

There were several common themes among those who opposed alcohol. Drinking was held to be a financial drain on the nation, a health hazard, and a source of endless corruption and vice. Alcohol was said to deaden the nerves and weaken the spirit. Drunkenness was judged a promoter of crime and delinquency, and at least one racial hygienist, Agnes Bluhm, made a career out of arguing that alcohol could cause genetic damage. Clear-cut distinctions were not always made between congenital and genetic injury, however, which led to confusion about the long-term implications of alcohol for genetic health. After 1933, the possibility of harm to the "German germ plasm" was used to justify the decision to sterilize "chronic alcoholics" in accordance with the Sterilization Law. Germans also spent a lot of time worrying about what today is known as "fetal alcohol syndrome," and the suggestion has been made that some of the offspring of the Jukes family of eugenics notoriety (defectives said to have passed down their taint through several generations) may have been victims of this syndrome.⁶⁷ It would be interesting to know whether the comparable German families ("Zero," "Victoria," and "Markus") were similarly afflicted—and whether, as in the American case, the post-World War II neglect of research in this era may have had something to do with its eugenics taint. (Historian Brian S. Katcher has pointed out that cirrhosis of the liver, cardiomyopathy, fetal injuries, and esophageal cancer were all well-known effects of alcohol at the turn of the century—and were later forgotten.)⁶⁸

The idea that alcohol might be a cause of cancer dates back at least to the nineteenth century, when tumors began to figure in the list of harms flowing from the demon liquor. Stomach cancers were said to be caused by the hard ciders drunk in Normandy and the acidic wines imbibed in eastern Switzerland.⁶⁹ Karl B. Lehmann's influential 1919 textbook on occupational health and safety noted that bartenders, brewers, and others in "alcohol-related occupations" had high rates of cancer, especially oral and esophageal, the implication being that drink was the primary cause.⁷⁰ Work involving the sale of alcohol (especially bartending) became one of the two most cited occupational causes of cancer—the other being work with tar, paraffin, or oil.⁷¹ The usual explanation, dat-

ing back to the nineteenth century, was that chronic alcohol consumption led to a general "stomach catarrh" which then progressed to cancer. There were some who doubted this theory (critics pointed out that cancer afflicted women as often as men, even though men drank much more),⁷² but it persisted into the 1940s.⁷³

One cannot understand the strength of Germany's antialcohol movement in the 1930s without appreciating the fact that many Nazi leaders were early advocates of abstinence or temperance. Erwin Liek had been a teetotaler prior to the First World War and never drank very much thereafter. Alcoholic overindulgence he blamed for a whole raft of diseases, cancer being just one of many.⁷⁴ Heinrich Himmler claimed that alcohol was the most treacherous poison humans ever faced, a greater cause of human failure than any other. (The SS chief had joined a fraternity as a student but successfully petitioned for exemption from the drinking bouts because of his sensitive stomach.)⁷⁵ Hitler himself attacked alcohol in a 1926 article in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the official Nazi party newspaper, mourning "the valuable people—especially Germans—destroyed or rendered useless by alcohol, exceeding by an order of magnitude even the numbers of those lost on the field of battle." The NSDAP leader predicted that "a people managing successfully to rid itself of this poison" would likely come to dominate other parts of the world "unprepared to take that step."⁷⁶

With so many Nazi leaders on the wagon, temperance advocates waxed confident that a Nazi future was a bright future. *Auf der Wacht*, the leading German antialcohol journal, in May of 1933 celebrated Hitler's rise to power in glowing terms: "We Germans stand at an important turning point: new men are shaping the destiny of our fatherland, new laws are being created, new measures put into place, new forces awakened. The struggle touches on everything that has been and is unclean."⁷⁷ Nazi leaders returned the favor: the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the founding of the Antialcoholism Association on October 22–25, 1933, was attended by many prominent politicians and racial hygienists—including Eugen Fischer and Fritz Lenz, interior minister Wilhelm Frick, and future Reich Health Führer Leonardo Conti. The Horst Wessel