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Hitler's willing executioners

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ELIMINATIONIST ANTISEMITISM AS GENOCIDAL MOTIVATION

THAT THE PERPETRATORS approved of the mass slaughter, that they willingly gave assent to their own participation in the slaughter, is certain. That their approval derived in the main from their own conception of Jews is all but certain, for no other source of motivation can plausibly account for their actions. This means that had they not been antisemites, and antisemites of a particular kind, then they would not have taken part in the extermination, and Hitler's campaign against the Jews would have unfolded substantially differently from how it did. The perpetrators' anti-semitism, and hence their motivation to kill, was, furthermore, not derived from some other non-ideational source. It is not an intervening variable, but an independent one. It is not reducible to any other factor.

This, it must be emphasized, is not a monocausal account of the perpetration of the Holocaust. Many factors were necessary for Hitler and others to have conceived the genocidal program, for them to have risen to the position from which they could implement it, for its undertaking to have become a realistic possibility, and for it then to have been carried out. Most of these elements are well understood. This book has focused on one of a number of the causes of the Holocaust, the least well-understood one, namely the crucial motivational element which moved the German men and women, without whom it would and could not have occurred, to devote their bodies, souls, and ingenuity to the enterprise. With regard to the *motivational* cause of the Holocaust, for the vast majority of perpetrators, a monocausal explanation does suffice.

When focusing on only the motivational cause of the Holocaust, the following can be said. The claim here is that this virulent brand of German racial antisemitism was in *this historical instance* causally sufficient to provide not only the Nazi leadership in its decision making but also the perpetrators with the requisite motivation to participate willingly in the extermination of the Jews. This does not necessarily mean that some other set of factors (independent of or conjoined with the regnant German antisemitism) could not conceivably have induced Germans to slaughter Jews. It merely means that it simply did not happen.

To be sure, some of the mechanisms specified by the conventional explanations were at work, shaping the actions of some *individuals*. It cannot be doubted that individual Germans became perpetrators despite a principled disapproval of the extermination. After all, not all perpetrators were offered the opportunity to refuse to kill and not all were serving under a commander as kindly as Police Battalion 101's "Papa" Trapp. It is also likely that disapproving individuals, finding themselves in an *atmosphere of general approval*, would, because of group pressure, commit acts which they had considered to be crimes, perhaps finding comforting rationalizations to assuage their consciences. It cannot be ruled out that some individuals, who were themselves not beholden to virulent German antisemitism, would have been moved to kill by a cynicism that set the value of some coveted advantage, material or otherwise, higher than that of the lives of innocent people. A presumption of coercion, social psychological pressure from assenting comrades, and the occasional opportunities for personal advancement, in different measures, were at times real enough; yet they cannot explain, for all the reasons already adduced, the actions in *all* of their varieties of the perpetrators *as a class*, but only some actions of some individuals who might have killed despite their disapproval, or of others who might have needed but a push to overcome reluctance, whatever its source. Nevertheless, none of these factors influenced the general course of the perpetration of the Holocaust fundamentally. Had these particular non-ideological factors—to the extent that they even existed—not been present, then the Holocaust would still have proceeded apace. And it must be emphasized that for analytical purposes these factors are not very significant; all the ordinary, representative Germans who were not under coercion, who had no career or material advantage to gain from killing, who formed the assenting majority that might have created pressure for dissenting individuals, and who nevertheless killed, all these ordinary, representative Germans show that these non-ideological factors were mainly irrelevant to the perpetration of the Holocaust.¹ They show that racial eliminationist antisemitism was a sufficient cause, a sufficiently potent motivator, to lead Germans to kill Jews willingly; absent these other tertiary factors, the

perpetrators would have acted more or less as they did—once mobilized by Hitler in this national undertaking.

A second claim is equally strong. Not only was German antisemitism in this historical instance a sufficient cause, but it was also a *necessary* cause for such broad German participation in the persecution and mass slaughter of Jews, and for Germans to have treated Jews in all the heartless, harsh, and cruel ways that they did. Had ordinary Germans not shared their leadership's eliminationist ideals, then they would have reacted to the ever-intensifying assault on their Jewish countrymen and brethren with at least as much opposition and non-cooperation as they did to their government's attacks on Christianity and to the so-called Euthanasia program. As has already been discussed, especially with regard to religious policies, the Nazis backed down when faced with serious, widespread popular opposition. Had the Nazis been faced with a German populace who saw Jews as ordinary human beings, and German Jews as their brothers and sisters, then it is hard to imagine that the Nazis would have proceeded, or would have been able to proceed, with the extermination of the Jews. If they somehow had been able to go forward, then the probability that the assault would have unfolded as it did, and that Germans would have killed so many Jews, is extremely low. The probability that it would have produced so much German cruelty and exterminatory zeal is zero. A German population roused against the elimination and extermination of the Jews most likely would have stayed the regime's hand.

More generally, it can be said that certain kinds of dehumanizing beliefs² about people, or the attribution of extreme malevolence to them, are necessary and *can* be sufficient to induce others to take part in the genocidal slaughter of the dehumanized people, if they are given proper opportunity and coordination, typically by a state.³ Yet such beliefs alone are not on their own always sufficient to produce a genocide, for other inhibiting factors may be operative, such as an ethical code and a moral sensibility which prohibit killing of this sort. Such beliefs constitute the enabling conditions necessary for a state to mobilize large groups of people to partake in genocidal slaughter. A hypothetical exception to the necessary existence of such genocidal beliefs is when coercion on a massive scale might be applied (by the state) to people compelled to become perpetrators. Although this could undoubtedly cause individuals to kill, it seems to me unlikely ever to succeed in making tens of thousands murder hundreds of thousands or millions over a prolonged time. Moreover, as far as I know, it has never happened—not in Cambodia, Turkey, Burundi, Rwanda, or the Soviet Union, to name prominent twentieth-century places of genocide.⁴ The Nazi leadership, like other genocidal elites, never applied, and most likely would not have been willing to apply, the vast amount of coercion that it would have needed to move tens of thousands of non-antisemitic Ger-

mans to kill millions of Jews. The Nazis, knowing that ordinary Germans shared their convictions, had no need to do so.

The Holocaust was a *sui generis* event that has a historically specific explanation. The explanation specifies the enabling conditions created by the long-incubating, pervasive, virulent, racist, eliminationist antisemitism of German culture, which was mobilized by a criminal regime beholden to an eliminationist, genocidal ideology, and which was given shape and energized by a leader, Hitler, who was adored by the vast majority of the German people, a leader who was known to be committed wholeheartedly to the unfolding, brutal eliminationist program. During the Nazi period, the eliminationist antisemitism provided the motivational source for the German leadership and for rank-and-file Germans to kill the Jews. It also was the motivational source of the other non-killing actions of the perpetrators that were integral to the Holocaust.

It is precisely because antisemitism alone did not produce the Holocaust that it is not essential to establish the differences between antisemitism in Germany and elsewhere.⁵ Whatever the antisemitic traditions were in other European countries, it was only in Germany that an openly and rabidly antisemitic movement came to power—indeed was elected to power—that was bent upon turning antisemitic fantasy into state-organized genocidal slaughter. This alone ensured that German antisemitism would have qualitatively different consequences from the antisemitisms of other countries, and substantiates the *Sonderweg* thesis: that Germany developed along a singular path, setting it apart from other western countries. So whatever the extent and intensity of antisemitism was among, say, the Poles or the French, their antisemitism is not important for *explaining* the Germans' genocide of the Jews; it might help to explain the Polish or French people's reactions to the German genocidal onslaught, but that is not an issue under consideration here.⁶ Even if, for explanatory purposes, it is not essential to discuss German antisemitism comparatively, it is still worth stating that the antisemitism of no other European country came close to combining *all* of the following features of German antisemitism (indeed, virtually every other country fell short on *each* dimension). No other country's antisemitism was at once so widespread as to have been a cultural axiom, was so firmly wedded to racism, had as its foundation such a pernicious image of Jews that deemed them to be a mortal threat to the *Volk*, and was so deadly in content, producing, even in the nineteenth century, such frequent and explicit calls for the extermination of the Jews, calls which expressed the logic of the racist eliminationist antisemitism that prevailed in Germany. The unmatched volume and the vitriolic and murderous substance of German antisemitic literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries alone indicate that German antisemitism was *sui generis*.

This is a historically specific explanation, yet it has implications for our understanding of other genocides and suggests why a greater number of genocides have not occurred; even though severe conflicts and war have characterized group relations throughout history and today, a genocidal ideology and genocidal opportunities must be simultaneously present if people are to be motivated and able to exterminate other groups of people. The genocidal ideology has generally been absent, and even when it has been present and has motivated people to kill others, the *content* of the ideology, which always includes an account of the putative nature of the victims, has led other perpetrators to treat their victims in ways that have differed significantly from the comprehensively and singularly brutal deadly German assault upon the Jews.

IT IS BECAUSE factors other than exterminationist antisemitism shaped the Germans' actions that the character of the interaction of the various influences, including strategic and material constraints, needs to be understood. This, as was detailed earlier, can be seen at the policy level in the evolution of the Germans' eliminationist policies into exterminationist ones as the opportunities and constraints became more favorable for a "final solution."

Whatever the constancy of Hitler's and other leading Nazis' eliminationist *ideals* was, the Germans' anti-Jewish *intentions* and *policy* had three distinct phases.⁷ Each was characterized by different practical opportunities for "solving" the "Jewish Problem" that derived—this was true both of the possibilities and the constraints—from Germany's geostrategic situation, namely from its position on the European continent and its relations with other countries.

The first phase lasted from 1933 until the outbreak of the war. The Germans implemented the utterly radical policies of turning the Jews into socially dead beings and of forcing most of them to flee from their homes and country. They did so by perpetrating ceaseless verbal and sporadic yet ferocious physical violence upon Jews, by depriving them of civil and legal protections and rights, and by progressively excluding them from virtually all spheres of social, economic, and cultural life. At a time when most of Europe's Jews were beyond the Germans' reach—rendering a lethal "solution" to the "Jewish Problem" unfeasible—and when a comparatively weak Germany was pursuing dangerous foreign policy goals and arming in preparation for the coming war, these were the most final "solutions" that were practicable, the only ones that they could prudentially adopt.

The second phase lasted from the beginning of the war until early 1941. The conquest of Poland and then of France and the prospective defeat or peace with Britain created new opportunities for the Germans, yet funda-

mental constraints remained. They now had over two million, not mere hundreds of thousands, of European Jews under their control, so they could entertain some "solution" to the "Jewish Problem" more effective than anything possible while Germany remained confined to its 1939 borders. Yet killing these Jews was still not opportune, because a good part of the putative wellspring of Jewry remained out of reach in the Soviet Union, and because the uneasy non-aggression pact with the "Jewish-Bolshevik" Soviet Union could have been expected to disintegrate prematurely, to the detriment of the Germans, should they then have begun the genocidal killing of Jews under the gaze of the Soviet troops stationed in the heart of Poland. Still, during this period the Germans fashioned more apocalyptic plans and began to implement them. By the beginning of this phase, the Germans had made it clear that the Jews' lives were worthless and forfeit; that anything, literally anything, could be done to them. The Germans proceeded to sever the Jews from the economy of German-occupied Poland, to ghettoize them under inhuman, deadly conditions, which produced starvation and a high mortality rate. All Jews were "*vogelfrei*," outlaws who were fair game. Germans could and did kill Jews at a whim. The groundwork had clearly already been laid for the Germans to exterminate them or to devise some surrogate quasi-genocidal fate for them.

Under these more propitious circumstances, the Nazis contemplated more radical "solutions"—bloodless equivalents of genocide. They began to explore the possibility of removing this good portion of all of European Jewry living under their dominion to some god-forsaken territory, where they could discard, immure, and leave the Jews to wither and expire. In November 1939, at a meeting devoted to expulsions, Hans Frank, the German Governor of Poland, expressed the underlying exterminationist motive that was already operative in and constitutive of the relocation schemes: ". . . We won't waste much more time on the Jews. It's great to get to grips with the Jewish race at last. The more that die the better."⁸ During this second phase, the Germans pursued the most radical "solutions" that were practicable and prudent. Their proto-genocidal policies for handling Jews within their dominion gave a new lethality to their Jewish policies. Their bloodlessly genocidal eliminationist "solution" of vast deportations, however, did prove to be chimerical—the only major German initiative against the Jews that did—but to no great disappointment on the part of the Nazi leadership, for the impending conquest of the Soviet Union rendered such deportations undesirable, by offering them at last the opportunity for a truly final and irrevocable "solution."

The third phase began with the planning of the attack on the Soviet Union and the invasion itself. It was only during this phase that killing the Jews whom the Germans could actually reach would prove to be, from their

hallucinatory perspective, an effective and not a counterproductive policy. It was only then that a "final solution" by systematic killing was practical. It was only then that the Germans no longer had major political and military constraints hindering them from pursuing such a policy. It is no surprise, therefore, that immediately upon launching the assault on the Soviet Union, Germans began to implement Hitler's decision, already cast, to exterminate all of European Jewry. During this phase, with the exception of some tactical attempts to use Jews to gain concessions from the Allies, every German measure affecting the Jews either led to their immediate deaths, was a means that would hasten or contribute eventually to their deaths, or was a temporary surrogate for death.⁹ With the absence of any but comparatively minor logistical constraints upon their eliminationist desires, the eliminationist compulsion in the form of the slaughter of the Jews came to take priority over every other goal. The Germans continued with it in the form of mass shootings and death marches until, literally, the final day of the war.

Most striking about the Germans' anti-Jewish policy is that in each of the three phases, its major thrust was *the maximum feasible eliminationist option possible* given the existing opportunities and constraints. There was no *unintended* cumulative radicalization of policy because of bureaucratic politics or for any other reason.¹⁰ The extent and virulence of the verbal violence assaulting the Jews from their own countrymen have no parallel in modern history. The rapid enactment of discriminating, debilitating, and dehumanizing legislation also has no parallel in modern history. The speed with which this group of prosperous, economically and culturally relatively well-integrated citizens were stripped of their rights and, with the approval of the vast majority of people in their society, turned into social lepers has no parallel in modern history. Our knowledge of the genocidal measures that followed tends to obscure how radical the Germans' treatment of Jews was during the 1930s. All of these measures, the turning of Jews into socially dead beings, and the policies that sought to compel them, 500,000 people, to emigrate from Germany constituted an utterly "radical" campaign, the likes of which western Europe had not seen for centuries. Those who argue that a radicalization of German policy towards the Jews occurred only in the 1940s minimize the radical nature of the anti-Jewish policy of the 1930s (which was noted as such by contemporaries) and miss the underlying continuity among the three phases of the anti-Jewish policy.

Indeed, the Germans' anti-Jewish policy evolved in a logical manner—always flowing from the eliminationist ideology—in consonance with the creation of new eliminationist opportunities, opportunities which Hitler was happy to exploit, promptly and eagerly, to their limits. Holding Hitler back in the first two phases were the practical limits on policy, limits imposed by Ger-

many's constrained capacity to "solve" the "Jewish Problem"—independent of any other considerations—and by the existence of other considerations, the prudential ones regarding Germany's military and geo-political situation.¹¹ On October 25, 1941, a few months after Hitler's genocidal onslaught had begun, Hitler reminded Himmler and Heydrich—during a long disquisition that began with a reference to his January 1939 prophecy that the war would end with the elimination of the Jews—of what they already knew: that, having often operated under severe constraints, he had been content to wait for the right moment to pursue his apocalyptic ideals: "I am compelled to accumulate within me a tremendous amount; that does not, however, mean that what I take note of, but to which I do not react immediately, becomes extinguished in me. It is entered into a ledger; one day the book is brought out. Vis-à-vis the Jews as well, I had to remain for long inactive. It is pointless artificially to cause oneself additional difficulties; the cleverer one proceeds, the better."¹² Hitler was presenting himself as the prudent politician that he often was, biding his time, waiting for a propitious moment to strike. He had for long been "inactive" with regard to the Jews. The word "inactive" (*tatenlos*) here could have meant only "abstinence from mass killing," since for eight years Hitler had been very active indeed against the Jews, persecuting them, degrading them, burning their synagogues, expelling them from Germany, herding them into ghettos, and even killing them sporadically. For him, all these measures had amounted to inaction, for they all fell short of the one act that was adequate to the necessary task, adequate to the threat. The patiently longed-for final act that, for Hitler, qualified as real "action" was the physical annihilation of the Jews.¹³

In no sense was Hitler's monumental, indeed world-historical, decision—driven as it was by his fervent hatred of Jews—to exterminate European Jewry an historical accident, as some have argued, that took place because other options were closed off to him or because of something as ephemeral as Hitler's moods. Killing was not undertaken by Hitler reluctantly. Killing, biological purgation, was for Hitler a natural, preferred method of solving problems. Indeed, killing was Hitler's reflex. He slaughtered those in his own movement whom he saw as a challenge. He killed his political enemies. He killed Germany's mentally ill. Already in 1929, he publicly toyed with the idea of killing all German children born with physical defects, which he numbered in a murderously megalomaniacal moment of fantasy at 700,000 to 800,000 a year.¹⁴ Surely, death was the most fitting penalty for the Jews. A demonic nation deserves nothing less than death.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine Hitler and the German leadership having settled for any other "solution" once they attacked the Soviet Union. The argument that only circumstances of one sort or another *created* Hitler's and

the Germans' *motive* to opt for a genocidal "solution" ignores, for no good reason, Hitler's oft-stated and self-understood intention to exterminate the Jews. This argument also implies, counterfactually, that had these putative motivation-engendering circumstances not been brought about—had Hitler's allegedly volatile moods not allegedly swung, had the Germans been able to "resettle" millions of Jews—then Hitler and the others would have preferred some other "solution" and then millions of additional Jews would have survived the war. This counterfactual reasoning is highly implausible.¹⁵ It would have necessitated that during this *Vernichtungskrieg*, this avowed war of total destruction, some circumstances would have led the Germans to spare their "anti-Christ," the Jews, even though Hitler and Himmler were planning to dispossess and kill millions of, in their view, the far less threatening Slavs (before the attack on the Soviet Union, Himmler once set the expected body count for that country at thirty million), when creating the planned "Germanic Eden" of eastern Europe.¹⁶

Hitler, on January 25, 1942, after affirming that "the absolute extermination" of the Jews was the appropriate policy, himself pointed out to Himmler, the head of his Chancery, Hans Lammers, and General Kurt Zeitzler how nonsensical it would have been not to be killing the Jews: "Why should I look upon a Jew with eyes other than [if he were] a Russian prisoner [of war]? In the POW camps many are dying, because we have been driven by the Jews into this situation. What can I do about it? Why did the Jews instigate this war?"¹⁷ In addition to the general implausibility of the counterfactual notion that Hitler and Himmler preferred or would have preferred a non-genocidal course once they had unleashed their forces against the Soviet Union, the facts do not support such speculative reasoning. Once the extermination program began, the Germans conceiving and implementing the mass slaughter did not consider any other "solution" to be preferable;¹⁸ they did not lament that the "Jewish Problem" could not be solved through emigration or "resettlement." All indications suggest that they understood the genocidal slaughter as the natural and therefore appropriate means to dispose of the Jews now that such an option had become practicable.

The idea that death and death alone is the only fitting punishment for Jews was publicly articulated by Hitler at the beginning of his political career on August 13, 1920, in a speech entirely devoted to antisemitism, "Why Are We Antisemites?" In the middle of that speech, the still politically obscure Hitler suddenly digressed to the subject of the death sentence and why it ought to be applied to the Jews. Healthy elements of a nation, he declared, know that "criminals guilty of crimes against the nation, i.e., parasites on the national community," cannot be tolerated, that under certain circumstances they must be punished only with death, since imprisonment lacks the quality

of irrevocableness. "The heaviest bolt is not heavy enough and the securest prison is not secure enough that a few million could not in the end open it. Only one bolt cannot be opened—and that is death [my emphasis]."¹⁹ This was not a casual utterance, but reflected an idea and resolve that had already ripened and taken root in Hitler's mind.

In the discussion that ensued with members of the audience about the above-mentioned speech, Hitler revealed that he had contemplated the question of how the "Jewish Problem" is to be solved. He resolved to be thoroughgoing. "We have, however, decided that we shall not come with ifs, ands, or buts, but when the matter comes to a solution, it will be done thoroughly."²⁰ In the speech proper, Hitler spelled out, with a candid explicitness that he prudently would not repeat in public after he had achieved national prominence, what he meant by the phrase "it will be done thoroughly." It meant that putting the entire Jewish nation to death—or, as Hitler himself had stated publicly a few months earlier in another speech, "to seize the Evil [the Jews] by the roots and to exterminate it root and branch"—would be the most just and effective punishment, the only enduring "solution." Mere imprisonment would be too clement a penalty for such world-historical criminals and one, moreover, fraught with danger, since the Jews could one day emerge from their prisons and resume their evil ways. Hitler's maniacal conception of the Jews, his consuming hatred of them, and his natural murderous propensity rendered him incapable of becoming reconciled permanently to any "solution of the Jewish Problem" save that of extinction.

The road to Auschwitz was not twisted. Conceived by Hitler's apocalyptically bent mind as an urgent, though future, project, its completion had to wait until conditions were right. The instant that they were, Hitler commissioned his architects, Himmler and Heydrich, to work from his vague blueprint in designing and engineering the road. They, in turn, easily enlisted ordinary Germans by the tens of thousands, who built and paved it with an immense dedication born of great hatred for the Jews whom they drove down that road. When the road's construction was completed, Hitler, the architects, and their willing helpers looked upon it not as an undesirable construction, but with satisfaction. In no sense did they regard it as a road chosen only because other, preferable venues had proven to be dead ends. They held it to be the best, safest, and speediest of all possible roads, the only one that led to a destination from which the satanic Jews are absolutely sure never to return.

THE INTERACTION of a variety of influences on the Germans' treatment of Jews on all institutional levels can be seen also, in a manner still more complex than in the evolution of the Germans' general eliminationist assault on

the Jews, in the realm of Jewish "work." In the area of Jewish "work," as with the anti-Jewish policy, despite enormous material obstacles and constraints (in this case, urgent economic need), the power of German eliminationist antisemitism was the force that drove the Germans to override other considerations, even if the pattern of German actions that emerged at first seems hard to fathom.

There can be no doubt that the objective economic needs were the principal cause of Germans putting Jews to work. But the rational *need* did not produce anything resembling a rational German *response*, and the two should not be confused. The need could be translated into labor only in a distorted, atrophied way, because it came into conflict with far more powerful ideological dictates. The creation of a special Jewish economy, which was by and large separated from the general economy, produced an enormous drop in overall Jewish productivity and did substantial damage to the economic health of war-engulfed Germany. The Lublin camps are particularly noteworthy because they existed in a context of the Germans' general work mobilization of continental Europe, and after orders had been given by Himmler to treat non-German workers better. They show that the ideological foundations of Germany during the Nazi period rendered it constitutionally incapable of creating the conditions for the decent treatment and the rational use of Jewish labor power. Because of the Germans' fantastical beliefs about Jewish evil, the Jews *had* to be segregated, *had* to be removed from the general economy, in which they should have been integrated had the Germans wanted to utilize their talents, skills, and labor in an economically rational manner. The policies that brought millions of other laborers to Germany, both people from the West and "subhumans" from the East, and that led to over thirty thousand of them fleeing their German masters every month in 1943,²¹ could not have been duplicated for Jews. Any policy which held out at this time the mere possibility, however unintended, of large numbers of Jews roaming around the countryside unchecked was unimaginable in Germany. The Jews had to be incarcerated in the only places deemed fitting, in leper-like colonies where disease and death festered. This produced even more deleterious economic results. And this Jewish economy was itself absolutely irrationally organized and run, and woefully unproductive. In war-ravaged Europe, the Germans found it difficult to bring to these bizarre and eerie colonies on the figurative frontier of humanity the plant, equipment, and conditions of work that were necessary for any rational kind of production to occur. Furthermore, it was itself destroyed in large chunks at a time when the Germans decided, for extra-economic reasons, to kill some group or community of Jews. The realm of politics and the realm of social relations, in this matter, worked hand in glove towards the same end. The political-ideological imperative to

separate the Jews from Germans, to punish the Jews, and to kill them, together with the manifold forms of crippling and fatal abuse to which the Jews' "foremen" subjected their "workers" in face-to-face relations, prevented the Germans from meeting their pressing economic needs. The objective economic need existed. The Germans were ideologically and psychologically unfit to respond to it. If the Germans had used all the Jews as slaves, which they could easily have done, then they would have extracted great economic profit from them. But they did not do so. They were like slave masters who, driven by frenzied delusions, murdered most of their slaves and treated the small percentage whom they did put to work so recklessly and cruelly that they crippled the slaves' capacity for work.

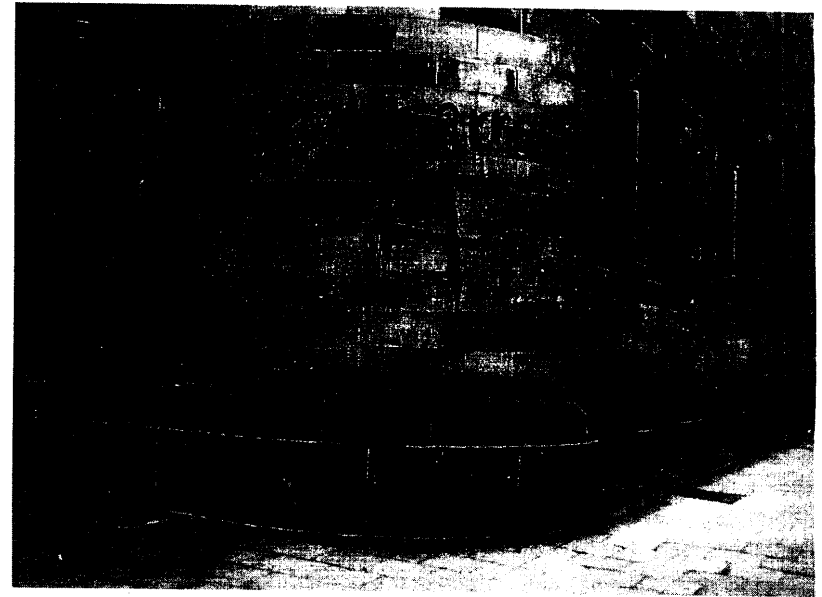
Economic irrationality and cruelty and debilitation were embedded in the organizational, material, and psychological constitution of the German institutions (including the overseers) of Jewish "work."²² It is not just, as others have correctly maintained, that extermination had political priority over economics and work, as if the leadership had willfully made a choice between alternative possibilities.²² During its Nazi period, Germany developed along a path, according to the logic of its animating beliefs, that made it, probably by 1941 and certainly by 1943, generally *incapable* of the rational economic use of Jews, except, at times, on a local basis. The Germans were so beholden to the barbarous implications of their ideology that even when they tried to apply the normal linguistic and practical forms of work to Jews, they generally failed, except in crippled and crippling approximations. The power of German antisemitism to derail rationality in the economy, the realm of modern industrial society where rationality is most consistently sought, and which for non-Jews was highly rationally organized, demonstrates that with regard to the Jews, the Germans' ideology had created for them a cognitive map singular in nature, leading them in directions that they themselves would have considered false and dangerous—at odds with reality and rationality—for peoples other than Jews.²³

Just as antisemitism operated in conjunction with other factors on the levels of policy and of institutional practice, so too did it at times on the individual level. On the individual level, it is clear that although German antisemitism was sufficient to motivate the perpetrators, it did not produce completely uniform practices. Other factors of belief and personality naturally gave variation to individual action. The degree of enthusiasm that Germans brought to their dealings with Jews as well as the cruelty that they showed did vary, undoubtedly because of the perpetrators' different degrees of inhibitions, their characters, and, especially in the case of cruelty, their taste for barbarism, the pleasure that they took in the suffering of Jews, their sadism. The norm in Police Battalion 101 was that the men carried out

their eliminationist tasks willingly and skillfully, yet, as one of the battalion's lieutenants, fully aware of the base-line exemplary performance of his compatriots, says, there were men "who particularly distinguished themselves on missions. This was true in this respect also for Jewish actions."²⁴ Even by the high standard that the genocidal cohort that was Police Battalion 101 set, some, indeed many, of the men distinguished themselves. Similarly, virtually all Germans in concentration camps brutalized Jews. That was the common feature. Some brutalized Jews more frequently, vigorously, or inventively than others. That was the variance which, in light of the Holocaust's constituent feature of near universal cruelty, is really but a nuance of action in need of explanation. It is also no surprise that a small number of people refrained from killing or brutalizing Jews. In Germany, some people dissented from the prevailing Nazified conception of Jews, and others, even if they shared this view, still adhered to a restraining ethical standard at odds with the disinhibiting one of the new dispensation. Minority cognitions of these sorts gave such people, but a tiny percentage of Germans, the impetus to help hide Jews in Germany²⁵ and, in the killing fields, made such people unwilling to take part in the genocide. The existing opportunities to avoid killing permitted these same people to realize their wishes. Hence the *small* group of refusers.

THE VIRULENT, racial antisemitism, in motivating Germans to push the eliminationist program forward on the macro, meso, and micro levels, must be understood to have been moving people who were operating under constraints, both external ones and those created by competing goals. This was true of Hitler and of the lowliest guard in a "work" camp. These ameliorating circumstances notwithstanding, the eliminationist antisemitism was powerful enough to have set Hitler and the German nation on an exterminationist course, powerful enough to have overridden economic rationality so thoroughly, powerful enough to have produced in so many people such individual voluntarism, zeal, and cruelty. The eliminationist antisemitism, with its hurricane-force potential, resided ultimately in the heart of German political culture, in German society itself.

Because the "Jewish Problem" was openly assigned high political priority and discussed continuously in the public sphere, there can be no doubt that the German people understood the purpose and the radicality of the anti-Jewish measures unfolding before their eyes during the 1930s. How could they not? "Jews are our misfortune"²⁶ was shouted from every rooftop in Germany. "Jew perish," no mere hyperbolic metaphorical flourish, could be heard and seen around Germany in the 1930s.



In Düsseldorf, an execration painted on the wall of a synagogue: "Jew perish"

The perpetrators, from Hitler to the lowliest officials, were openly proud of their actions, of their achievements; during the 1930s, they proclaimed and carried them out in full view and with the general approval of the *Volk*.

If ordinary Germans did not concur with Melita Maschmann's Nazified conception of Jews as a corporate "active force for evil" whose "wickedness was directed against the prosperity, unity and prestige of the German nation," if Germans did not share her abhorrence and demonology of Jews, then what did they believe? Did they believe that Jews were ordinary human beings, but simply of another religion? Did they believe perhaps that Jews harbored some objectionable qualities, but nothing remotely resembling the perniciousness that the beloved Hitler and the Nazis, as an article of faith, incessantly and emphatically attributed to them? Did they identify with the Jews as innocent victims of a deluded regime? Did they see all of the groups and numerous people in German society who aided the persecution as being deluded? If Germans had dissented from Hitler's conception of Jews, from the characterization of Jews as a powerful evil that is racially destined to harm and destroy the German *Volk*, if Germans had been moved by some other more benevolent conception of Jews, then what is the evidence for it? The Gestapo and its inform-

ers pursued people who expressed their divergence from Nazi antisemitism with a zeal that has led the foremost expert on the Gestapo to conclude that all such cases were reported and investigated. Yet in all of Lower Franconia, a region with 840,663 people (in 1939)—a region in which, as in all regions of Germany, Germans expressed an enormous amount of dissent on a broad range of Nazi policies, including on the treatment of foreigners—during *twelve years* of Nazi rule, only *fifty-two* such cases, four per year, came to the attention of the Gestapo! In the still much larger jurisdiction of Munich between 1933 and 1944, only *seventy* people were tried for remarks critical of the eliminationist project. The number of remarks was so small as to have been “almost insignificant.”²⁷

At no point during the Nazi period did significant portions, or even identifiable minorities, of the German people express either dissent from the dominant elaboration of the nature of Jews or principled disapproval of the eliminationist goals and measures that the German government and so many Germans pursued. After the war, many Germans and many scholars have asserted otherwise, but have provided little real evidence to support their claims.

How many German churchmen in the 1930s did not believe that the Jews were pernicious? Where is the *evidence* to support the contention that a significant number of them rejected the eliminationist antisemitic view of Jews?

How many German generals, the supposed guardians of traditional German honor and moral rectitude, did not want to cleanse Germany of Jews? Himmler, in fact, once discussed the extermination of the Jews in a speech before a good portion of the leadership of the armed forces—three hundred generals and staff officers gathered in Posen on January 25, 1944. The genocide was hardly news to the military leaders for, by then, the Germans had killed millions of Jews, and the army had been a full partner in the slaughter of Soviet Jewry. Himmler, knowing the army leadership well—which, as the abundant and irrefutable evidence shows, was in “fundamental agreement” with the extermination of the Jews²⁸—spoke openly as someone does before an approving crowd. Indeed, when Himmler announced that Germany was wiping the Jews off the face of the earth, the military leaders broke into applause. The applause was not scattered; it was well-nigh unanimous. A dissenting general looked about him to see how many in the audience abstained from applauding. He counted five.²⁹

What is the evidence for the belief that these men and their brethren saw the Jews as fellow Germans deserving full rights? Even many of those who hated the Nazis and plotted to kill Hitler were eliminationist antisemites.

How many jurists, how many in the medical community, how many in other professions held the ubiquitous, public antisemitism, with its hallucinatory elements, to be sheer nonsense? Where is the evidence?

How many of the over eight million members of the Nazi Party, and how many other ordinary Germans thought that Hitler's obsessive antisemitism were the ravings of a madman—and therefore that Hitler was a madman—that the eliminationist measures and the societal attack upon Jews of the 1930s were criminal, that all those measures ought to have been reversed and the Jews restored to their prior places in German society? Where is the evidence?

To be sure, not all churchmen, generals, jurists, and others wanted to exterminate the Jews. Some wanted to deport them, a few wanted to sterilize them, and some would have been content to deprive the Jews “only” of fundamental rights. Nevertheless, underlying all of these views was an eliminationist ideal. Where is the *evidence* for any other conclusion?

The words of one man, Pastor Walter Höchstädter, who in the summer of 1944 was a hospital chaplain in France, cast into sharp relief the powerful hold that the antisemitic cognitive model had on the rest of Germany, even typically on those who opposed aspects of the eliminationist program. Höchstädter secretly printed his indicting protest and sent one thousand copies through the military mail to soldiers at the front:

We live in an age which is raging throughout with mad ideas and demons, no less than the Middle Ages. Our allegedly “enlightened” age, instead of indulging in an orgy of crazed witch-hunting, feasts itself in an orgy of maniacal Jew-hatred. Today the Jew-hating madness, which had already raged frightfully in the Middle Ages, has entered upon its acute stage. This, the Church, the community of Jesus Christ, must acknowledge. If she does not do it, then she will have failed, just as she had failed then, during the time of the witch-hunts. Today, the blood of millions of slaughtered Jews, of men, women, and children, cries to heaven. The Church is not permitted to be silent. She is not permitted to say that the settlement of the Jewish Problem is a matter for the state, the right to perform this function having been granted to it by Romans 13. The Church is also not permitted to say that in our time just punishment is being carried out upon the Jews for their sins. . . . There is no such thing as a moderate Christian antisemitism. Even when it is set forth seemingly convincingly by means of reasonable arguments (say, national ones) or even with scientific (read pseudo-scientific) arguments. The witch craze also was once scientifically justified by leading authorities of the theological, legal, and medical faculties. The battle against Jewry proceeds from the same muddy source from which the witch craze once proceeded. Contemporary mankind has not overcome its proclivity to look for a “scapegoat.” Therefore it searches for all kinds of guilty parties—the Jews, the Freemasons and supra-state powers. This is the background of the hymns of hate of our time.

. . . Who gives us the right to lay the blame solely on the Jews? A Christian is forbidden to do this. A Christian is not allowed to be an antisemite,

and he is not allowed to be a moderate antisemite. The objection that, without the [defensive] reaction of "moderate" antisemitism, the Jewification of the life of the *Volk* [*Verjudung des Volkslebens*] would become a horrible danger originates from an unbelieving and purely secular outlook, which Christians ought to overcome.

... The Church ought to live of love. Woe to her if she does not do that! Woe to her if by her silence and by all sorts of dubious excuses she becomes jointly guilty of the world's outbursts of hatred! Woe to her if she adopts words and slogans that originate in the sphere of hatred . . .³⁰

In the annals of the history of Germany during its Nazi period, Höchstädter's letter, in its explicit and thoroughgoing rejection of the eliminationist antisemitic model, is an exceedingly rare and luminous document. Nearly all of the few protests and petitions of Germans that lamented or objected to their nation's treatment of the Jews were themselves imbued with antisemitism, an antisemitism that was irrational in its beliefs and harsh in its practical proposals, yet which can seem moderate when compared with the lethal variety practiced by the Nazis and by all of the ordinary Germans who aided them. Virtually all objectors to the physical violence that Germans inflicted on Jews assumed as a matter of course that a "Jewish Problem" did indeed exist, that the Jews were an evildoing tribe that had harmed Germany, and that a "solution" must be found whereby their corrosive presence would be greatly reduced and their influence eliminated. Such "dissenters" still wanted a "solution," one that was "civilized," bloodless, and orderly, not violent and cruel, as was the one that the Nazis had adopted. They wanted to curtail the putative power of the Jews, to exclude them from many spheres of social life, to prohibit them from holding public office, and to impose other restrictions that would render them powerless to harm Germans. Antisemitism ought to be "decent," "moderate," "spiritual," "ethical," "salutary," as befits a civilized nation. The Bishop of Linz, Johannes Maria Gfoellner, in a pastoral letter circulated in 1933, exhorted the Nazis thus: "If National Socialism . . . wants to incorporate only this spiritual and ethical form of antisemitism into its program, there is nothing to stop it."³¹ "Be decent, moderate, spiritual, ethical antisemites, eliminate the Jews, but do not slaughter them" was the spoken or unspoken maxim that informed nearly all of the relatively few German objections to the countrymen's systematic slaughter of the Jews.

The obscure Pastor Höchstädter was dismayed by this brand of "moderation." To him, the Germans' persecution of the Jews sprang from the same troubled mental source from which the medieval witch craze had sprung. The accusations which Germans inside and outside the Church leveled at the Jews were hallucinatory delusions. Höchstädter emphatically rejects the view

that existed in the churches and in anti-Nazi circles that what is needed is a "moderate" and "salutary" antisemitism. Antisemitism in any form, he states with a simplicity and clarity that was all but singular during the Nazi period, is a radical evil, a tissue of vicious falsehoods. Therein lies the extreme rarity of Höchstädter's appeal. I know of very few statements by opponents of the Nazis that condemned the wild antisemitic beliefs which were ubiquitous in Germany as wholly false, as devoid of essential truth, as frenzied, monstrous obsessions, in the manner that Höchstädter did in his anguished letter. He calls upon the clergy to come to their senses, to awaken from their delusions, to break their silence in the face of the millionfold slaughter of the Jews. "Therefore Be Sober" reads the admonition with which Höchstädter entitled his appeal.

How singularly sober, how "abnormal," how forlorn Höchstädter's *cri de coeur* appears when set beside the antisemitic utterances of bishops, ecclesiastical leaders, and other renowned members of the Church—when set beside the statement of Martin Niemöller, the celebrated anti-Nazi clergyman, that the Jews poison everything that they take up; beside Bishop Dibelius' recorded hope that the Jewish community, with its low birth rate, would die out and thus free Germany of its injurious presence; beside Bishop Wurm's assurance that he does not dispute with "a single word" the right of the state to combat Jewry as a dangerous element which corrodes "the religious, moral, literary, economic, and political spheres;"³² beside Bishop August Marahrens' statement (made after the war in August 1945 in the course of his confession of guilt for not having spoken up for the Jews) that although a number of them had brought "a great disaster" (*ein schweres Unheil*) upon the German people, the Jews should not have been attacked in so "inhumane a manner."³³ So besotted were he and all those who shared his sort of "ethical" antisemitism that even after the war the good bishop appeared to imply that a more humane castigation would have been sufficient. Particularly glaring is the contrast between Höchstädter's appeal and the collective declaration of the National Church leaders of the Evangelical churches of Mecklenburg, Thuringia, Saxony, Nassau-Hesse, Schleswig-Holstein, Anhalt, and Lübeck urging that all Jewish converts to Christianity be expelled from the Church, that the "severest measures against the Jews be adopted," and that "they be banished from German lands."³⁴ Given the Germans' full-scale slaughter of Soviet Jews that was already under way, this proclamation is a unique document in the history of Christendom—an ecclesiastical imprimatur of genocide. Even if these leading men of God had not known that the deportees were destined to be slaughtered (which is highly unlikely since knowledge of the mass killings was already enormously widespread, including among other Church leaders), their proclamation would still be a rare and perhaps unique

document in the modern history of the Christian churches—an ecclesiastical appeal to a tyrannous, enormously brutal state to treat an entire people with even greater brutality, to proceed against that people without any mitigation. For the churchmen were not only acquiescing in the persecution of the Jews; they were, on their own initiative, urging their government to adopt not merely “severe measures” but the “severest measures,” by which they could have meant only measures even more severe than those to which the Jews had hitherto been subjected, measures which were bound to deepen the Jews’ degradation and increase their suffering. The corporate voice of a significant part of the Protestant Church leadership of Germany was scarcely distinguishable from that of the Nazis. It was no doubt ecclesiastical sentiments such as these that Höchstädter had in mind when he included in his appeal the warning sentence “Woe to her [to the Church] if she adopts words and slogans that originate in the sphere of hatred.”³⁵

In the eyes of posterity, contemplating the darkness that was Germany during the Nazi period, Höchstädter’s letter, recalling *The Merchant of Venice*, shines forth like a bright beam: “How far that little candle throws his beams! / So shines a good deed in a naughty world.”³⁶ But in the vast antisemitic darkness that had descended upon Germany, enveloping even the churches, the appeal of Höchstädter was like a tiny, brief flame of reason and humanity, kindled in secret in a remote corner of occupied France, flickering invisibly.

The loneliness of Höchstädter’s principled dissent indicates how important it is for us to focus on the Christian churches when trying to understand the nature of antisemitism in Germany during the Nazi period. The churches and the clergy of which they were composed are particularly instructive on this issue because they composed a large network of non-Nazi institutions, and because a large body of evidence has been preserved about their stance towards Jews during the Germans’ persecution and slaughter of them. Moreover, Christianity’s moral doctrines and complex traditions regarding Jews make this evidence particularly illuminating and telling.

The Christian churches have borne an ancient animus against Jews, regarding them as a guilt-laden people who not only rejected the divinity of Jesus but also crucified him. The churches were also institutions that believed themselves to be bound by a divine ordinance to preach and practice compassion, to foster love, to relieve suffering, and to condemn crime, wanton cruelty, and mass murder. For all these reasons, the attitude of the churches serves as a crucial test case for evaluating the ubiquity and depth of eliminationist antisemitism in Germany. If the ecclesiastical men, whose vocation was to preach love and to be the custodians of compassion, pity, and morality, acquiesced or looked with favor upon and supported the elimination of

the Jews from German society, then this would be further and particularly persuasive proof of the ubiquity of eliminationist antisemitism in German society, an antisemitism so strong that it not only inhibited the natural flow of the feeling of pity but also overruled the moral imperatives of the creed to speak out on behalf of those who have fallen among murderers. As studies of the churches have shown, it cannot be doubted that antisemitism did succeed in turning the Christian community—its leaders, its clergy, and its rank and file—against its most fundamental traditions. The foremost historian of the German Protestant Church during this period, Wolfgang Gerlach, entitled his book *When the Witnesses Were Silent*. Similarly, Guenther Lewy ends his treatment of the German Catholic Church and the “Jewish Problem,” whose leadership’s attitudes towards the eliminationist enterprise were only somewhat more critical than that of the Protestant leadership, by quoting the question posed by the young girl to her priest in Max Frisch’s *Andorra*: “Where were you, Father Benedict, when they took away our brother like a beast to the slaughter, like a beast to the slaughter, where were you?”³⁷

The churches welcomed the Nazis’ ascendancy to power, for they were deeply conservative institutions which, like most other German conservative bodies and associations, expected the Nazis to deliver Germany from what they deemed to have been the spiritual and political mire that was the Weimar Republic, with its libertine culture, democratic “disorder,” its powerful Socialist and Communist parties which preached atheism and which threatened to rob the churches of their power and influence. The churches expected that the Nazis would establish an authoritarian regime that would reclaim the wrongly dishonored virtues of unquestioning obedience and submission to authority, restore the cultivation of traditional moral values, and enforce adherence to them. The Nazi Party was, to be sure, not wholly faultless in the eyes of the Christians. Indeed, it exhibited disquieting tendencies. Some of its ideologues were manifestly anti-Christian. Others urged a nebulous version of Teutonic paganism. And the Party’s support of Christianity embodied in its program was framed in vague, puzzlingly qualified terms. These unwholesome facets of the Nazis the churches tended to interpret with the sort of wishful optimism that was to be found among many people who welcomed Nazism while disliking certain of its aspects—as transient excrescences upon the body of the Party which Hitler, in his wisdom and benevolence towards religion, would slough off as so many alien accretions.

The Nazis’ ferocious antisemitism was not a feature of their movement to which the churches objected. On the contrary, they appreciated it, for they too were antisemitic. They too believed in the necessity of curtailing and eliminating the putative power of the Jews. For decades, nearly all the opinions, utterances, and pronouncements about Jews issuing from German ec-

clesiastical organs or clergymen of all ranks were informed by a deep hostility to Jews. The hostility was for the most part extra-religious, secular in character—an echo of the temporal enmity to Jews that coursed through German society. It did not spring merely from theological sources; it was not merely a latter-day reiteration of the perennial and deep-rooted Christian condemnation of the Jews as a “reprehensible people,” as the crucifiers of Jesus, and as the stiff-necked spurners of the Christian revelation. Conjoined with that ancient accusation, and greatly overshadowing it, was the modern indictment of the Jews as the principal driving force behind the relentless tide of modernity that was steadily eroding hallowed and time-honored values and traditions. They held the Jews to be promoters of mammonism, of “soulless capitalism,” of materialism, of liberalism, and, above all, of that skeptical and iconoclastic temper that was seen as the bane of the age. Reflecting the current trend of secular antisemitism, the “modern” Christian denigrators of Jews preached that the wickedness of the Jews derives not from their religion, but from their racial instincts, from immutable inborn destructive drives which cause them to act like cankerous weeds in blossoming gardens. Thus, even in the Christian churches, racist antisemitism overlay and, to a large extent, replaced the traditional religious enmity to Jews; the denunciations of the Jews that Christian clergymen broadcasted had become scarcely distinguishable from the diatribes that the militantly secular, racist antisemites delivered. This was especially the case in Protestant Church circles, where such antisemitic opinions were rampant. One Protestant Church organ bearing, with unintended irony, the name “Life and Light” would, in the words of a contemporary observer, “again and again describe the Jews with great zeal as a foreign body of which the German people must rid itself, as a dangerous adversary against whom one must wage a struggle to the last extreme.”³⁸ Even a pastor who urged moderation in speaking of and treating the Jews nevertheless concurred in the common belief that they were a deadly affliction. “It is indisputable: the Jews have become for us a national plague which we must ward off.”³⁹

Indeed, the “indisputable” was seldom disputed. These antisemitic sentiments were not confined to a minority within the Protestant churches; they were well-nigh universal. Dissent was rare. To question them took intellectual courage. Who would dare to appear in the frowned-upon role of a defender of that detestable Jewish race whose maleficent character was held to be a self-evident truth? One churchman recalls in his memoirs that antisemitism was so widespread in clerical circles that “explicit objection [to antisemitism] could not be ventured.”⁴⁰

Throughout the period of Nazi rule, as the government and people of Germany were subjecting the Jews of Germany and those of the conquered

countries to an increasingly severe persecution that culminated in their physical annihilation, the German Protestant and Catholic churches, their governing bodies, their bishops, and most of their theologians watched the suffering that Germans inflicted on the Jews in silence. No explicit public word of sympathy for the Jews, no explicit public condemnation or protest against their persecution issued from any of the authoritative figures within the churches or from any of their ecclesiastical offices. Only a few lowly pastors and priests spoke out or, rather, cried out forlornly their sympathy with the Jews and, with it, their bitter reproach of the Church authorities for their silence. Of all the Protestant bishops of Germany, one (Bishop Wurm), in a confidential letter to Hitler, protested the slaughter of the Jews. The other bishops were almost as impassive in private as they were in public, and at least one (Martin Sasse of Thuringia) published a pamphlet, bristling with virulent antisemitism, that explicitly justified the burning of the synagogues and large scale anti-Jewish violence.

In sum, in the face of the persecution and annihilation of the Jews, the churches, Protestant and Catholic, as corporate bodies exhibited an apparent, striking impassiveness. Moreover, in the ranks of the clergy at all levels, numerous voices could be heard vilifying the Jews in Nazi-like terms, hurling imprecations at them, and acclaiming their persecution at the hands of their country's government. No serious historian would dispute the anti-Nazi theologian Karl Barth's verdict contained in his parting letter before leaving Germany in 1935: “For the millions that suffer unjustly, the Confessing Church does not yet have a heart.”⁴¹ To which it could be added, “and would not exhibit a heart during the entire Nazi era.”

The impassiveness of the Protestant and Catholic churches, their official public silence is thrown into particularly sharp relief by the very few, scattered, impassioned, yet barely audible and utterly ineffectual voices of reproach and protest that were raised within their precincts by lowly isolated figures. Perhaps the most impassioned, the bluntest, the most detailed and most damning of the protests against the silence of the Christian churches came from the pen of a comparatively obscure officer of one of its auxiliary organizations, the chair of the Evangelical Welfare Service of the Berlin-Zehlendorf district, Marga Meusel. It consisted of a lengthy memorandum prepared for the synod of the Protestant Confessing Church which met at Steglitz between September 26 and 29, 1935. Meusel supplemented the memorandum with additions which she completed on May 8, 1936. She had been prompted to make these additions by the worsening plight of the Jews that resulted from the Nuremberg Laws. The memorandum vividly describes the manner in which the Jews have been persecuted, giving examples of the indignities, torments, and brutalities to which Germans subjected them. It

shows that even German children, nourished in this antisemitic culture, had taken to defaming and abusing Jews. "It is Christian children that do it, and Christian parents, teachers, and clergymen who allow it to happen." With clarity and directness, Meusel contends that "it is not an exaggeration when one speaks of the attempt to annihilate the Jews." In the presence of this fury of hate and immense suffering, the Church stands idle and mute. "What should one reply to the desperate and bitter questions and accusations? Why does the Church do nothing? Why does it allow unspeakable injustice to occur?" Particularly telling was Meusel's denunciation of the Church's warm welcome of Nazi rule, the Church's avowal of fealty to Hitler's regime. She quotes and concurs with the verdict of a Swedish report "that the Germans have a new God, and it is The Race, and to this God they bring human sacrifices." "How can it again and again profess joyous loyalty to the National Socialist state?" wonders Meusel. Alluding to the Nazi doctrine that decreed humaneness to be a base and contemptible sentiment, she asks: "Does it mean that all that is incompatible with humaneness, which is so disdained today, is compatible with Christianity?" In dire words of surpassing accusatory harshness, Meusel warns the Church: "What shall we one day answer to the question, where is thy brother Abel? The only answer that will be left to us as well as to the Confessing Church is the answer of Cain."

The German churches provide a crucial case in the study of the breadth, character, and power of modern German eliminationist antisemitism, because their leadership and membership could have been expected, for a variety of reasons, to have been among the people in Germany most resistant to it. The churches retained a large measure of their institutional independence, they contained many people who regarding other matters harbored non-Nazi and anti-Nazi sympathies, and their governing doctrines and humanistic traditions clashed glaringly with central precepts of the eliminationist project. The abundant evidence about their leadership's and membership's conceptions of Jews and stances towards the eliminationist persecution merely confirms and, because it is a crucial case, further strengthens greatly the conclusion that among the German people, the Nazified conception of Jews and support for the eliminationist project was extremely widespread, a virtual axiom.

Not only the churches and their leadership but also, as was shown in Chapter 3, virtually the entire German elite—intellectual, professional, religious, political, and military—embraced eliminationist antisemitism wholeheartedly as its own. The German elite and ordinary Germans alike failed to express dissent from the Nazi conception of Jewry in 1933, 1938, 1941, and 1944, although the nature and status of the Jews was one of the most relentlessly discussed subjects in the German public sphere. No evidence suggests

that any but an insignificant scattering of Germans harbored opposition to the eliminationist program, save for its most brutally wanton aspects. Even violent anti-Nazi diatribes typically did not dwell on the eliminationist antisemitism or measures as reasons for hating and opposing the Nazis.⁴² Germans not only failed to indicate that they believed the (by non-Nazi standards) criminal treatment of the Jews to be unjust. They not only failed to lend help to their beleaguered countrymen, let alone foreign Jews. But even worse for the Jews, so many Germans also willingly aided the eliminationist enterprise. They did so by taking initiative to further it, by attacking Jews verbally and physically, or by hastening the process of excluding and isolating them from German society and thereby accelerating the process of turning Jews into socially dead beings and German Jewry into a leprous community.

It is often said that the German people were "indifferent" to the fate of the Jews.⁴³ Those who claim this typically ignore the vast number of ordinary Germans who contributed to the eliminationist program, even to its exterminationist aspects, and those many more Germans who at one time or another demonstrated their concurrence with the prevailing cultural cognitive model of the Jews or showed enthusiasm for their country's anti-Jewish measures, such as the approximately 100,000 people in Nuremberg alone, who, with obvious approval, attended a rally on the day after *Kristallnacht* which celebrated the night's events. Those who postulate that "indifference" governed the German people proceed as if all these Germans, who either openly assented to or were complicit in the eliminationist program, were a trivial number of people, and as if we learn from these Germans' actions nothing about the character of the German people in general. Ignoring, for the moment, these fundamental, unsurmountable empirical and analytical problems in asserting that Germans were "indifferent" to their national project of persecuting and exterminating the Jews, the invocation of "indifference" suffers from fatal conceptual problems as well.

Before the concept of "indifference" should be used, at least two issues must be addressed. The first is its meaning. How could Germans have been "indifferent"—in the sense of having no views or predilections on the matter, in the sense of feeling no emotions, of being utterly neutral, morally and in every other way—to the mass slaughter of thousands of people, including children, which the people themselves or their countrymen were helping to perpetrate in their name? Similarly, how could Germans have been "indifferent" to all of the earlier eliminationist measures, including the forcible wresting from their own neighborhoods of people (Jews) who had lived there for generations? The public vitriol against Jews was so ubiquitous in Germany during its Nazi period that it was as impossible for Germans to have had no

views about Jews or about the elimination of Jews from German society as it was for Whites in the American South during the heyday of the civil rights movement to have had no views about Blacks or about the desirability of desegregation. "Indifference" was a virtual psychological impossibility.⁴⁴

If, however, somehow "indifference" existed, if somehow many Germans had no views about Jews and no views about the justice of what their countrymen were doing to the Jews, then this cognitive state still must be elucidated, which would not obviate the problems of using the concept, but lead to the second issue. Germans, like others, were not indiscriminately "indifferent" to all matters. So why would they have been "indifferent" to the slaughter of Jews but not to many other occurrences that, on the face of it, should have been less likely to have stirred them from a state of total neutrality than would the eliminationist measures that culminated in mass murder? The structure and content of cognition and value and the nature of social relations that would produce "indifference" (if indeed it ever obtained) to such radical and unnerving measures as the anti-Jewish program in all its facets must be explicated if the concept is to have any meaning—if it is to be more than a label to be slapped on the German people, a label which prevents considered analysis of the difficult issues.

The psychologically implausible attitude of "indifference" should not be projected onto the Germans who lived through (let alone those who contributed to) the process of turning the Jews into the social dead, who all over Germany stood by with curiosity and watched the synagogues burn on *Kristallnacht* (let alone those who applauded that night's events), who observed their countrymen deport their Jewish neighbors (let alone those who jeered them), and who witnessed or heard about the exterminatory slaughter. Instead, it would be better to recall from W. H. Auden lines that could have been written for the millions of Germans who watched the events unfold:

*Intellectual disgrace
stares from every human face,
and the seas of pity lie
locked and frozen in each eye.*⁴⁵

Indeed, the evidence indicates not Germans' "indifference," but their pitilessness.⁴⁶ It is oxymoronic to suggest that those who stood with curiosity gazing upon the annihilative infernos of *Kristallnacht*, like the "thousands, probably tens of thousands of Frankfurters,"⁴⁷ looked upon the destruction with "indifference." People generally flee scenes and events that they consider to be horrific, criminal, or dangerous. Yet Germans flocked to watch the assaults on the Jews and their buildings, just as spectators once flocked to

medieval executions and as children flock to a circus. The evidence for the putative, general German "indifference," as far as I can tell, is typically little more than the absence of (recorded) expression with regard to some anti-Jewish measure. Absent any evidence to indicate otherwise, such silence far more likely indicated tacit approval of measures which we understand to have been criminal, but which "indifferent" Germans obviously did not.

After all, there is usually a natural flow of sympathy for people who suffer great wrongs. As Thomas Hobbes' exposition of pity underscores, the Germans should have felt great compassion for the Jews: "Pity is imagination or fiction of future calamity to ourselves, proceeding from the sense of another man's calamity. But when it lighteth on such as we think have not deserved the same, the compassion is greater, because there then appeareth more probability, that the same may happen to us; for the evil that happeneth to an innocent man may happen to every man."⁴⁸ What in Germans blocked the natural flow of compassion? Something must have. Would Germans not have been overcome with pity, would they have been "indifferent," would they have been so silent, if they had been witnessing the forced deportation of thousands of non-Jewish Germans? Apparently, they did not conjure up this "fiction of future calamity" to themselves when this happened to Jews. Apparently, they did not believe themselves to have been watching Hobbes' "innocent" men.

At the same time that Germans quietly or with open approval watched their countrymen persecute, immiserate, and kill the Jews, many of these same Germans were expressing dissent from a wide variety of governmental policies. For these other policies, including the so-called Euthanasia program and often the treatment of "inferior" races of foreigners as well, many Germans were anything but indifferent. They were possessed of a divergent cognitive map, a will to oppose these policies, a will that moved them to work actively to block or subvert them, even in matters that could have resulted in punishment as harsh as any that they would have received for having aided Jews. Tomes have been written on discontent and resistance in Germany during the Nazi period, filled copiously with examples of each, yet virtually nothing has come to light to lend credence to, let alone substantiate, the belief that Germans departed from essential features of the Nazi conception of Jews, viewed the persecution of the Jews as immoral, and judged the regime as a consequence to be criminal.⁴⁹

This is not surprising, for no alternative, institutionally supported public image of the Jews portraying them as human beings was available on which Germans could have drawn. In fact, every significant institution in Germany supported a malevolent image of Jews, and virtually every one of them actively contributed to the eliminationist program, many even to the extermination itself. Again, it must be asked of those who hold that a large number

century. Although continually evolving during the modern era in its manifest content, the model maintained stability in its bedrock conception of Jews as beings immutably different from Germans: malevolent, extremely powerful, and a permanent threat to the well-being of German society. Throughout, this conception of Jews was woven into the social and moral fabric of society, imbuing it with cultural and political centrality and a tenacious permanency. Indeed, this model of Jews had for long been almost as much a part of German culture as the ubiquitous, virtually unquestioned belief in the qualities of the revered German *Volk*. Naturally, during the Nazi period, when a wildly popular leader worked the existing hallucinatory views of Jews relentlessly and expertly, a further intensification of this antisemitism occurred.⁵⁶

It needs to be emphasized that the eliminationist antisemitic ideology was multipotential in action. The indeterminate issue was which of the rough, functionally substitutable "solutions" to the "Jewish Problem" would the Nazi leadership choose, and which would be deemed acceptable by what parts of the German people. That "solutions" of various kinds and of various degrees of radicality were compatible with the regnant German cultural cognitive model of Jews is obvious, since Hitler and his followers opted for different eliminationist policies at different stages of their rule, even though their conception of Jews remained unchanged. The logical compatibility of different "solutions" with the "Jewish Problem" can be seen clearly in the theologian Gerhard Kittel's 1933 public lecture, which was discussed earlier, on the advisability and feasibility of four eliminationist options for "solving" the "Jewish Problem": extermination, separating the Jews from other peoples by giving them their own state, the Jews' disappearance through total assimilation, and effective large-scale ghettoization.⁵⁷ In his lecture, Kittel made explicit the logical relationship and kindred nature of such different "solutions," and articulated openly and transparently the thought process that eliminationist antisemites went through when formulating their "solutions"—even if all antisemites, because they were governed by different considerations (including ethical ones), did not settle upon the same option. These "solutions" were but variations—of different degrees of acceptability, radicality, and finality—flowing from the principles and goals of eliminationist antisemitism.

Even though the eliminationist antisemitic ideology was multipotential in action, it strongly tended, given the Germans' twentieth-century conception of the Jews, to metastasize into its most extreme, exterminationist variant, promising a commensurate political "solution" to the putative "problem." The elective affinity between a person subscribing to a racially based, virulent eliminationist antisemitism and a person concluding that an exterminationist "solution" was desirable could already be seen in the latter part of the pre-

genocidal nineteenth century. Fully two-thirds of the prominent antisemitic polemicists proposing "solutions" to the "Jewish Problem," who were examined in one study, agitated during this period explicitly for a genocidal assault against the Jews.⁵⁸ The beliefs that promoted the Nazis' steps to eliminate German Jewish citizens first from influence in German society and then from the society itself—aside from some cases where the material interests of Germans were severely harmed—produced enthusiastic support among the German population for the eliminationist measures. Indeed, every major feature of the evolving eliminationist program, from verbal violence to ghettoization to the killing itself, was willingly abetted by an enormous number of ordinary Germans and failed to produce significant dissatisfaction and (principled) dissent within the general German populace. The dire diagnosis and prognosis for Germany—should the Germans not succeed in eradicating the putative Jewish illness from the German body social—engendered both the exclusionary measures, eventually seen as but temporary and insufficient, and the exterminatory impulse. These beliefs justified extermination as the Germans' appropriate final treatment for the putative social pathology of Jewry. As one physician who worked for a time in Auschwitz explains, the nexus between belief and action—between Germans' antisemitism and their willing slaughter of the Jews, who were considered by Germans to be, in his words, the "arch enemies of Germany"—was exceedingly close. "The step," as this man trenchantly puts it, from the monstrous accusations leveled at the Jews, "to their annihilation is only a millimeter long."

Returning to the dimensional analysis adopted here for analyzing antisemitism, it cannot be doubted that Germans considered the source of the Jews' perniciousness to be racial and the perniciousness to be extreme. For the perpetrators, antisemitism was obviously completely manifest, having been, at the time of their genocidal actions, central in their mental and emotional world. For ordinary Germans, particularly in the 1930s, the same antisemitism was far less manifest. Ordinary Germans did not leap to mass extermination on their own, or generally even urge it—although they harbored such virulent, eliminationist beliefs, upon which many did act in other, non-lethal ways. This is not surprising, the exterminationist potential within them notwithstanding. A number of factors in all probability prevented them from doing so. They included Germans' knowledge that they could confidently leave the "solution" of the "Jewish Problem" to Hitler and the Nazi government, which was openly devoting itself to it—and making great strides towards achieving their goals. After all, the most virulent, committed antisemites in human history were steering the helm of state. The relative latency of German antisemitism, owing to an absence of regular contact with Jews and to the national focus on rebuilding German strength at home and

abroad, and the absence of appropriate conditions—including a relevant precedent, sufficient German military strength, and the simple fact that the vast majority of European Jewry was beyond the Germans' grasp—meant that most people, on their own, could simply not have made the moral and imaginative leap necessary to consider and advocate mass slaughter on this scale, no matter their ready willingness to follow when others finally showed the way. The best that Germans could have hoped for during the 1930s, given these conditions, was to remove the Jews from German public life and to place them at arm's length, eliminating their putative corrosive presence through emigration. Hitler was already working towards this goal with heart and soul, so many Germans sat by, satisfied that their government was doing the best that any government conceivably could. Many others applauded the policies and actively urged them forward.

The same virulent, eliminationist antisemitism thus at once failed to produce widespread German calls for the extermination of the Jews and was able to move the same Germans *under propitious circumstances* to kill Jews willingly and often eagerly. This is not as curious as it might at first seem. That latent antisemitism can be *activated* explains this seeming paradox of German society during the Nazi period. The willingness, for example, of Americans to fight Japanese in the event of a war, a far more "normal" and probable eventuality than genocide, was similarly not a burning conversational topic in the United States in the 1930s. If today evidence were sought of the then ordinary Americans' pre-existing willingness to bear arms against Japan, similarly too little would be uncovered to persuade the skeptic. Yet when the circumstances presented themselves, Americans willingly fought, fully believing in the justice of their cause. The perpetrators of the Holocaust underwent the same process—even if the substance of the beliefs and the morality was enormously different, even if, unlike Americans' realistic understanding of their conflict with Japan, the German perpetrators' understanding of their enemy was hallucinatory. The analytical point is that the American soldiers' moral evaluation of *their* undertaking against Japan was not fundamentally different from the moral stance of American civilians, or from what the soldiers themselves had undoubtedly believed before the possibility of war with Japan had even loomed on the horizon—that is, had they before the war ever considered what a proper response to Japanese attack and imperial conquest should be. Similarly, the antisemitism of the perpetrators and of the vast majority of the German people was, for all practical purposes, identical in content, identical in the evaluation of the nature and severity of the Jewish threat. Ordinary Germans became willing perpetrators because their pre-existing antisemitism, the common currency of German society—which one forthright liberal Catholic attested to in 1927 by writing, "the av-

erage citizen in Germany is a latent antisemite"⁵⁹—became *activated* in two senses, of becoming more manifest, more central to its bearers, and of having its lethal potential realized, turned into action. For this to happen, changed circumstances and the intervention of the German state were crucial.

Hitler leaped across the moral chasm that ordinary Germans on their own could not cross. He also engineered the conditions that enabled the exterminationist version of the eliminationist ideology to become a practical guide for action. By bringing people harboring an eliminationist mind-set with exterminationist potential into institutions of killing, by sanctioning their actions with the orders, hence the blessings, of a charismatic, beloved leader, the German state was able, easily, to enlist ordinary Germans in the program of extermination, even though, prior to its implementation, most of them had certainly never imagined that they would be mass executioners. After the years of turmoil, disorder, and privations that Germans believed the Jews to have caused their country, Hitler was offering Germans a true "final solution." They latched themselves onto Hitler's exterminationist wagon, working in concert to realize his vision and promise, which was compatible with their own worldview, with their deepest moral dictates.⁶⁰

The symbiosis between Hitler's passionately held and pursued aim of extinguishing Jewish power by whatever means and the German people's racial eliminationist view of Jews together produced the conditions and the drive to undertake the eliminationist policies of the 1930s and 1940s.⁶¹ On this issue, Hitler and the Nazi leadership knew that the German people were of like mind. In a telling exchange during the high-level November 12, 1938, meeting on "The Jewish Problem" convened by Göring after *Kristallnacht*, Heydrich explained to Göring why controlling the Jews of Germany was easier without the creation of ghettos, which, because the Jews would be living only among Jews, would, according to the Nazis' hallucinatory view, "remain the eternal hideout for crimes and above all [a breeding ground] for epidemics and similar things." Heydrich had a better solution which was to rely on the antisemitic German people: "Today it is so that the German population . . . forces Jews to congregate in [certain] blocks or houses. The control of the Jew through the watchful eye of the entire population is better than if you have the Jews in the thousands and but thousands in one quarter of a city where I, using uniformed officials, cannot establish control of their daily life."⁶² Heydrich knew that when it came to the Jews, the German people served as his police force and that they were a more effective force in policing the Jews ultimately than the Gestapo.

Heydrich and the Nazi leadership were not in the habit of deluding themselves about the German people. They were well aware that the people did not support them on many issues. For example, although the Nazis were

profoundly anti-Christian and would have destroyed Christianity after the war, they knew that until that time, they would remain hamstrung by the German people. According to Goebbels, who himself expected that after military victory they would undertake the dismantling of the churches, the anti-Christian measures undertaken by Martin Bormann, the Secretary of the Party, which were still relatively mild, were, because of their unpopularity, causing "more harm than good." Goebbels noted in his diary the contrast between the people's reaction to these measures and to the assault on the Jews. With the persecution and extermination of the Jews, the regime ran no risk of causing a second front to form at home, though he feared that that would be the result should the regime move forcefully against the churches. Goebbels' diary entry further substantiates two notions discussed earlier, namely that had the German people and the Christian leadership opposed the elimination and extermination of the Jews, then they could have stopped the regime and, second, that Hitler and the Nazis, when faced with constraints, repeatedly deferred the implementation of their programmatic goals until the right conditions appeared. Goebbels—in the privacy of his diary and therefore reflecting his sincere belief—also provides the answer to the question of why the German people granted the regime a free hand with regard to the Jews, but not with regard to churches. It was the concordance of their views: "All Germans are at present against the Jews."⁶³

This symbiosis between Hitler and the German people's racist eliminationist view of Jews also produced the consonance that has, in a variety of areas, been demonstrated here, among the macro, meso, and micro levels of action—of overall policy, institutional structure, and individual action. Initiative in persecuting and eliminating Jews, if having come mainly from the person of Hitler, the state, and the Party, also came from individuals and groups in all spheres and levels of society, so that, if in fits and starts, an ever-increasing exclusion of Jews from society, accompanied by increasing levels of violence, characterized the evolutionary direction of Germany. This was apparent to everyone.⁶⁴ Hitler and the Nazis were obviously the driving force behind the persecution and eventual slaughter of Jewry, yet the German people's own prior antisemitism created the *necessary enabling condition* for the eliminationist program to unfold, of which they, with sadly few exceptions, approved in principle, if not wholeheartedly.⁶⁵

The beliefs, principally the cultural cognitive model of Jews, that underlay this participation and approval of the general eliminationist program were the same ones that underlay the extermination. Prior to the initiation of the genocidal program, they were the common property of ordinary Germans, perpetrators and non-perpetrators alike, the perpetrators having been but ordinary Germans who brought the common German ideational property to their task.⁶⁶ That it was the common German ideational property is testified

to by a German Jew who in May 1942 recorded in his diary the reason why virtually all Germans shunned him, which clearly, in summary form, also expressed the content of German beliefs about Jews: "It was, after all, no surprise. Because for nearly ten years the inferiority and harmfulness of the Jews has been emphasized in every newspaper, morning and evening, in every radio broadcast and on many posters, etc., without a voice in favor of the Jews being permitted to be raised."⁶⁷ Genocide was immanent in the conversation of Germany society. It was immanent in its language and emotion. It was immanent in the structure of cognition.⁶⁸ And it was immanent in the society's proto-genocidal practice of the 1930s. Under the proper circumstances, eliminationist antisemitism metastasized into its most virulent exterminationist form, and ordinary Germans became willing genocidal killers.

The autonomous power of the eliminationist antisemitism, once given free rein, to shape the Germans' actions, to induce Germans voluntarily on their own initiative to act barbarously towards Jews, was such that Germans who were not even formally engaged in the persecution and extermination of the Jews routinely assaulted Jews physically, not to mention verbally. One memoirist describes a paradigmatic occurrence. Young soldiers, veterans of the western front, arrived in Łosice, a town of eight thousand people in the Lublin region of Poland. They initially acted courteously. Then they learned that the vast majority of the town's denizens were Jews, "and immediately they were transformed. Their *Sie* turned to *du*; they made us polish their boots and clubbed us for not tipping our hats promptly."⁶⁹ Nothing had changed. The Germans beheld people who looked exactly as they had before, people who acted no differently. Yet everything had changed, for the Germans had gained knowledge of the identity of these people and, like their countrymen all over eastern Europe, immediately became "transformed," using the demeaning "*du*" form of address, instead of the normal, respectful "*Sie*," exacting symbolic obeisance, and beating the innocent people.

So profound and near universal was the antisemitism during the Nazi period that to the Jewish victims it appeared as if its hold on Germans could be captured and conveyed only in organic terms: "A poison of diseased hatred permeates the blood of the Nazis."⁷⁰ Once activated, Germans' profound hatred of Jews, which had in the 1930s by necessity lain relatively dormant, so possessed them that it appeared to exude from their every pore. Kaplan, the keen diarist of the Warsaw ghetto, observed many Germans from September 1939 until March 1940 when he penned his evaluation derived from their actions and words.

The gigantic catastrophe which has descended on Polish Jewry has no parallel, even in the darkest periods of Jewish history. First, in the depth of hatred. This is not just hatred whose source is in a party platform, and which

was invented for political purposes. It is a hatred of emotion, whose source is some psychopathic malady. In its outward manifestations it functions as physiological hatred, which imagines the object of hatred to be unclean in body, a leper who has no place within the camp.

The [German] masses have absorbed this sort of qualitative hatred. . . . They have absorbed their masters' teachings in a concrete, corporeal form. The Jew is filthy; the Jew is a swindler and an evildoer; the Jew is the enemy of Germany, who undermines its existence; the Jew was the prime mover in the Versailles Treaty, which reduced Germany to nothing; the Jew is Satan, who sows dissension between one nation and another, arousing them to bloodshed in order to profit from their destruction. These are easily understood concepts whose effect in day-to-day life can be felt immediately.⁷¹

Significantly, this characterization and the previous description of the young German soldiers in Łosice are each based on the words and acts of Germans—of SS men, policemen, soldiers, administrators, and those working in the economy—before the formal genocidal program of systematic killing had begun. It is the masses, the ordinary Germans, not the Nazi ideologues and theoreticians, whom Kaplan exposes. The causal link between the Germans' beliefs and actions is palpable, so that the Jews feel the effect of their "concepts" "in day-to-day life." In the more than two and a half years of subsequent concentrated observation of the Germans in Warsaw, Kaplan saw no reason to alter this evaluation.

THE BELIEFS ABOUT Jews that underlay the German people's participation and approval of the eliminationist policies of the 1930s, and that led ordinary Germans in Łosice and Warsaw prior to the initiation of a formal program of genocide to act so barbarously, were the beliefs that prepared ordinary Germans—as it did the men of Police Battalion 3—to concur with what an officer of the battalion said while addressing his men in Minsk, before the first enormous massacre that they were to perpetrate, namely that "no suffering should accrue to noble German blood in the process of destroying this sub-humanity." These ordinary Germans saw the world in such a manner that the slaughter of thousands of Jews was seen as an obvious necessity that produced concern only for the well-being of "noble German blood." Their beliefs about Jews prepared these representative Germans to hear the officer's accompanying offer to be excused if they were not up to the task, yet to choose to slaughter Jewish men, women, and children willingly.⁷²

These were the beliefs that engendered in ordinary Germans the lethal racial fantasies which led them to write to loved ones and friends of the geno-

cidal exploits of their nation and its representative men. A member of Police Battalion 105 wrote to his wife on August 7, 1941, from the Soviet Union, in explicit and approving terms, of the total annihilation of the Jews, and then added; "Dear H., don't lose sleep over it, it has to be." Having borne witness to continual, ongoing genocidal killing, and written openly and with the obvious expectation of his wife's general understanding (whatever misgivings she might have had notwithstanding), this man could write to her again one month later that he was "proud" to be a German soldier, because "I can take part up here and have many adventures." These were the beliefs that led him, now filled with pride in the German national accomplishments on their genocidal march through the Soviet Union, to take photographs (he did not specify of what), as did legions of other Germans, so that he would have a document of his time, which would be "extremely interesting for our children."⁷³ These same beliefs led an air force sergeant, Herbert Habermatz, to write in June 1943, candidly and proudly, of what he considered to be a German national accomplishment—the final, utter destruction of the largest Jewish population in Europe, the Warsaw ghetto, which once housed almost 450,000 Jews: "We flew several circles above the city. And with great satisfaction we could recognize the complete extermination of the Jewish Ghetto. There our folks did really a fantastic job. There is no house which has not been totally destroyed."⁷⁴ Habermatz, as did many German soldiers, sent this and other letters to his former place of employment, a firm producing farm equipment. These letter writers knew that employers often circulated the letters' contents to their workers, in order to solidify between the workers and their brethren at the front a sense of common purpose in the pursuit of the war. Habermatz, governed by exterminationist beliefs about Jews—beliefs which he apparently believed, no doubt correctly, that his co-workers shared—wanted to convey to those at home his thrill at having had such a rare and satisfying visual overview of this "fantastic" genocidal job.

These were the beliefs that prepared officers of Police Regiment 25 to boast, like so many other Germans engaged in the slaughter, and to believe themselves "to have accomplished feats of heroism by these killings." These were the beliefs that led so many ordinary Germans to kill for pleasure and to do so not while trying to hide their deeds but in full view of others, even of women, girlfriends and wives, some of whom, like those in Stanisławów, used to laugh as their men picked off Jews from their balconies, like so many ducks in a shooting gallery.⁷⁵ These same beliefs moved the men of Police Battalion 61's First Company, who guarded the Warsaw ghetto and eagerly shot Jews attempting to sneak in or out of the ghetto during 1941–1942, to create a recreational shrine to their slaughter of Jews. These German reservists turned a room in their quarters into a bar, adorned its walls with antisemitic caricatures

and sayings, and hung over the bar itself a large, internally illuminated Star of David. Lest some of their heroics go unnoticed, by the door to the bar was a running tabulation of the number of Jews whom the company's men shot. After successful kills, these Germans were in the habit of rewarding themselves by holding special "victory celebrations" (*Siegesfeiern*).⁷⁶

The beliefs about Jews that governed the German people's assent and contributions to the eliminationist program of the 1930s were the beliefs that prepared the men of Police Battalion 101 and so many other Germans to be eager killers who volunteered again and again for their "Jew-hunts," and to call Międzyrzec, a city in which they conducted repeated roundups, killings, and deportations—playing on its name with obvious reference to its many thousands of Jews—"Menschenschreck," or "human horror."⁷⁷ These were the beliefs that led Germans, in the words of Herbert Hummel, the Bureau Chief of the Warsaw District, to have "welcomed thankfully" the 1941 "shoot-to-kill order," which authorized them to kill any Jews found outside ghettos.⁷⁸ These same beliefs moved the men of another police unit, ordinary Germans, to shoot Jews whom they found even "without express orders, completely voluntarily." One of the men explains: "I must admit that we felt a certain joy when we would seize a Jew whom one could kill. I cannot remember an instance when a policeman had to be ordered to an execution. The shootings were, to my knowledge, always carried out on a voluntary basis; one could have gained the impression that various policemen got a big kick out of it." Why the "joy," why the eager voluntarism? Obviously, because of these ordinary Germans' beliefs about the Jews, which this man summarizes definitively: "The Jew was not acknowledged by us to be a human being."⁷⁹ With this simple observation and admission, this former executioner uncovers from below the shrouds of obfuscation the mainspring of the Holocaust.

These were the beliefs that led so many ordinary Germans who degraded, brutalized, and tortured Jews in camps and elsewhere—the cruelty in the camps having been near universal—to *choose* to do so. They did not choose (like the tiny minority who showed that restraint was possible) not to hit, or, if under supervision, to hit in a manner that would do the least damage, but instead regularly chose to terrorize, to inflict pain, and to maim. These were the beliefs that prepared the men of Police Battalion 309, ordinary Germans, not to hate, but to esteem the captain who had led them in their orgy of killing and synagogue-burning in Białystok in a manner similar to the glowing evaluations of "Papa" Trapp given by the men of Police Battalion 101, esteem which echoed the sentiments of men in many other killing institutions towards their commanders. This captain, according to his men, "was entirely humane [*sic*] and as a superior beyond reproach."⁸⁰ After all, in the transvaluated world of Germany during the Nazi period, ordinary Ger-

mans deemed the killing of Jews to be a beneficent act for humanity. These were the beliefs that led Germans often to mark and celebrate Jewish holidays, such as Yom Kippur, with killing operations,⁸¹ and for a member of Police Battalion 9, who was attached to *Einsatzkommando 11a*, to compose two poems, one for Christmas 1941 and the other for a social evening, ten days later, that celebrated their deeds in the Soviet Union. He managed to work into his verse, for the enjoyment of all, a reference to the "skull-cracking blows" (*Nüssknacken*) that they had undoubtedly delivered with relish to their Jewish victims.⁸²

These were the beliefs that led Germans to take joy, make merry, and celebrate their genocide of the Jews, such as with the party (*Abschlussfeier*) thrown upon the closing down of the Chelmno extermination camp in April 1943 to reward its German staff for a job well done. By then, the Germans had killed over 145,000 Jews in Chelmno.⁸³ The German perpetrators' rejoicing proudly in their mass annihilation of the Jews occurred also at the conclusion of the more concentrated slaughter of twelve thousand Jews on the "Blood Sunday" of October 12, 1941, in Stanisławów, where the Germans there threw a victory celebration.⁸⁴ Yet another such celebration was organized in August 1941, during the heady days in the midst of the Germans' campaign of extermination of Latvian Jewry. On the occasion of their slaughter of the Jews of Cēsis, the local German security police and members of the German military assembled to eat and drink at what they dubbed a "death banquet [*Totenmahl*] for the Jews." During their festivities, the celebrants drank repeated toasts to the extermination of the Jews.⁸⁵

While the perpetrators' routine symbolic degradation of their Jewish victims, their celebrations of their killings, and their photographic mementos of their genocidal achievements and milestones all attest to this transvaluation of values, perhaps nothing demonstrates this more sharply than the farewell given by a man who should have been a moral conscience for Germany. Like the leaders of a good portion of the Protestant Evangelical Church of Germany, who in a proclamation declared the Jews to be "born enemies of the world and the Reich," incapable of being saved by baptism, and responsible for the war, and who, having accepted the logic of their racial, demonological antisemitism, gave their explicit ecclesiastical authorization for the implementation of the "severest measures" against the Jews while the genocidal program was well under way, Cardinal Adolf Bertram of Breslau once appears to have explicitly expressed his own understanding of the extermination of the Jews, except for those who had converted to Christianity. The beliefs that led the German people to support the eliminationist program and the perpetrators to carry it out were the beliefs that moved Bertram—who, like the entire Catholic and Protestant ecclesiastical leadership, was fully cog-

nizant of the extermination of the Jews and of the antisemitic attitudes of his parishioners—to pay final homage to the man who was the mass murderer of the Jewish people and who had for twelve years served as the beacon of the German nation. Upon learning of Hitler's death, Cardinal Bertram in the first days of May 1945 ordered that in all the churches of his archdiocese a special requiem, namely "a solemn requiem mass be held in commemoration of the Führer . . ." ⁸⁶ so that his and Hitler's flock could pray to the Almighty, in accord with the requiem's liturgy, that the Almighty's son, Hitler, be admitted to paradise. ⁸⁷

The beliefs that were already the common property of the German people upon Hitler's assumption of power and which led the German people to assent and contribute to the eliminationist measures of the 1930s were the beliefs that prepared not just the Germans who by circumstances, chance, or choice ended up as perpetrators but also the vast majority of the German people to understand, assent to, and, when possible, do their part to further the extermination, root and branch, of the Jewish people. The inescapable truth is that, regarding Jews, German political culture had evolved to the point where an enormous number of ordinary, representative Germans became—and most of the rest of their fellow Germans were fit to be—Hitler's willing executioners.

Epilogue

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-