
Citing Nazi 'Research': To Do So Without Condemnation Is Not Defensible

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Elie Wiesel, the concentration camp survivor and 1986 Nobel laureate, has often spoken and written about the difficulty of translating the events of the Holocaust into words. To do so, he has explained, begins to limit and make objective what can neither be, nor should be, easily defined and comfortably separated from our daily lives as just another grim episode in history that happened long ago and elsewhere. The Holocaust was qualitatively different from other human events: The years after it have been darker for humankind than those before it. That it happened continues to affect us all.

Alan C. Nixon's support for the use of data derived from so-called experiments by Nazi scientists (November 14, 1988, page 9) elicited a strong response, as might have been expected. Some of the letters we received are published on this page and the next. It may be true, as Nixon wrote, that "many German scientists were rather reluctant party members, going along with the Nazi's demands in order to save their lives in an impossible situation." But it is also the awful fact that many scientists and physicians served in the vanguard of Hitler's army as "biological soldiers." (See,

for example, Robert J. Lifton's comments on "medicalized killing" in *The Nazi Doctors*, 1986.) Moreover, those who tortured camp prisoners and later published their "results" in German medical journals of the time cannot be described as "reluctant" participants. The Nuremberg Doctors' Trial of 1946-47 proved this. Fifteen "scientists" were convicted of crimes; seven were hanged.

As for citing the published data from the Nazi "experiments," I agree with our European Editor Bernard Dixon, who has rhetorically asked, "Is it not a gratuitous insult to those pathetic human guinea pigs, and to the memory of the dead, for journals and textbooks to cite data acquired in such an odious manner?" ("Citations of shame," *New Scientist*, volume 105, number 1445, page 31, 1985).

But what about those extremely rare instances in which the data collected during these atrocities have been judged by scientific experts to have practical value in life-saving research today? For example, many hypothermia researchers have found the data from Sigmund Rascher's cold-water immersion tortures at Dachau significant to their work. Al-

though it is difficult morally, one might concede that within the mass of pseudoscientific Nazi data some shreds can be valuable to researchers, as a small portion of the hypothermia data has proven to be. Of course, such data should be used only in the most exceptional circumstances and only in the absence of ethically derived data.

Science writer Kristine Moe (in "Should the Nazi research data be cited?," *Hastings Center Report*, volume 14, number 6, pages 5-7, 1984) held up an article by John P. Fernandez, a hypothermia researcher, as a model for the tone in which Nazi "research," if used, should be cited. Fernandez wrote: "These sordid investigations proved to the satisfaction of the executioners that the best method of resuscitating hypothermia prisoners

was by rapid and intensive rewarming." ("Rapid active external rewarming in accidental hypothermia," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, volume 212, pages 153-6, April 6, 1970.)

What is certainly morally unacceptable is to cite Nazi data without any comment or qualification. To do so hides these evil acts in the cloak of legitimate scientific inquiry, as the Nazis tried to do (See E. Garfield, "Remembering the Holocaust. Parts 1 and 2," *Essays of an Information Scientist*, volume 8, pages 254-75, 1986.)

We need to remember, as Wiesel has noted, that the language in which we attempt to describe the Nazis' acts is all important. That is one point I think Nixon has failed to underscore properly. ■