

# HITLER'S WILLING EXECUTIONERS

Daniel Goldhagen's astonishing, disturbing, and riveting book, the fruit of phenomenal scholarship and absolute integrity, will permanently change the debate on the Holocaust. By telling terrible, unavoidable truths, it banishes forever the simple pieties about guilt and innocence that have settled over the mass graves and ashes of the murdered. For anyone wanting to come to terms with the enormity of the genocide, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* will be obligatory reading.' SIMON SCHAWMA

This unbearably painful book forces one to fundamentally reappraise the events of the Second World War. It is no longer possible either to deny the quantitative events of the Holocaust - as some lunatics wish to - nor is it possible to make any of the subtler evasions which have become currently fashionable.' JONATHAN MILLER

As general readers, we may think we already know enough about the Germans' killing of the Jews to disturb us for the rest of our lives, but there is enough new material here to disturb the human race to the end of time.' ROBERT KEE

# HITLER'S WILLING EXECUTIONERS DANIEL GOLDHAGEN

# ORDINARY GERMANS AND THE HOLOCAUST

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# Introduction

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## RECONCEIVING CENTRAL ASPECTS OF THE HOLOCAUST

CAPTAIN WOLFGANG HOFFMANN was a zealous executioner of Jews. As the commander of one of the three companies of Police Battalion 101, he and his fellow officers led their men, who were not SS men but ordinary Germans, in the deportation and gruesome slaughter in Poland of tens of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children. Yet this same man, in the midst of his genocidal activities, once stridently disobeyed a superior order that he deemed morally objectionable.

The order commanded that members of his company sign a declaration that had been sent to them. Hoffmann began his written refusal by saying that upon reading it, he had thought that an error had been made, "because it appeared to me a piece of impertinence to demand of a decent German soldier to sign a declaration in which he obligates himself not to steal, not to plunder, and not to buy without paying. . . ." He continued by describing how unnecessary such a demand was, since his men, of proper ideological conviction, were fully aware that such activities were punishable offenses. He also pronounced to his superiors his judgment of his men's character and actions, including, presumably, their slaughtering of Jews. He wrote that his men's adherence to German norms of morality and conduct "derives from their own free will and is not caused by a craving for advantages or fear of punishment." Hoffmann then declared defiantly: "As an officer I regret, however, that I must set my view against that of the battalion commander and am not able to carry out the order, since I feel injured in my sense of honor. I must decline to sign a general declaration."

Hoffmann's letter is astonishing and instructive for a number of reasons. Here is an officer who had already led his men in the genocidal slaughter of tens of thousands of Jews, yet who deemed it an effrontery that anyone might suppose that he and his men would steal food from Poles! The genocidal killer's honor was wounded, and wounded doubly, for he was both a soldier and a German. His conception of the obligations that Germans owed the "subhuman" Poles must have been immeasurably greater than those owed Jews. Hoffmann also understood his parent institution to be so tolerant that he was willing to refuse a direct order and even to record his brazen insubordination in writing. His judgment of his men—a judgment based, no doubt, on the compass of their activities, including their genocidal ones—was that they acted not out of fear of punishment, but with willing assent; they acted from conviction, according to their inner beliefs.

Hoffmann's written refusal sets in sharp relief important, neglected aspects of the Holocaust—such as the laxness of many of the institutions of killing, the capacity of the perpetrators to refuse orders (even orders to kill), and, not least of all, their moral autonomy—and provides insight into the unusual mind-set of the perpetrators, including their motivation for killing. It should force us to ask long-ignored questions about the sort of worldview and the institutional context that could produce such a letter which, though on a tangential subject and seemingly bizarre, reveals a host of typical features of the Germans' perpetration of the Holocaust. Understanding the actions and mind-set of the tens of thousands of ordinary Germans who, like Captain Hoffmann, became genocidal killers is the subject of this book.

DURING THE HOLOCAUST, Germans extinguished the lives of six million Jews and, had Germany not been defeated, would have annihilated millions more. The Holocaust was also the defining feature of German politics and political culture during the Nazi period, the most shocking event of the twentieth century, and the most difficult event to understand in all of German history. The Germans' persecution of the Jews culminating in the Holocaust is thus the central feature of Germany during the Nazi period. It is so not because we are retrospectively shocked by the most shocking event of the century, but because of what it meant to Germans at the time and why so many of them contributed to it. It marked their departure from the community of "civilized peoples."<sup>2</sup> This departure needs to be explained.

Explaining the Holocaust is the central intellectual problem for understanding Germany during the Nazi period. All the other problems combined are comparatively simple. How the Nazis came to power, how they suppressed the left, how they revived the economy, how the state was structured

and functioned, how they made and waged war are all more or less ordinary, "normal" events, easily enough understood. But the Holocaust and the change in sensibilities that it involved "defies" explanation. There is no comparable event in the twentieth century, indeed in modern European history. Whatever the remaining debates, every other major event of nineteenth- and twentieth-century German history and political development is, in comparison to the Holocaust, transparently clear in its genesis. Explaining how the Holocaust happened is a daunting task empirically and even more so theoretically, so much so that some have argued, in my view erroneously, that it is "inexplicable." The theoretical difficulty is shown by its utterly new nature, by the inability of social theory (or what passed for common sense) preceding it to provide a hint not only that it would happen but also that it was even possible. Retrospective theory has not done much better, shedding but modest light in the darkness.

The overall objective of this book is to explain why the Holocaust occurred, to explain how it could occur. The success of this enterprise depends upon a number of subsidiary tasks, which consist fundamentally of reconceiving three subjects: the perpetrators of the Holocaust, German antisemitism, and the nature of German society during the Nazi period.

FOREMOST AMONG the three subjects that must be reconceived are the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Few readers of this book will have failed to give some thought to the question of what impelled the perpetrators of the Holocaust to kill. Few have neglected to provide for themselves an answer to the question, an answer that necessarily derives usually not from any intimate knowledge of the perpetrators and their deeds, but greatly from the individual's conception of human nature and social life. Few would probably disagree with the notion that the perpetrators should be studied.

Yet until now the perpetrators, the most important group of people responsible for the slaughter of European Jewry, excepting the Nazi leadership itself, have received little concerted attention in the literature that describes the events and purports to explain them. Surprisingly, the vast literature on the Holocaust contains little on the people who were its executors. Little is known of who the perpetrators were, the details of their actions, the circumstances of many of their deeds, let alone their motivations. A decent estimate of how many people contributed to the genocide, of how many perpetrators there were, has never been made. Certain institutions of killing and the people who manned them have been hardly treated or not at all. As a consequence of this general lack of knowledge, all kinds of misunderstandings and myths about the perpetrators abound. These misconceptions, moreover, have

broader implications for the way in which the Holocaust and Germany during the Nazi period are conceived and understood.

We must therefore refocus our attention, our intellectual energy, which has overwhelmingly been devoted elsewhere, onto the perpetrators, namely the men and women who in some intimate way knowingly contributed to the slaughter of Jews.<sup>3</sup> We must investigate their deeds in detail and explain their actions. It is not sufficient to treat the institutions of killing collectively or singly as internally uncomplicated instruments of the Nazi leadership's will, as well-lubricated machines that the regime activated, as if by the flick of a switch, to do its bidding, whatever it might have been. The study of the men and women who collectively gave life to the inert institutional forms, who peopled the institutions of genocidal killing must be set at the focus of scholarship on the Holocaust and become as central to investigations of the genocide as they were to its commission.

These people were overwhelmingly and most importantly Germans. While members of other national groups aided the Germans in their slaughter of Jews, the commission of the Holocaust was primarily a German undertaking. Non-Germans were not essential to the perpetration of the genocide, and they did not supply the drive and initiative that pushed it forward. To be sure, had the Germans not found European (especially, eastern European) helpers, then the Holocaust would have unfolded somewhat differently, and the Germans would likely not have succeeded in killing as many Jews. Still, this was above all a German enterprise; the decisions, plans, organizational resources, and the majority of its executors were German. Comprehension and explanation of the perpetration of the Holocaust therefore requires an explanation of the *Germans'* drive to kill Jews. Because what can be said about the Germans cannot be said about any other nationality or about all of the other nationalities combined—namely no Germans, no Holocaust—the focus here is appropriately on the German perpetrators.

The first task in restoring the perpetrators to the center of our understanding of the Holocaust is to restore to them their identities, grammatically by using not the passive but the active voice in order to ensure that they, the actors, are not absent from their own deeds (as in, “five hundred Jews were killed in city X on date Y”),<sup>4</sup> and by eschewing convenient, yet often inappropriate and obfuscating labels, like “Nazis” and “SS men,” and calling them what they were, “Germans.” The most appropriate, indeed the only appropriate *general* proper name for the Germans who perpetrated the Holocaust is “Germans.”<sup>5</sup> They were Germans acting in the name of Germany and its highly popular leader, Adolf Hitler. Some were “Nazis,” either by reason of Nazi Party membership or according to ideological conviction; some were not. Some were SS men; some were not. The perpetrators killed and

made their other genocidal contributions under the auspices of many institutions other than the SS. Their chief common denominator was that they were all Germans pursuing German national political goals—in this case, the genocidal killing of Jews.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, it is sometimes appropriate to use institutional or occupational names or roles and the generic terms “perpetrators” or “killers” to describe the perpetrators, yet this must be done only in the understood context that these men and women were Germans first, and SS men, policemen, or camp guards second.

A second and related task is to reveal something of the perpetrators' backgrounds, to convey the character and quality of their lives as genocidal killers, to bring to life their *Lebenswelt*. What *exactly* did they do when they were killing? What did they do during their time as members of institutions of killing, while they were not undertaking killing operations? Until a great deal is known about the details of their actions and lives, neither they nor the perpetration of their crimes can be understood. The unearthing of the perpetrators' lives, the presentation of a “thick,” rather than the customary paper-thin, description of their actions, as important and necessary as it is for its own sake, lays the foundation for the main task of this book's consideration of them, namely to explain their actions.<sup>7</sup>

It is my contention that this cannot be done unless such an analysis is embedded in an understanding of German society before and during its Nazi period, particularly of the political culture that produced the perpetrators and their actions. This has been notably absent from attempts to explain the perpetrators' actions, and has doomed these attempts to providing situational explanations, ones that focus almost exclusively on institutional and immediate social psychological influences, often conceived of as irresistible pressures. The men and women who became the Holocaust's perpetrators were shaped by and operated in a particular social and historical setting. They brought with them prior elaborate conceptions of the world, ones that were common to their society, the investigation of which is necessary for explaining their actions. This entails, most fundamentally, a reexamination of the character and development of antisemitism in Germany during its Nazi period and before, which in turn requires a theoretical reconsideration of the character of antisemitism itself.

Studies of the Holocaust have been marred by a poor understanding and an under-theorizing of antisemitism. Antisemitism is a broad, typically imprecisely used term, encompassing a wide variety of phenomena. This naturally poses enormous obstacles for explaining the perpetration of the Holocaust because a central task of any such attempt is to evaluate whether and how antisemitism produced and influenced its many aspects. In my view, our understanding of antisemitism and of the relationship of antisemitism to

the (mal)treatment of Jews is deficient. We must begin considering these subjects anew and develop a conceptual apparatus that is descriptively powerful and analytically useful for addressing the ideational causes of social action. The first chapter is devoted to initiating such a theoretical reconsideration.

The study of the perpetrators further demands a reconsideration, indeed a reconceiving, of the character of German society during its Nazi period and before. The Holocaust was the defining aspect of Nazism, but not only of Nazism. It was also the defining feature of German society during its Nazi period. No significant aspect of German society was untouched by anti-Jewish policy; from the economy, to society, to politics, to culture, from cattle farmers, to merchants, to the organization of small towns, to lawyers, doctors, physicists, and professors. No analysis of German society, no understanding or characterization of it, can be made without placing the persecution and extermination of the Jews at its center. The program's first parts, namely the systematic exclusion of Jews from German economic and social life, were carried out in the open, under approving eyes, and with the complicity of virtually all sectors of German society, from the legal, medical, and teaching professions, to the churches, both Catholic and Protestant, to the gamut of economic, social, and cultural groups and associations.<sup>8</sup> Hundreds of thousands of Germans contributed to the genocide and the still larger system of subjugation that was the vast concentration camp system. Despite the regime's half-hearted attempts to keep the genocide beyond the view of most Germans, millions knew of the mass slaughters.<sup>9</sup> Hitler announced many times, emphatically, that the war would end in the extermination of the Jews.<sup>10</sup> The killings met with general understanding, if not approval. No other policy (of similar or greater scope) was carried out with more persistence and zeal, and with fewer difficulties, than the genocide, except perhaps the war itself. The Holocaust defines not only the history of Jews during the middle of the twentieth century but also the history of Germans. While the Holocaust changed Jewry and Jews irrevocably, its commission was possible, I argue, because Germans had *already* been changed. The fate of the Jews may have been a direct, which does not, however, mean an inexorable, outgrowth of a worldview shared by the vast majority of the German people.

Each of these reconceivings—of the perpetrators, of German anti-Semitism, and of German society during the Nazi period—is complex, requires difficult theoretical work and the marshaling of considerable empirical material, and, ultimately, is deserving of a separate book in its own right. While the undertaking of each one is justifiable on its own theoretical and empirical grounds, each, in my view, is also strengthened by the others, for they are interrelated tasks. Together the three suggest that we must substantially rethink important aspects of German history, the nature of Germany during

the Nazi period, and the perpetration of the Holocaust. This rethinking requires, on a number of subjects, the turning of conventional wisdom on its head, and the adoption of a new and substantially different view of essential aspects of this period, aspects which have generally been considered settled. Explaining why the Holocaust occurred requires a radical revision of what has until now been written. This book is that revision.

This revision calls for us to acknowledge what has for so long been generally denied or obscured by academic and non-academic interpreters alike: Germans' antisemitic beliefs about Jews were the central causal agent of the Holocaust. They were the central causal agent not only of Hitler's decision to annihilate European Jewry (which is accepted by many) but also of the perpetrators' willingness to kill and to brutalize Jews. The conclusion of this book is that antisemitism moved many thousands of "ordinary" Germans—and would have moved millions more, had they been appropriately positioned—to slaughter Jews. Not economic hardship, not the coercive means of a totalitarian state, not social psychological pressure, not invariable psychological propensities, but ideas about Jews that were pervasive in Germany, and had been for decades, induced ordinary Germans to kill unarmed, defenseless Jewish men, women, and children by the thousands, systematically and without pity.

FOR WHAT developments would a comprehensive explanation of the Holocaust have to account? For the extermination of the Jews to occur, four principal things were necessary:

1. The Nazis—that is, the leadership, specifically Hitler—had to decide to undertake the extermination.<sup>11</sup>
2. They had to gain control over the Jews, namely over the territory in which they resided.<sup>12</sup>
3. They had to organize the extermination and devote to it sufficient resources.<sup>13</sup>
4. They had to induce a large number of people to carry out the killings.

The vast literature on Nazism and the Holocaust treats in great depth the first three elements, as well as others, such as the origins and character of Hitler's genocidal beliefs, and the Nazis' ascendancy to power.<sup>14</sup> Yet, as I have already indicated, it has treated the last element, the focus of this book, perfunctorily and mainly by assumption. It is therefore important to discuss here some analytical and interpretive issues that are central to studying the perpetrators.

Owing to the neglect of the perpetrators in the study of the Holocaust, it is no surprise that the existing interpretations of them have been generally

produced in a near empirical vacuum. Until recently, virtually no research has been done on the perpetrators, save on the leaders of the Nazi regime. In the last few years, some publications have appeared that treat one group or another, yet the state of our knowledge about the perpetrators remains deficient.<sup>15</sup> We know little about many of the institutions of killing, little about many aspects of the perpetration of the genocide, and still less about the perpetrators themselves. As a consequence, popular and scholarly myths and misconceptions about the perpetrators abound, including the following. It is commonly believed that the Germans slaughtered Jews by and large in the gas chambers,<sup>16</sup> and that without gas chambers, modern means of transportation, and efficient bureaucracies, the Germans would have been unable to kill millions of Jews. The belief persists that somehow only technology made horror on this scale possible.<sup>17</sup> "Assembly-line killing" is one of the stock phrases in discussions of the event. It is generally believed that gas chambers, because of their efficiency (which is itself greatly overstated), were a necessary instrument for the genocidal slaughter, and that the Germans chose to construct the gas chambers in the first place because they needed more efficient means of killing the Jews.<sup>18</sup> It has been generally believed by scholars (at least until very recently) and non-scholars alike that the perpetrators were primarily, overwhelmingly SS men, the most devoted and brutal Nazis.<sup>19</sup> It has been an unquestioned truism (again until recently) that had a German refused to kill Jews, then he himself would have been killed, sent to a concentration camp, or severely punished.<sup>20</sup> All of these views, views that fundamentally shape people's understanding of the Holocaust, have been held unquestioningly as though they were self-evident truths. They have been virtual articles of faith (derived from sources other than historical inquiry), have substituted for knowledge, and have distorted the way in which this period is understood.

The absence of attention devoted to the perpetrators is surprising for a host of reasons, only one of which is the existence of a now over-ten-year-long debate about the genesis of the *initiation* of the Holocaust, which has come to be called by the misnomer the "intentionalist-functional" debate.<sup>21</sup> For better or worse, this debate has become the organizing debate for much of the scholarship on the Holocaust. Although it has improved our understanding of the exact chronology of the Germans' persecution and mass murder of the Jews, it has also, because of the terms in which it has been cast, confused the analysis of the causes of the Germans' policies (this is taken up in Chapter 4), and it has done next to nothing to increase our knowledge of the perpetrators. Of those who defined this debate and made its central early contributions, only one saw fit to ask the question, Why, once the killing began (however it did), did those receiving the orders to kill do so?<sup>22</sup> It ap-

pears that for one reason or another, all the participants in the debate assumed that executing such orders was unproblematic for the actors, and unproblematic for historians and social scientists. The limited character of our knowledge, and therefore our understanding, of this period is highlighted by the simple fact that (however the category of "perpetrator" is defined) the number of people who were perpetrators is unknown. No good estimate, virtually no estimate of any kind, exists of the number of people who knowingly contributed to the genocidal killing in some intimate way. Scholars who discuss them, inexplicably, neither attempt such an estimate nor point out that this, a topic of such great significance, is an important gap in our knowledge.<sup>23</sup> If ten thousand Germans were perpetrators, then the perpetration of the Holocaust, perhaps the Holocaust itself, is a phenomenon of one kind, perhaps the deed of a select, unrepresentative group. If five hundred thousand or one million Germans were perpetrators, then it is a phenomenon of another kind, perhaps best conceived as a German national project. Depending on the number and identity of the Germans who contributed to the genocidal slaughter, different sorts of questions, inquiries, and bodies of theory might be appropriate or necessary in order to explain it.

This dearth of knowledge, not only about the perpetrators but also about the functioning of their host institutions has not stopped some interpreters from making assertions about them—although the most striking fact remains how few even bother to address the subject, let alone take it up at length. Still, from the literature a number of conjectured explanations can be distilled, even if they are not always clearly specified or elaborated upon in a sustained manner. (In fact, strands of different explanations are frequently intermingled without great coherence.) Some of them have been proposed to explain the actions of the German people generally and, by extension, they would apply to the perpetrators as well. Rather than laying out what each interpreter has posited about the perpetrators, an analytical account is provided here of the major arguments, with references to leading exemplars of each one. The most important of them can be classified into five categories:

One explanation argues for external compulsion: the perpetrators were coerced. They were left, by the threat of punishment, with no choice but to follow orders. After all, they were part of military or police-like institutions, institutions with a strict chain of command, demanding subordinate compliance to orders, which should have punished insubordination severely, perhaps with death. Put a gun to anyone's head, so goes the thinking, and he will shoot others to save himself.<sup>24</sup>

A second explanation conceives of the perpetrators as having been blind followers of orders. A number of proposals have been made for the source or sources of this alleged propensity to obey: Hitler's charisma (the perpetrators

were, so to speak, caught in his spell),<sup>25</sup> a general human tendency to obey authority,<sup>26</sup> a peculiarly German reverence for and propensity to obey authority,<sup>27</sup> or a totalitarian society's blunting of the individual's moral sense and its conditioning of him or her to accept all tasks as necessary.<sup>28</sup> So a common proposition exists, namely that people obey authority, with a variety of accounts of why this is so. Obviously, the notion that authority, particularly state authority, tends to elicit obedience merits consideration.

A third explanation holds the perpetrators to have been subject to tremendous social psychological pressure, placed upon each one by his comrades and/or by the expectations that accompany the institutional roles that individuals occupy. It is, so goes the argument, extremely difficult for individuals to resist pressures to conform, pressures which can lead individuals to participate in acts which they on their own would not do, indeed would abhor. And a variety of psychological mechanisms are available for such people to rationalize their actions.<sup>29</sup>

A fourth explanation sees the perpetrators as having been petty bureaucrats, or soulless technocrats, who pursued their self-interest or their technocratic goals and tasks with callous disregard for the victims. It can hold for administrators in Berlin as well as for concentration camp personnel. They all had careers to make, and because of the psychological propensity among those who are but cogs in a machine to attribute responsibility to others for overall policy, they could callously pursue their own careers or their own institutional or material interests.<sup>30</sup> The deadening effects of institutions upon the sense of individual responsibility, on the one hand, and the frequent willingness of people to put their interests before those of others, on the other, need hardly be belabored.

A fifth explanation asserts that because tasks were so fragmented, the perpetrators could not understand what the real nature of their actions was; they could not comprehend that their small assignments were actually part of a global extermination program. To the extent that they could, this line of thinking continues, the fragmentation of tasks allowed them to deny the importance of their own contributions and to displace responsibility for them onto others.<sup>31</sup> When engaged in unpleasant or morally dubious tasks, it is well known that people have a tendency to shift blame to others.

The explanations can be reconceptualized in terms of their accounts of the actors' capacity for volition: The first explanation (namely coercion) says that the killers could not say "no." The second explanation (obedience) and the third (situational pressure) maintain that Germans were psychologically incapable of saying "no." The fourth explanation (self-interest) contends that Germans had sufficient personal incentives to kill in order not to want to say "no." The fifth explanation (bureaucratic myopia) claims that it never even

occurred to the perpetrators that they were engaged in an activity that might make them responsible for saying "no."

Each of these conventional explanations may sound plausible, and some of them obviously contain some truth, so what is wrong with them? While each suffers from particular defects, which are treated at length in Chapter 15, they share a number of dubious *common* assumptions and features worth mentioning here.

The conventional explanations *assume* a neutral or condemnatory attitude on the part of the perpetrators towards their actions. They therefore premise their interpretations on the assumption that it must be shown how people can be brought to commit acts to which they would not inwardly assent, acts which they would not agree are necessary or just. They either ignore, deny, or radically minimize the importance of Nazi and perhaps the perpetrators' ideology, moral values, and conception of the victims, for engendering the perpetrators' willingness to kill. Some of these conventional explanations also caricature the perpetrators, and Germans in general. The explanations treat them as if they had been people lacking a moral sense, lacking the ability to make decisions and take stances. They do not conceive of the actors as human agents, as people with wills, but as beings moved solely by external forces or by transhistorical and invariant psychological propensities, such as the slavish following of narrow "self-interest." The conventional explanations suffer from two other major conceptual failings. They do not sufficiently recognize the extraordinary nature of the deed: the mass killing of people. They *assume* and imply that inducing people to kill human beings is fundamentally no different from getting them to do any other unwanted or distasteful task. Also, none of the conventional explanations deems the *identity* of the victims to have mattered. The conventional explanations imply that the perpetrators would have treated any other group of intended victims in exactly the same way. That the victims were Jews—according to the logic of these explanations—is irrelevant.

I maintain that any explanation that fails to acknowledge the actors' capacity to know and to judge, namely to understand and to have views about the significance and the morality of their actions, that fails to hold the actors' beliefs and values as central, that fails to emphasize the autonomous motivating force of Nazi ideology, particularly its central component of antisemitism, cannot possibly succeed in telling us much about why the perpetrators acted as they did. Any explanation that ignores either the particular nature of the perpetrators' actions—the systematic, large-scale killing and brutalizing of people—or the identity of the victims is inadequate for a host of reasons. All explanations that adopt these positions, as do the conventional explanations, suffer a mirrored, double failure of recognition of the human aspect of the

Holocaust: the humanity of the perpetrators, namely their capacity to judge and to choose to act inhumanely, and the humanity of the victims, that what the perpetrators did, they did to these people with their specific identities, and not to animals or things.

My explanation—which is new to the scholarly literature on the perpetrators<sup>32</sup>—is that the perpetrators, “ordinary Germans,” were animated by antisemitism, by a particular *type* of antisemitism that led them to conclude that the Jews *ought to die*.<sup>33</sup> The perpetrators’ beliefs, their particular brand of antisemitism, though obviously not the sole source, was, I maintain, a most significant and indispensable source of the perpetrators’ actions and must be at the center of any explanation of them. Simply put, the perpetrators, having consulted their own convictions and morality and having judged the mass annihilation of Jews to be right, did not *want* to say “no.”

BECAUSE STUDYING THE perpetration of the Holocaust is a difficult task interpretively and methodologically, it is necessary to address a number of issues openly and directly. Consequently, I lay out here central features of my approach to the subject, and specify clearly the gamut of perpetrators’ actions that needs to be explained. The discussion continues in Appendix 1, where I take up some related issues that might not interest the non-specialist—namely the rationale for the choice of topics and cases that are presented in this study, as well as some further items of interpretation and method.

Interpreters of this period make a grave error by refusing to believe that people could slaughter whole populations—especially populations that are by any objective evaluation not threatening—out of conviction. Why persist in the belief that “ordinary” people could not possibly sanction, let alone partake in wholesale human slaughter? The historical record, from ancient times to the present, amply testifies to the ease with which people can extinguish the lives of others, and even take joy in their deaths.<sup>34</sup>

No reason exists to believe that modern, western, even Christian man is incapable of holding notions which devalue human life, which call for its extinction, notions similar to those held by peoples of many religious, cultural, and political dispensations throughout history, including the crusaders and the inquisitors, to name but two relevant examples from twentieth-century Christian Europe’s forebears.<sup>35</sup> Who doubts that the Argentine or Chilean murderers of people who opposed the recent authoritarian regimes thought that their victims deserved to die? Who doubts that the Tutsis who slaughtered Hutus in Burundi or the Hutus who slaughtered Tutsis in Rwanda, that one Lebanese militia which slaughtered the civilian supporters of another, that the Serbs who have killed Croats or Bosnian Muslims, did so out of con-

viction in the justice of their actions? Why do we not believe the same for the German perpetrators?

The manifold problems in writing about the Holocaust begin with the choice of assumptions that are brought to the study of Germany. This subject is taken up at greater length in Chapter 1. Perhaps the most important is whether or not it is assumed, as the rule has been for most interpreters of this period, that Germany was more or less a “normal” society, operating according to rules of “common sense” similar to our own. For people to be *willing* to slaughter others, in this view, they must be moved by a cynical lust for power or riches or they must be in the grip of a powerful ideology that is so self-evidently false that only the disturbed few could actually succumb to it (aside from those who cynically exploit it for power). The majority of modern people, simple and decent, may be pushed around by these few—but not won over.

Alternatively, this period can be approached without such assumptions, and instead with the critical eye of an anthropologist disembarking on unknown shores, open to meeting a radically different culture and conscious of the possibility that he might need to devise explanations not in keeping with, perhaps even contravening his own common-sense notions, in order to explain the culture’s constitution, its idiosyncratic patterns of practice, and its collective projects and products. This would admit the possibility that large numbers of people, in this case Germans, might have killed or been willing to kill others, in this case Jews, in good conscience. Such an approach would not predetermine the task, as virtually all previous studies have done, to be the explanation of what could have forced people to act against their will (or independent of any will, namely like automatons). Instead, it might be necessary to explain how Germans came to be such potential willing mass killers and how the Nazi regime tapped this disastrous potentiality. This approach, which rejects the anthropologically and social-scientifically primitive notion of the universality of our “common sense,”<sup>36</sup> guides this inquiry.<sup>37</sup>

Central and generally unquestioned methodological and substantive assumptions that have guided virtually all scholarship on the Holocaust and its perpetrators are jettisoned here, because such assumptions are theoretically and empirically unsustainable. In contrast to previous scholarship, this book takes the actors’ cognition and values seriously and investigates the perpetrators’ actions in light of a model of choice. This approach, particularly with regard to the Holocaust, raises a set of social theoretical issues that, however briefly, must be addressed.

The perpetrators were working within institutions that prescribed roles for them and assigned them specific tasks, yet they individually and collectively had latitude to make choices regarding their actions. Adopting a per-



spective which acknowledges this requires that their choices, especially the patterns of their choices, be discerned, analyzed, and incorporated into any overall explanation or interpretation. Ideal data would answer the following questions:

What did the perpetrators actually do?

What did they do in excess of what was "necessary"?

What did they refuse to do?

What could they have refused to do?

What would they not have done?<sup>38</sup>

What was the manner in which they carried out their tasks?

How smoothly did the overall operations proceed?

In examining the pattern of the perpetrators' actions in light of the institutional role requirements and incentive structure, two directions beyond the simple act of killing must be explored. First, in their treatment of Jews (and other victims), the Germans subjected them to a wide range of acts other than the lethal blow. It is important to understand the *gamut* of their actions towards Jews, if the genocidal slaughter is to be explicated. This is discussed in more detail presently. Second, the perpetrators' actions when they were *not* engaged in genocidal activities also shed light on the killing; the insights that an analysis of their non-killing activities offers into their general character and disposition to action, as well as the general social psychological milieu in which they lived might be crucial for understanding the patterns of their genocidal actions.

All of this points to a fundamental question: Which of the gamut of perpetrators' acts constitute the universe of the perpetrators' actions that need to be explained? Typically, the interpreters of the perpetrators have focused on one facet of the Germans' actions: the killing. This tunnel-vision perspective must be broadened. Imagine that the Germans had not undertaken to exterminate the Jews but had still mistreated them in all the other ways that they did, in concentration camps, in ghettos, as slaves. Imagine if, in our society today, people perpetrated against Jews or Christians, Whites or Blacks anything approaching one one-hundredth of the brutality and cruelty that Germans, independent of the killing, inflicted on Jews. Everyone would recognize the need for an explanation. Had the Germans not perpetrated a genocide, then the degree of privation and cruelty to which the Germans subjected Jews would in itself have come into focus and have been deemed an historic outrage, aberration, perversion that requires explanation. Yet these same actions have been lost in the genocide's shadow and neglected by previous attempts to explain the significant aspects of this event.<sup>39</sup>

The fixation on the mass killing to the exclusion of the other related actions of the perpetrators has led to a radical misspecification of the explanatory task. The killing should be, for all the obvious reasons, at the center of

scholarly attention. Yet it is not the only aspect of the Germans' treatment of the Jews that demands systematic scrutiny and explication. Not only the killing but also *how* the Germans killed must be explained. The "how" frequently provides great insight into the "why." A killer can endeavor to render the deaths of others—whether he thinks the killing is just or unjust—more or less painful, both physically and emotionally. The ways in which Germans, collectively and individually, sought in their actions, or merely considered, to alleviate or intensify their victims' suffering must be accounted for in any explanation. An explanation that can seemingly make sense of Germans putting Jews to death, but not of the manner in which they did it, is a faulty explanation.

If analytical clarity is to be achieved, then the actions that need to be explained must be stated clearly. A classificatory scheme that specifies four types of actions can be mapped in two dimensions. One dimension denotes whether or not a German's action was a consequence of an order to perform *that* action or was taken on his own initiative. The other dimension characterizes whether a German perpetrated cruelty.<sup>40</sup>

#### THE PERPETRATORS' ACTIONS

*Ordered by Authority*

		Yes	No
Cruelty	Yes	Organized and "Structured" Cruelty	"Excesses" Such as Torture
	No	Killing Operations and Individual Killings	"Acts of Initiative" Such as Individually Initiated Killings

Acts committed under orders, such as rounding up, deporting, and killing Jews, which were devoid of "excess" or "surplus" cruelty, are acts that in the German context of the times were utilitarian in intent. They were the deeds that the proverbial (mythical) good German who merely slavishly "followed orders" is alleged to have committed. "Acts of initiative" and "excesses" are really both acts of initiative, not done as the mere carrying out of superior orders. Crucially, both are acts of voluntarism on the part of the individual perpetrators. They differ in the dimension of cruelty—the "acts of initiative"

having been the actions of the cool executioner, the "excesses" that of the German who, presumably, took special pleasure in the suffering that he inflicted. The final category of action comprises those actions that Germans undertook under orders, the sole purpose of which was to inflict suffering on the Jews. Such actions are interesting, and some of them are discussed in the case chapters, because they cast doubt on the perpetrators' retrospective rationales for their actions which they have typically proffered after the war. Although the sorts of sham reasons that were ordinarily offered to the men at the time (and by them after the war) for killing Jews (for example, that the Jews threatened Germany, that they were "partisans" and "bandits," or that they spread disease) could perhaps have been believed by a Nazified mind in search of some utilitarian reason for the genocidal slaughter, orders to torture victims should have cast doubt on the "legality" and "reasonableness" of the alleged rationale for their overall treatment of the Jews.

The perpetrators' treatment of Jews, even the act of killing, consisted of different actions, or variables, each of which requires explanation. Any general explanation of Germans' contribution to genocidal slaughter must account for all of them. Large in number, the sorts of actions that need to be explained include those specified by the two dimensions of actions done with or without authoritative directive, and actions which were or were not cruel:

1. All perpetrator actions carried out under orders without surplus cruelty, the most important of these having been those that contributed to genocidal killing.
2. Perpetrator cruelties committed by dint of authority's directives. Institutional, structured cruelties are more important than those carried out on an *ad hoc* basis by individuals or small groups.
3. Perpetrator actions that required initiative beyond what was strictly ordered or required by authority, but which were not marked by "excessive" cruelty.
4. Perpetrator cruelties performed on the perpetrator's own initiative.

This kind of objective characterization of the perpetrators' actions, as useful as it is, remains insufficient either for adequate description and classification, or as the complete basis for explanation. Unless further qualified, this analytical scheme, like previous interpretations of the perpetrators, suggests that "order following" is an unproblematic category. Yet it must be recognized that other actions—such as an individual's disobeyal of other orders, although he carries out the lethal ones—may shed light on the meaning of "order following" in this specific context. In other words, if Germans discriminated among the orders that they chose to follow or in how well they chose to execute them, then the mere obeying of orders, as well as the manner of their execution, needs to be investigated and explained. This action

classification also ignores the potential opportunities that perpetrators had to extract themselves from situations or institutions where they were likely to receive tasks that they deemed undesirable.<sup>41</sup> In short, these naïve characterizations of "obeying orders" or of "acting under orders" shear the perpetrators' actions out of their broader social, political, and institutional context. It is necessary to recapture this context if the actors' willingness to obey orders is to become intelligible.

In light of this discussion, the following must be considered: The first category of action or variable, obeying orders, is not itself unproblematic. German perpetrators had available to them the options of trying to avoid killing duty or to lessen the suffering of the victims. Why did they exercise these options as they did, not more and not less? Knowledge of the second type of action, authoritative cruelties, should lead us to pose the question of why large-scale institutions in the middle of twentieth-century Europe came to be structured in a manner that would purposely promote, to whatever extent they did, enormous misery for their inhabitants. All the institutions were, for their nature and functioning, dependent upon their personnel. The third type of action, initiative or voluntarism, to the extent that it characterized German conduct, obviously needs to be explained, for it might be supposed that those who opposed mass murder would have done no more than the minimum required of them. The fourth type of action, individual cruelty, must, it goes without saying, be explained.<sup>42</sup>

An explanation must account for two more aspects of the perpetrators' actions. The first is the manner in which the perpetrators carried out their assignments, whether half-heartedly or zealously. Even those acts that Germans undertook because of orders should be assessed for their zeal of implementation. An actor can perform a job with various degrees of dedication, thoroughness, and accomplishment. When Germans were searching for hidden Jews, they could have done their utmost to uncover them or could have sought them out in a dilatory, half-hearted manner. The Germans' zeal of implementation both provides insight into their motivation and itself needs to be explained. A second additional feature that requires explanation relates to the horror of their deeds. Why did the horror, brutality, and frequent gruesomeness of the killing operations fail to stay the perpetrators' hands or at least substantially daunt them? The horrific nature of the operations was, of course, not a type of action on the part of the perpetrators, but one of the conditions of their actions that might be thought to have been so revolting and off-putting that its failure to have affected the perpetrators significantly is itself in need of explanation.<sup>43</sup>

Even with these qualifications, this approach must be broadened beyond being an objective categorization of actions to include an investigation of the

motives of those Germans performing acts in a given category, particularly among the "order followers." No matter what category of action a person's act is properly classified as, the person's attitude towards his act, and his motivation to undertake it, is still important, for it renders the act itself one thing or another.<sup>44</sup> This "objective" categorization needs to be supplemented by a subjective one of motivation. A variety of motives is compatible with acting under orders, with showing initiative, with committing "excesses," or with doing a job well or badly. Most important is the question of whether or not the perpetrators believed their treatment of the Jews to be just and, if so, why.<sup>45</sup>

The motivational dimension is the most crucial for explaining the perpetrators' willingness to act, and to a great extent is a product of the social construction of knowledge.<sup>46</sup> The types of actions that a person is willing to carry out—whether only those directly ordered, those that take initiative, those that are excessive, and those that are the product of zealotry—are derived from a person's motivation; but the person's actions do not necessarily correspond to his motivations, because his actions are influenced by the circumstances and opportunities for action. Obviously, without opportunity, a person's motivation to kill or to torture cannot be acted upon. But opportunity alone does not a killer or torturer make.

To say that every (socially significant) action must be motivated does not mean that all acts are merely the result of the actor's prior beliefs about the desirability and justice of the action. It simply means that a person must decide to undertake the action and that some mental calculation (even if he does not conceive of it in such terms) leads him to decide not to refrain from undertaking the action. The mental calculation can include a desire to advance one's career, not to be ridiculed by comrades, or not to be shot for insubordination. A person might kill another without believing in the justice of the death if, despite the understood injustice, he is sufficiently motivated to act by other considerations, such as his own well-being. Wanting to protect one's life is a motive. As such, structures, incentives, or sanctions, formal or informal, can themselves never be motives; they only provide inducements to act or not to act, which the actor might consider when deciding what he will do.<sup>47</sup> Now, of course, certain situations are such that the vast majority of people will act in the same manner, seemingly regardless of their prior beliefs and intentions. Instances of this sort have tempted many to conclude, erroneously, that "structures" cause action.<sup>48</sup> The structures, however, are always interpreted by the actors, who, if they share similar cognitions and values (preserving one's life is a value, as is wanting to live in a "racially pure" society, or wanting to succeed in one's career, or seeking monetary gain, or wanting to be like others at all costs), will respond to them in a like manner. Not every person will place his own well-being over principle; not every person will vi-

olate deeply held moral positions because his comrades do not share them. If people do, then the values—which are not universal values and certainly not universal social psychological dispositions—that lead them to do so must be seen as a crucial part of the explanation. Some people will risk their lives for others, renounce the advancement of their careers, dissent in word and deed from their comrades. Inanimate objects do not independently produce cognition and values; all new cognition and values depend upon a preexisting framework of cognition and value that lends meaning to the material circumstances of people's lives. And it is cognition and values, and only cognition and values, that in the last instant move someone willfully to pick up his hand and strike another.

Whatever the cognitive and value structures of individuals may be, changing the incentive structure in which they operate might, and in many cases will certainly, induce them to alter their actions, as they calculate the desired course of action in light of what they know and value, and the possibilities of realizing them in differing mixes. This, it must be emphasized, does not mean that the incentive structure itself is causing people to act, but only that it *in conjunction with the cognitive and value structures* are together producing the action.

Explaining the perpetrators' actions demands, therefore, that the perpetrators' phenomenological reality be taken seriously. We must attempt the difficult enterprise of imagining ourselves in their places, performing their deeds, acting as they did, viewing what they beheld.<sup>49</sup> To do so we must always bear in mind the essential nature of their actions as perpetrators: they were killing defenseless men, women, and children, people who were obviously of no martial threat to them, often emaciated and weak, in unmistakable physical and emotional agony, and sometimes begging for their lives or those of their children. Too many interpreters of this period, particularly when they are psychologizing, discuss the Germans' actions as if they were discussing the commission of mundane acts, as if they need explain little more than how a good man might occasionally shoplift.<sup>50</sup> They lose sight of the fundamentally different, extraordinary, and trying character of these acts. The taboo in many societies, including western ones, against killing defenseless people, against killing children, is great. The psychological mechanisms that permit "good" people to commit minor moral transgressions, or to turn a blind eye even to major ones committed by others, particularly if they are far away, cannot be applied to people's perpetration of genocidal killing, to their slaughter of hundreds of others before their own eyes—without careful consideration of such mechanisms' appropriateness for elucidating such actions.

Explaining this genocidal slaughter necessitates, therefore, that we keep two things always in mind. When writing or reading about killing operations,

it is too easy to become insensitive to the numbers on the page. Ten thousand dead in one place, four hundred in another, fifteen in a third. Each of us should pause and consider that ten thousand deaths meant that Germans killed ten thousand individuals—unarmed men, women, and children, the old, the young, and the sick—that Germans took a human life ten thousand times. Each of us should ponder what that might have meant for the Germans participating in the slaughter. When a person considers his or her own anguish, abhorrence, or revulsion, his or her own moral outrage at the murder of one person, or of a contemporary “mass murder” of, say, twenty people—whether by a serial killer, or by a semiautomatic-toting sociopath in a fast food outlet—that person gains some perspective on the reality that these Germans confronted. The Jewish victims were not the “statistics” that they appear to us on paper. To the killers whom they faced, the Jews were people who were breathing one moment and lying lifeless, often before them, the next. All of this took place independent of military operations.

The second item to bear in mind, always, is the horror of what the Germans were doing. Anyone in a killing detail who himself shot or who witnessed his comrades shoot Jews was immersed in scenes of unspeakable horror. To present mere clinical descriptions of the killing operations is to misrepresent the phenomenology of killing, to eviscerate the emotional components of the acts, and to skew any understanding of them. The proper description of the events under discussion, the re-creation of the phenomenological reality of the killers, is crucial for any explication. For this reason, I eschew the clinical approach and try to convey the horror, the gruesomeness, of the events *for the perpetrators* (which, of course, does not mean that they were always horrified). Blood, bone, and brains were flying about, often landing on the killers, smirching their faces and staining their clothes. Cries and wails of people awaiting their imminent slaughter or consumed in death throes reverberated in German ears. Such scenes—not the antiseptic descriptions that mere reportage of a killing operation presents—constituted the reality for many perpetrators. For us to comprehend the perpetrators’ phenomenological world, we should describe for ourselves every gruesome image that they beheld, and every cry of anguish and pain that they heard.<sup>57</sup> The discussion of any killing operation, of any single death, should be replete with such descriptions. This, of course, cannot be done, because it would make any study of the Holocaust unacceptably lengthy, and also because few readers would be able to persevere in reading through the gruesome accounts—such inability itself being a powerful commentary on the extraordinary phenomenology of the perpetrators’ existence and the powerful motivations that must have impelled Germans to silence such emotions so that they could kill and torture Jews, including children, as they did.

SINCE UNDERSTANDING THE BELIEFS and values common to German culture, particularly the ones that shaped Germans’ attitudes towards Jews, is the most essential task for explaining the perpetration of the Holocaust, it is the first substantive topic taken up here and forms Part I of the book. The first of its three chapters proposes a framework for analyzing antisemitism. It is followed by two chapters devoted to a discussion of German antisemitism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively. These chapters demonstrate the development in Germany well before the Nazis came to power of a virulent and violent “eliminationist” variant of antisemitism, which called for the elimination of Jewish influence or of Jews themselves from German society. When the Nazis did assume power, they found themselves the masters of a society already imbued with notions about Jews that were ready to be mobilized for the most extreme form of “elimination” imaginable.

Part II presents an overview of the measures that produced Jewish suffering and death and of the institutions that implemented the decisions. The first of its two chapters puts forward a new interpretation of the evolution of the Germans’ assault on the Jews, and demonstrates that whatever the twists and turns of the policy might have been, or seem to have been, the policy conformed to the precepts of German eliminationist antisemitism. Its second chapter provides a sketch of the institutions of killing, the range of perpetrators, and a treatment of the emblematic German institution of killing: the “camp.” Together, these two chapters provide the broader context in which to investigate and understand the core subjects of this study, the institutions of killing and the perpetrators.

The chapters of Parts III through V present cases from each of three institutions of mass killing: police battalions, “work” camps, and death marches. The actions of the members of each are examined in detail, as are the institutional contexts of their actions. These investigations provide the intimate knowledge of the perpetrators’ actions and of the immediate settings and incentive structures of the perpetrators’ lives as genocidal killers, upon which any valid analysis and interpretation of the Holocaust must depend.

Part VI contains two chapters. The first one provides a systematic analysis of the perpetrators’ actions, and it demonstrates the theoretical and empirical inadequacy of the conventional explanations for the findings of the empirical studies. It shows that the perpetrators’ eliminationist antisemitism explains their actions, and that the explanation is also adequate to making sense of the perpetrators’ actions in a variety of comparative perspectives. The second chapter of Part VI explores further the character of eliminationist antisemitism’s capacity to move the Nazi leadership, the perpetrators of the

Holocaust, and the German people to assent and, in their respective ways, to contribute to the eliminationist program. The book ends with a brief Epilogue that draws upon the lessons derived from the study of the perpetrators. It proposes that the nature of German society during the Nazi period must be re-considered, and it suggests some features of such a revised understanding.

THIS BOOK FOCUSES on the perpetrators of the Holocaust. In explaining their actions, it integrates analyses of the micro, meso, and macro levels, of the individual, institutional, and societal. Previous studies, and almost all previous explanations of the perpetrators' actions, have been generated either in the laboratory, have been deduced purely from some philosophical or theoretical system, or have transferred conclusions (which themselves are often erroneous) from the societal or institutional levels of analysis to the individual. As such, they underdetermine the sources of the perpetrators' actions, and they fail to account for, or even to specify,<sup>52</sup> the varieties and variations of those actions. This is particularly the case with all non-cognitive "structural" explanations. Few interpreters have concerned themselves with the micro-physics of the Holocaust's perpetration, which is where the investigation of the perpetrators' actions must begin.<sup>53</sup> This book, therefore, lays bare the perpetrators' actions and makes sense of them by examining them in their institutional and societal contexts, and in light of their social psychological and ideational settings.

People must be motivated to kill others, or else they would not do so. What conditions of cognition and value made genocidal motivations plausible in this period of German history? What was the structure of beliefs and values that made a genocidal onslaught against Jews intelligible and sensible to the ordinary Germans who became perpetrators? Since any explanation must account for the actions of tens of thousands of Germans of a wide variety of backgrounds working in different types of institutions, and must also account for a wide range of actions (and not merely the killing itself), a structure common to them must be found which is adequate to explaining the compass of their actions. This structure of cognition and value was located in and integral to German culture. Its nature and development form the subject of the next three chapters.

## PART I

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# Understanding German Antisemitism: The Eliminationist Mind-set

The community of Jesus is not allowed to hear the horrible fate of the Jews other than in humility, in merciful compassion, and in holy terror. . . . For a Christian therefore there can be no indifferent attitude in this matter [of antisemitism]. . . .

THE GERMAN PASTOR WALTER HÖCHSTÄDTER IN A FORLORN  
APPEAL TO GERMAN SOLDIERS SURREPTITIOUSLY  
DISTRIBUTED IN JUNE AND JULY 1944

How is it possible that our ears, the ears of Christians, do not ring in the presence of the . . . misery and malice [suffered by the Jews]?

KARL BARTH, DECEMBER 1938 LECTURE IN WIPKINGEN  
(SWITZERLAND)

We do not like the Jews as a rule, it is therefore not easy for us to apply to them as well the general love for humankind. . . .

KARL BARTH, JULY 1944 LECTURE IN ZURICH

RECASTING THE VIEW OF  
ANTISEMITISM:  
A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

**I**N THINKING ABOUT German antisemitism, people have a tendency to make important, unacknowledged assumptions about Germans before and during the Nazi period that bear scrutiny and revision. The assumptions are ones that people would not adopt for investigating a prelerate group in Asia or fourteenth-century Germans, yet which they do for the study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany. They can be summed up as follows: Germans were more or less like us or, rather, similar to how we represent ourselves to be: rational, sober children of the Enlightenment, who are not governed by "magical thinking," but rooted in "objective reality." They, like us, were "economic men" who, admittedly, sometimes could be moved by irrational motives, by hatreds, produced by economic frustrations or by some of the enduring human vices like the lust for power or pride. But these are all understandable, as common sources of irrationality, they seem commonsensical to us.

There are reasons to doubt the validity of such assumptions, as an American educator intimately familiar with Nazi schools and youth cautioned in 1941. Nazi schooling, he averred, "produced a generation of human beings in Nazi Germany so different from normal American youth that mere academic comparison seems inane and any sort of evaluation of the Nazi educational system is extremely difficult." So what justifies the prevailing assumptions about the similarity between us and Germans during the Nazi period and before? Should we not take a fresh look and examine whether or not our notions

of ourselves held for Germans in 1890, 1925, and 1941? We readily accept that preliterate peoples have believed trees to be animated by good and evil spirits, capable of transforming the material world, that the Aztecs believed human sacrifices were necessary for the sun to rise, that in the middle ages Jews were seen as agents of the Devil,<sup>2</sup> so why can we not believe that many Germans in the twentieth century subscribed to beliefs that appear to us to be palpably absurd, that Germans too were, at least in one realm, prone to "magical thinking"?

Why not approach Germany as an anthropologist would the world of a people about whom little is known? After all, this was a society that produced a cataclysm, the Holocaust, which people did not predict or, with rare exceptions, ever imagine to have been possible. The Holocaust was a radical break with everything known in human history, with all previous forms of political practice. It constituted a set of actions, and an imaginative orientation that was completely at odds with the intellectual foundations of modern western civilization, the Enlightenment, as well as the Christian and secular ethical and behavioral norms that had governed modern western societies. It appears, then, on the face of it, that the study of the society which produced this then unimagined, and unimaginable, event requires us to question our assumptions about that society's similarity to our own. It demands that we examine our belief that it shared the rational economic orientation that guides social scientific and popular images of our society. Such an examination would reveal that much of Germany did roughly mirror our society, but that important realms of German society were fundamentally different. Indeed, the corpus of German antisemitic literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—with its wild and hallucinatory accounts of the nature of Jews, their virtually limitless power, and their responsibility for nearly every harm that has befallen the world—is so divorced from reality that anyone reading it would be hard pressed to conclude that it was anything but the product of the collective scribes of an insane asylum. No aspect of Germany is in greater need of this sort of anthropological reevaluation than is its people's antisemitism.

We know that many societies have existed in which certain cosmological and ontological beliefs were well-nigh universal. Societies have come and gone where everyone believed in God, in witches, in the supernatural, that all foreigners are not human, that an individual's race determines his moral and intellectual qualities, that men are morally superior to women, that Blacks are inferior, or that Jews are evil. The list could go on. There are two different points here. The first is that even if many of these beliefs are now considered to be absurd, people once held them dearly, as articles of faith. Because they did, such beliefs provided them with maps, considered to have been infalli-

ble, to the social world, which they used in order to apprehend the contours of the surrounding landscapes, as guides through them and, when necessary, as sources and inspiration for designs to reshape them. Second, and equally important, such beliefs, however reasonable or absurd some of them may be, could be and were subscribed to by the vast majority, if not all of the people in a given society. The beliefs seemed to be so self-evidently true that they formed part of the people's "natural world," of the "natural order" of things. In medieval Christian society, for example, fierce debates over some aspect of Christian theology or doctrine could lead to violent conflict among neighbors; yet the bedrock belief in a God and in the divinity of Jesus that made the people all Christians would, nevertheless, remain uncontested, except by some few on the mental and psychological fringe of society. Beliefs in the existence of God, in the inferiority of Blacks, in the constitutional superiority of men, in the defining quality of race, or in the evil of the Jews have served as axioms of different societies. As axioms, namely as unquestioned norms, they were embedded in the very fabric of different societies' moral orders, no more likely to have been doubted than one of the foundational notions of our own, namely that "freedom" is a good.<sup>3</sup>

Although most societies throughout history have been governed by absurd beliefs at the center of their cosmological and ontological notions of life, which their members have held axiomatically, the starting point for the study of Germany during the Nazi period has generally ruled out the possibility that such a state of affairs then prevailed. More specifically, the *assumptions* preponderate first that most Germans could not have shared Hitler's general characterization of Jews, presented in *Mein Kampf* and elsewhere, as being a devilishly cunning, parasitic, malevolent "race" which had harmed the German people greatly, and second that most Germans could not possibly have been so antisemitic as to countenance the Jews' mass extermination. Because this is assumed, the burden of proof has been placed on the people who would assert the opposite. Why?

In light of the obvious possibility, indeed probability, that antisemitism was an axiom of German society during the Nazi period, two reasons suggest that the prevailing interpretive approach towards German antisemitism during the Nazi period should be rejected. Germany during the Nazi period was a country in which government policies, public acts of other sorts, and the public conversation were thoroughly, almost obsessively antisemitic. Even a cursory glance at this society would suggest to the unsophisticated observer, to anyone who takes the evidence of his senses to be real, that the society was rife with antisemitism. Essentially, in Germany during the Nazi period, antisemitism was shouted from the rooftops: "The Jews are our misfortune," we must rid ourselves of them. As interpreters of this society, it is

worth taking both the numbing verbal antisemitic barrage—that emanated not only from the top in what was a political dictatorship but also in large quantity from below—and also the discriminatory and violent policies as indications of the character of its members' beliefs. A society that declares antisemitism with the full power of its lungs, with apparent heart and soul, might indeed be antisemitic.

The second reason for adopting a different perspective than the prevailing one regarding German antisemitism is based on an understanding of the development of German society and culture. In the middle ages and the early modern period, without question until the Enlightenment, German society was thoroughly antisemitic.<sup>4</sup> That the Jews were fundamentally different and maleficent (a theme taken up in the next chapter) was at the time an axiom of German and of most of Christian culture. This evaluation of Jews was shared alike by elites and, more importantly, by the common people. Why not assume that such deeply rooted cultural beliefs, that such basic guides to the social and moral order of the world persist, unless it can be *shown* that they have changed or dissipated?

When conclusive data about the nature of a belief system are lacking, historians and social scientists interested in ascertaining its prevalence and etiology should not project the features of their own society back in time—as students of modern German antisemitism frequently do. They should instead choose a sensible starting point and work forward historically, in order to uncover what actually occurred. If we were to adopt this approach and start in the middle ages, in order to investigate if, where, when, and how Germans abandoned the then culturally ubiquitous antisemitism, our entire orientation towards this issue would change. The questions we would ask, the kinds of phenomena that would count as evidence, and the evaluation of the evidence itself would all be different. It would force us to abandon the *assumption* that, by and large, Germans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were not antisemitic, and instead to *demonstrate* how they freed themselves of their culture's previously ingrained antisemitism, if indeed they ever did.

If, instead of being guided by the widespread assumption of the Germans' likeness to us, we began our analysis from the opposite, more sensible position, namely that Germans during the Nazi period were generally beholden to the dominant and pervasive antisemitic creed of the time, then it would be impossible to dissuade us of this original position. Virtually no evidence exists to contradict the notion that the intense and ubiquitous public declaration of antisemitism was mirrored in people's private beliefs. Before we would change this view we would demand, in vain, that Germans' professions of dissent from the antisemitic creed be produced, that letters and diaries testifying to a conception of Jews different from the public one be

unearthed. We would want reliable testimony that Germans really did look upon the Jews living in their lands as full members of the German and the human community. We would want evidence that Germans opposed and abhorred the myriad anti-Jewish measures, legislation, and persecutions, that they thought it a great crime to incarcerate Jews in concentration camps, to wrest Jews from their homes and communities, and to deport them to horrible fates from the only land that they had ever known. Isolated instances of dissenting individuals would not satisfy. We would want many cases from which it would be justifiable to generalize about significant portions or groups of German society before we would be convinced that our position is wrong. The documentary record does not even come close to meeting such a standard of evidence.

Which starting point is the appropriate one? The one that stands in stark contradiction to the record of public and private utterances and acts? Or the one in consonance with them? The one that *assumes* that a long-standing cultural orientation evaporated, or the one that demands that the subject be investigated and, before antisemitism is declared to have dissipated, that the process by which it allegedly occurred be demonstrated and explained? So why is the burden of proof not on those who maintain that German society had indeed undergone a transformation and had jettisoned its culturally borne antisemitism? With the assumption of the Germans' similarity to our ideal images of ourselves guiding us, with the assumption of the "normalcy" of the German people, the burden of proof *de facto* has lain with those who argue that tremendous antisemitism existed in Germany during the Nazi period. Methodologically, this approach is faulty and untenable. It must be abandoned.

My position is that if we knew nothing more than the character of the public discussion and governmental policies in Germany during its Nazi period, and the history of German political and cultural development, and were forced to draw conclusions about the extent of German antisemitism during the Nazi period, we could judiciously opt for believing only that it was widespread in the society, and Nazi-like in quality. Fortunately, we are not compelled to be satisfied with this state of affairs, and therefore are not wholly dependent upon the sensible assumptions that we bring to the study of Germany during the Nazi period. The conclusion that Nazi antisemitism was integral to the beliefs of ordinary Germans (as reasonable as it would be if based solely on the general historical understanding coupled with an analysis of Germany's public record during the Nazi period) finds considerable further empirical and theoretical support. So the belief in the continuation of a general, culturally shared German antisemitism into the twentieth century—which is based in part on the inability of anyone yet to demonstrate that a



process producing the diminution and abandonment of antisemitism did indeed ever occur—has another foundation. As the next two chapters show, much *positive* evidence exists that antisemitism, albeit an antisemitism evolving in content with the changing times, continued to be an axiom of German culture throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and that its regnant version in Germany during its Nazi period was but a more accentuated, intensified, and elaborated form of an already broadly accepted basic model.

A general problem in uncovering lost cultural axioms and cognitive orientations of societies since gone or transformed is that they are often not articulated as clearly, frequently, or loudly as their importance for the life of a given society and its individual members might suggest. In the words of one student of German attitudes during the Nazi period, “to be an anti-Semite in Hitler’s Germany was so commonplace as to go practically unnoticed.”<sup>5</sup> Notions fundamental to the dominant worldview and operation of a society, precisely because they are taken for granted, often are not expressed in a manner commensurate with their prominence and significance or, when uttered, seen as worthy by others to be noted and recorded.<sup>6</sup>

Look at our own society. It is virtually an unquestioned norm that democracy (however understood) is a good thing, is the desirable form for the organization of politics. It is so unquestioned, and also uncontested in current political parlance and practice, that were we, in the evaluation of the democratic creed in this country, to adopt the approach prevalent among students of German antisemitism, then we might have to conclude that most people are not among its subscribers. We could scour the utterances, both public and private, the letters, and the diaries of Americans, and (social science research on the subject aside) we would find comparatively few professions of their democratic temper. Why? Precisely because the views are uncontested, because they are part of the “common sense” of the society. Obviously, we would find that people participate in the institutions of democracy, just as we would find that Germans massively complied with and enthusiastically lent support in a variety of ways to the antisemitic institutions, legislation, and policies of their country. The Nazi Party, a profoundly antisemitic institution, had over *eight million* members at its peak.<sup>7</sup> We would find among American politicians and officials professions of democratic sensibility, as we can find incessant declarations—indeed, probably far more—of the antisemitic creed among their German counterparts during and before the Nazi period. We could find expressions of the democratic creed in American books, journal and magazine articles, and newspapers, though, similarly, not nearly as frequently as we could find articulation of antisemitism in Germany of the time. The comparison could go on. The point remains that if we looked at the quality and quantity of private individuals’ expressions of their

attitudes towards democracy, were we already beholden to the view that Americans gave little allegiance to democratic institutions and notions, then we would be hard pressed to convince ourselves that our preconceived notion is erroneous. And it is precisely because the democratic creed is uncontested, just as (as the next two chapters show) the antisemitic creed was essentially unchallenged in Germany, that far less “evidence” as to the existence and nature of each people’s beliefs on the respective subjects rises to the surface. Since the unearthing of lost cultural axioms is problematic—because the nature of the phenomenon means that they remain relatively concealed from view—pains must be taken not to rule out their existence, and not to assume that *our* cultural axioms have been shared by other peoples. To make this all too common error is to promise a fundamental misunderstanding of the society under study.<sup>8</sup>

A powerful way to conceive of the cognitive, cultural, and even, in part, the political life of a society is as a conversation.<sup>9</sup> All we know of social reality is taken from the stream of unending conversations which constitute it. How could it be otherwise, since people never hear or learn anything else? With the exception of a few strikingly original people, individuals view the world in a manner that is in consonance with their society’s conversation.

Many axiomatic features of a society’s conversation are not readily detectable, even to the discerning ear. They include the vast majority of culturally shared cognitive models. Cognitive models—beliefs, viewpoints, and values, which may or may not be explicitly articulated—nevertheless serve to structure every society’s conversation. Cognitive models, which “typically consist of a small number of conceptual objects and their relations to each other,”<sup>10</sup> inform people’s understanding of all aspects of their lives and the world, as well as their practices. From understanding emotions,<sup>11</sup> to performing mundane acts, such as buying an item in a store,<sup>12</sup> to negotiating face-to-face relations,<sup>13</sup> to conducting the most intimate of social relations,<sup>14</sup> to constructing a map of the social and political landscape,<sup>15</sup> to making choices about public institutions and politics, including matters of life and death,<sup>16</sup> people, in both their understanding and their actions, are guided by their culturally shared cognitive models, of which they are often but dimly or not at all aware, models such as our culturally bred conception of personal autonomy, which leads us to have a degree of personal autonomy unimaginable in cultures with different conceptions of human beings and social existence.<sup>17</sup>

When a conversation is monolithic or close to monolithic on certain points—and this includes the unstated, underlying cognitive models—then a society’s members automatically incorporate its features into the organization of their minds, into the fundamental axioms that they use (consciously or unconsciously) in perceiving, understanding, analyzing, and responding to

all social phenomena. Thus, the tenets of a society's conversation, namely the fundamental ways in which a culture conceives of and represents the order of the world and the orders and patterns of social existence, become reflected in a person's mind as it matures, because that is all that is available for a developing mind to draw on—as is the case with language. During the Nazi period, and even long before, most Germans could no more emerge with cognitive models foreign to their society—with a certain aboriginal people's model of the mind, for example—than they could speak fluent Romanian without ever having been exposed to it.

ANTISEMITISM, which often has the status and therefore the properties of cultural cognitive models, is only dimly understood. Our apprehension of what it is, how it is to be defined, what produces it, how it is to be analyzed, and how it functions, remains, despite the volumes devoted to the subject, underdeveloped. To some great extent, this is a consequence of the difficulty of studying its host domain, the mind. Our access to its data is notably difficult to win, and the yield, even under optimal conditions, is notoriously unreliable and treacherous.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, our understanding of this multifarious phenomenon can be improved. The next few pages lay out an approach that should contribute to this end.

Antisemitism—namely negative beliefs and emotions about Jews *qua* Jews—has typically been treated in an undifferentiated manner. A person is either an antisemite or not. To the extent that a more nuanced view of antisemitism is put forward, it is usually, for analytical purposes, of limited value, if not misleading. For example, “abstract” antisemitism is often distinguished from presumably “real” antisemitism.<sup>19</sup> The former is supposedly directed at the “idea” of Jews or of Jewry as a corporate entity, but not at live Jews, which is the putative province of the latter. This distinction, as an analysis of different kinds of antisemitism, is specious.<sup>20</sup>

All antisemitism is fundamentally “abstract,” in the sense of not being derived from actual qualities of Jews, yet simultaneously is real and concrete in its effects. What could “abstract” antisemitism possibly mean that would make it not concrete in its consequences? That antisemitism is attached to words or to the concept of a Jew, and never to people? For such a claim to be true, the following would have to obtain: Every time an “abstract” antisemite meets a Jew, he evaluates the Jew, his personal qualities and his moral character, with as much openness, with as little prejudice, as the antisemite would any non-Jew. This is self-evidently false. “Abstract” antisemitism is actually *concrete*, because it guides perception, evaluation, and the willingness to act. It is applied to actual Jews, particularly to those who are not known by the

bearer of such antisemitism. It ends up defining the nature of actual Jews for the antisemite. Antisemitism is always *abstract* in its conceptualization and its source (being divorced from actual Jews), and always concrete and *real* in its effects. Because the consequences of antisemitism are determinative for evaluating its nature and importance, all antisemitisms are “real.”<sup>21</sup>

The moment that the meaning of such a distinction is examined, it becomes clear that it can map the social and psychological world only crudely. Composite categories, such as “dynamic, passionate hatred of Jews,”<sup>22</sup> although they may describe the manifest apparent quality of some antisemitic types that do exist, also cannot be the basis for analysis. Often a contradiction exists between perception and categorization on the one hand, which are often ideal-typical in nature, and the needs of analysis on the other, which are dimensional. Dimensional analysis—the breaking down of a complex phenomenon into its component parts—is imperative not only for the sake of clarity but also for elucidating various aspects of antisemitism, including its ebbs and flows, and the relationship of its various guises to the actions of antisemitites. What confuses much of the discussion about antisemitism, including German antisemitism, is the failure to specify, and keep analytically separate, its various dimensions, of which there are three.<sup>23</sup>

The first dimension captures the type of antisemitism—that is, the antisemite's understanding of the *source* of the Jews' malefic qualities, whatever they are considered to be. What, in the antisemite's eyes, produces a Jew's unfitness or perniciousness? Is it his race, his religion, or his culture, or the alleged deformities inculcated in him by his environment? The consideration of the source of the Jews' undesirable qualities has implications for how the antisemite analyzes the “Jewish problem,” as well as how his cognizance of Jews may change with other societal and cultural developments. This is partly so because each *source* is embedded in an extended metaphorical structure that automatically extends the domain of phenomena, situations, and linguistic usages relevant to the antisemitic compass in a manner paralleling the metaphorical structure itself. The analogical thinking that accompanies different metaphorical structures informs the definition of situations, the diagnoses of problems, and the prescriptions of appropriate courses of action. The biological metaphor at the heart of Nazi antisemitism, for instance (which held the Jews' evil to reside in their blood and which described them in terms of vermin and bacilli, to give but two of the images) is powerfully suggestive.<sup>24</sup>

The second dimension is a *latent-manifest* one that simply measures how preoccupied an antisemite is with Jews. If his antisemitic views occupy his thoughts and inform his actions only rarely, then he is at that moment a latent antisemite, or his antisemitism is in a latent state. If, on the other hand, Jews

occupy a central role in his daily thinking and (perhaps) his actions as well, then his antisemitism is in a manifest state. Antisemitism can fall anywhere on the continuum, from the antisemite hardly thinking about Jews to thinking about them obsessively. The latent-manifest dimension represents the amount of time devoted to thinking about the Jews and the kind and variety of circumstances that conjure up prejudicial thoughts about Jews. It represents the centrality of the Jews in a person's consciousness.

The third dimension, which is the level or intensity of the antisemitism, is a continuum which represents the putative *perniciousness* of the Jews. Are the Jews conceived of by the antisemite to be simply clannish and stingy or to be conspiratorial and bent on dominating political and economic life? As the most casual student of antisemitism knows, the qualities that antisemites have attributed to Jews, that add up to the Jews' overall perceived perniciousness, vary greatly in content. The charges that antisemites have hurled against the Jews through the ages have been diverse and plentiful, from the mundane to the fantastic; yet there is no need to discuss them now at length, for the crucial aspect to understand is that each antisemite has some notion of how dangerous he considers the Jews to be. If an antisemite's beliefs could be measured and quantified accurately, then some index of perceived Jewish perniciousness could be calculated.<sup>25</sup> Although different particular accusations of Jewish malfeasance might lead to different responses by antisemites on particular issues, it is the antisemite's overall sense of the Jewish threat (and not any individual accusation) which is more important for understanding how his beliefs might inform his actions.

Antisemites who fall at similar places on this continuum can and do fall at different places on the latent-manifest continuum. Two antisemites can continually and vociferously blame many of their respective ills on the Jews, while one believes that they are due to the Jews being clannish and thus giving job opportunities to other Jews, and the second believes that the Jews are bent on conquering and destroying his society. These antisemitisms, in their different varieties, are manifest, indeed central to their holders. In the same way, each of these two beliefs about the Jews' intentions and actions can be held not only by manifest antisemites but also by latent ones, the antisemitism remaining latent, perhaps because of little contact with Jews. To take the first type, a person can believe the Jews to be clannish and discriminatory, without ever giving it much thought—for example, during economic boom times, when everyone, including the antisemite, is doing well. He can even believe the Jews to be bent upon destroying his society, but if he is preoccupied with daily affairs and is, to boot, not very political, such beliefs might simmer deep below his daily consciousness. Turning to the *source* dimension, these two different considerations of the Jews' perniciousness, whether in a relatively la-

tent or manifest state, can be based on different understandings of the cause of the Jews' actions. An antisemite may believe that the Jews act the way that they do because their "race," namely their biology, has so programmed them, or because the tenets of their religion, including their rejection of Jesus, has so conditioned them.

Any study of antisemitism needs to specify where the antisemitism falls on each of the dimensions. The temptation should be resisted to think of the two continuous dimensions of *latent-manifest* and of *perniciousness* as dichotomies, as either/or propositions. Naturally, some recurring complexes of the various components of antisemitism exist. Yet their usefulness as "ideal types" derives from this dimensional analysis, which promises greater analytical clarity and precision and which in turn should yield insight into the nature and working of antisemitism.

While this dimensional analysis can usefully characterize all varieties of antisemitism, an important distinction among antisemitisms overlays and qualifies this general scheme. All antisemitisms can be divided according to one essential dissimilitude which can be usefully thought of as being dichotomous (even if, strictly speaking, this may not be the case). Some antisemitisms become woven into the moral order of society; others do not. Many aversions towards Jews—whether they be the kind of mild stereotypes that characterize much intergroup conflict, or even more conspiratorial notions about Jews controlling a country's newspapers—are aversions which, though perhaps intense, are not interwoven into the people's understanding of the moral order of society, or the cosmos. A person can assert that the Jews are bad for his country, just as he can about Blacks, Poles, or any other group, while seeing the Jews as one group, like so many others, with distasteful or harmful qualities. This is a kind of classic intergroup antipathy, which normally characterizes group conflict. In such cases, a person's understanding of the nature of the Jews does not hold them to be in violation of the moral order of society. The classic American prejudice, which takes the form "I'm Italian, or Irish, or Polish, and he's a Jew, and I don't like him," is an assertion of difference and distaste, but not one of perceived violation of the moral order by the other. Jews are sometimes just another "ethnic" group in the array of groups that make up society.

In contrast, the conception of Jews in medieval Christendom, with its uncompromising non-pluralistic and intolerant view of the moral basis of society, was one which held the Jews to violate the moral order of the world. By rejecting Jesus, by allegedly having killed him, the Jews stood in defiant opposition to the otherwise universally accepted conception of God and Man, denigrating and defiling, by their very existence, all that is sacred. As such, Jews came to represent symbolically and discursively much of the

evil in the world; they not only represented it but also came to be seen by Christians as being synonymous with it, indeed as being self-willed agents of evil.<sup>26</sup>

The consequences of antisemites' conceiving of Jews in terms of the moral order of the world are extensive. Identifying Jews with evil, defining them as violators of the sacred and as beings opposed to the fundamental good towards which people ought to strive, demonizes them, producing a linguistic, metaphorical, and symbolic integration of Jews into the antisemites' lives. Jews are not just *evaluated* according to a culture's moral principles and norms but become *constitutive* of the moral order itself, of the cognitive building blocks that map the social and moral domains, which come partly, yet significantly, to depend for their coherence on the then prevailing conception of Jews. Conceptions of Jews, by being integrated by non-Jews into the moral order and hence the underlying symbolic and cognitive structure of society, take on ever wider ranges of meaning, meaning that accrues ever greater structural coherence and integrity. Much that is good becomes defined in opposition to Jews and, in turn, comes to depend upon maintaining this conception of Jews. It becomes difficult for non-Jews to alter the conception of Jews without altering a wide-ranging and integrated symbol structure, including important cognitive models, upon which people's understanding of society and morality rest. It becomes difficult for them to see the Jews' actions, even their existence, other than as desecration and defilement.

Certain antisemitisms conceive of Jews as being more than mere violators, however grave, of moral norms (all antisemitisms hold them to commit such transgressions), but as beings whose very existence constitutes a violation of the moral fabric of society. The fundamental nature of antisemitism of this kind is different from the great variety of antisemitisms that are not colored in this way.<sup>27</sup> They are more tenacious, arouse more passion, usually provoke and support a wider variety of more serious and inflammatory charges against the Jews, and inhere within them a greater potential for violent and deadly anti-Jewish action. Conceptions of Jews that hold them to be destructive of the moral order, that demonize them, can be and have been based on different understandings of the source of the Jews' perniciousness, clearly including both religious and racial understandings of Jews. The former was the case in medieval Christendom, the latter in Germany during its Nazi period.

IN ADDITION TO the *analytical approach* presented here, three major *substantive* notions about the nature of antisemitism undergird the ensuing analysis of German antisemitism. They are:

1. The existence of antisemitism and the content of antisemitic charges against Jews must be understood as an expression of the non-Jewish culture, and are fundamentally *not* a response to any objective evaluation of Jewish action, even if actual characteristics of Jews, and aspects of realistic conflicts, become incorporated into the antisemitic litany.
2. Antisemitism has been a permanent feature of Christian civilization (certainly after the beginning of the Crusades), even into the twentieth century.
3. The widely differing degree of antisemitic expression at different moments in a bounded historical time (of, say, twenty to fifty years) in a particular society is not the result of antisemitism appearing and disappearing, of larger and smaller numbers of people being or becoming antisemites, but of a generally constant antisemitism becoming more or less manifest, owing primarily to altering political and social conditions that encourage or discourage people's expression of their antisemitism.

Each of these propositions could be written about at great length, yet can be treated here only a bit more closely. The first two find support in the general literature on antisemitism. The third is new to this study.

Antisemitism tells us nothing about Jews, but much about antisemites and the culture that breeds them. Even a cursory glance at the qualities and powers that antisemites through the ages have ascribed to Jews—supernatural powers, international conspiracies, and the ability to wreck economies; using the blood of Christian children in their rituals, even murdering them for their blood; being in league with the Devil; controlling simultaneously both the levers of international capital and of Bolshevism—indicates that antisemitism draws fundamentally on cultural sources that are *independent* of the Jews' nature and actions, and the Jews themselves then become defined by the culturally derived notions which antisemites project onto them. This underlying mechanism of antisemitism is true of prejudice in general, though the impressive imaginative heights to which antisemites have repeatedly and routinely soared are rare in the vast annals of prejudice. Prejudice is not the consequence of its object's actions or attributes. It is not some objective dislike of the object's real nature. Classically, no matter what the object does, whether "X" or "not X," the bigot defames him for it. Prejudice's source is the holder of the beliefs himself, his cognitive models and his culture. Prejudice is a manifestation of people's (individual and collective) search for *meaning*.<sup>28</sup> It makes little sense to discuss the real nature of a bigotry's object—in this case, of Jews—when trying to understand the genesis and maintenance of the beliefs. To do so would surely be to muddle the understanding of prejudice—in this case, of antisemitism.

Because antisemitism springs from the bosom of the culture of the antisemites and not from the character of Jews' actions, it is not surprising that

the nature of antisemitism in a given society tends to be in harmony with the cultural models that guide contemporary understanding of the social world. Thus, in theological times, antisemitism tends to share the prevailing religious presuppositions; in times dominated by social Darwinian notions, antisemitism tends to correspond to notions of immutability (since traits are considered to be inborn) and of nations being engaged in zero-sum conflict with each other (for the world is a struggle for survival). It is precisely because cognitive models underlie the general worldviews of those in a society and also the character of antisemitism that antisemitism mimics aspects of the regnant cultural models. Moreover, to the extent that antisemitism is central to the worldview of the people in a society, which has often been the case (especially in the Christian world), the likelihood of its congruence with the prevailing cultural models increases, because if they were in conflict, the psychological and emotional coherence of the people's worldviews would be upset, creating significant cognitive dissonance.

Antisemites typically cast their deep-seated hatreds in the prevailing terms of their era, by incorporating some actual cultural characteristics of Jews or certain elements within the Jewish community into the antisemitic litany. This is to be expected. It would be surprising were this not the case. Students of antisemitism should therefore avoid the temptation of latching on to the few incantations of a prevailing antisemitic litany which appear, if only dimly, to resonate with reality, and to see in the Jews' own actions any cause for the antisemitism; to do so is to confuse symptom with cause. A common mistake of this sort is to attribute the existence of antisemitism to the antisemites' jealousy of Jews' economic success, instead of recognizing that the economic jealousy is a consequence of an already existing antipathy towards Jews. Of the many shortcomings of the economic theory of antisemitism, two are worth mentioning here, one conceptual, one empirical. Economic hostility of this sort is necessarily predicated upon the antisemites' marking of the Jews as being different, identifying them not by the many other (more relevant) features of these people's identities, but as Jews, and then using this label as the *defining* feature of these people, rather than seeing the Jews as the antisemites see others in society, namely as fellow citizens.<sup>29</sup> Without this preexisting, prejudicial conception of the Jews, people would not consider their Jewishness as a relevant economic category. A second failing of the economic theory of antisemitism is that, historically, minority groups have occupied intermediary economic positions in many countries—such as Chinese in Asia and Indians in Africa—and though they have been the objects of prejudice that included economic jealousy and hostility, such prejudice does not invariably produce, indeed almost never produces, the hallucinatory charges that have been routinely directed at Jews.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, economic conflict could not possibly be

the principal source of antisemitism, which, historically, has almost always had such hallucinatory charges at its core.

Perhaps the most telling evidence supporting the argument that antisemitism has fundamentally nothing to do with the actions of Jews, and therefore fundamentally nothing to do with an antisemite's knowledge of the real nature of Jews, is the widespread historical and contemporary appearance of antisemitism, even in its most virulent forms, where there are no Jews, and among people who have never met Jews. This recurring phenomenon is also difficult to explain with an account of the sociology of knowledge and prejudice other than the one adopted here, namely the notion that they are each socially constructed, that they are aspects of culture and of the cognitive models integral to culture that are passed on from generation to generation. People who have never met Jews have believed that Jews were agents of the Devil, inimical to all that is good, responsible for many of the world's actual ills, and bent on the domination and destruction of their societies. England from 1290 to 1656 is a striking, but by no means rare, example of this phenomenon. During this period, it was virtually *judenrein*, purged of Jews, the English having expelled them as the culmination of the anti-Jewish campaign that began in the middle of the previous century. Still, the culture of England remained deeply and thoroughly antisemitic. "For almost four centuries the English people rarely, if ever, came into contact with flesh-and-blood Jews. Yet they considered the Jews to be an accursed group of usurers, who, in league with the Devil, were guilty of every conceivable crime that could be conjured up by the popular imagination."<sup>31</sup> The almost-four-hundred-year persistence of antisemitism in the folk culture of an England devoid of Jews is remarkable and, upon initial consideration, perhaps surprising. Yet when the relationship of Christianity to antisemitism is understood, coupled with an appreciation of how cognitive models and belief systems are socially transmitted, it becomes clear that it would have been surprising had antisemitism dissipated. As part of the moral system of English society, antisemitism remained integral to the standing and sway of Christianity, even when no Jews were in England, even when the people of England had never met any actual Jews.<sup>32</sup>

Antisemitism without Jews was the general rule of the middle ages and early modern Europe.<sup>33</sup> Even when Jews were permitted to live among Christians, few Christians knew Jews or had any opportunity to observe Jews at close range. Christians typically segregated Jews in ghettos, and restricted their activities through a host of oppressive laws and customs. Jews were isolated both physically and socially from Christians. Christians' antisemitism was not based on any familiarity with real Jews. It could not have been. Similarly, most virulent antisemites in Germany during Weimar and during the

Nazi period probably had little or no contact with Jews. Entire areas of Germany were practically without Jews, since Jews formed less than 1 percent of the German population and 70 percent of this small percentage of Jews lived in large urban areas.<sup>34</sup> The anti-Jewish beliefs and emotions of all such antisemites could not possibly have been based on any objective assessment of Jews, and must have been based only on what they had *heard* about Jews,<sup>35</sup> when listening to and partaking in the society's conversation, which itself was equally cavalier about representing the Jews faithfully, having a genesis, life, and shape independent of the Jews whom it purportedly described.

A second major substantive notion about antisemitism important to this study is that antisemitism has been a more or less *permanent* feature of the western world. Without a doubt, it is the all-time leading form of prejudice and hatred within Christian countries. A variety of reasons lie behind this, which are discussed in the next chapter. Briefly, until (and, to a lesser extent, even during) the modern period, with the rise of secularism, beliefs about Jews were integral to the moral order of Christian society. Christians defined themselves partly by differentiating themselves from and often in direct opposition to Jews; beliefs about Jews were intertwined with the moral system of Christianity, which in Christian societies underlies, and for much of western history has been (roughly) coterminous with, the larger moral order. Beliefs about Jews thus do not necessarily change more easily than do Christian precepts that have helped and continue to help people define and negotiate the social world. Indeed, in some ways, antisemitism has proven more durable. For much of western history, it was virtually impossible to be a Christian without being an antisemite of some stripe, without thinking ill of the people who rejected and reject Jesus and thus the moral order of the world derived from his teachings, from his revealed words. This is especially the case since Christians held the Jews responsible for Jesus' death.

That a thoroughgoing antipathy towards Jews was integral to the moral order of society explains not only why antisemitism has persisted for so long and has possessed such a great emotional charge but also why it has had its remarkably protean quality. The underlying need to think ill of Jews, to hate them, to derive meaning from this emotional stance, woven into the fabric of Christianity itself, together with the derivative notion that Jews stand in opposition to the Christian defined moral order, create a readiness, an openness, if not a disposition, to believe that the Jews are capable of all heinous acts. All charges against the Jews become plausible.<sup>36</sup> Of what are the Jews—the killers of Jesus and constant rejecters of his teachings—not capable? What emotion, fear, anxiety, frustration, fantasy could not believably be projected upon the Jews? And because the underlying antipathy towards the Jews has historically been bound to the definition of the moral order, when cultural, social, eco-

nomic, and political forms have undergone change, robbing some of the existing charges against Jews of their resonance, new antisemitic accusations have easily replaced the old. This occurred, for example, throughout western Europe in the nineteenth century, when antisemitism shed much of its religious medieval garb and adopted new, secular clothing. Antisemitism has had an unusual adaptability, an unusual capacity to modernize itself, to keep up with the times. So when the existence of the Devil in his tangible corporal form ceased to move ever greater numbers of people, the Jew in his guise as an agent of the Devil was easily replaced by a Jew of equal danger and malevolence wearing a secular disguise.

Without a doubt, the definition of the moral order as a Christian one, with the Jews as its sworn enemies, has been the single most powerful cause in producing an endemic antisemitism (at least until recently) in the Christian world. This has been reinforced by two other enduring causes which are only mentioned here. First, the social and psychological functions that Jew-hatred, once ensconced, comes to play in people's mental economies reinforce the antisemitism itself, for to abandon antisemitism would necessitate a discomfiting reconceptualization of the social order. Second, politically and socially, Jews have historically been safe targets of hatred and verbal and physical aggression, incurring to the antisemite fewer costs than would attacks on other groups or institutions of society.<sup>37</sup> These two causes have buttressed the foundational Christian cause, producing a deep and enduring hatred—so out of proportion with any objective material or social conflict—of a sort that is unrivaled by any other group hatred in western history.

A third major substantive notion about antisemitism informs this study. It is distinct from the second, yet can be seen as its corollary. Over a period of years, *antisemitism*—composed of a set of beliefs and cognitive models with a stable source metaphor and understanding of the nature of the Jews' putative perniciousness—does not appear, disappear, then reappear in a given society. Always present, antisemitism becomes more or less manifest. Its cognitive salience, emotional intensity, and *expression* increases or decreases.<sup>38</sup> The vagaries of politics and social conditions overwhelmingly account for these swings. German and European history has seen waves of antisemitic expression. Such waves are typically described as the consequence of the growth of antisemitism—of people previously not touched by antisemitism suddenly becoming antisemites—owing to this or that cause. And when the wave subsides, the diminution of antisemitic vituperation is understood to have been caused by a decrease in, or the passing of, antisemitic belief and feeling. This account of antisemitism is wrong. Instead of *antisemitism* itself waxing and waning, it is its differential *expression* that is being observed.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the widespread exhibition of antisemitism at any

time in a given historical period is properly understood as evidence of its existence, if only latent, for that entire era.

No theoretically adequate explanation for the periodic outbursts of antisemitic expression which holds antisemitism itself to appear and disappear in a society can be given. What is the evidence that the beliefs underlying the expressive and other actions vanish? Just as with the genesis of a person's action in the first place, a person might cease to act in a certain manner for many reasons, aside from the dissipation of the beliefs that prefigure it. A man who continues to believe in God may stop attending church for a variety of reasons independent of his unchanging belief. He may not like the new pastor, may have himself acted in a manner that makes him not want to show his face before his community, may need (owing to economic misfortune, for example) to use his time for other activities, and the like. Simply to assume, as so many do, that in the case of antisemitism, action and belief are synonymous, that the disappearance of the former means the disappearance of the latter, is unwarranted.

Had the antisemitic beliefs themselves truly evaporated, from where would they arise again? From thin air? Reemergent antisemitic expression typically employs images, beliefs, and accusations that were central to previous outbursts.<sup>40</sup> How could this be had they indeed disappeared? Particularly when the beliefs, as they so often do, contain hallucinatory elements—holding the Jews to have magical and malevolent powers imperceptible to the naked eye—could such wild beliefs rematerialize whole, in nearly identical form, had they dissipated completely? In the intervening period of months or years between outbursts of passionate hatred, do erstwhile antisemites believe the Jews to be good neighbors, citizens, people? Do they develop positive feelings for Jews? Do they learn to regard Jews favorably as their national brothers and sisters? Do they even minimally develop a strictly neutral attitude towards them, towards their Jewishness, which they still deem to be the Jews' defining feature? And, on the slim chance that the erstwhile antisemites do turn themselves around, do they then afterwards suddenly come to realize (all of them at once) that their positive views of Jews were wrong and that their initial hatreds had been correct all along? No evidence exists for these sorts of oscillations, for individuals or for collectivities.

Thus, to take the most prevalent account of antisemitism, those who argue that economic crises cause antisemitism miss the point. This is the "Jews as scapegoats" account of antisemitism. Among the many empirical and theoretical shortcomings of this account is the failure to realize that the populace could not be mobilized against just anyone or any group. It is no accident that, regardless of the real character of their economic situation or of their actions—even when the overwhelming majority of a country's Jews are

poor—Jews routinely become the object of frustration and aggression owing to economic troubles. Indeed, for most people antisemitism is already integral to their worldview before the advent of a crisis, but in a latent state. Economic crises make people's antisemitism more manifest and *activate* it into open expression. People's preexisting beliefs channel their misfortune, frustration, and anxiety in the direction of the people whom they already despise: the Jews.

Antisemitism's remarkable malleability, already remarked upon, is itself evidence of its constancy. That it comes and goes, finding different forms of expression, reemerging when it seems that it no longer dwells within a society, suggests strongly that it is always there waiting to be aroused and uncovered. That it is more manifest at one point, and less at some other, should not be taken as a sign that antisemitism itself comes and goes, but, as with so many beliefs, that its *centrality* for individuals and their willingness to give it *expression* vary with social and political conditions.

By way of brief comparison, another ideology (and the emotions underlying it) that seems to appear and disappear over and over again has been nationalism. Similar to antisemitism, nationalism, namely the powerful beliefs and emotions associated with holding the nation to be the paramount political category and object of loyalty, has itself not materialized and vanished repeatedly, but its ideational centrality for people and its expression have. The nationalistic beliefs and emotions themselves lie dormant and, like antisemitism, can be activated easily, quickly, and often with devastating consequences, when social or political conditions are such as to provoke them. The rapid activation<sup>41</sup> of nationalistic sentiment that has occurred repeatedly, even recently, in European and German history,<sup>42</sup> especially during the Nazi period, is important to bear in mind, not just because it parallels the account presented here for antisemitism. Historically, the expression of nationalism, particularly in Germany, has gone hand in hand with the expression of antisemitism, since the nation was in part defined in contradistinction to the Jews. In Germany and elsewhere, nationalism and antisemitism were interwoven ideologies, fitting hand in glove.<sup>43</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The study of Germans and their antisemitism before and during the Nazi period must be approached as an anthropologist would a previously unencountered preliterate people and their beliefs, leaving behind especially the preconception that Germans were in every ideational realm just like our ideal notions of ourselves. A primary task is thus to unearth the cognitive models

that underlay and informed the Germans' thinking about the social world and politics, particularly about Jews.

Such models are primarily socially constructed, derivative of and borne by the societal conversation, linguistically and symbolically. A society's conversation defines and forms much of an individual's understanding of the world. When beliefs and images are uncontested or are even just dominant within a given society, individuals typically come to accept them as self-evident truths. Just as people today accept that the earth revolves around the sun, and once accepted that the sun revolves around the earth, so too have many people accepted culturally ubiquitous images of Jews. The capacity of an individual to diverge from prevailing cognitive models is still smaller because cognitive models are among the individual's building blocks of understanding, and are incorporated into the structures of his mind as naturally as the grammar of his language. An individual learns the cognitive models of his culture, like grammar, surely and effortlessly. They each—unless, in the case of the cultural cognitive models, the individual at some point works to reconfigure them—guide the understanding and production of forms that depend on them, contributing to the generation, in the case of grammar, of sentences and meaning, and in the case of cognitive models, of perceptions of the social world and articulated beliefs about it.

Within a society, the most important bearers of the general conversation are its institutions, including crucially the family. It is in institutions generally, and particularly in those that are prominent in socializing children and adolescents, that the belief systems and cognitive models, including those about Jews, are imparted to individuals. Without institutional support of some kind, it is extraordinarily difficult for individuals to adopt notions contrary to those that prevail in society, or to maintain them in the face of widespread, let alone near unanimous, social, symbolic, and linguistic disapproval.

Since the grinding inertia of a society reproduces its axioms and its basic cognitive models as a matter of rule,<sup>44</sup> the presumption here is that the absence of evidence that change occurred in Germany's cognitive models about Jews should be seen to suggest strongly that these models and the elaborated beliefs dependent upon them were reproduced and continued to exist; this perspective departs from the usual presumption that if (difficult to obtain) evidence is not found of the continuing *presence* of once obtaining cognitive models, then the cognitive models—in this case, about Jews—have been abandoned. Finally, cognitive models about Jews are seen here to have been fundamental for generating the kinds of "solutions" that Germans entertained for the "Jewish Problem" and the kinds of actions that they actually undertook.

A sociology of knowledge, an analytical framework for studying antisemitism (specifying its three dimensions of source, perniciousness, and

manifestness), and some foundational substantive notions about the character of antisemitism have been presented here because these elements, whether they are articulated or not, give shape to the conclusions of any study of antisemitism. The importance in laying out the approach being employed for the study of antisemitism is greater still because the data that provide the basis for conclusions are less than ideal in a number of ways. The conclusions must be defended, therefore, not only on the basis of the data themselves, and the use to which they are put, but also on the basis of the general approach adopted for understanding beliefs and cognition, and antisemitism.

It needs to be emphasized that the analysis here cannot be definitive. The proper data simply do not exist. The data are especially deficient because the purpose here is not to trace the character of antisemitism merely among the political and cultural elites, but to gauge its nature and scope among the broad reaches of German society. Even run-of-the-mill public opinion polls, for all their shortcomings, would be an illuminating, luxurious addition to the existing record. The analysis here delineates only certain aspects of antisemitism, and indicates antisemitism's probable societal scope. It focuses on German antisemitism's central tendencies. It does so not only because the data are limited but also because of the conviction that what needs to be illuminated is the *dominant cognitive thread* from which the intricately woven yet powerfully clear and well-focused tapestry of anti-Jewish actions emerged. To focus on the exceptions to the rule—which were on the whole but secondary or tertiary aspects of Germans' views of Jews—would be a disservice, because it would shift attention from the central tendencies of German antisemitism as it developed. The analysis here also devotes less attention to a content analysis of German antisemitism than is customary, because such analyses are readily available elsewhere, and because this space is better spent delimiting antisemitism's dimensions, scope, and power as a source of action.

The next two chapters reconceive our understanding of modern German antisemitism by applying the general theoretical and methodological prescriptions enunciated here, including the dimensional framework, to a more specific analysis of the history of antisemitism in Germany prior to the Nazi period, and then to an analysis of antisemitism in Germany during the Nazi period itself. The historical account is necessary in order to clarify why the German people so easily accepted the tenets of Nazi antisemitism and supported the Nazis' anti-Jewish policies. In light of the problematic nature of the data, the discussion emerges from, among other things, the strategy of investigating "crucial" cases, namely those people or groups of people who (according to other criteria) should have been least likely to have conformed to the interpretations and explanations being presented here. If it can be shown that even the "friends" of Jews concurred with German antisemites about es-



sential aspects of their understanding of the Jews' nature, in large measure because their thinking derived from similar cognitive models about Jews, then it would be difficult to believe anything but that antisemitism was endemic to German culture and society. When the analysis of the nature and extent of German antisemitism has been completed, the dimensional analysis is broadened, in order to demonstrate the links between antisemitism and anti-Jewish action. The discussion concludes with an analysis of the relationship of German antisemitism during the Nazi period to the measures that Germans took against Jews.

The conclusion of these chapters is that in Germany during the Nazi period an almost universally held conceptualization of the Jews existed which constituted what can be called an "eliminationist" ideology, namely the belief that Jewish influence, by nature destructive, must be eliminated irrevocably from society. During the Nazi period, all of the Germans' policy initiatives and virtually all of their important measures towards Jews, as different in nature and degree as they manifestly appear to be, were in the practical service of, and indeed were symbolically equivalent expressions of, the Germans' desire, the Germans' perceived need, to succeed in the eliminationist enterprise against Jews.

## Epilogue

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### THE NAZI

### GERMAN REVOLUTION

THIS STUDY OF the Holocaust and its perpetrators assigns to their beliefs paramount importance. It reverses the Marxian dictum, in holding that consciousness determined being. Its conclusion that the eliminationist antisemitic German political culture, the genesis of which must be and is explicable historically, was the prime mover of both the Nazi leadership and ordinary Germans in the persecution and extermination of the Jews, and therefore was the Holocaust's principal cause, may at once be hard to believe for many and commonsensical to others. The evidence that so many ordinary people did maintain at the center of their worldview palpably absurd beliefs about Jews like those that Hitler articulated in *Mein Kampf* is overwhelming. And the evidence has been available for years, indeed available to any observer in Germany during the 1930s. But because the beliefs have seemed to us to be so ridiculous, indeed worthy of the ravings of madmen, the truth that they were the common property of the German people has been and will likely continue to be hard to accept by many who are beholden to our common-sense view of the world, or who find the implications of this truth too disquieting.

Germany during the Nazi period was inhabited by people animated by beliefs about Jews that made them willing to become consenting mass executioners. The study of the perpetrators, especially of police battalions, who were a representative cross section of German men—and therefore are indicative of what ordinary Germans were like regarding Jews—compels us, precisely be-

cause they were representative of Germans, to draw this conclusion about the German people. Being ordinary in the Germany that gave itself to Nazism was to have been a member of an extraordinary, lethal political culture. That German political culture was producing such voluntaristic killers suggests, in turn, that perhaps this was a society that had undergone other important and fundamental changes, particularly cognitive and moral ones. The study of the Holocaust's perpetrators thus provides a window through which German society can be viewed and examined in a new light. It demands that important features of the society be conceived anew. It suggests further that the Nazis were the most profound revolutionaries of modern times and that the revolution that they wrought during their but brief suzerainty in Germany was the most extreme and thoroughgoing in the annals of western civilization. It was, above all, a cognitive-moral revolution which reversed processes that had been shaping Europe for centuries. This book is ultimately not only about the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Because the perpetrators of the Holocaust were Germany's representative citizens, this book is about Germany during the Nazi period and before, its people and its culture.<sup>1</sup>

The Nazi German revolution, like all revolutions, had two fundamental, related thrusts: a destructive enterprise, which was a thoroughgoing revolt against civilization, and a constructive enterprise, which was a singular attempt to make a new man, a new body social, and a new Nazified order in Europe and beyond. It was an unusual revolution in that, domestically, it was being realized—the repression of the political left in the first few years notwithstanding—without massive coercion and violence. The revolution was primarily the transformation of consciousness—the inculcation in the Germans of a new ethos. By and large, it was a peaceful revolution willingly acquiesced to by the German people. Domestically, the Nazi German revolution was, on the whole, consensual.

While it was consensual at home, the Nazi German revolution was the most brutal and barbarous revolution of modern western history for those who would be excluded from the new Germany and Europe, namely the tens of millions whom the Germans marked for subjugation, enslavement, and extermination. The essential nature of the revolution—how it was transforming the mental and moral substance of the German people and how it was destroying, to use Himmler's formulation, the "human substance" of non-Germans—was to be discerned in Germany's emblematic institution during its Nazi period: the camp.

THE CAMP WAS NOT merely the paradigmatic institution for the Germans' violent domination, exploitation, and slaughter of those whom they desig-

nated as enemies, for the Germans' most uninhibited self-expression of mastery, and for the Germans' molding of their victims according to their "sub-human" image of them. The camp's essence was not reducible to these particular features (which were discussed in Chapter 5), because the camp was above all else a revolutionary institution, one that Germans actively put to ends that they understood to be radically transformative.

The revolution was one of *sensibility and practice*. As a world of unrestrained impulses and cruelty, the camp system allowed for the expression of the new Nazi moral dispensation, one which was in its essential features the antithesis of Christian morality and Enlightenment humanism—"those, stupid, false, and unhealthy ideals of humanity," as Göring called them.<sup>2</sup> The camp system denied in practice the Christian and Enlightenment belief in the moral equality of human beings. In the Nazi German cosmology, some humans, by reason of their biology, ought to be killed; others were fit for slavery, and they too could be killed if the Germans deemed them to be superfluous. The camp system was predicated upon the existence of superiors and inferiors, of masters and slaves. Both its theory and practice mocked the Christian admonition to love one's brother, to feel pity for the downtrodden, to be guided by empathy. Instead, the ethos of the camp preached and was animated by the hatred of others, banished pity from its discourse and practice, and inculcated not an empathetic emotional reverberation for the suffering of others, but a hardened disdain, if not a gleeful enjoyment of it.

Suffering and torture in the German camp world was, therefore, not incidental, episodic, or a violation of rules, but central, ceaseless, and normative. Gazing upon a suffering or recently slaughtered Jew or, for that matter, a suffering Russian or Pole, did not elicit and, according to the moral life of the camp, should not have elicited sympathy, but was indeed greeted, as it ought to have been according to the Nazi German morality, by German hardness and satisfaction in having furthered the reconstructive destructive vision for the new Germany and the new German-ruled Europe.

The ideal guiding the Germans' treatment of the most hated of the camp world's prisoners, the Jews, was that it ought to be a world of unremitting suffering which would end in their deaths. A Jew's life ought to be a worldly hell, always in torment, always in physical pain, with no comfort available. It is worth emphasizing that this was a profound alteration, a revolutionary alteration, in sensibility occurring in mid-twentieth-century Europe. So brutal was the German revolutionary practice that Chaim Kaplan was already struck by it in late 1939—before the formal program of extermination had begun:

The horrible persecutions of the Middle Ages are as nothing in face of the terrible troubles in which the Nazis enmesh us. In primitive times, methods

of torture were also primitive. The oppressors of the Middle Ages knew only two alternatives: life or death. As long as a man lived, even if he were a Jew, they let him live. He also had an opportunity to live out his days by choosing conversion or exile. The Nazi inquisition, however, is different. They take a Jew's life by throttling his livelihood, by "legal" limitations, by cruel edicts, by such sadistic tortures that even a tyrant of the Middle Ages would have been ashamed to publicize them. It was part of the concept of that generation to burn a sinning soul, but it was not their habit to torture a man because he was born "in sin," according to the hangman's ideas.<sup>3</sup>

The regression to barbarism, the logic of modern German antisemitism, and the tasks to which the Nazi leadership put it were such that Kaplan and, presumably, many other Jews would have preferred to live not in this German twentieth century, with its exemplary institution of the camp, but under some benighted medieval tyrant.

The second goal for which the Germans employed the camp world was the *revolutionary transformation of society* in a manner that denied basic premises of European civilization. The Nazi German revolution sought to reconstitute and reshape the European social landscape according to its racial biological principles, by killing millions of people deemed, according to its racial fantasies, dangerous or expendable, and thereby to increase the proportion of the "superior races" and strengthen the overall biological stock of humanity and, complementing this, to reduce the danger to the "superior races" by the more numerous "inferior" ones. The ethos of the vast, regressive reconstructive enterprise that Nazism envisaged for a German-dominated Europe was frequently declaimed by Himmler, who was spearheading the revolution: "Whether nations live in prosperity or starve to death interest me only insofar as we need them as slaves for our *Kultur*, otherwise it is of no interest to me."<sup>4</sup> Eastern Europe would become a German colony populated by German settlers and Slavic slaves.<sup>5</sup>

The camp world was revolutionary because it was the main instrument for the Germans' fundamental reshaping of the social and human landscape of Europe. The camp world and the *system* of German society which it composed was understood to have been guided by principles which stood on its head the body of principles that had previously informed the public morality and (the many exceptions notwithstanding) the conduct of German and European society. The establishment of this new world would have meant the end of western civilization as it was known, which would have included and been symbolized by the destruction of Christianity itself.<sup>6</sup> The camp system was also revolutionary because it was itself already a microcosm of that world, the social model that was to be imposed on a large part of Europe and the

moral model that was to become the foundation for the European society which the Germans were forging. Indeed, the ever-growing camp system was the embryo of the new Germanic Europe, which essentially would have become a large concentration camp, with the German people as its guards and the remaining European peoples (with the exception of the "racially" privileged) as its corpses, slaves, and inmates.

Already in the fall of 1940, Hans Frank, the German Governor of Poland outlined clearly this vision of Europe, though he spoke directly only of his jurisdictional area of Poland. "We think here in imperial terms, in the most grandiose style of all times. The imperialism that we develop is incomparable with those miserable attempts that previous weak German governments have undertaken in Africa." Frank reported to his audience that "the *Führer* has further said explicitly" that Poland is (in Frank's paraphrase) "destined" to be a "gigantic work camp, where everything that means power and independence is in the hands of the Germans." No Pole would receive higher education, and "none may rise to a rank higher than foreman." In Hitler's and Frank's view, the Polish state would never be restored. The Poles would be permanently "subjugated" to the master race. Frank's elaboration upon this vision of the concentration camp as the model for Poland was not done in secret but expressed in two speeches to the heads of the departments of his administration. Frank was imparting the governing ethos to the people who were governing Poland.<sup>7</sup>

The camp system was a defining feature of German society during its Nazi period, and the camp was the society's emblematic institution. It was the institution that most prominently set Germany apart from other European countries, that to a large extent gave it its distinctive murderous character. The camp system was also the largest and most important institutional innovation of Nazism, forming an entire new subsystem of society. The first few camps of 1933, set up shortly after Hitler's ascension to power, laid the foundation for this new system of society, which continually expanded geographically in the number of its installations (reaching over ten thousand) and in the size of its population. The camp system was the greatest growth institution during this period of German history, and it would only have increased in size and importance had Germany not been defeated. Finally, it was defining and emblematic because manifold features of camps represented and symbolized distinctive central aspects of Germany during its Nazi period. The camp system was the site where the Nazi German world was most unreservedly, most unabashedly being created. Nazi ideology, which cannot be doubted to have been the source of and the driving force behind the murderous and transformative German policies under Hitler, was most fully expressed in the camp world. The type of society and values which Nazi

ideology called for, which the German educational system was inculcating in Germany's young, and which Hitler and Himmler made clear they were working to create, was realized first and found its closest empirical referent in the camp world. Thus, it was in the camps that the essential features of the Nazi German revolution and the revolution's new German man, the character of its refashioned body social, and the nature of the intended European order could most clearly be seen.

The camp world taught its victims firsthand lessons and therefore teaches us secondhand lessons about the essential nature of Germany during the Nazi period. The camp system exposes not just Nazism's but also Germany's true face. The notion that Germany during the Nazi period was an "ordinary," "normal" society which had the misfortune to have been governed by evil and ruthless rulers who, using the institutions of modern societies, moved people to commit acts that they abhorred, is in its essence false. Germany during the Nazi period was a society which was in important ways fundamentally different from ours today, operating according to a different ontology and cosmology, inhabited by people whose general understanding of important realms of social existence was not "ordinary" by our standards. The notion, for example, that an individual's defining characteristics were derived from his race and that the world was divided into distinct races—whose respective capacities and moral worth were biologically determined and widely variable—was, if not quite an axiom of German society during the Nazi period, then an extremely widespread belief. That the world ought to be organized or reorganized according to this conception of an immutable hierarchy of races was an accepted norm. The possibility of peaceful coexistence among the races was not a central part of the cognitive landscape of the society. Instead, races were believed to be inexorably competing and warring until one or another triumphed or was vanquished. Life within the camp system demonstrated how radically ordinary Germans would implement the racist, destructive set of beliefs and values that was the country's formal and informal public ideology. The camp—Germany's distinguishing, distinctive, indeed, perhaps, central institution—was the training ground for the masterly conduct of the ordinary new German "superman," and it revealed his nature. The camp reveals that Himmler's *Kultur* had, to a great extent, already become the *Kultur* of Germany.

The ever-expanding camp world was the principal site of central aspects of the Nazi German revolution. The Germans' mass murder, their reintroduction of slavery on the European continent, their adoption of free license to treat "subhumans" however they wished without any restraints—all suggest that the camp was the emblematic institution of Germany dur-

ing its Nazi period and the paradigm for the Thousand Year Reich. The camp world reveals the essence of the Germany that gave itself to Nazism, no less than the perpetrators reveal the slaughter and barbarism that ordinary Germans were willing to perpetrate in order to save Germany and the German people from the ultimate danger—DER JUDE.

## APPENDIX 1

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### A NOTE ON METHOD

As important as it is to lay bare the general and theoretical considerations that guide this book's inquiry, it is equally necessary to specify other considerations of method that have given shape to this investigation of the perpetrators.

Because the scope of what we do not know of the perpetrators and of the Holocaust is so large, and because of the consequent need to be selective, this book covers only some of the institutions of killing. It makes no pretense of providing a comprehensive history of the Holocaust. Its cases derive not from considerations of narrative fluency and comprehensiveness, but of their appropriateness for answering certain questions, for testing certain hypotheses. The book's intent is primarily explanatory and theoretical. Narrative and description, important as they are for specifying the perpetrators' actions and the settings for their actions properly, are here subordinate to the explanatory goals.

The hypothesis that I believed most likely to be borne out, upon embarking on the empirical research for this study, was that the perpetrators were motivated to take part in the lethal persecution of the Jews because of their beliefs about the victims, and that various German institutions were therefore easily able to harness the perpetrators' pre-existing antisemitism once Hitler gave the order to undertake the extermination. I therefore chose to investigate institutions and particular cases of those institutions which would in a variety of ways isolate the influence of antisemitism in order to assess its causal efficacy. Should the hypothesis be erroneous, then the cases chosen here would have clearly confounded it. The three institutions analyzed in depth are police battalions, "work" camps, and death marches, each of which, as it happens, has been greatly neglected.

A further consideration informed the choice of cases and samples. Two different target populations are the object of this study: the population of perpetrators and

the German people themselves. This is a study of the perpetrators of the Holocaust and simultaneously of Germany during the Nazi period, its people and political culture. Thus, the institutions treated here are intended to do double analytical duty. They should permit the motivations of the perpetrators in those particular institutions to be uncovered, and also allow for generalizing both to the perpetrators as a group and to the second target group of this study, the German people. Much of what is said here about methods therefore pertains both to the perpetrators and to the larger population of Germans.

This study subjects the competing hypotheses discussed earlier to empirical scrutiny, drawing on a variety of cases, including, occasionally, comparative material from non-German actors and other genocides. It draws on my research on a large number of different kinds of units and institutions engaged in the Holocaust: over thirty-five police battalions involved in mass killings; all eighteen *Einsatzkommandos*, which were the killing squads set up for the extermination of Soviet Jewry; a number of different ghettos and concentration camps; "work" camps; Auschwitz and the other death camps; and a dozen death marches that took place in the waning days of the war.<sup>1</sup> So even though the case chapters are devoted to only a few police battalions, "work" camps, and death marches, my conclusions are buttressed by a still more extensive fund of knowledge. The chapters of Part VI, which bring together the lessons learned from the cases, selectively draws on material from other cases. An effort, though, has been made not to poach from other cases, for the temptation to pick and choose propitious material from a large number of cases should be resisted so as to avoid bias in the conclusions. My research has been guided by the belief that examining the men (and women) working in different kinds of institutions with different kinds of tasks would provide a comparative perspective on the perpetrators that would yield insights unobtainable by focusing on one kind of institution.<sup>2</sup>

Of the many units I have researched, the ones I decided to study most intensively tended to share a number of characteristics, although not every unit shared each one. Chief among them were units in which it could be proven conclusively that the men knew that they did not have to kill. As long as the threat of coercion might have existed, it would be hard to assess whether or not other motivations were operative. I also concentrated on units that were engaged in repeated face-to-face killings, where they confronted their victims and were parties to unspcakably gruesome scenes of spattered blood, bone, and brain matter, over an extended period of time because, for a variety of reasons, the actions of people who were *vocational* killers of *this sort* rather than episodic ones make greater explanatory demands. Of the units that satisfied the first two criteria, I focused a great deal of attention on those that were also made up of the men who seemed by their backgrounds to be the *least* likely candidates for becoming willing executioners. This is one reason for the emphasis on police battalions, many of which were composed of "ordinary" Germans. It is these people, and not Hitler's most fanatical followers, whose actions are most difficult to explain and therefore test most severely any explanation. So any explanation has to be able to account for their participation, and if it can do so for them, then it is likely to explain the actions of Hitler's more zealous acolytes, who presumably would have been far

more willing than less enthusiastic followers to carry out a given policy whatever it was.

A number of police battalions satisfy all the criteria. Surprisingly, these units, until two recent books,<sup>3</sup> have hardly even been mentioned in the literature on Nazi genocide, and until I began my research (before these books appeared), I too was unaware of the scope of their actions and, naturally, their significance for understanding this period of German society and politics. Many police battalions were units of men drawn haphazardly into them (they were drafted), who had no special ideological training; no particular military background, who were often older, in their mid-thirties, and who were family men—not the pliable eighteen-year-olds that armies love to mold. Furthermore, these units ended up in killing operations not by design, but by chance. In sending these men to kill, the regime proceeded as if any German was fit to be a mass executioner. All of this is treated in great detail in Part III.

The rationale for studying "work" camps was to subject the operative hypothesis to its toughest test. Institutions devoted to economic production, whose calling card is rationality, should have been the least susceptible to the influence of a pre-existing ideology—in this case, to antisemitism. If it turned out that the functioning of "work" camps could be explained only by taking into account the existence of antisemitism among the responsible Germans, then this would be powerful evidence for the primary importance of antisemitism in explaining the Germans' actions. Naturally, were this hypothesis not borne out in this case, then it would have to be jettisoned, qualified, or complemented by other ones. The camps studied most intensively were those around Lublin during a later phase of the Holocaust when the Germans were permitting Jews to remain alive in Poland ostensibly *only* to extract labor from them. This was the time and these were the circumstances when "work" camps should have been most purely for work, and so, in studying them, it should be easiest to isolate the capacity of German antisemitism to undermine, if indeed it did, the rational operation of institutions of labor.

The death marches of 1945, when Germans marched Jews around the European and German countryside in flight from allied armies, among other things, allow the perpetrators' actions to be examined at a time when, because they were under virtually no supervision, they could choose most freely to act as they wished, and when, because Germany was imminently to become a defeated, occupied, and perhaps punished country, killing and brutalizing Jews actually imperiled their captors. The death marches permit the perpetrators' actions and motivations under conditions of virtual autonomy and, consequently, the degree of their devotion to the mass slaughter to be assessed. Under these conditions, those not devoted to the suffering and deaths of Jews should have desisted from harming them. The death marches therefore subject the hypothesis that the perpetrators were motivated by their own antisemitism, by their attendant belief in the justice of the slaughter of the Jews, to a different kind of difficult test.

The cases chosen here can be conceived of as different kinds of "crucial cases," namely cases chosen on the basis of explanatory variables that are most likely to confound my proposed explanation. They are therefore also the cases which would most

firmly lend credence to that explanation, if it can account for them.<sup>4</sup> The cases have the further virtue of allowing for the isolation of the various factors that could plausibly explain the perpetrators' actions and thereby permit for a necessary degree of analytical clarity.

I decided to study selected entire institutions and their personnel, rather than take some scientific sample of perpetrators from a larger number of institutions (though for the purposes of studying the backgrounds of the perpetrators, samples were taken from different institutions). The perpetrators, I reasoned, could not be understood, their actions could not be explained, if wrested from their institutional contexts. It makes little sense to view them as individuals disembodied from their immediate social relations. Without studying the units in which they operated, too little would be learned about the character of their lives for a proper assessment of their motivations. Institutions of killing (such as police battalions, *Einatzkommandos*, camps of different kinds, and death marches) differed from each other, as did different units within each type of institution, in a host of ways. Studying some scientific sample of individuals from many units would efface the institutional, material, and social psychological circumstances of the Holocaust's perpetration.

A second reason for choosing entire units is that not enough is known about the actions of most individuals in order to make it sensible to base a study on such a methodology. While a fair amount can be unearthed about the overall character and *patterns of action* in given institutions of killing, no such robust knowledge can be acquired about the vast majority of individuals who would form the sample of such a research strategy. The perpetrators about whom much is known are an unrepresentative group of people who were intensively investigated by the Federal Republic of Germany's legal authorities because, generally speaking, they were in command positions or, by their actions, distinguished themselves as having been especially brutal. These people are no doubt of great interest, and the knowledge we have of them is used here, but because they are an unrepresentative group, they cannot provide the basis for answers to the *general* empirical and theoretical questions of this book.

The particular cases from each institution chosen here depended on the criteria mentioned as well as on the availability of sufficient data. A problem in studying the perpetrators is the unevenness of the extant material. Contemporary documents which illuminate in sufficient detail the perpetrators' actions, or anything at all about their motivations, barely exist. About some institutions of killing, including some of the cases discussed here, virtually no contemporary documents of any kind have survived. Therefore, the primary material for this study has been drawn mainly from materials amassed during the Federal Republic of Germany's postwar legal investigations of Nazi crimes, which reside in the German justice system. These investigations are the major, indeed the indispensable, almost sole source for studying the executioners, yet they remain greatly underutilized. They contain the relevant documents that could be found and obtained, and, more important, extensive interrogations of the perpetrators themselves as well as of surviving victims and bystanders.<sup>5</sup> From these interrogations and testimonies, a detailed portrait of life within an institution of killing and of the history of its members' actions can often be constructed.

Since frequently a number of people, sometimes people positioned differently in relation to the execution ditch, give testimony about the same events, the opportunity exists to check and cross-check accounts. This often produces mutual verification and clarity, though at other times it leads to contradictions, which cannot be resolved except logically and according to the judgment of the interpreter.<sup>6</sup> Fortunately, when such unresolvable discrepancies do occur, especially over the number of Jews whom the Germans deported or killed in a given operation, they are generally not especially significant for analytical purposes.<sup>7</sup>

This rich, illuminating postwar testimony is also a problematic source. Aside from memory's natural deficiencies in portraying events often of over twenty years past,<sup>8</sup> the perpetrators have powerful motivations for concealing, evading, dismissing, and lying. Their testimony is replete with omissions, half-truths, and lies. They, it should not be forgotten, were giving testimony to police interrogators and other legal authorities about crimes which were considered by their own society, the Federal Republic of Germany, and by the world at large to be among the greatest in human history. Many perpetrators had spent the two to three decades prior to their testimony denying to others, whether by silence or prevarication, the degree of their involvement in the genocide. Even when they could not completely hide that they had given their bodies to the slaughter, they in all likelihood denied that they had given to it their souls, their inner will and moral assent. To do otherwise was to declare to family, and friends, to their growing children, to their now disapproving society: "I was a mass murderer and am (or was) proud of it." After years of habitual repression and denial, they found themselves facing the legal authorities, forced to confront their deeds, long buried from the conversation of their daily lives. Is it any surprise that they would not now be eager to declare to their interrogators that they had been mass murderers and that they had approved of their actions, even perhaps enjoyed them? They could also not have been sure that they would not themselves be held accountable for their crimes. Motivations for lying, for not announcing that they were among history's greatest criminals, were powerful indeed. And indeed it is easy to demonstrate that they do lie rampantly, by word and by omission, in order to minimize their physical and cognitive involvement in the mass slaughters. Because of this, the only methodological position that makes sense is to discount *all* self-exculpating testimony that finds no corroboration from other sources.<sup>9</sup>

Attempting to explain the Germans' actions, indeed just writing a history of this period, by relying on their self-exonerating testimony would be akin to writing a history of criminality in America by relying on the statements of criminals as given to police, prosecutors, and before courts. Most criminals assert that they have been wrongly accused of the crimes. They certainly neglect to volunteer information about other criminal acts that they may have engaged in, of which the authorities are ignorant. If they are unable to deny plausibly their material culpability, then they find whatever ways they can to attribute responsibility for the crimes to others. If asked, whether in court or by the news media, then they ordinarily profess, even with great conviction and passion, to abhor the crimes which they, despite their protestations, have committed. When facing the authorities, as well as the general society, criminals



lie about their actions and their motivations. Even after conviction, even after the evidence has been presented which convinces a jury beyond a reasonable doubt that a person is guilty, criminals habitually proclaim their innocence. Why should we think that those who were complicit in one of the greatest crimes in human history should be more honest, more self-incriminating?

To accept the perpetrators' self-exonerations without corroborating evidence is to guarantee that one will be led down many false paths, paths that preclude one from ever finding one's way back to the truth. On the other hand, were such self-exonerations indeed true, a variety of other evidence supporting them should have come to light. It rarely does. As the chapters treating the perpetrators lay out in depth, had the perpetrators really disapproved of the mass murder, had they really been opposed to participating in it, then many ways to express this were available to them—the spectrum ran from outright refusal to kill, to expressing disapproval and opposition either symbolically or in discussion with comrades<sup>10</sup>—that entailed few, if any, costs to the perpetrators.<sup>11</sup>