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## What Shall We Do With Germany?

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Psychoanalysts and psychiatrists have often tried to „analyze“ nations, and religious and political movements. The methodological pitfall common to most of these attempts followed the same pattern--the psychoanalyst discovered some similarity between a clinical symptom and a cultural phenomenon. He then proceeded to establish an analogy between the two and *to explain* the cultural phenomenon on the assumption that it was caused by the same factors which had caused the individual's neurotic symptom. Thus, for instance, religious controversies were „explained“ as symptoms of compulsive neurosis, political movements as results of an unresolved „Oedipuscomplex,“ socio-economic systems as caused by neurotic character formations. Social and political factors were not considered to be „real“ excepting as the rationalized expression of some neurotic symptom. The fallacy of this method has been so discouraging to many social scientists that most of them did not consider fit worth while to combine psychoanalytic and sociological knowledge.

The desire on the part of psychiatrists to make a contribution to victory over the enemy has resulted in a series of articles and books dealing with the character of the Germans. Dr. Brickner's book is one of the outstanding attempts of this kind. To a social psychologist who has always believed that psychology can make a significant contribution to our understanding of group behavior, the renewed interest in this problem as expressed in Dr. Brickner's book should be very encouraging. All the more must I regret that the author repeats the methodological fallacy which was typical of the older writings of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts.

His book, too, employs the method of *analogy* where a thorough *analysis* of the character of the Germans is warranted. His clinical description of the paranoid character is excellent. But his way to prove that „the Germans“--or most of them--fit into this clinical picture is untenable. He attempts to prove his thesis mainly by quoting German writers whose utterances have the *paranoid* coloring which he had described in the clinical presentation of *paranoid* patients. Quite aside from the fact that it seems dubitable that one can analyze the character of any nation on the basis of literary quotations, the author's selection of German writers is lacking completely in objectivity. With few exceptions, he only quotes nationalistic and reactionary writers who are not more repre-



representative of Germany than reactionary writers are representative of any other country; as a matter of fact, this same method of quoting certain writers as proof of the evilness of a whole nation has been used by the Nazis in their attacks on the Jews, French, or British. Not only is the selection of writers one-sided, the author also quotes particularly often from books written during the First World War or previous wars which adds to the bias of his selections. He puts Goethe's sentence „Hammer or anvil must thou be“ as a motto to the chapter on the German need to dominate, although Goethe could serve as an excellent illustration of the very opposite of the „paranoid“ philosophy. One of the few occasions where the author refers to political movements instead of literature is the frequent reference to the Pan-German League; here Dr. Brickner is simply misinformed about the popularity of this small group of German Tories in pre-Hitler Germany.

It would indeed be most valuable for our war effort if we were correctly informed about the German character. But this task requires more knowledge of the Germans and a better method than is applied in Dr. Brickner's book. It is true, nations have a „social character.“ They share certain character traits because they share certain fundamental experiences to which all members of the group have been exposed. In order to analyze the social character of any nation, one must study their social, economic, political, and cultural situation in its minute details and then proceed to understand how this total situation molded the character structure of the majority of all members; one must study the intricate interaction of socio-economic, ideological, and psychological factors which operate in the history of any nation. This can only be done if one is as thoroughly acquainted and concerned with the history of a nation as the psychiatrist is acquainted with the individual life history of his patient.

There are good reasons to assume that the result of such serious study will be to show that great nations differ in certain character traits but not in the sense that some are essentially good and others essentially evil nor in the sense that some are „healthy“ and others „sick.“ What such study is most likely to show is that the characterological differences between different social groups within a nation are of great significance. Germany is a case in point; some of Dr. Brickner's description of the paranoid character may very well be applied to the German lower middle class, which formed the nucleus of the Nazi party, and further analysis can show that the reasons for this development are to be found in the socio-economic position of this class. It would become equally apparent that the paranoid trends are not characteristic of the vast majority of German workers, peasants, and middle class.

The increasing literature dealing with a psychiatric approach to the German national character suggests a twofold danger. On the one hand that psychiatric concepts are used as rationalizations for political slogans; thus depriving us of valid knowledge which we need for the conduct of the war and for realistic and rational plans for peace. On the other hand, that they become a substitute for valid ethical concepts; that they tend to weaken the sense for moral values, by calling something by a psychiatric term when it should be called plainly evil.