, but especially in Polish research after the return of Florian Znaniecki from the USA between 1921 and 1939, in order to obtain targeted research materials with the help of a (financial) incentive. Targeted because the researcher's specifications made it possible to 'target' the possible answers, at least within limits.

Abel had developed a set of specifications for the respondents in the present project. After the announcement

8 The two scientific prize competitions presented here were followed by two other 'competitions', partly related in method and partly in content. 1. The 1942 competition of the YIVO Institute (Yiddish Scientific Institute) in New York City, 'Why I Left the Old Country and What I Have Accomplished in America' (cf. Cohen/Soyer 2006; Kligsberg 1942; Soyer 1999). 2. The 1943 prize competition of the Institute for Social Research, which had moved from Frankfurt to the USA, on 'Experiences with NS-Antisemitism in Germany': 'Antisemitism under Hitler' (cf. Institute of Social Research 1944/45).

“Four hundred marks in prizes

for the best description of the own life of a Hitler-German. Every German citizen, regardless of sex and age, who is an old fighter of the N.S.D.A.P., can participate in the competition” (emphasis added).⁹

he then listed the following characteristics: In the sense of describing one’s own life, information should be given above all about family relationships, upbringing, work, membership in clubs and associations, and participation in the Hitler movement and the revolution. Of central importance are the comprehensiveness as well as the sincerity, while the style should not play a role in the assessment (cf. *ibid.*).

The 1st prize was 125.00 RM (Reichsmark), the 2nd prize 50.00 RM, the 3rd prize 25.00 RM, 5 prizes of 20.00 RM each and 10 prizes of 10.00 RM each; a total of 400 Reichsmark – this amount was also handed over to the Gauschutzmeister on July 4, 1934 (see box above)¹⁰.

In 1936, a total of 683 manuscripts were sent to Abel, which form the basis of his book. Not included in this book were 35 very short manuscripts and 48 manuscripts written by women. Abel stated that he did not include the contributions written by women in his analysis because of the comparatively small number and announced a separate publication on this – which never took place (but cf. Fehlhaber/Garz/Kirsch 2007; Kosubek 2017).

Data Analysis

An analysis of the approximately 600 biograms produced by men shows that these belonged predominantly to the ‘lower middle class’ (51 %) or were workers, skilled and unskilled (35 %). 7 % can be assigned to the upper middle class and aristocracy; just as many peasants took part. About 80 % joined the NSDAP between 1925 and 1927; there are also 42 people (7 %), however, who found their way into the party very early, between 1922 and 1924 (Abel 1938, p. 5). Many of the manuscripts, some of which are written by hand but mostly on typewriters, have no more than one, two, three or four pages; another segment contains between 5 and 20 pages, only a few go beyond 20 pages – an ‘outlier’ is manuscript No. 28 with 48 pages. The body in total consists of more than 3700 pages.

9 From the German-language text of the invitation to submit manuscripts. I would like to thank Ms. Claudia Thiede (M. A.) for providing me with this document, which was considered lost. “The announcement was distributed in the form of a bulletin at all local headquarters of the National Socialist party and was also published in the party press” (Abel 1938, p. 4).

10 Nothing is known about possible winners. The prizes were presumably not paid out.

At present, there are only 582 manuscripts left, as about 90 manuscripts were 'lost' very early. Already on October 26, 1951, Abel, at the time a professor at Hunter College at City University in New York, had responded to an inquiry from Stanford University's Hoover Institute:

"With regard to the missing numbers of life stories of Nazis which I sent you, I have made inquiries and found the following fact: In 1943 the F.B.I. (sic) took all my material away in search for evidence against some persons on their list. They apparently kept some of the life stories which happened to be also the most illuminating ones" (Letter Abel, in: Hoover Institution Archives).¹¹

The majority of the manuscripts submitted correspond to a classical, albeit narrow, chronological pattern. The description begins with personal data, i. e. the birth, the family background and one's own educational history, and then gradually turns into a narrative. Finally, follows the narrative turn to the NSDAP as a subjectively experienced biographical course with many lows, but lastly even more highs; in the case selected below, this happens on an anti-Semitic basis; I do not go into this here (manuscript 247, 9 pages). The autobiographical prompts at the beginning.

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Mein Weg zur N.S.D.A.P.

Ich bin als Sohn des Ackerers Johann Mürlebach in Kottenheim (Kreis Mayen) am 14. Mai 1881 geboren.

Vom 6ten bis 14ten Lebensjahr besuchte ich die Volksschule in Kottenheim.

Nach der Schulentlassung erlernte ich das Bäckerhandwerk. Im Jahre 1904 heiratete ich. War im Krieg eingezogen als Landsturmmann bei der Feldartillerie 51 in Strasbourg, später war ich bei der Fliegerabwehr.

Nach dem Kriege habe ich mich in dem Geschäft meiner Frau (Weisswarengeschäft) betätigt.

11 This shows the danger that scientific competitions could be used for other purposes.

My way to the N.S.D.A.P

I was born on 14 May 1881 in Kottenheim (district of Mayen) as the son of the field worker Johann Mürlebach.

Between the ages of 6 and 14, I attended the elementary school in Kottenheim.

After leaving school, I learned the baker's trade. I married in 1904. In the war I was drafted as an infantry soldier in Field Artillery 51 in Strasbourg, later I was with air defense.

After the war I worked in my wife's business (white goods shop).

Fig. 1. Translation: Biographical information. (Ms. 247, p. 1). Hoover Institution Library & Archives der Stanford University. (Collection Number: 50000).

Often the autobiographical narrative was also preceded by a prologue, which then provided the framework for the further narrative; in part, it pointed to key events, in part, it served for self-charismatization, as in the case of Ms. E. (Manuscript 195, 16 pages).

“If today, with my membership number 98.082, I am one of the ‘Old Guard’ of the NSDAP and in possession of the movement’s badge of honor, I must say that all the events that have swept over our fatherland over the last 20 years could not have brought me to any movement other than the freedom movement of Adolf Hitler” (p. 1).

The narrative part often concludes with the takeover of Adolf Hitler on 30 January 1933 in a ‘culminating narrative’ (Schütze 1984, p. 99).

“January 30, 1933, 5 p.m.: Hitler Reich Chancellor. Unbelievable jubilation in the city. We immediately alert the whole SA for the evening. The shame has ended. Germany rises under the sign of the swastika, which we will serve, as on the first day, without end” (Ms. 533, 5 pages; here p. 5).¹²

Abel focuses his analysis in parts two and three of the book under the headings ‘Analytical’ (p. 115–200) and ‘Selected Life Histories’ (p. 201–301) and expressed the hope that “that my interpretation may be more complete and systematic than any made by previous investigators” (Abel 1938, p. 115).¹³ However, he already works in the first part, the historical part, on the ‘background

12 Interestingly, January 30, 1933, only played a central role in very few manuscripts by those who had to leave Germany, i. e. the emigrant.

13 For a long time, Abel was embroiled in scientific theory controversies, as in his essay ‘The Operation called Verstehen’ (1948) he closely associated ‘understanding’ with ‘feeling’ and only granted it the methodologically ‘weak’ function of formulating hypotheses. In his essay ‘Understanding I and Understanding II’ from 1975, he attempted to clarify his position and take a clear stance. “I regard the hermeneutical analysis of culture and history as not only relevant but as an indispensable task of the social sciences” (Abel 1975, p. 99).

and the periods¹⁴ of the Hitler movement,' with numerous excerpts from the autobiographies, whereby the cited passages usually have a documentary character rather than that they themselves reveal anything new.

In the analytical part, by contrast, Abel construes the (biographical) factors that led the persons into the NSDAP from the answers. As an overarching feature, he identifies the general and at the same time diffuse dissatisfaction of people (see p. 121ff.). A dissatisfaction that arose out of external circumstances. The lost war, the loss of the "Heimat," the Treaty of Versailles, the supposed incompetence of the contemporary governments, and the economic situations from the inflation up to the Great Depression of the late 1920s were the events that were reflected in the biographies and led to a disillusionment. In addition, the old parties were no longer able to attract, not to say, to retain the electorate. The "common man, the worker, the farmer, and lower middle-class shopkeeper and clerk" (ibid., p. 130), felt his needs and interests no longer represented by neither the national nor the socialist or communist parties.

This deficiency, as it can be formulated in a complementary and pointed way, can be compensated especially by the fact that a person with charisma steps into the 'ensuing gap'. For his followers, this function was met completely by the person Adolf Hitler.

"So all the fighting and striving was not in vain. The German people rose up; for the saviour had come to it. Profound thanks to God who gave him to us fills our hearts. ... Just as each and every one of us has found him, so there is only one way for everyone: 'The way to Adolf Hitler!'" (Ms. 210, 6 pages; here p. 6).

The contribution, like many others, closed with the 'Hitler greeting'.

In the third part of his book (Chapter 9), Abel finally had six selected persons speak, on the basis of their fully printed and translated English contributions. The biograms or 'life stories' are manuscripts with a length of between 11 and 30 pages:

- Case No. 13: The Story of a Worker; in the volume pp. 204–218.
- Case No. 110: The Story of an Anti-Semite; pp. 218–244.
- Case No. 162: The Story of a soldier; pp. 244–262.
- Case No. 267: The Story of a Middle-Class Youth; pp. 262–274.
- Case No. 171: The Story of a Bank Clerk; pp. 274–289 and
- Case No. 168: The Story of a farmer; pp. 289–301.

At the beginning of the section, Abel explains his approach in detail.

"So far ..., I have referred to the first-hand material only through quotations and isolated passages. The reproduction here of selected complete autobiographies is designed to show, in unified, more realistic form, patterns of National Socialist experience separately analysed in previous chapters. ... The autobiographies re-

14 Abel distinguished in the historical introduction (pp. 54–112) three periods of the 'Hitler movement'. 1: 1919–1923. 2: 1924–1929. 3: 1929–1933.

produced in this section were chosen for the following reasons: first, story value and richness of content; second, usefulness in enriching points previously raised; third, portrayal of typical personality traits and mental reactions” (Abel 1938, p. 203).

In particular, the aspects mentioned in the third point – the development of typical personality traits and psychological modes of reaction – could, in my opinion, not only be taken up by current research but, due to the methodological developments that have taken place, could fruitfully go beyond them in order to understand how it could come about “that Germans went into Nazis” (Fritzsche 1998).

2. ‘My Life in Germany Before and After January 30, 1933’ or ‘All persons who have known Germany well before and since Hitler!’. The Research of Gordon Allport, Sidney Fay and Edward Hartshorne

2.1 About the Framing

It is obvious that the scholars at Harvard University were well acquainted with the prize competition conducted by Theodore Abel. Edward Hartshorne even reviewed the publication ‘Why Hitler Came into Power’ in 1938 (predominantly ‘critical-and-something-benevolent’) (Hartshorne 1938/39), and Ernest Jandorf, a research associate of the project, also showed that the research group itself was interested in these sources: First of all, because of the fact that the Harvard researchers had no access to primary sources, i. e. followers of the NSDAP, their data collection focused on the autobiographies of emigrants. This approach is also encouraged by the formulation of the research interests. In addition to methodological questions, as with Abel, the aspect of the (revolutionary) social movement was particularly emphasized. “The present study is the result of two distinct lines of thought and types of interest. One concerns *the psychology of a revolutionary social movement*, the other the specific utilization of *the life-history as a technique of research*” (Jandorf 1941, p. 1; emphasis in the original). And a little later stresses Jandorf, “We were unsuccessful in obtaining life-histories written by proponents of National Socialism” (ibid., p. 2). And after a reference to Abel’s work, he explains the consequences: “Since we ... were unable to obtain Nazi life-histories, the prize com-

petition from which our material is gathered, yields only the story of the revolution as told by its victims, the refugees from Nazi persecution” (ibid., p. 3).¹⁵

Gordon Allport, the project leader of the psychological segment, was, because of his previous scientific work, very well prepared, albeit mostly theoretically, for the study of autobiographies. The personality theory he developed in the 1930s emphasized the importance of traits in human life, distinguishing between cardinal, central and secondary characteristics. While cardinal traits, which determine the entire personality throughout, rarely occur (as an example: Joan of Arc and her heroic self-sacrifice), the central traits determine the personality in many respects and form its foundation (basic foundation); up to 10 characteristics are addressed here, such as optimism, anxiousness, honesty. Secondary traits, finally, describe (very) personal peculiarities or preferences such as eating or clothing habits. The respective combination of characteristics is the personality.

But Allport had also dealt with biographical research in the strict sense at that time, as can be seen from his manuscript ‘A tentative set of rules for the preparation and evaluation of life histories and case studies’, written at the end of the 1930s but not published until 1981 by John Garraty.¹⁶ In addition, in 1942 Allport presented the extensive study ‘The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science’, which has since become a classic (cf. Hevern 2019).

Allport, who had become acquainted with German-speaking (psychological) science through a long stay in Germany and Austria (here among others with Freud), was sceptical of his American colleagues, who at that time wanted to explain the whole of the psychological field in a nomothetic way, with experiments, statistics, and a behaviorist approach, although he was not opposed to their approach in principle. What bothered him, rather, was the emphasis on

15 In the following, in addition to my own extensive research, I refer to the three studies that were produced within the psychological sphere of the research project: The publication by Allport, Bruner, and Jandorf was aimed at a specialist audience trained in psychology; the publication by Bruner and Bruner, on the other hand, appealed to a broader public, and the study by Jandorf was a qualification paper and/or a project report; technical details were also addressed here. All the papers were published in 1941. – In a letter dated October 25, 1940, Allport wrote to Charlotte Bühler, who had (presumably) inquired about a possible collaboration. “On the psychological side we are writing just one article and closing the subject” (Papers of Gordon Allport. Harvard University. HUG 4118.10, correspondence folder Bühler; emphasis added). Consequently, Edward Hartshorne was able to stress to Henry Albert in a letter dated July 22, 1941 (Ms. 4): “Please communicate directly with me, as the project is now entirely in my hands.”

16 Hevern points out how important the study of life stories was for Allport. In an essay from 1967 (the year he died), he posed the question: “‘How shall a psychological life history be written?’ and suggested that pursuing an answer to this question was, perhaps, the unifying theme of his professional career” (Hevern 2019, p. 82).

the exclusivity of their approach, which he contrasted with his conviction of the importance of the human being in the sense of an idiographic science.

2.2 The Research Procedure

Data Collection

As part of the scientific competition they advertised, Harvard University researchers Gordon Willard Allport (psychology), Sidney Bradshaw Fay (history) and Edward Yarnall Hartshorne (sociology) asked “persons who have known Germany well before and since Hitler” to produce a report on their personal experiences. The conditions for participation were concretely specified. Accordingly, in addition to age, gender, status, region of origin, and religion:

“Your life-history should be written as *simply, as directly, as fully and as concretely* as possible. You should aim to *describe*, insofar as you can remember them, THINGS WHICH ACTUALLY HAPPENED, THINGS PEOPLE DID AND SAID. The Judges are not interested in philosophical reflections about the past but in a record of personal experience” (emphasis in the original; cf. Figures 2 and 3).

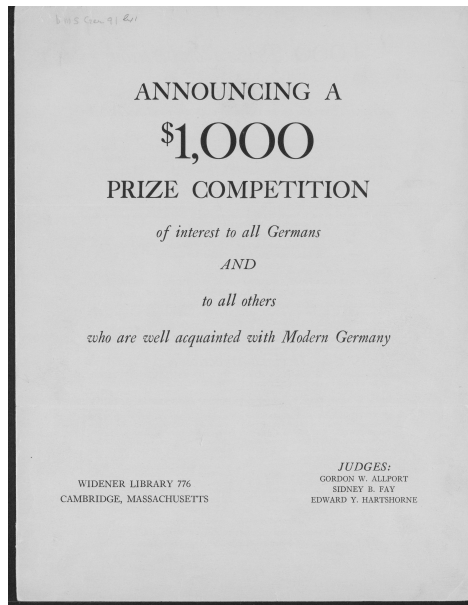


Fig. 2. Leaflet announcing the competition (short version). MS Ger 91 (Box 1: 0), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

\$1,000 Prize Competition

★

ATTENTION:

All persons who have known Germany well before and since Hitler!

★

For the purely scientific purpose of collecting materials which will be used to study the *social and psychological effects of National Socialism on German society and on the German people*, one thousand dollars has been made available to be offered as prizes for the *best unpublished personal life-histories (autobiographies)* on the theme —

“MY LIFE IN GERMANY BEFORE AND AFTER JANUARY 30, 1933”

The competition is being personally sponsored by the following members of the Faculty of Harvard University, who will serve as a Committee of Judges. They will assume sole responsibility for reading the manuscripts and awarding the prizes:

GORDON WILLARD ALLPORT	<i>Psychologist</i>
SIDNEY BRADSHAW FAY	<i>Historian</i>
EDWARD YARNALL HARTSHORNE	<i>Sociologist</i>

The following prizes are offered:

FIRST PRIZE \$500	SECOND PRIZE \$250	THIRD PRIZE \$100
FOURTH PRIZE \$50	5 FIFTH PRIZES, \$20 EACH	

Manuscripts may be submitted *under a pseudonym or anonymously*, but they *must be authentic*. You may write in *English or in German*, whichever you use more naturally. There is *no limit as to length*, but 20,000 words should in general be regarded as a minimum.

The Competition closes *April 1st, 1940*. (Manuscripts must be *mailed* by then.) Prizes will be announced as early as possible.

The manuscripts will be treated as *strictly confidential*.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

No manuscript will be accepted if it does not state clearly on the first page the following information: AGE (approximate) and SEX of writer; the REGION of Germany where writer lived, and SIZE OF COMMUNITY; RELIGION professed by writer; — and other relevant information about the writer's SOCIAL POSITION in Germany (e.g. married or single, children, approximate income, occupation, education, etc.). (Your social position as such has no bearing on your chances of winning.)

Your life-history should be written as *simply, as directly, as fully and as concretely* as possible. You should aim to *describe*, insofar as you can remember them, THINGS

WHICH ACTUALLY HAPPENED, THINGS PEOPLE DID and SAID. The Judges are not interested in philosophical reflections about the past but in a record of personal experience. Quotations wherever possible from *letters, diaries, note-books and other personal documents* will help to give your account the *authenticity and completeness* which are desired. This is not a literary competition. Even if you have never written before, if you have a good memory, and a good insight into human nature, you should try. Even if you do not win a prize, your manuscript will be of value as a source of information about modern Germany and National Socialism.

Address all communications to: S. B. FAY

776 WIDENER LIBRARY, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, U. S. A.

Additional copies of this announcement will be gladly furnished on request.

Fig. 3. The English-language long version of the competition. MS Ger 91 (Box 1: 0), Houghton Library, Harvard University. * The German-language text incorrectly reads ‘To all who know Germany well before and **after** Hitler’. In the English version it is correctly stated: ‘... before and **since** Hitler!’.

In response to these calls, which were made not only on pamphlets but also in other regular dailies as well as emigrant newspapers in addition to the New York Times, the present manuscripts were submitted.

PRIZE FOR NAZI STORIES

CAMBRIDGE, Mass., Aug. 6.—A \$1,000 prize competition for the best unpublished personal life histories of persons who have experienced the effects of National Socialism in Germany was announced today by three members of the Harvard University faculty.

The purpose of the competition, which is open to "all persons who have known Germany well before and since Hitler," is to collect materials which will be used in a study of the social and psychological effects of National Socialism on German society and on the German people.

The Harvard faculty members who are personally sponsoring the competition and who will serve as judges are Dr. Gordon W. Allport, associate professor of psychology, chairman of the Harvard Department of Psychology; Dr. Sidney B. Fay, Professor of History and an authority on German history, and Dr. Edward Y. Hartshorne, instructor in sociology.

The competition awards will be a first prize of \$500, second prize of \$250, third prize \$100, fourth prize \$50 and five fifth prizes of \$20 each. Manuscripts may be submitted under a pseudonym or anonymously, but they must be authentic, and all papers submitted will be treated as strictly confidential.

Fig. 4. Article in the New York Times of August 7, 1939.

Data Analysis

If one considers the social status of the participants on the basis of the occupations they pursued, the members of the professions predominate: About 25 lawyers (men only), three judges (men only); 25 doctors (men and women) and 24 teachers (almost exclusively men) submitted their contributions. Another larger group encompasses businessmen with about 16 % (N = 35); however, this category includes both owners or managers of large companies as well as owners of small retail outlets, so this classification is not too meaningful. In addition, journalists, artists, some high school and college students, rabbis and priests as well as office workers (women only) and, last but not least, 5 laborers take part.

Occupation	N = 213	% (rounded)
Workers	5	2
Architects	2	1
Officials	5	2
Employees	7	3
Businessmen	35	16
Craftsmen	5	2
Housewives	13	6
Engineers	3	1
Journalists/Writers	26	12
Artists	9	4
Lawyers/Judges	29	14
Teachers	24	11
Physicians	25	12
Professors	3	1
Psychologists	3	1
Rabbis	3	1
Students	6	3
Social Workers	2	1
Others	8	4
Not specified	6	3

Graph 1: Occupations of the participants (own presentation)¹⁷

¹⁷ It is not surprising that, given the required scope of the contributions, it was predominantly people who felt able to fulfill this requirement due to their education