

*The Non-German German and  
the German German: Dilemmas  
of Identity after the Holocaust*

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Whoever thou art . . . by ceasing to take part . . . in the public worship of God, as it now is (with the claim that it is the Christianity of the New Testament), thou hast constantly one guilt the less, and that a great one. . . . I want honesty. If that is what the human race or this generation wants, if it will honorably, honestly, openly, frankly, directly rebel against Christianity, if it will say to God, "We can but we will not subject ourselves to this power" . . . very well then, strange as it may seem, I am with them.

—Søren Kierkegaard

The proposition that the Federal Republic has developed a healthy democratic culture around the memory of the Holocaust has almost become a platitude.<sup>1</sup> Symbolizing the relationship between the Federal Republic's liberal political culture and honest reckoning with the past, an enormous memorial to the

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murdered Jews of Europe has been constructed adjacent to the Bundestag and Brandenburg Gate in the national capital. The memorial's significance is underlined by the fact that states usually erect monuments to their fallen soldiers, not to the victims of these soldiers. In the eyes of many, the West German and, since 1990, the united German experiences have exemplified how posttotalitarian and postgenocidal societies "come to terms with the past."<sup>2</sup> Germany now seems no different from the rest of Europe, or indeed from the West generally. Jews from Eastern Europe are as happy to settle there as they are to emigrate to Israel, the United States, or Australia.<sup>3</sup>

This rosy picture of the Berlin Republic is explicitly whiggish. Not for nothing has the philosopher Jürgen Habermas been hailed as the "Hegel of the Federal Republic," because his articulation of its supposedly "postconventional" identity presents the self-understanding of the Berlin Republic as a successful moral learning process.<sup>4</sup> The Red-Green government of Gerhard

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1. Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2002). For an excellent overview of postwar memory politics see Andrew H. Beattie, "The Past in the Politics of Divided and Unified Germany," in *Partisan Histories: The Past in Contemporary Global Politics*, ed. Max Paul Friedman and Padraic Kenney (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 17–38.

2. See, e.g., Daniel J. Goldhagen, "Modell Bundesrepublik: National History, Democracy, and Internationalization in Germany," *Common Knowledge* 3 (1997): 10–18; Gesine Schwan, "Political Consequences of Silenced Guilt," *Constellations* 4 (1998): 472–91; and Schwan, "The Healing Value of Truth Telling," *Social Research* 4 (1998): 725–40. Making the same case for the Holocaust in an international context are Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5 (2002): 87–106. Not for nothing have scholars of Germany become central players in the global memory boom: Jeffrey K. Olick, ed., *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformation in National Retrospection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); John Torpey, ed., *Politics and the Past: On Repairing Historical Injustices* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); Jan-Werner Müller, ed., *Memory and Power in Post-war Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

3. Jeffrey M. Peck, *Being Jewish in the New Germany* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes, eds., *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945–2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

4. Jan Ross, "Der Hegel der Bundesrepublik," *Die Zeit*, October 11, 2001; cf. Mary Nolan, "The Politics of Memory in the Berlin Republic," *Radical History Review*, no. 81 (2001): 113–32.

Schröder (1998–2005) turned this philosophy into policy. Former minister for culture Michael Naumann justified the Berlin memorial by invoking the political theology of Habermas's friend, the Roman Catholic priest Johann Baptist Metz: the Federal Republic's "anamnesic culture" of remembrance demanded such a commemorative gesture.<sup>5</sup> Twenty years after the "historians' dispute" (*Historikerstreit*), then, "a culture of contrition" was part and parcel of the country's new democratic spirit.<sup>6</sup> And since (re)unification in 1990, historians and political scientists have been attempting to explain this unexpectedly happy end to Germany's otherwise dismal twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

Yet there are good reasons to find suspicious a narrative in which the memory of murdered Jews redeems Germany. No consensus has ever obtained about remembering the Holocaust. Consider the tortured memory debates in Germany over the past decade. Many Germans opposed the new memory politics, which they felt was imposed on them by distant leaders attuned to the expectations of Atlantic political and cultural elites. As recent research into the intergenerational transmission of German memory shows, a considerable gap exists between the pieties of official statements and the intimate sphere of the family, where stories of German suffering and survival endured a half century after the end of World War II.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, the call for the "normalization" of German history and national consciousness appears regularly in public

5. Michael Naumann, "Remembrance and Political Reality: Historical Consciousness in Germany after the Genocide," *New German Critique*, no. 80 (2000): 22–23; Naumann, "Ohne Antwort, ohne Trost," *Die Zeit*, May 4, 2005. In this recent article he does not think that the memorial offers or signals "redemption" (*Erlösung*) for Germany, let alone "reconciliation." Cf. Peter Carrier, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures in France and Germany since 1989: The Origins and Political Function of the Vél' "dHiv" in Paris and the Holocaust Monument in Berlin* (New York: Berghahn, 2005).

6. Karl Wilds, "Identity Creation and the Culture of Contrition: Recasting Normality in the Berlin Republic," *German Politics* 9 (2000): 83–102.

7. Klaus Naumann, ed., *Nachkrieg in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001); Helmut Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte* (Munich: Hanser, 1999); Anne Sa'adah, *Germany's Second Chance: Trust, Justice, and Democratization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Siobhan Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past and German National Identity* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001); Jeffrey Herf, "Politics and Memory in West and East Germany since 1961 and in Unified Germany since 1990," *Journal of Israeli History* 23 (2004): 40–64; Manfred Hettling, "Die Historisierung der Erinnerung—Westdeutsche Rezeptionen der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 29 (2000): 357–78; Helmut König, *Die Zukunft der Vergangenheit: Der Nationalsozialismus im politischen Bewusstsein der Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2003); Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*; Michael Geyer, "The Politics of Memory in Contemporary Germany," in *Radical Evil*, ed. Joan Copjec (London: Verso, 1996), 169–200. Careful to avoid the temptation of teleology are Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Pasts: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

8. Olaf Jensen, *Geschichte Machen: Strukturmerkmale des intergenerationellen Sprechens über die NS-Vergangenheit in deutschen Familien* (Tübingen: Diskord, 2004).

discourse.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, had not the writer Martin Walser caused a stir in 1998 by claiming that Holocaust memory was wielded like a “moral cudgel” to bully Germans into accepting a politically correct version of their past?<sup>10</sup> He was just one of many who opposed the decision to construct the memorial in Berlin.<sup>11</sup>

Then there were the many reminders of a half-forgotten past that appear regularly to rupture the moral smugness of official politics. In the so-called Flick affair in 2004, for instance, the son of a business tycoon who profited greatly under the Nazis by employing slave laborers to whom his family has never paid compensation moved his modern art exhibition to Berlin after protesters successfully hounded it from Switzerland. Herr Flick could not comprehend the motives of those who objected to the separation of his love for modern arts and the moral issues surrounding his father’s business dealings before 1945. Neither could Chancellor Schröder, who opened the exhibition by calling for the “normalization” of German memory.<sup>12</sup>

These were not isolated incidents. A year earlier, controversy had rocked the literary establishment when the celebrated rehabilitators of postwar German literature, the Gruppe 47, were accused of anti-Semitism. The seeming mania for uncovering apparent brown roots in public figures, particularly those with impeccable left-liberal credentials, continued with the claim that the prominent Germanists Walter Jens (b. 1923) and Peter Wapnewski (b. 1922) had been members of the Nazi Party. Historians were likewise shocked when it was revealed that Martin Broszat (1926–89), the longtime director of the celebrated Institut für Zeitgeschichte, which for decades had been at the forefront of innovative scholarship on Nazism, had joined the Nazi Party on April 20, 1944. In

9. Stuart Taberner, “‘Normalization’ and the New Consensus on the Nazi Past: Günter Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* and the Problem of German Wartime Suffering,” *Oxford German Studies* 31 (2002): 161–86; Mitchell G. Ash, “Becoming Normal, Modern, and German (Again!),” in *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany*, ed. Michael Geyer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 295–313; Konrad H. Jarausch, “Normalisierung oder Re-Nationalisierung?” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 21 (1995): 571–84; Jeffrey K. Olick, “What Does It Mean to Normalize the Past? Official Memory in German Politics since 1989,” *Social Science History* 22 (1998): 547–71; A. James McAdams, “Germany after Unification—Normal at Last?” *World Politics* 49 (1997): 282–308.

10. Martin Walser, *Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede: Friedenspreis der Deutschen Buchhandels 1998* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 17–18.

11. Michael S. Cullen, ed., *Das Holocaust-Mahnmal: Dokumentation einer Debatte* (Zürich: Pendo, 1999); Ute Heimrod, Günter Schlusche, and Horst Seferens, eds., *Der Denkmalstreit—das Denkmal?* (Berlin: Philo, 1999); Claus Leggewie and Erik Meyer, “*Ein Ort, an den man gerne geht*” (Munich: Hanser, 2005).

12. Wolfgang Joop, “Soll die Flick-Sammlung nach Berlin? Darf in Deutschland Kunst ausgestellt werden, die angeblich mit Nazi-Vermögen finanziert wurde? Eine Debatte um Geld und Moral,” *Die Welt*, November 22, 2004.

the same vein, the famous journalist and founder of *Der Spiegel* magazine, Rudolf Augstein (1923–2002), was revealed to have employed former Gestapo and SS officers in high positions in the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> The accumulation of these controversies in the first years of the new century led one journalist to remark on the seemingly never-ending “virulent identity crisis of the Germans.”<sup>14</sup>

The virulence is also evident in the theme of “Germans as victims,” which also reappeared after its high point in the 1950s. In 2002 the German public was treated to a heated debate about the morality of the Allied bombing campaign against German cities, a discussion saturated by graphic images of charred mounds of civilians that excited thoughts of Germans as victims of the British, the Americans, and perhaps even the Nazis.<sup>15</sup> Even the Nobel laureate Günter Grass signaled the preoccupation with German suffering in his novel *Im Krebsgang* (*Crabwalk*).<sup>16</sup> All the while, the expellee organizations agitate for a memorial site for their own suffering, much to the alarm of neighboring Poland and the Czech Republic, ever alert to any sign of irridentist politics in Germany.<sup>17</sup>

The viewpoint that Germany today is the culmination of a collective moral learning process whose past has been successfully “mastered” seems increasingly untenable. That the “correct” answer to the Nazi past has been found also ignores the proposition that such an answer is impossible to prove.

13. Klaus Briegleb, *Mißachtung und Tabu: Eine Streitschrift zur Frage: “Wie antisemitisch war die Gruppe 47?”* (Berlin: Philo, 2003); Hubert Spiegel, “Biographien Sprachlos: Germanisten als Hitlers Parteigenossen,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 24, 2003; Peter Wapnewski, “Die Kartei hat immer Recht: Wie ich Mitglied der NSDAP wurde,” *Die Zeit*, November 27, 2003; Nicolas Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker: Erforschung und Erinnerung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003); Otto Koehler, *Rudolf Augstein: Ein Leben für Deutschland* (Munich: Knauer, 2003). The “68ers” now are found to be anti-Semites like their parents: Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die Bombe im jüdischen Gemeindehaus* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005).

14. Thomas Lindemann, “Es kommt spät, aber zur rechten Zeit,” *Die Welt*, May 8, 2005.

15. Robert G. Moeller, “Germans as Victims? Thoughts on a Post–Cold War History of World War II’s Legacies,” *History and Memory* 17, nos. 1–2 (2005): 147–94.

16. Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg, 1940–1945* (Munich: Propyläen, 2002); Lothar Kettenacker, ed., *Ein Volk von Opfern? Die neue Debatte um den Bombenkrieg 1940–45* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2003); Robert Moeller, “Sinking Ships, Lost *Heimat*, and Broken Taboos: Günter Grass and the Politics of Memory in Contemporary Germany,” *Contemporary European History* 12 (2003): 147–81.

17. Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, “Memories of Universal Victimhood: The Case of Ethnic German Expellees,” *German Politics and Society* 23, no. 2 (2006): 1–27; Aleida Assmann, “On the (In)compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in Germany Memory,” *German Life and Letters* 59 (2006): 187–200; Norbert Frei, *1945 und wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen* (Munich: Beck, 2005); “Germans as Victims during the Second World War,” special issue, *Central European History* 38, no. 1 (2005); Henning Sussner, “Still Yearning for the Lost *Heimat*? Ethnic German Expellees and the Politics of Belonging,” *German Politics and Society* 22, no. 2 (2004): 1–26.

Moreover, can a past such as Germany's be contained in a comfortable way? It is striking how long the debate has been framed by stark polarities: remembering or forgetting, too much memory or too little, its cynical instrumentalization or redeeming quality, capitulation in 1945 or liberation.<sup>18</sup> All evidence points to the fact that the meaning of memory is actually indeterminate and controversial, and will not be tamed by political elites.

The point of this article is not to sound the tocsin about supposed revisionist tendencies in German memory, or to expound on some mythical German national character, or to express dismay at the apparently querulous Germans. It is to suggest an alternative way of thinking about the past sixty years of German memory debates. Rather than trace linear progress or transformations in collective memory,<sup>19</sup> it tries to explain the source of controversies about the national past as manifest enactments of an underlying structure of German political emotions. This structure was articulated in a rival memory project after the end of the Nazi regime and began to dissolve gradually only at the beginning of the twenty-first century with the change of generations. I lay bare this structure by examining in depth two figures, Jürgen Habermas and Martin Walser, who, I claim, exemplify the two characteristic reactions to the stigmatized national history: the "non-German German" and the "German German." Before I consider them, however, I explore the structure and logics of German political emotions, in particular the centrality of "basic trust" in a subject's familial and national environment as a determinant of the country's bifurcated memory culture.

### ***An Underlying Structure of Political Emotions***

The language of German identity dramas invites a structural analysis because it is consistently framed in binary oppositions: forgetting/remembering, denying the past/working through the past, good Germans/bad Germans, truth/error, sin/redemption, sacred/profane, and so forth. We need not follow structural anthropology or linguistics in positing deep mental structures, discerning laws of universal application, or regarding discourse as a system of self-sufficient signs to find fruitful an approach that thematizes the striking dualisms of the German memory discussion. By highlighting how the elements of binary

18. Klaus Naumann made this aspect of German memory debates clear to me in a conversation in Hamburg in October 2003. See Jan-Holger Kirsch, "'Befreiung' und/oder 'Niederlage'? Zur Konfliktgeschichte des deutschen Gedenkens an Nationalsozialismus und den Zweiten Weltkrieg," in *1945—Der Krieg und seine Folgen: Kriegsende und Erinnerungspolitik in Deutschland*, ed. Burkhard Asmuss et al. (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2005), 60–71.

19. An important study tracking changes in German memory is Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933–2001* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

oppositions are mutually interdependent components in a specific cultural system, we can see that none of the participants in a discursive field possessed a vantage point over others. The conceit of arrogating to oneself an epistemological (or moral) superiority over others is inherent in the atomism of conventional analyses that regard the terms of the memory discourse merely as elements in an aggregate, without necessarily any relation with other terms.<sup>20</sup> To understand how the system works, then, we need to observe its functioning rather than participate in it.

Studying a structure demands what Jean Piaget called “a special effort of reflective abstraction.”<sup>21</sup> We need, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss explained, to look “beyond the empirical facts to the relations between them,” which “reveals and confirms that these relations are simpler and more intelligible than the things they interconnect.”<sup>22</sup> By studying two intellectuals whose political emotions dramatize the structure of German subjectivities, we can reveal these relations in the case of postwar German memory and identity. Intellectuals and writers are no different from other Germans in having to wrestle with political emotions. In fact, because their identity projects are so elaborately articulated in public language, they embody the affects and unconscious fantasies about their large-group identity as Germans in both oblique but sometimes disarmingly candid ways. Because of the high level of reflection in their thinking for and against the nation, intellectuals are more likely to develop internally consistent and coherent positions and, consequently, we can “read off” the logic and structure of their political emotions from their writings. Dissecting their writings is thereby at once an exercise in biographical study as well as the detection of those deeper, often quasi-religious currents that subtend public discourse. Nonetheless, while agreeing with Nietzsche that “every great philosophy” is “the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir,” this article does not argue that the link between individual intellectual life and social psychology affords access to the political emotions of every German.<sup>23</sup> Consistent with the focus on the relation

20. Jean Piaget, *Structuralism*, trans. Chanihah Maschler (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 7–8.

21. *Ibid.*, 137.

22. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man: Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, vol. 4 (London: Cape, 1980), 687.

23. Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Prejudices of the Philosophers,” pt. 1, sec. 6, of *Beyond Good and Evil*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 203. Successful examples of intellectual history that highlight the existential meaning of ideas to thinkers are John E. Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path of Dialectical Reason, 1805–1841* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 89–90; and Carl Schorske’s portrayal of Theodore Herzl’s “conversion” to Zionism, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Culture and Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 159.

between individual and group, this particular exercise in abstraction uncovers the subjectivities of those for whom the fate of their nation is a burning personal question, who regard it as an object about which they are entitled to worry and about whose fate they are socially qualified to propound.<sup>24</sup>

For all its merits, however, the structural gaze cannot explain why a particular vocabulary and emotions developed in any specific case. It is one thing to point out that German memory discourse was—and at times remains—relentlessly polarized; it is quite another to account for this dualism.<sup>25</sup> This article suggests the following answer. The criminal deeds of the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945 bifurcated Germans' collective identity and group self; that is, they were constituted by an underlying structure. The structure was underlying because memories of this past were inescapable; no German could avoid their inscription in his or her subjectivity. They constitute a structure because a strict logic determined the individual's reaction to the shared, national past. Germans could try to convince themselves and others that they had invented (or were inventing) a new collectivity, divorced from an unbearable past. The dominant type here was the "non-German German." Or they could defend the viability of their collective identity by making the national past bearable through various displacement strategies. These were the "German Germans."

These are, to be sure, metapsychological statements that posit a mutually dependent relationship between individual and large-group identity with intergenerational implications—a relationship notoriously difficult to define.<sup>26</sup> Until recently, psychologists have been satisfied to assert that certain events, for instance, can be "internalized as powerful configurations that give the group structure and unity" without showing how or why.<sup>27</sup> That membership

24. Cf. Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Sydney: Pluto, 1998).

25. See the articles of Eric Langenbacher, which usefully describe "German memory regimes" but do not explain why their patterns occur and recur: "Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany?" *German Politics and Society* 21, no. 2 (2003): 46–68; Langenbacher, "Moralpolitik versus Moralpolitik: Recent Struggles over the Construction of Cultural Memory in Germany," *German Politics and Society* 23, no. 3 (2005): 106–34.

26. Skeptical of psychological approaches is Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," *History and Theory* 41 (2002): 179–97.

27. Rita R. Rogers, "Intergenerational Exchange: Transference of Attitudes down the Generations," in *Modern Perspectives in the Psychiatry of Infancy*, ed. John G. Howells (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1979), 341; Rogers, "The Emotional Contamination between Parents and Children," *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 36 (1976): 267–71. Similarly thin is Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 183–99.

in a larger group is inherent in individual identity because the individual is also a social being, as a number of psychoanalysts and psychohistorians have suggested, is as intuitively convincing as it is difficult to demonstrate.<sup>28</sup> The same goes for the analogy between the structure of the individual self and group self. Heinz Kohut, for example, wanted to entertain the proposition that the self's structure—"the central unconscious ambitions of the grandiose self and the central unconscious values of the internalized idealized parent imago"—could be applied to the group, but he did not systematically discuss the relationship.<sup>29</sup>

If such statements were somewhat speculative, they at least began to supersede the methodological individualism of clinical psychology by positing a supra-individual, group self. Recent social psychologists have given firmer theoretical foundations to the relationship between the political emotions of individuals and the group self. The most elaborated attempt to answer these questions—to "investigate the psychology of we-ness"—has been undertaken by Vamik Volkan. Basing his approach on Erik Erikson's definition of core identity as comprising the subjective experience of inner sameness, he shows how solidarity with one's large group grows in children after the third year. The external world is gradually internalized because cultural objects act as "shared reservoirs for externalization." By adolescence, cultural membership is accepted—and in some cases, rejected—as part of his or her core identity, and for this reason the group self (the "we-ness" of a collective) can act "as an invisible force in the unfolding drama" of the economy of individual emotion and intergroup interaction.<sup>30</sup> Elaborating on Freud's foundation text of social psychology, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," he regards the group less as a mass libidinally fixated on a leader than as a tent that individuals cooperate in keeping up, its canvas serving as a second skin. Accordingly, attacks on the group are experienced as an attack on the self. In fact, "at times

28. W. R. Brion, "Group Dynamics: A Re-view," in *New Directions in Psycho-analysis*, ed. Melanie Klein, Paula Heimann, and R. E. Money-Kyrle (London: Tavistock, 1955), 461; Peter Loewenberg, *Fantasy and Reality in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); John Mack, "Nationalism and the Self," *Psychohistory Review* 2 (1983): 52 ("Who one is as a person, one's sense of self, contains a number of fantasies or self-representations, among which are included one's conviction of belonging to a particular national or ethnic group"); George Klein, *Psychoanalytic Theory: An Exploration of Essentials* (New York: International Universities Press, 1976), 179.

29. *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut, 1950–1978*, ed. Paul H. Ornstein, 2 vols. (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), 2:837n21.

30. Vamik D. Volkan, *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 25; Volkan, *Blind Trust: Large Groups and Their Leaders in Times of Crisis and Terror* (Charlottesville, VA: Pitchstone, 2004), 38–41.

of collective stress . . . the tent's covering can take on greater importance than the various garments worn by the individual group members."<sup>31</sup>

This is not the place to explicate all aspects of Volkan's thought on trauma and cultural regression. Here his concept of the "chosen trauma" is the most relevant. He is interested in the indirect traumatization of the descendants of people who as a group have been subjected to some defeat or shame and humiliation. The chosen trauma is an unconscious choice "to add a past generation's mental representation of a shared event to its own identity." It "reflects the traumatized past generations' incapacity for or difficulty with mourning losses connected to the shared traumatic event, as well as its failure to reverse the humiliation and injury to the group's self-esteem ('narcissistic injury') inflicted by another large group."<sup>32</sup>

Contrary to much of the literature on collective and historical memory, Volkan does not think that traumatic memories can be handed down intergenerationally.<sup>33</sup> What is transmitted—he calls it "deposited"—to the next generation are the scarred self-images of the parents who have been unable to mourn the damage done to their individual and group selves. Consequently, we are not dealing with the level of cognition, of historical interpretations by children, but with affect, with children's reactions to parents.<sup>34</sup> Children can either identify with the representations deposited (the "psychological gene") in their selves or they can struggle against them.<sup>35</sup>

The cumulative affect of this self-image deposit based on the same event or narrative—at the level of a population of millions—means that large-group identity is effected. "Though each child in the second generation has an individualized personality organization, all share similar links to the trauma's mental representation and similar unconscious tasks for coping with that representation."<sup>36</sup> Because they share a reference to the same event,

31. Volkan, *Blind Trust*, 38.

32. Vamik D. Volkan, Gabriele Ast, and William F. Greer Jr., *The Third Reich in the Unconscious: Transgenerational Transmission and Its Consequences* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002), 42; Volkan, *Bloodlines*, chap. 3.

33. "People do not transmit to their progeny their memories of historical experience, for memory can belong only to the survivor of trauma and cannot be transmitted" (Volkan, Ast, and Greer, *Third Reich*, 43).

34. Volkan, *Blind Trust*, 49.

35. Vamik D. Volkan, "Intergenerational Transmission and 'Chosen' Traumas: A Link between the Psychology of the Individual and That of the Ethnic Group," in *Psychoanalysis at the Border*, ed. Leo Rangell and Rena Moses-Hrushovski (Madison, WI: International Universities Press, 1996), 258.

36. Vamik D. Volkan, "Traumatized Societies," in *Violence or Dialogue? Psychoanalytic Insights on Terror and Terrorism*, ed. Sverre Varvin and Vamik D. Volkan (London: International Psychoanalytic Association, 2003), 231.

“a shared image of the tragedy develops,” and “a new generation of the group is unconsciously knit together.”<sup>37</sup> The unspoken experience of individual sameness over time that Erikson identifies as core identity is extended to the group. “Children develop *general* history-related unconscious fantasies because the traumatized self- and object-images passed on to children by their ancestors become amalgamated with their identity as a member of the traumatized large group, which is part of their core identity.”<sup>38</sup> These fantasies manifest themselves in specific tasks like, say, diminishing a humiliation so the parent will have less to mourn. The specific mission varies from generation to generation, but the task is not to forget the chosen trauma as an identity-conferring mission.<sup>39</sup>

Although he has cowritten a book on postwar Germany, Volkan does not indicate what the tasks for young Germans have been other than to follow the standard refrain that they suffer from an “inability to mourn,” a reference to the well-known book by Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich that he clearly admires.<sup>40</sup> Nor does he reflect on how the chosen trauma functions in a society/nation that, although defeated, is regarded as the perpetrator rather than a victim. For all its insights, Volkan’s social psychology needs to be supplemented to satisfactorily explain how otherwise well-adjusted individuals and smoothly functioning societies feel that “something has gone wrong with their sense of collective self,” as T. M. Luhrmann puts it. Drawing on Volkan’s work, Luhrmann has developed the concept of the “traumatized social self,” by which she means the self-representation a person possesses that defines what constitutes a good member of a community but that is “now associated with failure, moral inadequacy, embarrassment and guilt.”<sup>41</sup> For many, the national collective self is a self-representation that matters intensely. The feelings associated with group pride or shame affect the emotional economy of the individual. A chosen trauma may inhere in a perpetrator group as well, then. Even if a group has started a conflict and inflicted the most damage, its members will feel victimized by the enemy, with attendant feelings of humiliation

37. Volkan, *Blind Trust*, 49.

38. Volkan, Ast, and Greer, *Third Reich*, 41.

39. *Ibid.*, 37; Volkan, “Traumatized Societies,” 230–31.

40. Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn—Principles of Collective Behaviour*, trans. B. R. Placzek (New York: Grove, 1975); for a critique of “The Inability to Mourn” see Anthony D. Kauders, *Democratization and the Jews* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

41. T. M. Luhrmann, “The Traumatized Social Self: The Parsi Predicament in Modern Bombay,” in *Cultures under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma*, ed. Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 185.

and helplessness, after defeat. The deflation of the collective self-representation and self-idealization will be all the greater if the defeat is compounded with the shame of having committed genocide.

But are people emotionally attached to the “traumatized social self” in a uniform manner? If we examine cases like Germany, we see that the loss of “we-ness” is internalized in two different ways. It can lead to efforts either to defend the culture or to renovate it. This structure of political emotions—the dualism of subjectivities related to the collective self—can be traced to the question of “basic trust” in a national culture, that is, the confidence in the predictability and moral reliability of the familial and social environment. The issue of such basic trust arises in adolescence. These concepts are taken from Erikson, who posited the midteenage years as a specific developmental stage in which the ego begins to understand the contingency of history and thus realizes that it needs to forge a personality that is both authentically its own and socially recognized.<sup>42</sup> This task is complicated if “something is rotten in the state of Denmark”—Erikson referred to Hamlet—and the youthful sense of basic trust in the community/nation is ruptured. An identity crisis arises, and the relation between the generations is reversed. The young “tell the old whether the life as represented by the old and as presented to the young has meaning; and it is the young who carry in them the power to confirm those who confirm them and, joining the issues, to renew and to regenerate, or to reform and to rebel.” The identity crisis is resolved when the adolescent joins a tradition she can ethically affirm and that links her to the fate of the community, which Erikson assumes to deserve trust.<sup>43</sup>

If Erikson’s resolution of the adolescent crisis overemphasized social integration—he was inclined to speak of youth rebellion in terms of delinquency<sup>44</sup>—it nonetheless opens the way for considering disruptive identity dramas when basic social trust was violated. What if the corruption is experienced as so deep that Hamlet feels he has to make invidious choices? To be or not to be? Here is the origin of the dualism we seek to uncover, and it is no coincidence that Lévi-Strauss himself regarded Hamlet’s question as underlying the binary structure of reality.<sup>45</sup>

42. For Erikson, identity is always psychosocial: *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: International Universities Press, 1959), 57–67, 108–9, 122, 132; *Childhood and Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1963), 247–51.

43. Erik H. Erikson, “Youth: Fidelity and Diversity,” in *Youth: Change and Challenge*, ed. Erik H. Erikson (New York: Basic, 1963), 5–20.

44. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), passim.

45. Lévi-Strauss, *Naked Man*, 694.

But how is this dualism inscribed in subjectivities, and what is the nature of the political emotions released? In the German case, one reaction—the non-German German reaction—was rage expressed against parents and grandparents for the pollution and stigmatization of the collective self that they had bequeathed the younger generation.<sup>46</sup> As the sociologist Norbert Elias put it, Germans had “to struggle again and again with the fact that the we-image of the Germans is soiled by the memory of the excesses perpetrated by the Nazis, and that others, and perhaps even their own consciences, blame them for what Hitler and his followers did.”<sup>47</sup> The rage of the non-German German—Erikson would call theirs a “negative identity”<sup>48</sup>—against the polluted collective self-image was split off and projected onto German Germans, who represented the polluting agent and who acted as emotional reservoirs against whom scorn could be constantly directed to stabilize a non-German identity. This projective identification allowed non-German Germans simultaneously to disavow their own national selves while excoriating the national selves of their compatriots.<sup>49</sup> Most non-German Germans were not as reflective as Joschka Fischer, who in 1984 told fellow Greens that “even in rebellion, one could not wipe the filth of the Fatherland from one’s boots. One would always be caught in a web called Germany, and so the basic political feeling of my generation, the 68ers, could be summed up as: vomiting with indignation [*zum Kotzen*].”<sup>50</sup>

For German Germans, by contrast, constructing the Nazi past as a stigma and secular metaphor for evil in the West was incompatible with national subjectivity. To live with pollution as a constituent part of one’s core identity was impossible or, at least, tortuous, as some younger Germans’ nightmares about

46. I elaborate this point in detail in A. Dirk Moses, “Stigma and Sacrifice in the Federal Republic of Germany,” *History and Memory* 19, no. 2 (2007).

47. Norbert Elias, *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, trans. Eric Dunning and Stephen Mennell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 16. He is not the only observer to resort to the language of pollution. Eric L. Santner has written of the poisoning of Germany’s “cultural reservoir” (*Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990], 45), while Dan Diner thinks that the German group self is tainted because every member of the group is affected by a common memory of this past (*Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000], 221).

48. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 139–43.

49. For the Kleinian background for this conclusion see Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco and Antonius C. G. M. Robben, “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Violence and Trauma,” in Suarez-Orozco and Robben, *Cultures under Siege*, 28–31; and Robert M. Young, “Psychoanalysis, Terrorism, and Fundamentalism,” *Psychodynamic Practice* 9 (2003): 307–24.

50. Joschka Fischer, “Identität in Gefahr!” in *Grüne Politik: Eine Standortbestimmung*, ed. Thomas Kluge (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1984), 28–29.

the Holocaust attest.<sup>51</sup> These reactions show that the stigma of the Holocaust results in “psychological dissonance” among Germans, that is, discomfort caused by the violation of one’s self-conception because of the conflict of two emotionally salient beliefs.<sup>52</sup> In this case, it is the incommensurability of regarding oneself as moral and socially respected but also as belonging to a group that until recently was stigmatized as having committed the worst of all genocides, and within living memory. Consequently, the crimes were, literally, unbearable for national Germans. Such an identity, like all national identities, was based on the affirmative continuity of ethnic traditions that reproduced basic trust. Positively loaded childhood emotions connected with the intergenerational transmission of these traditions cannot be reconciled with consciousness of these crimes unless they are displaced outside the in-group. The German German, then, was only viable by engaging in perpetual strategies of denationalizing Nazism and the Holocaust. What is more, German Germans similarly engage in projective identification, disavowing their own resentments and genealogical relationship to the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* by displacing them onto non-German Germans, regarding themselves, the vast majority of Germans, as victims of persecution.<sup>53</sup>

If these were the only two tenable identity options for Germans until recently, the question is how these divergent reactions to the question of basic trust manifested themselves in concrete political projects.

### ***The Non-German German and the Non-Jewish Jew***

Those Germans who felt indignant about the crimes committed by Germans and the subsequent lack of contrition sought to construct a political community cleansed of polluted nationalist ideals and values. The radicalism of this project should not be underestimated. It was to recast Germans essentially as European citizens of a republic cut off from the national traditions that led to Auschwitz. The social theorists like Habermas who have devised metanarratives to

51. Lutz Rosenkötter, “The Formation of Ideals in the Succession of Generations,” in *Generations of the Holocaust*, ed. Martin S. Bergmann and Milton E. Jucovy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 182: “The adolescent children of such parents can either share their right-wing ideals and, thus, openly oppose present-day society; or they may break with their parents, who, in their rigor, cannot bear to be questioned; or they may leave the matter open and go on living with conflicting ideals.”

52. For this paragraph I rely on the helpful analysis of Alexander L. Hinton, “Agents of Death: Explaining the Cambodian Genocide in Terms of Psychosocial Dissonance,” *American Anthropologist*, n.s., 98 (1996): 818–31.

53. Cf. Charlotte Kahn, “The Different Ways of Being a German,” *Journal of Psychohistory* 20 (1993): 391.

clothe this temporal-moral impulse for a new beginning call such an identity “postconventional,” a synonym for “postnational.” These non-German Germans should not be confused with the few Germans who converted to Judaism to escape their national identity. Nor do they resemble the German refugees for whom the professor of German literature Hugo Kuhn coined a new term after he encountered them on his study tour of Australian universities in 1960. “In the concert halls of Melbourne and Sydney, we felt as we used to in Breslau. What a forced-export of cultivated and culture-conscious Germans has gone across the entire globe! Hitler has indeed brought together German and German-conscious Europeans in all the world—but as German anti-Germans [*deutsche Gegen-Deutsche*].”<sup>54</sup> This orientation may have even preceded the Nazis: we know from Thomas Mann that a “German self-antipathy” (*deutscher Selbst-Antipathie*) has existed for over a thousand years!<sup>55</sup>

Finally, non-German Germans are not to be conflated with the so-called anti-Germans (*Antideutsche*), for whom “Germany must die so we can live” and who insist that “after Auschwitz, we have no right to be German.”<sup>56</sup> For this sect of the German Left, the average German is “Otto Normalvergaser” (Otto Normal-gasser), a petit bourgeois with barely concealed genocidal and anti-Semitic urges.<sup>57</sup> Incarnating the “self-hating German,”<sup>58</sup> like those young Germans who hide their nationality during travels abroad, the anti-Germans regard the German problem in terms of the country’s fascist reaction to the crises of capitalism. They support anything that negates German nationalism and, now, Islamism and for that reason are fiercely critical of German and European anti-Zionism, particularly on the left. Solidarity with Israel is paramount.<sup>59</sup>

54. Hugo Kuhn, “Europäische Reflexionen in Australien,” *Die Zeit*, March 17, 1961. I thank my father, John A. Moses, for furnishing me with this long-forgotten article that he clipped while studying in Germany in the early 1960s.

55. Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus*, vol. 6 of *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1960), 51.

56. Cited by Richard Schroeder, “Verführtes Denken? Zur Rolle der Ideologie in der DDR,” in *Deutsche Entfremdung: Zum Befinden in Ost und West*, ed. Wolfgang Hardtwig and Heinrich August Winkler (Munich: Beck, 1994), 158.

57. Eike Geisel, *Die Banalität des Guten: Deutsche Seelenwanderungen* (Berlin: Tiamat, 1992), 17. This term is a play on *Otto Normaverbraucher*, the average citizen, as in “the man on the Clapham omnibus.”

58. This term is used in an angry settling of accounts with former, fellow leftists by Klaus Rainer Röhl, “Morgenthau und Antifa: Über den Selbsthaß der Deutschen,” in *Die selbstbewußte Nation: “Anschwellende Bockgesänge” und weitere Beiträge zu einer deutschen Debatte*, ed. Heimo Schwilk and Ulrich Schacht (Berlin: Ullstein, 1994), 85–100.

59. Vigilant in combating contemporary manifestations of the problem, they now identify Islamism as a form of National Socialism and condemn “Old Europe’s” stance of diplomatic solutions to Iran’s nuclear aspirations as a form of “collaboration.” See the new journal *Promodo*:

As this example shows, identity dilemmas cannot be reduced to questions of the Left and the Right. It was the Greens and peace movement, after all, that in the early 1980s raised the issue of German national sovereignty against NATO and the USSR, as an earlier peace movement had in the 1950s.<sup>60</sup> And an anti-Israel reflex, replete with Nazi analogies, in relation to the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, was equally evident in sections of the Left at the same time.<sup>61</sup> Non-German Germans, by contrast, are not constituted purely by negation. They want to transform their social environment by making it nonnational.

But why use this specific term? The non-German German is of course an adaptation of the famous coinage the “non-Jewish Jew” by the Polish Jewish historian Isaac Deutscher. The link between the two identities is more than semantic. A universalist, postnational orientation constitutes their inner affinity. The non-Jewish Jew is the Jewish heretic, the rebel, perhaps especially for the Marxist Deutscher, the revolutionary. His heroes were Baruch Spinoza, Heinrich Heine, Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky, and Sigmund Freud. It is true that many of them left not only Judaism but any Jewish identity behind, yet, Deutscher insisted, they belonged to a venerable Jewish tradition.<sup>62</sup> Precisely because Jews did not have their own nation-state and always had to contend with the other, even in Galician shtetls where he grew up, they were not permitted, as he put it, “to reconcile themselves to ideas which were nationally or religiously limited, [which] induced them to strive for a universal *Weltanschauung*.”<sup>63</sup> By leaving tradition behind, these non-Jewish Jews resolved a tension in Jewish identity in the cosmopolitan, universalistic, and international direction that Deutscher preferred. That tension, he argued, inhered in the Jewish god who is unitary yet universal, indeed who is universal but reveals him-

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*Zeitschrift in eigener Sache* 1 (2005): 46, [www.promodo-online.org](http://www.promodo-online.org), which carried an announcement for an “antideutsche Konferenz”: “Kritik und Parteilichkeit Aufruf zur antideutschen Konferenz am 18. und 19. November 2005 in Berlin.” See also [www.redaktion-bahamas.org](http://www.redaktion-bahamas.org) and [www.jungleworld.org](http://www.jungleworld.org). I am grateful to Norbert Finsch for drawing my attention to these references. A critique by a former anti-German is Robert Kurz, *Die Antideutsche Ideologie: Vom Antifaschismus zum Krisenimperialismus* (Münster: Unrast, 2003).

60. Andrew Oppenheimer, “West German Pacificism and the Ambivalence of Human Solidarity, 1945–1968,” *Peace and Change* 29 (2004): 353–89.

61. Susann Heenen, “Deutsche Linke, linke Juden und der Zionismus,” in *Die Verlängerung der Geschichte: Deutsche, Juden und der Palästina-Konflikt*, ed. Dietrich Wetzell (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1983), 109, cited in Anson Rabinbach, “Introduction: Reflections on Germans and Jews since Auschwitz,” in *Germans and Jews since the Holocaust: The Changing Situation in West Germany*, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Jack Zipes (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986), 10.

62. Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew, and Other Essays*, ed. Tamara Deutscher (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 27.

63. *Ibid.*, 30.

self to a single chosen people. The tension was resolved by figures like Spinoza, whose ethics, Deutscher wrote, remained Jewish “except that his was Jewish monotheism carried to its logical conclusion and the Jewish universal God thought out to the end; and once thought out to the end, that God ceased to be Jewish.”<sup>64</sup> The non-Jewish Jew was important for world history because, he argued, “the genius of the Jews who have gone beyond Jewry has left us the message of universal human emancipation.” Later, he wrote less of a total flattening out of national or cultural differences than of “supra-national forms of social existence.” Writing in the 1960s, he was convinced that the age of the nation-state was coming to an end.<sup>65</sup>

There are obvious connections to Germany. They are not that Deutscher’s Polish Jewish family was originally from Nuremberg and that his father remained in thrall to German culture. Or that his son Isaac was fascinated by Yiddish and Polish culture. The connection is that the articulator of the non-German German idea, Habermas, was thinking in similar terms at the same time as Deutscher was writing in the late 1950s. Like Deutscher, he moved from particularism to universalism. And like Deutscher, he favored a world released from national egoism, contending that world history was rendering the nation-state obsolete.

### *Jürgen Habermas’s Non-German Germanism*

How did Habermas, born in 1929 and onetime member of the Hitler Youth, come to this conclusion? He writes that he experienced the war’s end as a liberation. A few weeks after Germany’s surrender, he saw the Allied films on the concentration camps and realized that he had been living in a system run by criminals. It was a great moral shock.

At the age of 15 or 16, we sat before the radio and experienced what was being discussed before the Nuremberg tribunal; when others, instead of being struck silent by the ghastliness, began to dispute the justice of the trial, procedural questions, and questions of jurisdiction, there was that first rupture, which still gapes. Certainly, it is only because I was still sensitive and easily offended that I did not close myself to the fact of collectively realized inhumanity in the same measure as my elders.<sup>66</sup>

64. Ibid.

65. Above all, Deutscher rejected the imperative that his “dominant emotion” must be “belonging to Jewry,” by which he meant feeling compelled to support Israel, to which he referred as “this new [nationalist] Hebrew mutation of the Jewish consciousness” (*Non-Jewish Jew*, 92, 56).

66. Jürgen Habermas, “The German Idealism of the Jewish Philosophers” (1961), in *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 41.

Disgusted with his country's depravity and thoroughly alienated by its provincialism and atmosphere of self-pity, he has been unable to possess a basic trust in his social environment ever since. His large-group identity as a German had been soiled.<sup>67</sup> By 1956 Habermas successfully approached Theodor W. Adorno about becoming his assistant at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt. The move to Frankfurt was more than a new intellectual home for the brilliant young social philosopher. Because the institute's most famous lights were German Jews, it offered leftists like Habermas the chance to stand with the victims of Nazi persecution. Run by the living embodiments of an intellectual tradition with which he could personally identify, the institute offered a project that he could make his life's work. As Albrecht Wellmer observed of critical theory's importance to the "second generation" like Habermas, Ludwig von Friedeburg (b. 1923), and himself, it "was the only position represented in Germany after the war that made conceivable a radical break with fascism without a just as radical break with the German cultural tradition, and that meant a radical break with one's own cultural identity."<sup>68</sup>

This source of identification was most apparent in Habermas's 1961 radio lecture, "The German Idealism of the Jewish Philosophers." German idealism was actually indebted to Jewish mysticism, he claimed, because Jakob Böhme had been influenced by the kabbalah, and in turn his Swabian pietism had influenced the Tübingen seminarians G. W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Schelling, and Friedrich Hölderlin. The content of this mysticism was the human fulfillment of the "new age of the world," as he put it, the "ancient goal of the redemption of humanity, of nature, and indeed of the God knocked off his throne."<sup>69</sup> In other words, Jewish messianism posited a divine culmination to history, a belief that underlay political utopianism. It was no surprise, Habermas averred, that the young Hegelian insight that "the ongoing beginning opens up a view of the still outstanding end" was taken up by Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and the early Georg Lukács. "The German Idealism of the Jews produces the ferment of a critical utopia."<sup>70</sup>

Making a case for the intellectual significance of the disputed "German-Jewish symbiosis," Habermas contended that the German spirit and Jewish spirit were *mutually dependent*, for it was in Germany that Jews were able

67. Peter Dews, ed., *Habermas: Autonomy and Solidarity; Interviews with Jürgen Habermas* (London: Verso, 1986), 126.

68. Albrecht Wellmer, "Die Bedeutung der Frankfurter Schule heute," in *Die Frankfurter Schule und die Folgen*, ed. Axel Honneth and Albrecht Wellmer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), 25–34, 27.

69. Habermas, "German Idealism," 39.

70. *Ibid.*, 42.

to emancipate themselves from the ghetto and medieval religion and make Jewish mysticism philosophically reflective. Here in particular there is a parallel with Deutscher's argument, although there is no evidence that Habermas knew about Deutscher's ideas at the time. What is important to note is that Habermas thought that the spirit of the Germanized Jewish messianism would be Germany's salvation after the attempt to exterminate it: "Meanwhile, the question of anti-Semitism itself has been disposed of—we have disposed of it by physical extermination. Hence, in our deliberations it cannot be a matter of the life and survival of the Jews, of influences back and forth; only we ourselves are at stake. That is to say, the Jewish heritage drawn from the German spirit has become indispensable for our own life and survival."<sup>71</sup> In other words, the tradition of the non-Jewish Jews becomes the model for the new Germans, that is, the non-German Germans! Surveying what he regarded as the reactionary political culture of the Federal Republic in the early 1960s, he looked to it to rescue the country from its past. "If there were not extant a German-Jewish tradition, we would have to discover one for our own sakes. Well, it does exist; but because we have murdered or broken its bodily carriers, and because, in a climate of an unbinding reconciliation, we are in the process of letting everything be forgiven and forgotten too. . . . we are now forced into the historical irony of taking up the Jewish question without the Jews."<sup>72</sup> Habermas made it his mission to embody this spirit, to pose the Jewish question in a Germany virtually bereft of Jews and to defend it against its enemies. In the 1950s and 1960s these enemies were the former conservative revolutionaries like Carl Schmitt, Arnold Gehlen, and Helmut Schelsky, and their postwar successors, the liberal positivists of the technocratic intelligentsia like Hermann Lübbe and Hans Albert.

After the 1980s and, above all, during the *Historikerstreit* and unification debates in the early 1990s, Habermas attacked conservative memory politics that he saw running counter to his postnational philosophy of history and the lessons of Auschwitz. His non-German German philosophy of history took the following form. The central event of modernity was the French Revolution because it actualized a new principle of sovereignty, the nation rather than the dynastic monarch. This historical progress brought its own problems because the "nation"—hitherto the appellation for a prepolitical ethnic community—became the defining term of citizenship within the state. So while the "nation-state" provided the legal forum for its democratization,

71. *Ibid.*, 41–42.

72. *Ibid.*, 42.

this process occurred at the expense of ethnic minorities because a “sovereign people” presupposed a common will and therefore a homogeneous population. From its inception, then, the nation-state contained the contradictory principles of the prepolitical attachment to particular ethnic and cultural life forms (which restricts full membership to its own) and the universalistic implications of a democratic constitutionalism (which conceives of the nation as a community of citizens, i.e., citizenship is conferred on those who consent to certain procedures and processes of government irrespective of their ethnic or cultural background).<sup>73</sup>

The historical process in Western Europe since the French Revolution has been constituted by the untangling of these contradictory ideas of the nation. The German problem was that this process had been obstructed: ever since the so-called Wars of Liberation against French occupation, the nationalist principle has dominated the democratic one. National Socialism was the ultimate apotheosis of the nation conceived in prepolitical, racial terms. Germany was able to develop into a civic community only after it had experienced a radical caesura with its past in 1945, by abandoning the Romantic tradition with its anti-Semitism, obscurantism, and *Deutschtümlerei* (hyper-Germanness) for the universalism of the Western Enlightenment.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the conclusion that Habermas drew from Auschwitz was that “the Germans have forfeited the right to base their political identity on grounds other than the universal principles of citizenship in whose light national traditions are no longer unscrutinized but are appropriated only critically and self-critically.”<sup>75</sup> Since the Holocaust, Germans could have not a national identity but a constitutional patriotism, because they could not “rely on the continuities of history.”<sup>76</sup> The constitu-

73. Jürgen Habermas, “Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe,” *Praxis International* 12 (1992): 2–3.

74. Jürgen Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 99, 162.

75. *Ibid.*, 220; Jürgen Habermas, “Historical Consciousness and Post-traditional Identity,” in *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historian’s Debate*, by Jürgen Habermas, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 259: “Every identity that establishes membership in a collectivity and that defines the set of situations in which those belonging to the collectivity can say ‘we’ in the emphatic sense seems to be part of an unquestioned background that necessarily remains untouched by reflection.”

76. Jürgen Habermas, “Der DM Nationalismus,” *Die Zeit*, March 30, 1990; Habermas, “Die zweite Lebenslüge der Bundesrepublik: Wir sind wieder ‘normal’ geworden,” *Die Zeit*, December 11, 1992; Habermas, “Historical Consciousness and Post-traditional Identity,” 255. For commentary on Habermas and unification see Howard Williams, Catherine Bishop, and Colin Wright, “German (Re)unification: Habermas and His Critics,” *German Politics* 5 (1996): 214–39.

tional patriot's reading of the past was necessarily critical, with he or she appropriating only what accords with the universal principles of democratic constitutionalism.<sup>77</sup> Only a constitutional patriotism, with its renunciation of the German *Sonderweg*, could ensure the country's continued attachment to the Western community of values. And such a patriotism could be secured only if consciousness of Auschwitz were placed at the center of collective identity, because it was the thorn in the flesh that provokes critical reflection and dissolution of the national "we."<sup>78</sup>

To be effectively normal, it was imperative to consolidate the critical culture that broke through with the *Historikerstreit*, the controversy that embedded the proposition in public culture that the Holocaust was unique. The historian Jürgen Kocka expressed this position in 1988 with his elegantly framed formulation that "this break [from German tradition] stands at the center of our [Federal Republican] tradition."<sup>79</sup> The problem with (re)unification in 1990, Habermas feared, was that it threatened to undermine this nascent anamnestic culture that non-German Germans had developed in the Federal Republic. He was referring to the antinationalism that had been developing slowly in West Germany since the 1950s, which had culminated in the country as "civilian power" and "human rights society" committed to demilitarization and multilateralism.<sup>80</sup>

His views were not isolated; they characterized the leftist intelligentsia generally. Grass famously pronounced that Auschwitz had disqualified Germany from having a united nation-state, while the Social Democratic chancellor candidate Oskar Lafontaine said that such an ideal had been historically superseded.<sup>81</sup> Prominent journalists in major newspapers like *Die Zeit* also

77. Jürgen Habermas, "On the Public Use of History: The Official Self-Understanding of the Federal Republic Is Breaking Up," in *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust*, trans. James Knowlton and Truett Cates (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1993), 166.

78. Jürgen Habermas, "A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing," in *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?* 43; Habermas, "Historical Consciousness and Post-traditional Identity," 264.

79. Jürgen Kocka, "Deutsche Identität und historischer Vergleich: Nach dem 'Historikerstreit,'" *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, September 30, 1988, 28.

80. Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution*, 159, 215; Hanns W. Maull, "Germany and Japan: The New Civilian Powers," *Foreign Affairs* 69, no. 5 (1990): 91–107; Hans Karl Rupp, *Politik nach Auschwitz: Ausgangspunkte, Konflikte, Konsens* (Münster: Lit, 2005), 5. See also Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (London: Vintage, 1994).

81. Jochen Fischer and Hans Karl Rupp, "Deutsche Vereinigung und NS-Vergangenheit," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, October 19, 2005, 41.

applied this philosophy of history to the new geopolitics of the initial post-Cold War years. Europe must move beyond the divisive paradigm of the nation-state, the journalist Theo Sommer insisted. Germany, in particular, could not rehabilitate its nation-state “but must overcome it in Europe.”<sup>82</sup> German nationalism, however tempered, was ultimately incompatible with European peace. The nation’s size and economic power would eventually manifest itself in military terms, he warned. Should a “normal” relationship to the past develop, it would be only a matter of time before the old German policies reemerged.<sup>83</sup> Germany could lead the way in renouncing sovereignty. “Our goal must be, first, to overcome the nation-state—in all of Europe. The hope of the future does not lie in nation-states; not in the compromise-less representations of particular self-assertions, nor in the vain jockeying for national profiles. It lies in combination and cooperation, in the progressive abandonment of national sovereignty to supranational institutions in common issues.”<sup>84</sup> Rather than see the Berlin Republic as a continuation of the Bismarckian project, Habermas invited Germans to believe that the former Federal Republic’s history had more in common with Italy, France, and the United States than the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). What mattered was the universalist political principles of democratic constitutionalism, not the prepolitical bonds of ethnicity or culture. “Their [East Germany’s] history is not our History.”<sup>85</sup> He viewed German unification in 1990 as an exercise in extending liberal democracy and civil rights to unfree lands rather than in terms of “the prepolitical unity of a community with a shared common historical destiny.”<sup>86</sup>

In other words, the *political* consciousness Habermas entreated was entirely ahistorical. Once the reflexive move was made, political consciousness became purely procedural, allowing a tolerant pluralism of other, non-German life forms. “[This identity] exists *only* in the method of the public, discursive battle around the interpretation of a constitutional patriotism, which must be

82. Theo Sommer, “Unser nunmehr fertiges Vaterland,” *Die Zeit*, June 29, 1990; Ulrich Greiner, “Das Phantom der Nation: Warum wir keine Nation sind und warum wir keine werden müssen,” *Die Zeit*, March 16, 1990.

83. Theo Sommer, “Keine Sehnsucht nach Stahlgewittern,” *Die Zeit*, August 31, 1990; Peter Glotz, “Wider den Feuilleton-Nationalismus,” *Die Zeit*, April 19, 1991. Although Eberhard Jäckel cannot be placed in the leftist camp, his reading of European history leads him to much the same conclusions. See his essay “Deutschland zwischen Geschichte und Zukunft,” in *Deutschland in der internationalen Politik*, ed. Hartmut Wasser and Norbert Kruse (Weingarten: Pädagogische Hochschule, 1992), 87–103.

84. Sommer, “Keine Sehnsucht nach Stahlgewittern.”

85. Jürgen Habermas, “Die andere Zerstörung der Vernunft,” *Die Zeit*, May 10, 1990.

86. Habermas, “Citizenship and National Identity,” 2–3.

concretized in particular historical circumstances.”<sup>87</sup> For that reason, he greeted with alarm the debate in the early 1990s about restricting political asylum while welcoming ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe. Germany was becoming more instead of less German: the “repressed feeling that Germany is becoming more German has a paralyzing effect.”<sup>88</sup>

Habermas was well aware that Germans could not cut themselves off from the national past even though the Federal Republic marked a radically new and positive departure in German history. Although not directly culpable for the Nazi misdeeds, Germans could not wash their hands of the past with the fatuous excuse, used by Helmut Kohl, of their “late birth.” They were collectively liable for what happened by historical and cultural—familial—prepolitical bonds:

Our own life is linked to the life context in which Auschwitz was possible not by contingent circumstances but intrinsically. Our form of life is connected with that of our parents and grandparents through a web of familial, local, political, and intellectual traditions that is difficult to disentangle—that is, through a historical milieu that made us what and who we are today. None of us can escape this milieu, because our identities, both as individuals and as Germans, are indissolubly interwoven with it.<sup>89</sup>

There is a glaring contradiction in his approach, symptomatic of the impossibility for the non-German German subjectivity to be conceived in isolation from the society it seeks to transform. On the one hand, Habermas asked Germans to remember their continuing responsibility for Auschwitz, which meant demanding that they understood themselves historically as a prepolitical national community. But on the other, he insisted that Germans understand themselves politically as an ahistorical, democratically self-willed, political collective. Alternatively: Germans were held responsible (guilty?) for the Holocaust because of their national-family connections, but they were forbidden to experience other (positive?) national feelings and ascribe political relevance to them. Not for nothing did the political scientist Walter Reese-Schäfer

87. Habermas, “Der DM Nationalismus”; emphasis added. See the withering critique of Mark Lilla, who accuses Habermas of Rousseauian antiliberalism: “The Other Velvet Revolution: Continental Liberalism and Its Discontents,” *Daedalus*, no. 123 (1994): 129–57.

88. Jürgen Habermas, “Gelähmte Politik,” *Der Spiegel*, July 12, 1993, 54. Curiously, this quotation does not appear in the English translation of this essay: “Afterword (May 1993),” in *The Past as Future*, by Jürgen Habermas, ed. and trans. Max Pensky (London: Polity, 1994), 143–65.

89. Jürgen Habermas, “On the Public Use of History,” in *New Conservatism*, 233.

point out that such a paradoxical anti-/postnationalism contained a religious dimension. Proscribing national feelings as a form of historical punishment made sense only to those for whom the nation mattered.<sup>90</sup>

To be sure, Habermas linked national and postnational consciousness by arguing that Auschwitz reminded Germans that they could not build their political identity on the former, but who or what was the “we” that was supposed to do the remembering in the long run? The community of penance was bound to disappear in the multicultural future he envisaged for Germany. Then what? Germany would be populated by people(s) who bore no affective or effective relationship to the past commemorated in camps and monuments around the country.<sup>91</sup> Ultimately, Habermas’s was an entreaty for the self-liquefaction of the German nation via critical self-reflection and immigration in the same way as the non-Jewish Jew would mean the end of the Jewish people if all Jews adopted this identity.<sup>92</sup> After all, not long ago, Edward Said could claim in that tradition that he was “the last Jewish intellectual.”<sup>93</sup> Like the non-Jewish Jew, then, the non-German German subjectivity was predicated on the continuity of the nation/people it wanted to transform. National life was transmitted by those with national identity. That is the contradiction, even incoherence, in the postnational perspective.

Habermas’s unconscious historical fantasy, then, was not only the end of Germany as a nation-state but also the end of the German people as a “community of destiny” (*Schicksaalsgemeinschaft*). His rage against the stubborn self-pity of his compatriots that set the public and private tone of his youth and adolescence was shared by his friends, the psychoanalysts Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich. In their famous 1967 book, *The Inability to Mourn*, they told Germans that the “guilt feelings at the horrors that were committed, at murder on a scale which we can only know objec-

90. Walter Reese-Schäfer, “Universalismus, negativer Nationalismus und die neue Einheit der Deutschen,” in *Universalismus, negativer Nationalismus und die neue Einheit der Deutschen*, ed. Petra Braitling and Walter Reese-Schäfer (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991), 39–54.

91. Turkish-German authors disclaim feeling part of the German coming to terms with the past and enjoy a less-ritualized comportment to the past that excludes them. See Leslie A. Adelson, “The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature and Memory,” *Germanic Review* 77 (2004): 326–38.

92. See Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon, 1987), 77, where he argues that the “linguistification of the sacred” entails making “symbolically mediated to normatively guided action.” In the national context, this means that the prepolitical bonds of ethnicity are supplanted by the communicative community of those committed to the procedures of constitutionally secured political deliberation.

93. Said is quoted in Ari Shavit, “My Right of Return,” *Ha’aretz*, August 18, 2000, cited in Ephraim Nimni, “Wada’an to a Jewish Palestinian,” *Theory and Event* 7, no. 2 (2004), [muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v007/7.2nimni.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v007/7.2nimni.html).

tively, but are incapable of re-enacting in our imagination, can no more be eliminated from the German unconscious awareness than can the shame of having lost face as a civilized nation.”<sup>94</sup> But the Mitscherliches were not simply reminding Germans of their pariah status in the eyes of the world. Their solution to overcoming the “ideals of the Nazi regime” was to cultivate a radical sense of guilt by internalizing the trauma of its victims: “We Germans should extend our introspection so that we can at least recognize ourselves in such scenes as that of the German officer in the Danish café, and those appalling occasions when one hundred, five hundred, or one thousand bodies lay in front of us, bodies of people we had killed.” They continued that “this would imply a compassionate and poignant acknowledgement of the victims long after the time of horror.”<sup>95</sup> In fact, it implied the annihilation of the German group self. For if the Holocaust was the unprecedented evil and trauma the non-German German claimed, how could it be bearable, let alone compatible with the continuity of the German self deemed responsible for its commission?<sup>96</sup> That is a question that Habermas neither posed nor answered. Instead, he wrote that Germans should say “‘never again’ to ourselves” and embrace the Holocaust as an “element of a broken national identity” that is “branded [*eingebrennt*] as a persistent disturbance and warning.”<sup>97</sup> This notion was taken a step further by Habermas’s younger colleagues Hajo Funke and Dietrich Neuhaus, who went so far as to say that “a German identity after ‘Auschwitz’ can only be a NON-IDENTITY.”<sup>98</sup>

### ***Martin Walser: A German German***

The persistence of the German German is not difficult to fathom. They do not wish to endure a nonidentity. Most people are not intellectuals or educators for whom daily reflection on the meaning of the Nazi past constitutes

94. Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, *Inability to Mourn*, 65–66.

95. *Ibid.*, 67.

96. The centrality of the uniqueness of the Holocaust for anamnestic memory is especially prominent in Jürgen Manemann, “Towards an Anamnestic Culture: A Contribution to a Theology after Auschwitz and the Gulag Archipelago from a Political Theological Perspective,” *Jewish-Christian Relations*, [www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=763](http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=763) (accessed April 17, 2006). First published in *Theology after Auschwitz and Its Correlation with Theology after the Gulag: Consequences and Conclusions; Proceedings of the Second International Conference*, ed. Natalia Pecherskaya (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg School of Religion and Philosophy, 1998).

97. Jürgen Habermas, “Der Zeigefinger: Die Deutschen und ihr Denkmal,” *Die Zeit*, March 31, 1999.

98. Hajo Funke and Dietrich Neuhaus, “Einleitung: Nationalismus, Antisemitismus, Demokratie—Beobachtungen zu einem gespannten Dreieckverhältnis,” in *Auf dem Weg zur Nation? Über deutsche Identität nach Auschwitz*, ed. Hajo Funke and Dietrich Neuhaus (Frankfurt am Main: Haag und Herchen, 1989), 8.

part of their habitus. Moreover, populist journalists and politicians defend the population's intuitive national identity against non-German German efforts to promote the national stigma and consequent transformative culture of contrition. Until the 1980s they still could denounce those who dredged up the past as *Nestbeschmutzer* (foulers of the nest), those who defecate on and thereby pollute the family and nation.<sup>99</sup> More subtle strategies to obviate stigma included ascribing the causes of the disaster to another source, whether to Hitler's charisma, plebeian democracy, or to the communist threat; German history before the war was not a one-way street to 1933 or 1945, and a thousand years of German history cannot be canceled by twelve dark ones. Such strategies permitted Germans to feel good, or at least not crippled, about their national identity despite the insistence that it was stigmatized.

These strategies were not, and are not, the preserve of the political Right. The German group self affects every member of the nation. Nationally based arguments have a long tradition in the political Left. For many, its integrity during the Nazi period was evidence that the group self was not irredeemably polluted. As one young man admitted, his communist grandfather was "a symbol for me, proof that the 'other' Germany had always existed as well."<sup>100</sup> In the immediate postwar years, leftists were as averse to the nascent rhetoric of collective guilt as other Germans.<sup>101</sup> After all, the old elites were responsible for fascism, not the workers. The Roman Catholic writer Eugen Kogon spoke for many when he worried that Germany would become a pariah nation like the Jews had been and insisted that the guilt could only be personal, never collective.<sup>102</sup> The tone for Social Democrats was set by their leader, Kurt Schumacher, who possessed impeccable anti-Nazi credentials. Like most Europeans at the time, he was also an ardent patriot. It was natural for nations to pursue their own interests, he insisted, and so a free Europe should comprise nation-states of equal status—without American or Soviet domination. Nor ought Germany be subservient to its neighbors. Indeed, a democratic socialist Germany should act as a third force between the warring fronts of the Cold War. Schumacher appealed to Germans by claiming that only the Social Democrats (SPD) were real patriots, because the Christian Democrats (CDU) had sold out

99. Ira Brenner, "On Confronting Truth about the Third Reich," *Mind and Human Interaction* 2 (1991): 97.

100. Peter Sichrovsky, *Born Guilty: Children of Nazi Families*, trans. Jean Steinberg (London: Tauris, 1988), 158.

101. Frank M. Buscher, "Kurt Schumacher, German Social Democracy, and the Punishment of Nazi Crimes," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5 (1990): 261–73.

102. Jeffrey K. Olick, *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943–1949* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 185.

to the occupation forces of the West by accepting the country's division; they had become "patriots of other states." Moreover, as the party of property and the Roman Catholic Church, the CDU represented the antidemocratic forces that relied on foreign support to exploit German workers. In the tradition of socialist internationalism, he argued that Germany required democratic (and therefore national) self-determination, and it was the SPD's role to create "a new spirit of national self-confidence" in the defeated Germans so that they could play their new, important role.<sup>103</sup>

The anti-atomic protest movement of the late 1950s also linked humanist ideals to national self-determination—the end of German division.<sup>104</sup> Concerned that the defense minister Franz-Josef Strauss was seeking nuclear weapons for the Federal Republic, Martin Walser (b. 1927), a young writer, organized his generation of oppositional intellectuals in a much-cited book of protest called *Die Alternative oder brauchen wir eine neue Regierung?*<sup>105</sup> Walser is important to raise in relation to the tradition of progressive patriotism because he is now usually considered a renegade leftist, a non-German German even, who in the 1990s moved to the right by embracing the national cause and attacking Holocaust memory. Critics saw his notorious 1998 Paulskirche speech, with its rhetoric of intellectuals wielding the Holocaust as a "moral cudgel" to intimidate Germans, as part of a trend that culminated in his supposedly anti-Semitic novel *Tod eines Kritikers* (*Death of a Critic*) four years later.<sup>106</sup> On closer inspection, a consistent theme of national identification is evident in his many reflections on the subject since the 1960s. Walser was always a "German German," as were many leftists of his generation. The group self had not been polluted by the Nazi deeds, nor ought it be stigmatized, they effectively insisted. Unlike Habermas, Walser thought the nation was redeemable, indeed, that it warranted basic trust. An examination of his relevant writings reveals the development of his efforts to rescue the national ideal in relation to the changing status of Holocaust commemoration and discourse in the Federal Republic.

103. Lewis J. Edinger, *Kurt Schumacher: A Study in Personality and Political Behavior* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965), 150–51.

104. Martin Wengeler, "Die Deutschen Fragen: Leitvokabeln der Deutschlandpolitik," in *Politische Leitvokabeln in der Adenauer-Ära*, by Karin Böke, Frank Liedtke, and Martin Wengeler (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 325–77; Peter Brandt and Herbert Ammon, ed., *Die Linke und die nationale Frage: Dokumente zur deutschen Einheit seit 1945* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1981).

105. Martin Walser, ed., *Die Alternative oder brauchen wir eine neue Regierung?* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1961).

106. Elke Schmitter, "Der Ewige Flakhelfer," *Der Spiegel*, September 5, 2005, [service.spiegel.de/digas/find?DID=41682527](http://service.spiegel.de/digas/find?DID=41682527). On the novel see Bill Niven, "Martin Walser's *Tod eines Kritikers* and the Issue of Anti-Semitism," *German Life and Letters* 59 (2003): 299–311.

Walser has always seen himself as speaking on behalf of the silent majority of compatriots, the provincial nonelites looked down on by the powerful, the fashionable, and the worldly.<sup>107</sup> This orientation was in keeping with his analysis of National Socialism, which was close to that of the writer Peter Weiss, who shared his proximity to the German Communist Party in the 1970s. Weiss's controversial play about the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, *Die Ermittlung* (*The Investigation*), which linked the Holocaust to capitalism rather than to anti-Semitism, mirrored Walser's 1960 novel, *Halbzeit* (*Half-Time*), in which a company executive, a former senior officer of the Nazi security service, engaged in marketing with the same rhetoric of aggression and efficiency of the Nazi regime.<sup>108</sup> Influenced by Bertolt Brecht, Weiss and Walser held the population less criminally culpable than misled and betrayed by corrupt elites.<sup>109</sup> For these and other intellectuals, the contemporary problem was that the technocratic and capitalist system that had wrought Auschwitz persisted into the Federal Republic.

Three years later, Walser continued this critical tradition in the article "Our Auschwitz," a scathing commentary on the media coverage of the trial of Auschwitz guards in Frankfurt between 1963 and 1965.<sup>110</sup> The enduring themes of his essays on the Holocaust and national identity are all on display: a leftist critique of bourgeois society, especially its egoism and hegemonic media; a subtle defense of national solidarity; and the emotional abyss separating the Holocaust's victims and perpetrators and their descendants. Thus he rejected a moralistic interpretation of the Nazi past that led to affirming the status quo. "If the concentration camp trials . . . are to be proof that we don't shy back from 'mastering' our past, then they have to have some kind of political effect."<sup>111</sup> He was pessimistic of such enlightenment, however, given the

107. Jan-Werner Müller, *Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification, and National Identity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 152.

108. Robert Cohen, "The Political Aesthetics of Holocaust Literature: Peter Weiss's *The Investigation* and Its Critics," *History and Memory* 10, no. 2 (1998): 43–67; Martin Walser, *Halbzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1960).

109. Hellmuth Karasek, "Der Ewige Antisemit?" *Die Welt*, July 30, 2005.

110. Martin Walser, "Unser Auschwitz," in *Bewegung in der Republik, 1965 bis 1984*, ed. Ingrid Karsunke and Karl Markus Michel, 2 vols. (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1985), 1:13–22. For commentary see Michael Töteberg, "Walsers Stücke im Kontext der Zeit," *Text und Kritik*, nos. 41–42 (2000): 91–109.

111. Walser, "Unser Auschwitz," 18. Two recent books on the trial follow Walser on this point: Rebecca Wittmann, *Beyond Justice: The Auschwitz Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 246; Devin O. Pendas, *The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, 1963–1965: Genocide, History, and the Limits of the Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 245, 294–99.

media's sensationalist reporting of the guards' crimes. What bothered him most was the individualistic, indeed anarchic, consciousness of bourgeois Germans that permitted a distancing from the Holocaust. The media's singular focus on the gory details of the camp guards' specific crimes aided this exculpation.<sup>112</sup> By distancing themselves from the guards with whose spectacular crimes they had nothing in common, and by claiming lack of direct involvement, the average German could disavow any relationship of significance to Auschwitz, or indeed to Nazi Germany. Reported as a gross mass murder committed by sociopaths, Auschwitz would recede into oblivion like other crimes, an event of no particular consequence for the country.

What is more, Walser thought he detected cheap emotional identification with the victims as the means by which Germans avoided affective ties with the perpetrators. Yet all that separated contemporary Germans from them, he said, were contingent life narratives. Were we not all potential camp guards? At the very least, all Germans had enabled the persecution of Jews in the 1930s as passive bystanders.<sup>113</sup> One could avoid these connections only by emotionally and imaginatively standing with the victims, whose experiences were actually incomprehensible to everyone but themselves. "Only through the hapless attempt to place ourselves on the side of the victim as much as possible, at least to imagine how terribly they suffered, only with this participation does the perpetrator become so contemptible [*verabscheuungswürdig*] and brutal, as we need him for our reality-distant but momentarily intense feeling."<sup>114</sup> To tie Germans to Auschwitz—to make it "Our Auschwitz"—Walser argued that the individualistic imagination of the bourgeois German needed to be replaced by a social one of the humanist. In a move that would become more important in future decades, he linked Germans in collective political guilt to the Holocaust through national membership. If the problem was that Germans had lost any residual "national solidarity with the perpetrators," then it was important to force Germans to associate themselves with the crime by highlighting their national connection. Although he disclaimed feelings of guilt or shame, he saw himself "implicated in the great German crime."<sup>115</sup> The distinction between

112. Walser, "Unser Auschwitz," 17.

113. *Ibid.*, 19. Here his argument is close to that of Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996). I analyze his methodology in "Structure and Agency in the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and His Critics," *History and Theory* 37 (1998): 194–219.

114. Walser, "Unser Auschwitz," 17.

115. *Ibid.*, 19.

implication and guilt was how Walser was able to reconcile his nationalism and imperative to feel connected to the Holocaust. And this distinction was how he came to different conclusions from Habermas, with whose premise about prepolitical connections between Germans across the generations he agreed. Another key difference with Habermas was that Walser suspected the media's representation of the crime. His argument was communitarian; the collective preceded and enabled the individual, almost like God, as I show below.

But if the *Volk* and state still retain meaning for a polity, that is, for a collective that appears in history, in whose name justice can be spoken or broken, then all that occurs is determined [*bedingt*] by this collective, then the reasons for everything are to be sought in this collective. Then no act is just subjective. Auschwitz is then a pan-German issue. Then everyone belongs to some part of the causes of Auschwitz. Then it would be a task for everyone to find his or her part. One need not have been in the SS.<sup>116</sup>

Two years earlier he had reflected more specifically on the dilemmas of German identity after Auschwitz in terms redolent of socialist humanism and national self-determination of the Schumacherian type. His generation was the first raised as emphatically national, he observed, not mediated by regional bonds that characterized the world of his grandfather. But because of what Germans did to “finally become conscious of our individual nature [*Eigenart*],” he continued, “one prefers forever not to be German.”<sup>117</sup> In fact, he lamented, “today Germany no longer exists,” referring to the country's division and to the ostracization of those, like him, who advocated reunification in freedom and peace. Directing his hostility toward Konrad Adenauer, he excoriated the bourgeoisie's political immaturity in succumbing to the fantasy of inner enemies, the French and socialists before World War I, then the Jews, and now the communists.<sup>118</sup> In this way Walser narrated himself as a leftist patriot into a story of bourgeois-elite oppression of the little people in which the fate of the Jews was included.

116. *Ibid.*, 21.

117. Walser was not alone in making such observations. Thus Golo Mann wrote in 1968 that in Germany “history no longer forms the public conscience. . . . The past has ceased to determine the identity of democratic society” (*The History of Germany since 1789*, trans. M. Jackson [New York: Praeger, 1968], 528). Cf. Hans Magnus Enzensberg, “Bin ich ein Deutscher,” *Die Zeit*, June 12, 1964.

118. Martin Walser, “Ein deutsches Mosaik” (1963), in *Werke*, vol. 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 51–52, 71.

Feeling increasingly alienated from the Federal Republican consensus that accepted the country's division, he announced in 1977 that we should "defend ourselves" (*uns wehren*) against the seemingly immutable outcome of the history of World War II. His declarations were existential rather than discursive; they stated his political emotions with disarming honesty: "I find it unbearable that German history—as bad as it ultimately unfolded—has to end as a product of catastrophe [*Katastrophenprodukt*]; "Germany cannot be removed from my consciousness"; "We have to keep the wound called Germany open." He mourned for the German nation and imagined it in terms of the leftist nationalism of the 1950s. "I refuse to participate in the liquidation of history. In me, Germany still has another chance. One, namely, whose socialism is not imposed by the victorious powers but is allowed to develop on its own; and one whose development toward democracy does not just exclusively stumble along the capitalist crisis rhythms. This other Germany, I believe, could be useful today. The world would not need to shy back any longer from such a Germany."<sup>119</sup> As in the 1960s, he coded National Socialism as a German form of fascism that represented a degenerate potential in all capitalist societies. To overcome the past entailed not chipping away at national traditions but raising awareness that, in the terms of Adorno and Brecht, "we still live under the conditions that can produce fascism," namely, the hyperegoism of liberal capitalism.<sup>120</sup>

Where did Auschwitz and the Jews fit in here? Already in 1979 Walser explained his position in terms no different from those he expressed nearly twenty years later in his Paulskirche speech. As he did in 1998, he noted the temptation to avert his gaze from images of Auschwitz: "One can't live with such pictures." And he admitted that "we are all tempted to defend ourselves against Auschwitz [*uns gegen Auschwitz zu wehren*]." The Holocaust seemed incompatible with German national subjectivity. So how were Germans to comport themselves in this historical trauma? With humility, he effectively argued. Such was its excess that no one could gain a firm epistemological foothold from which to pronounce confidently about its meaning. There was no mastering of Auschwitz, and so no one should try.

The real problem was, as he argued in "Our Auschwitz," that Germans as individuals could not bear the guilt of the Holocaust and therefore dissociated themselves from it and the nation in whose name it was perpetrated.

119. Martin Walser, "Über den Leser—soviel man in einem Festzelt darüber sagen soll" (1977), in *Werke*, 11:569–71.

120. Martin Walser, "Unsere historische Schuldigkeit" (1978), in *Werke*, 11:608–10.

The modern bourgeois, the relaxed and “critical” (non-German) German whom Walser lampooned, was possible only by renouncing the collective that had committed the crime. “Today’s individual has emancipated itself from the nation.” Confronting the past was delegated to others, to officialdom.<sup>121</sup>

Walser’s suspicion of official ritualization of the Holocaust in public life grew with this hostility to what he saw as the moralization of the Nazi past aimed against the German national ideal in the 1980s: that West Germany was still suspected by some to contain a fascist potential, even that “Germans are all Nazis.” Such rhetoric evidently triggered intense anxieties in him. Throughout history, he complained, Germany, which once had been little more than a plethora of small states, had been subject to persecution that questioned its survival, as in the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>122</sup> That German division was punishment for its sins, he understood. “But surely not for ever. Punishment serves not contrition, but surely resocialization. Don’t we feel resocialized?” he asked. Here were the first signs of concern about the stigmatization of Germany, a mark that led, he thought, to the feeling of one author that East Germany was as foreign to him as Mongolia.<sup>123</sup> That an innocent (*unblamiertes*) Germany still existed—a Germany in which basic trust could be placed—he set out to show, was evident in an East German poet in touch with primal German traditions untainted by subsequent international literary trends about politics or morality. Such poetry’s virtue lay in its isolation from what he called the “conscience industry” (*Gesinnungsindustrie*) that purveyed antinational ideas against the people’s instincts. The binary relationship between innocent *Volk* and corrupt elites was thereby mapped onto literary production.<sup>124</sup>

As might be expected, no one was happier than Walser when the Wall came down in late 1989. The people had spoken against the elites on both sides of the border who had accepted the nation’s division. It was time for West Germans to show solidarity with East Germans and rejoice. “Now is the time to be happy, and to delight in the fact that history will work out once for the Germans, too.”<sup>125</sup> But his emotions were mixed, for the reunification was accompanied by vocal opposition from non-German Germans who expressed disdain about the desire of East Germans to join West Germans in one country. “Whoever says *Volk* instead of *society* may, no, must, be howled

121. Martin Walser, “Auschwitz und kein Ende” (1979), in *Werke*, 11:632–35.

122. Martin Walser, “Über Deutschland reden” (1988), in *Werke*, 11:899–900.

123. *Ibid.*, 11:901–5.

124. *Ibid.*, 11:913–15. For commentary see Stephen Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

125. Martin Walser, “November 1989,” in *Werke*, 11:927.

down [*niedergeschimpft*],” he complained. The end of German division did not mean the end of his critique of cultural elites hostile to national rhetoric. On the contrary, it increased it.<sup>126</sup> Walser’s imperative now was to rescue the nation from its criminalization by intellectual elites. And the problem was the media and leftist intellectuals. His identification with the nation intensified as his impatience with intellectuals grew; after the collapse of socialism, only the nation remained as the ideal of collective life. The stigma against it had to be removed. One way was to imagine historical continuities whose teleology was not genocide.

One cannot study this all-inclusive historical narrative [about the military assassination attempt on Hitler] without again and again developing the hope that this time Hitler would not escape, that the war would stop before it could manifest its worst consequences. In order not to suffocate in hopelessness [*Ausweglosigkeit*] and fatalism, one probably needs a factual narrative that permits us to think constantly that the outcome might have been different. I am embittered by little so constantly than every assertion that Hitler and thereby Auschwitz were unavoidable, that German history runs into nothing but Hitler and Auschwitz.<sup>127</sup>

This aim collided with the alarm about German nationality that emerged in the wake of arson and other attacks on foreigners living in Solingen, Mölln, and Rostock between 1991 and 1993. Trying to disarm the antinational implications of these attacks, Walser argued that the radical Right was less a product of an overreaching German nationalism than the pitiful result of social anomie. In fact, the recourse of disaffected youth to national rhetoric was possible only because it has been neglected by “the opinion makers, the politicians, the intellectuals.” They were to blame for the right-wing radicalism by not making Germans feel at home in Germany.<sup>128</sup>

He continued his attack in a 1994 speech, “On Free and Unfree Speech,” in which he complained that public speech codes inhibited his free expression of conscience. The public moralization about the two German dictatorships was particularly dangerous. “There is at the moment a terror of virtue of

126. Martin Walser, “Deutsche Sorgen I” (1989), in *Werke*, 11:928.

127. Martin Walser, “Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geist des Gehorsams” (1996), in *Werke*, 11:1081. Close to Walser in this regard is Konrad L  w, “*Das Volk ist ein Trost*”: *Deutsche und Juden, 1933–1945, im Urteil der j  dischen Zeitzeugen* (Munich: Olzog, 2006).

128. Martin Walser, “Deutsche Sorgen II” (1993), in *Werke*, 11:999–1000. In this essay Walser reprises his discomfort with the media, intellectuals’ justification of German division, and their hostility to national feeling.

political correctness that makes free speech a mortal [*halsbrecherischen*] risk.” Intellectuals engaged in the “public testing” of others’ consciences, a practice manifesting the “banality of good.”<sup>129</sup> Prescription regarding how to think and feel about dictatorial pasts in the manner of a catechism, even being hounded to make public statements of contrition as was Christa Wolf, undermined the delicate process of reflection about guilt that takes place in the individual conscience. The non-German German “cultivation of taboos in the name of enlightenment” was demoralizing the unified Germany.<sup>130</sup>

These were the themes that Walser expressed in distilled form in his controversial 1998 Paulskirche speech upon winning the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. The sense of stigmatization was especially prevalent in his disgust that only Germans were considered a people of whom it could be said that they still harbored genocidal fantasies. The intellectuals were the agents of this defamation. They “want to hurt us, because they think we deserve it.” They also continually instrumentalized Auschwitz, first to justify the division of Germany and now to bully writers into thematizing Holocaust issues in their work. And they who felt responsible for the consciences of others—he appeared to be referring to Habermas and Grass—were the ones who wanted to erect a “monumentalization of our disgrace” in the form of the Berlin Holocaust memorial.<sup>131</sup>

Walser’s subsequent face-to-face discussion with the German Jewish leaders Ignatz Bubis and Salomon Korn, organized and published by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, was even more revelatory of his resentments. Here the emotional interjection of rapid exchanges uncovered Walser’s own unconscious fantasies more clearly than the guarded phrases he had used in his carefully prepared speeches. He began by reporting that he had received over a thousand letters supporting his speech, which he interpreted as a “singular consciousness raising” and “liberation of the conscience.” The people’s voice had been heard finally, and they complained about stigma: that “one feels as a German in a state of being accused” (*Beschuldigenzustand*) and that they feel “treated like a criminal on probation who has to constantly demonstrate his resocialization because one does not otherwise believe him.” In fact, he continued, “Germans have to prove that they are human, because otherwise they are not.”<sup>132</sup> Walser, too, complained about stigma, rejecting

129. Martin Walser, “Über Freie und unfreie Rede” (1994), in *Werke*, 11:1051–53.

130. *Ibid.*, 11:1059.

131. Walser, *Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede*, 17–20.

132. Walser, “Wovon zeugt die Schande wenn nicht von Verbrechen,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 28, 1998, rpt. in *The Walser-Bubis Debatte: Eine Dokumentation*, ed. Frank Schirrmacher (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 446, 451, 462.

the entreaty of moderation by the Israeli ambassador to Germany, Avi Primor, in view of “the stain on the dress,” by which Primor meant Germany’s criminal past. Where is that stain on me, asked Walser? Why do others say contemporary Germans are tainted?<sup>133</sup>

The media (i.e., non-German Germans) were his principal object of scorn. The incessant public representation of the Holocaust was effectively a declaration that Germans were under accusation of criminality (*Beschuldigung*). The aim of public Holocaust memory was not education but “the domestication of conscience and manipulation of conscience.” Jews were to blame, too, for the persistence of German stigma. Thus Walser took Bubis to task for appearing at the site of the arson attack against German Turks in Rostock in August 1993 because his presence linked current issues to the Nazi past. Affecting to speak for the people, Walser informed his interlocutors that they “can’t bear that [link] any longer, and they don’t want to hear it any longer, and they have a right to that, because they have nothing more to do with that nightmarish spook [*Spuk*: the Nazis].” Plainly, any public expression of opinion on current affairs by a Jewish leader in Germany would have highlighted the stigmatized past. For that reason, he told Bubis and Korn that, because Jews had not been subject to the same temptations as Germans under Hitler, they were in no position to judge Germans. Jews ought to be silent and respect the sensitivities of the perpetrator collective.<sup>134</sup> Klaus von Dohnanyi, who had similarly questioned Bubis’s right to criticize Walser because Jews may not have behaved any differently from other Germans toward non-Jewish victims of Nazis had they not been persecuted, asked for Jewish restraint, because “we [Germans] are all vulnerable.”<sup>135</sup> The German German’s solidarity was with other German Germans, not with the victims of his or her ancestors.

This loyalty to one’s own was evident in Walser’s defense of the letters he received. Their writers were not anti-Semites, he insisted against the suspicion of Bubis and Korn, who were alarmed by the rhetoric of “liberation,” which they took to mean the collapse of the taboo on public anti-Semitism. In fact, there was no real anti-Semitism in the country, Walser retorted. The right-wing political parties were carried by protest voters, and besides, right-wing parties existed in other countries as well. What about objections to the

133. Avi Primor, “Der Fleck auf dem Rock: Keine Frage der Schuld, sondern der Verantwortung—Meine Antwort an Walser,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 9, 1998.

134. Walser, “Wovon zeugt die Schande,” 454, 452.

135. Klaus von Dohnanyi, “Wie sind alle Verletzbar,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 17, 1998.

proposed Berlin memorial that it would be defaced, Bubis responded? Was there not in fact a dangerous minority? Walser's reply was a stunning revelation of his views about the innocence of the people and corruption of elites: "If a memorial is constructed that provokes the people to defile it . . ."136 Non-German Germans and Jews, he was saying, were to blame for any stigmatized behavior by Germans.137 His unconscious historical large-group fantasy is that Jews and non-German Germans would cease trying to stigmatize the German people. Or that they disappear altogether.

Walser was not alone in these sorts of criticisms. Another articulation of the German German sensibility was evident in the figure of Hermann Lübke (b. 1926), the "neoconservative" philosopher who in the 1980s attacked the Mitscherlich thesis about the "inability to mourn" with the observation that discretion about the Nazi past in the 1950s was functionally necessary to integrate a population of former Nazis. "It is bizarre," Lübke wrote, "to regard one's own crimes as memorializable." As with Walser, with whom he sympathized, the problem lay with those Germans' disordered relationship to nation and memory. "We are touched with embarrassment and feel pushed around by the arrogance with which the converted [i.e., the non-German German] puffs himself up into the ideal of moral certainty." In their hands, the Berlin memorial became a weapon with which they could manipulate their countrymen—and women. "The memorial serves as the opportunity to accuse others about their moral shortcomings in their relationship to the past. One's own idea of the memorial represents the better conscience for which the others ought to strive." And like Walser, Lübke reiterated that a memorial to the victims was not for the perpetrators to erect, that it represented a "pride in sin" (*Sündenstolz*), an inverted hypernationalism.138

### ***Rival Political Theologies: Anamnestic Memory and Amnesiac Memory***

The culture wars in the Federal Republic have been based on the struggle between non-German Germans who advocated transforming the national culture and German Germans who resisted such a transformation. These rival

136. Walser, "Wovon zeugt die Schande," 463.

137. Social scientists call this reaction "secondary anti-Semitism," but Walser is so anxious about the threat that the stigmatized past presents to the survival of the German nation that he is blind to his own resentments: Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany: The Post-Nazi Epoch since 1945*, trans. Belinda Cooper and Allison Brown (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1997).

138. Hermann Lübke, *Aufklärung anlaßhalber: Philosophische Essays zu Politik, Religion und Moral* (Gräfelfing: Resch, 2001), 241–44.

projects were as much theological as political. On the one hand, non-German Germans advocated an *anamnestic* memory culture determined to abandon national identity; on the other, German Germans urged an *amnesiac* one devoted to its defense. The former was based on the political theology of Metz, who is in turn influenced by Walter Benjamin, Adorno, Ernst Bloch, and Habermas, his contemporary and friend. Writing in 1972, for instance, Metz urged Christians to adopt a theology of solidarity with the poor and oppressed based on what he called the “dangerous memory of freedom” of Christ’s sacrifice. The memory of undeserved suffering, he argued, subverted a purely affirmative attitude to the past and, therefore, to the present. As with Habermas, the Holocaust was not then the focus of such an antihistoricism. The perceived problem was an industrial society run by technocrats not subject to effective democratic control. The enemy was the past conceived in terms of historicism, empty time gradually filled with progress, a theodicy that justified the suffering of past victims in the name of the greater good of contemporary society. History written from the victors’ standpoint, then, is amnesiac. It attributed normative status to the present: what was past was past—above all, the suffering of the innocent—so let not memory of them disturb the present.

The only motivation to cast off slavery in such a system, Metz thought, was the *memorial passionis* of the sacrificed Lord. “The imagination of future freedom is nourished from the memory of suffering, and freedom degenerates wherever those who suffer are treated more or less as a cliché and degraded to a faceless mass. Hence the Christian *memoria* becomes ‘subversive remembrance,’ which shocks us out of ever becoming prematurely reconciled to the ‘facts’ and ‘trends’ of our technological society.”<sup>139</sup> By contrast, history written from the standpoint of the victims, or that expresses solidarity with them, is anamnestic.<sup>140</sup> Such a perspectival memory was not simply a memorial of resignation or apolitical remembrance. Standing with the victims of “progress” affected how we comported ourselves in the present and future political

139. Johann Baptist Metz, “The Future in the Memory of Suffering,” *Concilium* 6, no. 8 (1972): 19; Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (London: Seabury, 1980), 88–89. The link between Metz and Benjamin is lucidly discussed in Steven T. Ostovich, “Epilogue: Dangerous Memories,” in *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture*, ed. Alon Confino and Peter A. Fritzsche (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 239–56. See also Ostovich, “Dangerous Memories and Reason in History,” *KronoScope* 5, no. 1 (2005): 41–57.

140. Steven T. Ostovich, “Epilogue: Dangerous Memories,” in Confino and Fritzsche, *Work of Memory*, 241–42. For background on anamnestic culture in Greek philosophy, especially with Aristotle, see Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

community. A redeemed community was one so conscious of the crimes committed in its history that henceforth it was resolved to ensuring that its progress occasioned no further suffering of the innocent: “Resurrection mediated by way of the memory of suffering means: The dead, those already vanquished and forgotten, have a meaning which is as yet unrealized. The potential meaning of our history does not depend only on the survivors, the successful and those who make it.”<sup>141</sup> By the 1990s the Holocaust had become the foundational event of suffering for Metz: “For me Auschwitz signaled a horror that transcends all familiar theologies, a horror that makes every noncontextual talk about God appear empty and blind.” The question of theodicy was now framed in terms of the genocide of the Jews: “For an anamnestic reason, being attentive to God means hearing the silence of those who have disappeared.”<sup>142</sup> The Holocaust had profound implications for Christianity. It was “the catastrophe of our history, out of which we can find a way only through a radical change of direction achieved via new standards of action.” The question of Auschwitz entailed reevaluating its roots and emphasizing Christianity’s Hebraic rather than Greek origins. And this rethinking meant that the “apocalyptic-messianic wisdom of Judaism” ought be appropriated by Christianity, because this wisdom “continually suspends all reconciliations from entering our history,” that is, it resisted premature accommodation with extant reality in the name of an unfulfilled future, a conservative temptation he believed was all too apparent in Christianity.<sup>143</sup> A religiopolitical sensibility based on an eschatology in which God would raise the dead and dispense justice reflected a messianic theory of experience: anamnestic memory anticipated redemption at the end of time.<sup>144</sup>

It was one thing for Metz to advocate a new start for Christians based on the rupture he thought the Holocaust entailed for the Church; it was quite

141. Metz, “Future in the Memory of Suffering,” 20.

142. Johann Baptist Metz, “Suffering unto God,” *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994): 611, 615.

143. Johann Baptist Metz, “Christians and Jews after Auschwitz,” in *Bitburg and Beyond: Encounters in American, German, and Jewish History*, ed. Ilya Levkov (New York: Shapolsky, 1987), 513–14, 510; Metz, *Faith in History and Society* (New York: Burns and Oates, 1979). Cf. Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000); Ekkehard Schuster and Reinhold Bochert-Kimmis, *Hope against Hope: Johann Baptist Metz and Elie Wiesel Speak Out on the Holocaust* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1999).

144. Jürgen Habermas, “Consciousness-Raising of Redemptive Criticism—the Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin,” *New German Critique*, no. 17 (1979): 51; Christian Lenhardt, “Anamnestic Solidarity: The Proletariat and Its *Manes*,” *Telos*, no. 25 (1975): 131–54; Helmut Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action*, trans. James Bohman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 206–44.

another for these ideas to be secularized and addressed to Germans as a whole. That is precisely what non-German Germans entreated. The theological dimension of Habermas's political project was effectively admitted when he explicitly invoked anamnestic memory as the only defensible orientation for postwar Germans.

There is the obligation incumbent upon us in Germany . . . to keep alive, without distortion and not only in an intellectual form, the memory of the suffering of those who were murdered by German hands. It is especially those dead who have a claim to the weak anamnestic power of a solidarity that later generations can continue to practice only in the medium of a remembrance that is repeatedly renewed, often desperate, and continually on one's mind. If we were to brush aside this Benjaminian legacy, our fellow Jewish citizens and the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of all those who were murdered would feel themselves unable to breathe in our country.<sup>145</sup>

As might be expected, Metz expressed sympathy with Habermas in the *Historikerstreit* of the mid-1980s. He wondered whether

our coming to terms with the catastrophe of Auschwitz is so uncertain and discordant because we lack the spirit that was to have been irrevocably extinguished in Auschwitz; because we lack the anamnastically constituted Spirit necessary to perceive adequately what happened to us in this catastrophe—and to what we call “Spirit” and “Reason”; in a word: because we lack a culture of anamnestic Spirit. In place of remembrance, there is an evolutionarily colored history that presupposes that what is past is past and that no longer considers it a challenge to reason every time a part of our past is successfully historicized, it is also forgotten in a sense.<sup>146</sup>

Habermas also perceived parallels between Metz's theologically grounded eschatology and the “countertradition” in German thought on which he set so much store: what “stretches from Jakob Böhme and Franz Baader, via Schelling and Hegel, to Bloch and Adorno, [and] transforms the experience of the

145. Habermas, “Historical Consciousness and Post-traditional Identity,” 233. Metz himself observes that anamnestic reason was foundational of Habermas's notion of communicative reason, namely, the preparedness to listen to the other and not use language as an instrument of domination (“Suffering unto God”); Habermas expounds on the centrality of anamnestic consciousness to his social theory in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 14–16.

146. Johann Baptist Metz, “Anamnestic Reason: A Theologian's Remarks on the Crisis of the *Geisteswissenschaften*,” in *Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, ed. Alex Honneth et al., trans. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 191.

negativity of the present into the driving force of dialectical reflection. Such reflection is intended to break the power of the past over what is to come.”<sup>147</sup> The German Jewish professor of pedagogy Micha Brumlik, who invoked Metz’s notion of an “anamnestic culture,”<sup>148</sup> likewise situated his advocacy of the Berlin memorial in terms of Jewish religious themes. He was wont to quote Adorno: “The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption.”<sup>149</sup> Behind this notion lay the Hasidic and kabbalistic theology of redemption, Brumlik told German newspaper readers, which taught that God’s and one’s own exile would be ended, and the world healed, when the reasons for the exile were remembered. Referring to Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” he wrote that a “weak messianic power” could be granted to previous generations by remembering their suffering. Because such formulations were too metaphysical for political operationalization, he entreated a profane version in which the dead were accepted into one’s moral community by paying public respect to one’s victims.<sup>150</sup>

In its secular, Western version, anamnestic memory made the Holocaust the normative standard that guided policy, an effective implementation of Adorno’s injunction that the new categorical imperative ought to be preventing a future Auschwitz.<sup>151</sup> “Never again” was the expression of this temporal-moral sensibility, and it affected grand strategy, as Fischer’s justification of German military participation in the NATO Kosovo campaign demonstrated.<sup>152</sup> By

147. Jürgen Habermas, “Israel or Athens: Where Does Anamnestic Reason Belong? Johann Baptist Metz on Unity amidst Multicultural Plurality,” in *The Liberating Power of Symbols: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 78–89; Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 14. Expressing skepticism about Habermas’s invocation of this concept is Max Pensky, “On the Use and Abuse of Memory: Habermas, ‘Anamnestic Solidarity,’ and the *Historikerstreit*,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 15 (1989): 351–81.

148. Micha Brumlik, “Jedes Mahnmahl muß an der Nichtdarstellbarkeit des Holocaust scheitern,” *Die Tageszeitung*, April 1, 1995, in Heimrod, Schlusche, and Seferens, *Der Denkmalstreit*, 1193–94, 510–11.

149. Micha Brumlik, “Messianischer Blick oder Wille zum Glück: Kryptotheologie der Walser-Bubis-Debatte,” in *Umkämpftes Vergessen: Walser-Debatte, Holocaust-Mahnmal und neuere deutsche Geschichtspolitik*, by Micha Brumlik, Hajo Funke, Lars Rensmann (Berlin: Schiller, 2000), 130. The Adorno quotation is taken from *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), 247.

150. Micha Brumlik, “Das Geheimnis der Erlösung: Der Erinnerungs-Funktion des Berliner Mahnmahls,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, December 19, 1998, in Heimrod, Schlusche, and Seferens, *Der Denkmalstreit*, 1193–94.

151. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 365; Jeffrey C. Alexander, “On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The ‘Holocaust’ from War Crime to Trauma Drama,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5 (2002): 5–85.

152. Jeffrey Lantis, “The Moral Imperative of Force: The Evolution of German Strategic Culture in Kosovo,” *Comparative Strategy* 21 (2001–2): 21–46.

2000 the minister for culture, Michael Naumann, could proclaim that the anamnestic spirit was now government policy. The planned Berlin memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe would incarnate it.

If a memorial could bestow “honor” on Germany, Brumlik continued, it would not lead to collective German happiness.<sup>153</sup> Indeed, he went to great lengths to stress that an anamnestic culture entailed deferring a comfortable accommodation with reality. “Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in messianic light.” Such a culture reflected a “sad but unreconciled perspective on history and its victims” in contrast to an amnesiac one based on reconciliation, forgiveness, and a belief in the beauty of the world as it was.<sup>154</sup> The identity advocated by the Left was thus a “torn and unhappy consciousness,” which it felt was the only honest and authentic comportment to the German past.<sup>155</sup>

It is worth asking why non-German Germans thought that such a melancholy nonidentity should find many takers in the German population. Germans were not offered much in return other than vague, theological-sounding assurances about the benefits of “coming clean with oneself” (*mit sich selbst ins Reine Kommen*). Not for nothing did non-German Germans sometimes sound like Christian preachers, calling down damnation on those who did not follow their high road. “The Germans cannot walk away from this past . . . without abandoning themselves or drifting off into some dreamland. The denial of historical thinking does not do away with the past—but it is injurious to the present.”<sup>156</sup> Brumlik’s belief that nonethnic German citizens of the country would eventually take on this “hypothesis of the German past” seemed like a vain hope.<sup>157</sup> Why would anyone want to accept German history as their own?<sup>158</sup>

The contrast with Walser’s evocation of a viable Germanness could not be starker. That his apotheosis of the nation was as much a political theology

153. Brumlik, “Das Geheimnis der Erlösung,” 1194.

154. Brumlik, “Messianischer Blick oder Wille zum Glück,” 133.

155. Funke and Neuhaus, “Einleitung,” 7.

156. Michael Geyer, “The Place of the Second World War in German Memory and History,” *New German Critique*, no. 71 (1997): 12. For a good example of the non-German German path to redemption see Michael Geyer and Miriam Hansen, “German-Jewish Memory and National Consciousness,” in *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 175–90.

157. Micha Brumlik, “Gewissen, Gedenken und anamnetische Solidarität,” *Universitas* 53 (1998): 1143–53.

158. Friederike Eigler, “Memory, Moralism, and Coming to Terms with the Present: Martin Walser and Zafer Senocak,” in *Memory Traces: 1989 and the Question of German Cultural Identity*, ed. Silke Arnold-de-Simone (Oxford: Lang, 2005); Leslie Adelson, “The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature and Memory Work,” *Germanic Review* 77 (2002): 326–38.

as his critics' was evident in a little-noted passage he wrote in 1979 in which he expressed his yearning for the "bliss of trust" (*Vertrauensseligkeit*) and "connectedness" (*Verbindlichkeit*) that he felt was impossible in Germany because of its division, because of Auschwitz, and because of the banning of innocence. To cure the spiritual sickness caused by its excessive egoism, Germany required cooperation, social engagement, and solidarity, which he saw in entities that transcended the self, like "the people," "the nation," and "God." He had no problem with poetry after Auschwitz.<sup>159</sup> Whereas Americans and Russians could enjoy their nationality, he complained, foreigners and domestic intellectuals forbade Germans this pleasure. Indeed, German intellectuals prevented Germans from rediscovering a viable history by blaming the century's catastrophes on the *Volk* and especially its lower middle class (*Kleinbürgertum*). In fact, the German people had been "humiliated and plundered" in World War I, for which it was no more guilty than other nations. Feudal-capitalist elites continued this pattern between the wars and exploited the suffering of the people in order to enlist them in a terrible conflict, yet afterward the intellectuals perversely held the *Kleinbürger* responsible for the war and the Holocaust.<sup>160</sup>

The theme of popular innocence was also a feature of Walser's speech on Victor Klemperer's famous wartime diaries. What Walser liked about them was their clean distinction between the people and the regime, the latter of which was responsible for the campaign of racial hatred.<sup>161</sup> Klemperer was also a model German for another reason: he would not let the Nazis dictate to him whether he should feel German. "From Victor Klemperer one can learn how to treat one's own conscience rather than watch over that of others."<sup>162</sup> The parallel Walser wished Germans to entertain was between the imposition of alien norms on the people by the Nazis and that on the people in the Federal Republic by its intellectuals. In both cases, ordinary people had to learn a sort of foreign language to master the public sphere.<sup>163</sup>

Brumlik, for one, did not miss the apologetic intent in Walser's arguments. They were not only nationalist in orientation, he observed, but also a secularized form of Protestant existentialism with anti-Semitic overtones. For

159. For a lucid discussion of this famous phrase of Adorno see Michael Rothberg, "After Adorno: Culture in the Wake of Catastrophe," *New German Critique*, no. 72 (1997): 45–81.

160. Martin Walser, "Händedruck mit Gespenstern," in *Stichworte zur "Geistige Situation der Zeit,"* ed. Jürgen Habermas, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 1:47–49.

161. Martin Walser, "Das Prinzip Genauigkeit: Über Victor Klemperer," in *Werke*, 12:804.

162. *Ibid.*, 803.

163. Stuart Taberner, "A Manifesto for Germany's 'New Right'? Martin Walser, the Past, Transcendence, Aesthetics, and *Ein springende Brunnen*," *German Life and Letters* 53 (2000): 140.

not only did Walser rely on Hegel and Heidegger for his contention that the conscience was a radically solitary inwardness, he also invoked the contemporary German theologian Eberhard Jüngel (b. 1934), whose Lutheranism, Brumlik sensed, posited a sinister binary opposition between the God of law of the Old Testament and the spiritual freedom of the New Testament.<sup>164</sup> Brumlik presented no evidence that Walser was using Lutheran anti-Judaic categories. More plausible is that Walser shared Luther's concern about the emptiness of outward religious observance, a concern based less on his well-known antipathy to Judaism than on his critique of Aristotle and the scholastic theology of the Roman Catholic Church, which was, of course, what led him to stand before its authorities to defend his conscience by (allegedly) saying, "Here I stand," in the manner of Walser himself. Walser had grown up as a Roman Catholic and felt oppressed by the duty of confession.<sup>165</sup>

In fact, Jüngel's theology was an important inspiration in a less obvious but important way. Pace Brumlik, it was not his political theology, which explicitly rejected Metz's call for corporate Christian activism.<sup>166</sup> It was his theology of justification. Because personhood was based on intersubjectivity, a community can call on individuals to justify themselves before some duly constituted authority if accused of a crime. Individuals could show themselves to be innocent and thereby justified in the secular realm. But what about the sinner and spiritual realm? Only God, through the sacrifice of his son who gave the gift of life by taking upon himself the sin of the world, could justify the sinner. As might be expected in Jüngel's orthodox Lutheranism, the sinner played no part in her redemption. She was saved by faith alone (*sola fide*). There could be no mediator, whether human or semidivine, like Mary. God's love could not be earned. "It occurs unconditionally—or it is not love. When it has mercy on sinners, God's love does not turn to those worthy or deserving of love, but to those who have deformed themselves, those unworthy of love, those first made worthy of love through God's love."<sup>167</sup>

What is the relevance of this theology to Walser? The author rejected the proposition that he—or any German—needed to justify himself before anyone—especially the public through the media. Nor did Germans require a mediator, like the media, for their salvation because their secular god—the

164. Brumlik, "Messianischer Blick oder Wille zum Glück," 128–29.

165. Walser, "Über Freie und unfreie Rede," 1047.

166. Eberhard Jüngel, "Toward the Heart of the Matter," *Christian Century* 108, no. 7 (1991): 229–30.

167. Eberhard Jüngel, "On the Doctrine of Justification," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1 (1999): 41.

nation—took the communal sin upon itself and gave life at the same time in the manner of the “happy exchange” between sinner and God described by Luther. Individuals could not bear the guilt of Auschwitz because the crime was communal; the nation therefore assumed responsibility: “What we did in Auschwitz we did as a nation, and for this reason this nation must persist as a nation.”<sup>168</sup> Walser thus came to the opposite conclusion to Habermas and non-German Germans based on the same understanding of German guilt!

Jüngel was not Walser’s only theological source. The Christian existentialist theologian Søren Kierkegaard was another. Walser was drawn to Kierkegaard because the Dane helped him regard the attempt to institutionalize stigma as a campaign to persecute, even liquefy, German nationality. “My holy Kierkegaard said it is unethical to judge the inner life of another by their behavior. A grain of respect for the conscience of others would do us all good at this time. Can one not imagine, please, what Heidegger thought and felt when he discovered the enormity of the Nazi regime in its entirety?”<sup>169</sup> In asking for sympathy for the likes of Heidegger, Walser was rehearsing the Kierkegaardian themes about the authentic source of conversion. Becoming a Christian issued from inner struggle rather than participation in so-called Christian society. It entailed making the individual independent of others, a turning inward that led to feelings of anxiety about disordered relationships and a consciousness of finitude, then dependence on God, and finally a leap of faith. Truth inhered in this interior process rather than in subscription to objectively and publicly articulated dogmas.<sup>170</sup> Kierkegaard was led to this existentialist approach by his disgust with contemporary Danish society. The smugness of the established Lutheran Church in Denmark, whose prominent theologians had adopted Hegel’s philosophy of religion and state, conspired against authentic Christian interiority. The newspaper culture of the 1840s in Denmark appalled him, too, because it likewise promoted an abstraction—public opinion—over the integrity of concrete, individual, lived experience, which he thought was the only avenue to truth. Finally, the Christian establishment had made its peace with the liberal egoism of early capitalism and thereby violated the radical Christian message of renouncing wealth and status.<sup>171</sup>

168. Walser, “Wovon zeugt die Schande,” 443; Walser, “Auschwitz und kein Ende,” 632–33.

169. Walser, “Über Freie und unfreie Rede,” 1054–55.

170. Louis P. Pojman, “Kierkegaard on Faith and Freedom,” *Philosophy of Religion* 27 (1990): 41–61.

171. George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 33–34; Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 349, 359, 364.

The lessons that Walser drew from Kierkegaard were clear. Freedom was not an expression of what we chose—the official view of the Holocaust—but how we made our decisions. Just as official Christianity distracted from the existential decision for Christ—the inner stages of awakening through dread that are necessary for a true, personal faith—so ritualized Holocaust memory inhibited coming to terms with its meaning. An established civil religion—Holocaust memory—impeded the readiness and ability of Germans to grapple inwardly with Auschwitz.<sup>172</sup> Because accepting the consequences of guilt and disgrace was so difficult, Germans required full autonomy. They had to be trusted to wrestle with their consciences on their own, without external moralizing. In fact, Walser insisted, the conscience could not process guilt if it is coerced into conforming to official views. Terms like *singularity* and *relativization*—which signified stigma—made Walser “shy back” (*schrecke ich zurück*).<sup>173</sup> He thus bitterly opposed the “instrumentalization of this past for acceptance rituals and political correctness tests, for improvisations of the . . . moral organ of the feuilletons. I at any rate prefer to be ashamed without encouragement than with it. I don’t blush on command. Moreover, I believe that we are a kind of people whom something bad like this would leave no peace. One can leave us to ourselves.”<sup>174</sup> Just as Kierkegaard had attacked the official, Hegelianized Christianity of his day—in the terms of the epigraph that begins this article—so Walser attacked the “Hegel of the Federal Republic,” Habermas, for publicly questioning the conscience of others.<sup>175</sup> And just as, in the end, the individual could choose not to accept divine grace, so non-German Germans and others must be prepared to accept that Germans might not come to the same conclusions as the non-German Germans.

Walser’s Kierkegaardian insights into how conscience functioned have not been sufficiently appreciated in the debate about his Paulskirche speech. When it is read with his previous, more elaborate statements on the topic, we witness a tortured attempt to confront an unbearable past. So appalled was he by the images of the Holocaust that he admitted to being physically unable to look at them. He could not leave the perpetrator collective to enjoy emotional relief by standing with the victims. He conceded the guilt of his nation and the complicity of all Germans in the genocide. He thought that they should ponder the Holocaust in their consciences, even as he insisted that Germans were

172. As he pointed out to his critics, his target was not education in schools and the like but the media’s incessant depiction of Holocaust images (Walser, “Wovon zeugt die Schande”).

173. Walser, “Über Freie und unfreie Rede,” 1056.

174. *Ibid.*, 1060.

175. *Ibid.*, 1052.

likely to close off their minds if they felt lectured to about the appropriate feeling to experience.<sup>176</sup>

And yet, as much as he was prepared to lend Auschwitz a traumatic meaning—one whose excess of meaning exploded attempts to grasp or master it in concepts or narratives—Walser ultimately denuded it of collective implications. In fact, he used the Holocaust to reinforce what he regarded as an attenuating German national consciousness. By insisting that the Holocaust was purely a matter for the individual conscience, no one could gain an epistemological vantage point from which to determine its meaning. “There is no position that I could reach from which I could have a firm view about what was done; or at least one that the victim could acknowledge and the perpetrator bear. Every image of Auschwitz smashes every possible coming to terms [*abkommen*] with this past, which cannot become one.”<sup>177</sup> Consequently, no grounds existed for a public memorialization of the Holocaust; official memory would entail the imposition of a unitary meaning.

Walser’s Kierkegaardian insistence on the inviolability of individual conscience and its direct relationship with God thus performed an important function. It vitiated the efficacy of rituals and symbols manifesting institutionalized, communal worship, as noted by Brumlik, who himself advocated the Berlin memorial as a form of “liturgical memory.”<sup>178</sup> It was all very well for Walser to disparage the official, public commemoration of the Holocaust, but otherwise how was memory of it supposed to be transmitted? The same criticism was made of Kierkegaard’s anti-ecclesiology.<sup>179</sup> Communicative memory, lasting three generations, needs to become cultural memory by its concretion in rites, rituals, and institutions for the community to reproduce its identity.<sup>180</sup>

Walser effectively wanted the Holocaust memory to disappear from German consciousness by preventing its institutionalization as cultural memory. Even though “we” Germans were irredeemably linked to the perpetrators, such

176. See esp. Walser, “Auschwitz und kein Ende,” 632–33.

177. *Ibid.*, 633; Walser, “Über Freie und unfreie Rede,” 1056 (“There is no normative relationship to this guilt, no standardization of confirmation [*Bekennens*]”).

178. Brumlik, “Gewissen, Gedenken und anamnetische Solidarität,” 1143–53. Traces of German pietism were also discernible in Walser’s idealization of free communication between authentic individuals, whose community prefigured a redeemed state of wholeness and therefore represented a “secularized eschatology” (Georg Pfeleiderer, “Gewissen und Öffentlichkeit: Ein Deutungsvorschlag zur Walser/Bubis-Kontroverse,” *Zeitschrift für evangelische Ethik* 4 [1999]: 254).

179. Pojman, “Kierkegaard on Faith and Freedom.”

180. Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 128.

a memory was designed as the nation's glue rather than its solvent. It was a perversion of memory, therefore, for the Holocaust to be used to undermine national solidarity. What was primary for Walser, then, was not consciousness of the Holocaust but national consciousness. The nation bore the burden of Auschwitz, but that burden had no negative implications for the nation, whose existence he took as a self-evident good because the nation was a surrogate god.

Walser's elevation of the nation to divine status was by no means orthodox Protestantism. His "relationlessness," his existing purely for oneself, oblivious to the needs of recognition of others—such as the descendants of the Holocaust's victims—exemplified a sinful alienation from God and his creation.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, his hypostatization of the solitary conscience ignored the tradition in Lutheran theology that taught that the individual required communal guidance because the unsaved conscience was corrupted by sin. The distinction between an informed and a captive conscience was the difference between its objective and subjective dimensions. To avoid the solipsism of the latter, the individual was bound to account to the deliberative community of his or her cobelievers.<sup>182</sup> In this respect Walser's use of Kierkegaard can be contrasted with that of Habermas. Whereas Walser wants to protect the individual from official Holocaust commemoration, Habermas seeks to inure him or her to the seductions of nationalist modes of identification that he sees emanating from elites like Walser.<sup>183</sup>

Walser was not alone in feeling lectured to about the Holocaust. Even the German Jewish journalist Henryk Broder complained about the memorial in Walserian terms, writing that he "hated architecture that tells him how he should feel."<sup>184</sup> It seems virtually forgotten that Karl Jaspers's *Die*

181. Cf. Jünger, "On the Doctrine of Justification."

182. Martha Ellen Stortz, "Solus Christus or Sola Viscera? Scrutinizing Lutheran Appeals to Conscience," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44 (2005): 146–51.

183. Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 162; Habermas, "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action," in *New Conservatism*, 260–63. Cf. Martin J. Matustik, "Kierkegaard's Radical Existential Praxis; or, Why the Individual Defies Liberal, Communitarian, and Postmodern Categories," in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, ed. Martin J. Matustik and Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 245; Matustik, "Existence and the Communicatively Competent Self," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 24, no. 3 (1999): 93–120; Matustik, *Post-national Identity: Critical Theory and Existential Philosophy in Habermas, Kierkegaard, and Havel* (New York: Guilford, 1993).

184. "'Das ist die Fortsetzung des Dritten Reiches': Was soll, was kann, was hilft das Berliner Holocaust-Mahnmal? Ein Streitgespräch mit Henryk M. Broder und Wolfgang Menge," *Der Tagesspiegel*, June 9, 2005.

*Schuldfrage* (*The Question of German Guilt*), described by Anson Rabinbach as “the founding text of the new narrative of the ‘European German,’ of a neutral, anti-militarist, and above all ethical Germany,” was also dripping in Kierkegaardian themes of individual as well as collective sin and redemption.<sup>185</sup> “Either acceptance of the guilt not meant by the rest of the world but constantly repeated by our conscience comes to be a fundamental trait of our German self-consciousness—in which case our soul goes the way of transformation—or we subside into the average triviality of indifferent, mere living.”<sup>186</sup> Contrary to the assertions of his critics, Jaspers insisted on political communication between Germans in addition to private introspection.<sup>187</sup> For such communication to occur, however, Germans needed to respect each other’s consciences by moving beyond the clichéd accusations and denials that began to mark public and private discussions of the Nazi regime immediately after the war. The debate about Walser’s infamous Paulskirche speech showed that Jaspers’s concern was well placed. Walser was either roundly condemned by non-German Germans as someone who wanted to forget Auschwitz and draw a line under the past, or defended by German Germans as a persecuted patriot who allowed them to feel good about being German. Walser’s complaint that “the warners never speak of their own wrestling with guilt” was borne out by the denunciatory tone of his critics who blithely presumed they were on the side of the angels.<sup>188</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The dilemma about the integrity of German conscience reflected the underlying structure of national memory. Should it be “instructed” by intellectuals in a secularized version of the Lutheran imperative for the community of worshippers to guide its members? Or did that very instruction represent an intolerable moralization of politics that led to the unjust hounding of public

185. Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 132; cf. Diner, *Beyond the Conceivable*, 219. Already in the 1960s Jaspers was prophesying that Germany’s “future lay not in the recovery of the nation-state but in its overcoming” (*Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung: Über Aufgaben deutscher Politik* [Munich: Piper, 1960], 53).

186. Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Capricorn, 1961), 117.

187. Dagmar Barnouw, *Visible Spaces: Hannah Arendt and the German-Jewish Experience* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), 161–64.

188. Walser, “Über Freie und unfreie Rede,” 1056.

figures who breached language games whose rules were made by non-German Germans? The answer boiled down to a question of basic trust. Could Germans be trusted to wrestle with their consciences? Of course, Walser thought they could; it was the public sphere that was corrupted, not the population.<sup>189</sup> In a neat symmetry, Habermas thought not, although he was prepared to admit in 1988 that Germany no longer possessed a population whose majority one needed to fear.<sup>190</sup> His general anxiety about the unified Germany was shared by some Jews who thought that what was good for the Germans was bad for the Jews.<sup>191</sup> Jaspers might have agreed with them. His optimism about the efficacy of German conscience work in the 1940s lessened with time as he witnessed the apathy of Germans about the “question of German guilt.” Writing twenty years after his *Die Schuldfrage*, and having migrated to Switzerland, he complained that “the reality was completely different from what I had hoped for in 1945. Very soon there was no more talk of an intellectual reconstruction. . . . Politically, the will for a democratic reconstruction resulting from an inner conversion was lost. From 1948 a new state began with new assumptions. The years 1945–1948 were finished.”<sup>192</sup> Certainly, Jaspers did not possess basic trust in German political culture in the 1960s, worrying about its militarism and authoritarian potential.<sup>193</sup>

But what about 2007? The signs are that the fourth generation of Germans after the Holocaust—that generation which has no direct experience of grandparents who lived through the Nazi era—are beginning to place trust in the country’s institutions and political culture. Much of the public culture has been remade by non-German Germans, even the national soccer team of the 2006 World Cup, made up in part of Polish-born stars and coached by an American-based former player married to a Chinese American. Non-German Germans cheered for them as much as anyone else. Because such a new national feeling was based not on continuities with the generations that experienced World War II but on the achievements and culture of the Federal

189. Müller, *Another Country*, 175.

190. Habermas, *New Conservatism*, 194.

191. Moishe Postone, “A Comment: The End of the Postwar Era and the Reemergence of the Past,” in *Jews, Germans, Memory: Reconstructions of Jewish Life in Germany*, ed. Y. Michal Bodemann (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 273–79.

192. Karl Jaspers, quoted in Mark W. Clark, “A Prophet without Honour: Karl Jaspers in Germany, 1945–48,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 37 (2002): 215.

193. Karl Jaspers, *Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik? Tatsachen, Gefahren, Chancen* (Munich: Piper, 1966).

Republic, it was possible for them to feel good about their nationality—their “we-ness”—and acknowledge the memory of the Holocaust as an event that was laid at the door of a former Germany, a Germany of existential significance to members of the “forty-fiver” generation like Walser and Habermas (born in the 1920s),<sup>194</sup> but of increasingly less existential significance for the youth of the twenty-first century. With the development of basic trust, the underlying structure that has marked German memory for sixty years is gradually coming to an end.

194. A. Dirk Moses, “The Forty-Fivers: A Generation between Fascism and Democracy,” *German Politics and Society* 17, no. 1 (1999): 95–127. This argument is elaborated in my *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).