

## **ADOLF HITLER'S PARKINSON DISEASE DID NOT AFFECT HISTORY**

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Adolf Hitler had Parkinson disease (PD). This is not in dispute: it has been documented in descriptions by his contemporaries, including his physicians. It has been documented by comparing samples of his handwriting from before he was diagnosed in 1934, to shortly before he killed himself in 1945. It has been documented by videos taken over his lifetime (1). There is a dispute as to whether Adolf Hitler had post-encephalitic or idiopathic PD (2). This cannot be resolved. However, it does not affect whether PD affected Hitler's conduct: The effects of the disease, not its cause are in dispute.

### **Parkinson disease can affect conduct in several ways:**

(1). by imposing physical limitations, by impairing mobility. Videos of Hitler, shortly before he killed himself, reveal him to be stooped and tremulous but mobile. Hitler was more mobile than Franklin D. Roosevelt who, because of poliomyelitis, had been confined to a wheelchair for his entire Presidency. And no one questions whether Roosevelt's poliomyelitis affected his conduct of the Presidency.

(2). by taking drugs, amphetamines, administered by his physician Theodor Morell. While amphetamines can result in paranoia and a loss of impulse control, Hitler's paranoia and lack of impulse control were present before he had PD.

(3). by affecting mesolimbic and mesocortical structures resulting in depression, paranoia, lack of impulse control and dementia. In this report it will be argued that Hitler's lack of impulse control, his gambler's instinct, was an inherent part of his personality: His gambler's instinct, brought him to the Chancellorship of Germany in 1933 and, nearly, brought him to overlordship of Europe.

In 1923, Hitler, the leader of a small and obscure right-wing movement, the National Socialist Party (Nazi), tried to emulate his hero, Benito Mussolini, and violently seize control first of the Government of Bavaria and then of Germany. This was a high-stakes gamble, based on an inadequate understanding of the political situation in Germany: Hitler's gamble failed, he was arrested and served time in prison. Hitler learned from this and in 1933, through a series of political maneuvers, legally became Germany's Chancellor.

In 1936, after he had consolidated his control in Germany, after he met leading politicians from France and Great Britain, Hitler gambled that he could re-occupy the Rhineland. Hitler's armed forces were one-hundredth the size of France's and technically inferior. He gambled, correctly, that France, traumatized by its losses in the First World War, would not oppose him. Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhineland removed the Rhine, the great natural barrier between France and Germany, as a French defense.

In 1934, one year after he became Chancellor, Hitler impulsively gambled that he could annex Austria. His operatives assassinated the Austrian Chancellor, Engelbert Dollfuss, but his gamble failed when Mussolini, Austria's protector, came to Austria's aid. Hitler learned from his mistake. In 1938 he had befriended Mussolini and had assured himself that France, which had not acted in 1936, on its border, would not act in Austria. Thus, in 1938, Hitler's gamble, that he could, with impunity, annex Austria, was a minor one.

In 1938, after Hitler had annexed Austria and surrounded Czechoslovakia on three sides, Hitler gambled that he could annex the Sudetenland, the German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia, the part that contained the main defenses of Czechoslovakia. Although France had an alliance with Czechoslovakia Hitler gambled, correctly, that France would not act. And although Great Britain had an alliance with France, Hitler gambled, correctly that Great Britain, guilt-ridden over the hardships the Treaty of Versailles had imposed on Germany, would not oppose Germany regaining lands that were historically German.

In 1939, Hitler gambled that he could annex the remainder of Czechoslovakia, lands that were not German. Although Hitler gambled correctly, as Great Britain did not act, he lost any trust he had built with Great Britain. In 1939, Hitler gambled that he could annex parts of Poland, parts that were German, without going to war. To hedge his bet, to minimize his gamble, he made an alliance with his arch-rival Stalin. The gamble was successful, in part. Although Great Britain and France declared war on Germany, they did nothing to help the Poles, and the German army over-ran Poland in three weeks.

In 1940, Hitler gambled that he could defeat France and secure his western front. In 1940, the French army was considered the best in the world, and France was allied with Great Britain, and the British navy was the best in the world. Rather than taking the traditional route of attack through the Low Countries, the flat lands of Belgium and Holland, Hitler's main thrust was through the "impassable" Ardennes

Mountains. He gambled on the advice of a relatively unknown general, Erich von Manstein, a general whose innovative and unorthodox ideas excited Hitler. Hitler gambled correctly, the German invasion through the Ardennes resulted in the defeat of France in eight weeks, a defeat that the German Armies in World War I could not accomplish in four years.

In 1941, Hitler gambled that he could defeat Russia. His life-long ambition, enunciated in "Mein Kampf" was to secure an empire for Germany in Russia. He believed the odds favored him, based on the poor performance of the Red Army in its recent war against Finland. He gambled that he could thrust into Russia in three prongs: north toward Leningrad, centrally toward Moscow, and south toward the Ukraine and the oilfields of the Caucasus. His gamble was too great, and although he conquered White Russia and most of the Ukraine, his army was defeated at Moscow. In 1941, after his ally, Japan, attacked the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hitler declared war on America. His alliance with Japan did not obligate Hitler to declare war on America, he acted impulsively. He gambled that he could defeat America, a "mongrel" nation lead by a crippled President.

In 1942 and 1943, Hitler again gambled that he could defeat Russia. In 1942, his gamble nearly paid-off when his Army almost captured Stalingrad. His defeat at Stalingrad caused him to "double-up", to gamble, unsuccessfully, that he could recover his losses at Kursk. Hitler was like many gamblers, successful initially, they keep gambling, confident of their ability to assess the odds, they become more reckless. In June 1944, Hitler gambled the Allies would land at Calais, the shortest distance across the English Channel. He lost when the Allies landed at Normandy. In December 1944, Hitler gambled he could repeat his success in 1940, launching a surprise attack through the Ardennes, the Battle of the Bulge. He lost.

In 1918, if one were to choose one person out of 80,000,000 Germans to reverse the losses of World War I and the Treaty of Versailles, one would not choose an Austrian refugee, Adolf Hitler, a "high school" dropout, a vagrant who had never held a steady job. The odds that in 13 years, Adolf Hitler could rise to the Chancellorship of Germany, were incalculable, odds only a gambler, a risk taker, like Adolf Hitler would take. A compelling question is whether Hitler's early successes occurred because his lack of impulse control, his risk-taking, and his gambling instinct were coupled with an insightful understanding of human nature and a poisonous but forceful philosophy. And his later failures occurred because his PD exaggerated his lack of impulse control, his gambling instinct, and "robbed" him of his understanding of human nature. Without serial neurological and neuropsychological examinations and without an autopsy to confirm if Hitler had Parkinson dementia, it's impossible to exclude Parkinson disease as a cause of Hitler's failures. But if one looks at history, it's more likely that Hitler's failures, like the failures of Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan and Napoleon, were inherent in the hubris of a gambler

#### **Bibliography**

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