In 1990, previously unknown documents dated from the Nazi era were found in Berlin. They had been preserved in the central archives of the Ministry for State Security (MfS), the secret service of the now former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Nearly 30,000 psychiatric patient files turned out to comprise the smaller part of the records of patients who had been murdered in the 1940/41 "T4 action". More than 70,000 patients of psychiatric asylums were killed by gas in this first campaign of extermination during Nazism, and their files were believed to have been lost. Based on a project to be funded by the German Research Association, this paper offers a brief survey of the developments in historical research about Nazi "euthanasia" and the theories interpreting historical information. The paper will also present a research project dedicated to the memory of the victims of the "T4 action" and to the rediscovered files now conserved in the German Federal Archives in Berlin. The aim is to offer a systematic analysis of 3,000 records in an effort to contribute to the perception of the victims as individuals. The analysis will also include an examination of the selection criteria stipulated by the Nazi psychiatrists (hereditary illness, incurability, and incapacity to work productively) to select patients for extermination. In this way, the decision-making process, criteria, and
motes that led to the killing should become more clear. This empirical analysis will help to answer
questions concerning the proportion of eugenic and economic motivations and the Nazi rationale
behind the extermination campaigns. The project will build upon an earlier preliminary study of a
nonrepresentative sample of 185 files. As a preliminary result, it can be said that most of the victims
had been hospitalised over long terms and classified as schizophrenic or feeble-minded. A third of the
patients killed were considered invalid and not working, and almost 50% were described as working
"mechanically". Five per cent of the victims were working "productively".

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