

Breweries caught the drift and began to move into the nonalcoholic beverage business. By 1936, a quarter of all mineral water in Germany was being manufactured and distributed by breweries. The outbreak of the war brought restrictions on where alcohol could be bought: a law passed on October 18, 1939, banned distribution of alcohol at taverns.

"Success" was also evident in the already-mentioned inclusion of alcoholics within the chilly embrace of sterilization legislation. Racial hygienists had long insisted that alcohol caused damage to the genetic material, but also that the propensity to drink was itself an inherited trait. As early as 1903, at the Ninth International Congress to Combat Alcoholism, in Bremen, the psychiatrist Ernst Rüdin had proposed the sterilization of "incurable alcoholics" to prevent the transmission of their afflicted seed. His proposal was roundly defeated,⁸⁸ but three decades later, on July 14, 1933, his dream came true with the passage of the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring, allowing the forcible sterilization of chronic alcoholics and others deemed genetically inferior. Now director of the influential Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Psychiatry in Munich, Rüdin was a major architect of the law, which eventually resulted in the *Unfruchtbarmachung* of some 350,000–400,000 German citizens. Compliance was facilitated by an Interior Ministry requirement that anyone being treated for alcohol abuse be reported to the Reich Health Office, where a registry of such persons was assembled.⁸⁹ Thousands of alcoholics were eventually sterilized; surveys conducted in the period 1934–1937 show that 5 or 6 percent of the men vasectomized in accordance with the law were targeted for their drinking habits. (Feeble-mindedness was by far the largest category.) Women were slightly more likely than men to be sterilized, but alcoholism was less likely to be the reason.⁹⁰

Considered as a whole, however, the antialcohol campaign seems to have done little to stem the tide of drinking in Nazi Germany. Some of the early declines in consumption, after all, were simply late effects of Germany's massive economic downturn. Beer consumption fell from 86 liters per person in 1929 to only 59 liters in 1936—roughly half what it had been in 1913. The same is

true for hard liquor, which fell from 2.8 liters per person in 1913 to about half that figure in 1929 and only 0.6 liters in 1933, after which it slowly rose again to the levels of the late Weimar era.⁹¹ The recession of the early 1930s slowed alcoholic consumption: six million men and women were out of work when Hitler took power, and alcohol had become an unaffordable luxury.

Alcohol consumption rose for the rest of the decade, as the economy recovered and, perhaps, as people sought refuge from Nazi terror. German purchases of hard liquor rose from about forty million liters in 1932 to more than twice this amount in 1938. Production of wine increased by nearly 80 percent in the first five years of Nazi rule, and the consumption of champagne increased by a factor of about five. Output also increased of alcohol made from inferior substitutes like cellulose and carbide, which by 1937 represented more than 20 percent of all hard liquor produced—apparently violating Germany's 1922 liquor monopoly law, which fixed an upper limit of 10 percent on such products. Martin Gumpert in 1940 concluded that Germans were poisoning themselves with alcohol on a scale comparable to the poisoning of the Chinese by opium: alcohol was "the Nazi opium for Germany."⁹²

Why then did the Nazis consider alcohol a threat? And why did Nazi efforts to curb alcoholism and alcohol consumption fail?

For many at this time, again, the threat of alcohol was best understood in economic terms. Nazi leaders worried that alcohol was a drain on German finances and productivity—a serious concern given the drive to rationalize and militarize the economy. Prussian health minister Arthur Gütt in 1937 pointed out that Germans were spending a staggering 3.5 billion reichsmarks on alcohol and another 2.3 billion on tobacco every year: the total of 5.8 billion RM was 10 percent (!) of the entire German national income (*Volkseinkommen*).⁹³ Reich Health Führer Leonardo Conti voiced these same concerns a year later, by which time alcohol expenditures had grown by another billion RM.⁹⁴ Those figures continued to grow into the early war years, as German prosperity—and perhaps also psychological strain—prompted increased smoking and drinking. In many German cities, beer, wine, and harder drinks absorbed a sizable fraction of total disposable income: 5 percent in Lubeck,