

# How Hitler Could Regret He'd 'Been So Kind' in a Letter Days Before His Death

In a bunker in Berlin on April 27, 1945, just three days before [he'd take his own life](#)—either by cyanide or the pistol (historians still debate which killed him)—Adolf Hitler reflected on his shattered dream of creating a thousand-year *Third Reich*.

As the Red Army encircled the German capital, the 56-year-old Hitler, weary and defeated, expressed regret.

“Afterwards,” *Der Fuhrer* wrote, “you rue the fact that you’ve been so kind.” It was one of his final recorded remarks.

The sentiment is astonishing. In his [Final Solution](#), Hitler had perpetuated perhaps the most notorious and systematic mass killing in human history. How could the man who ordered the deaths of millions of innocents view himself as *kind*?

The anecdote comes from Paul Johnson’s history *Modern Times*, which sheds light on the question.

In the book, Johnson explains that to the very end Hitler and Goebbels were “both breathing socialist fire.” Hitler came to believe he came to power “too easily.” Unlike Franco in Spain or Stalin in Russia, the Fuhrer did not unleash a traditional Marxist revolution that destroyed “elites and classes.” He had failed to liberate the working class from the chains of “the bourgeoisie fossils.” As Hitler saw it, it was this benevolence that prevented him from attaining the complete control and respect his Soviet rival had achieved in his bloody purges of the Red Army, the Communist Party, and the Russian bureaucracy. The belief burned within Hitler.

“Above all he regretted his leniency,” Johnson writes, “his lack of the admirable ruthlessness Stalin had so consistently

showed.”

The narrative is a chilling reminder of the almost infinite capacity humans possess for rationalization—a psychological phenomenon the German psychoanalyst Karen Horney once described as “self-deception by reasoning.”

This type of self-deception helps explain why humans often [seem incapable](#) of recognizing their own behavior as evil. Hitler no doubt believed his actions were justified by some higher good.

Examples of such thinking are not difficult to find. Many intellectuals today, for example, maintain that Venezuela’s nightmare came about simply because socialist revolutionaries [didn’t go far enough](#) in enforcing their will over the people.

The human capacity to rationalize almost any kind of behavior was explored in Lawrence Kasdan’s wonderful 1983 film *The Big Chill*. In the movie, Michael (Jeff Goldblum) famously opined that rationalization is more important than sex. (“Ever gone a week without a rationalization?”)

What gets less attention than the catchy quote is Michael’s description of how humans rationalize.

*“I’m not even claiming that people always think they’re doing the right thing. They may know they are doing something dishonest, insensitive or manipulative, but they almost always think there’s a good reason for doing it. They almost always think that it will turn out for the best in the end. Even if it just turns out best for them. And by definition, what’s best for them is what’s best.”*

Michael's dialogue raises important questions.

If our values and actions are shaped not by their intrinsic virtue, but by what will "turn out for the best in the end" or what is "best for us," does the ease of rationalizing almost any kind of action or behavior begin to make more sense?

Rationalization will always be part of the human condition. But one wonders if the capacity for it is likely to increase as our ethical and moral ideas and language become less coherent and more malleable.