

# STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN THE HOLOCAUST: DANIEL J. GOLDHAGEN AND HIS CRITICS<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

A striking aspect of the so-called “Goldhagen debate” has been the bifurcated reception *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* has received: the enthusiastic welcome of journalists and the public was as warm as the impatient dismissal of most historians was cool. This article seeks to transcend the current impasse by analyzing the underlying issues of Holocaust research at stake here. It argues that a “deep structure” necessarily characterizes the historiography of the Holocaust, comprising a tension between its positioning in “universalism” and “particularism” narratives. While the former conceptualizes the Holocaust as an abstract human tragedy and explains its occurrence in terms of processes common to modern societies, the latter casts its analysis in ethnic and national categories: the Holocaust as an exclusively German and Jewish affair. These narratives possess important implications for the balance of structure and human agency in the explanation of the Holocaust: where the universalism narrative emphasizes the role of impersonal structures in mediating human action, the particularism narrative highlights the agency of human actors. Although historical accounts usually combine these narratives, recent research on the Holocaust tends in the universalist direction, and this bears on the sensitive issue of responsibility for the Holocaust by problematizing the common-sense notion of the perpetrators’ intention and responsibility. Goldhagen is responding to this trend, but by retreating to the particularism narrative and employing an inadequate definition of intention, he fails to move the debate forward. It is time to rethink the concept of intention in relation to events like the Holocaust.

## I. INTRODUCTION

No academic book received greater international scholarly and public attention in 1996 and 1997 than Daniel J. Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*.<sup>2</sup> Special symposia and conference sessions, television chat shows, and massive print media coverage, especially in the

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2. Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996). All references to this book will appear in parentheses in the text.

USA and Germany, addressed the central claim of the young American political scientist, namely that the systematic murder of millions of Jews during the Second World War was a German “national project,” committed with the connivance of perhaps a hundred thousand Germans or more, and with the approval of the rest of the population, which was “an assenting genocidal community” (11, 406). In Germany, where the reaction to Holocaust questions is as significant as the book, film, or television program that sparks discussion in the first place, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* caused a sensation even before the translation appeared in August 1996.<sup>3</sup> Originally a prize-winning doctoral thesis, the book's enormous popular impact, comparable with that of William Shirer's *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* in the early 1960s,<sup>4</sup> must be every graduate student's dream. As one commentator noted, Goldhagen has become a “phenomenon.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet the dream ended in tears as hostile reviews mounted in the scholarly and intellectual journals. Especially disappointing for Goldhagen is the fact that his most vociferous critics are the leading historians of anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, or German political culture, none of whom deny anti-Semitism a role in the Holocaust.<sup>6</sup> Goldhagen protests that he has been willfully misunderstood,

3. The German reception was driven by the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, which published a series of reviews by prominent historians in April and May 1996, and then gave Goldhagen an unprecedented six pages to reply to them. Most of these reviews are collected in *Ein Volk von Mördern? Die Dokumentation zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse um die Rolle der Deutschen im Holocaust*, ed. Julius H. Schoeps (Hamburg, 1996); for the debate in the German public sphere, see, above all, Michael Schneider, “Die ‘Goldhagen-Debatte’: Ein Historikerstreit in der Mediengesellschaft,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 37 (1997), 67-83; Kurt Pätzold, “Die verweigerte Herausforderung: Daniel J. Goldhagens Buch und seine Kritiker,” *Bulletin der Berliner Gesellschaft für Faschismus- und Weltkriegsforschung* 7 (1996), 26-67; and *Briefe an Goldhagen*, ed. Daniel J. Goldhagen (Berlin, 1997); English-language accounts can be found in Josef Joffe, “Goldhagen in Germany,” *The New York Review of Books* (November 28, 1996), 18-21, and Amos Elon, “The Antagonist as Liberator,” *New York Times* (January 26, 1997), 44.

4. William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York, 1960); for the reception of this book, see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, “The Reception of William Shirer's *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* in the United States and Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29 (1984), 95-128.

5. Andrei S. Markovits made this assessment as the commentator on a panel devoted to *Hitler's Willing Executioners* at the annual conference of the American Political Science Association held in San Francisco in August 1996.

6. Robert Wistrich, “Helping Hitler,” *Commentary* (July 1996), 27-32; Steven E. Aschheim, “Reconceiving the Holocaust?” *Tikkun* (July/August 1996), 62-65; Fritz Stern, “The Goldhagen Controversy,” *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1996), 128-138; Omer Bartov, “Ordinary Monsters,” *The New Republic* (29 April 1996), 32-38; Peter Pulzer, “Psychopaths and Conformists, Adventurers and Moral Cowards,” *The London Review of Books* (January 23, 1997), 20f.; Yehuda Bauer and Konrad Kwiet, *Washington Holocaust Memorial Symposium* (April 10, 1996); Christhard Hoffmann, *German Politics and Society* 14 (Fall 1996), 108-115; Reinhard Rürup, “Viel Lärm über Nichts? D.J. Goldhagens ‘radikale Revision’ der Holocaustforschung,” *Neue Politische Literatur* 3 (1996), 357-363; Hans Mommsen, “Die dünne Patina der Zivilisation,” *Die Zeit* (August 30, 1996), 14f.; Henry Friedlander, *German Studies Review* 19 (1996), 578-580; Christopher Browning, Ulrich Herbert, Eberhard Jäckel, Moshe Zimmermann, Norbert Frei, and Hans-Ulrich Wehler in *Ein Volk von Mördern?*; a slightly expanded English version of Wehler's review can be found under the title of “The Goldhagen Controversy: Agonizing Problems, Scholarly Failure, and the Political Dimension,” in *German History* 15 (1997), 80-91; Dieter Pohl, “Die Holocaustforschung und Goldhagens Thesen,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 45 (January 1997), 1-48. Raul Hilberg, in an open letter to his colleagues, described the book as “worthless”: cited in Steven E. Aschheim, “Archetypes and the

and defiantly refuses to concede his critics a single point.<sup>7</sup> Some of them retort that the popular success of *Hitler's Willing Executioners* can be attributed to its articulation of unreflective opinions about the Holocaust widespread in the public: for example, that it happened because Germans hated Jews and always have.<sup>8</sup> The book failed to make an impact in Israel, Moshe Zimmermann reported, because it merely restated Zionist commonplaces.<sup>9</sup> Usually, when a work meets with such unanimous rejection from the specialists, it indicates its failure to meet scholarly standards of evidential weight, logical rigor, and analytical acuity. But for journalists and much of the public, the cold reception that *Hitler's Willing Executioners* has received among historians is evidence that Goldhagen has uncovered some uncomfortable truths.<sup>10</sup> The bifurcated reception of *Hitler's Willing Executioners* is perhaps the controversy's most striking feature.

Several of Goldhagen's critics discern sinister implications in this fact. In presenting a "simple, strangely comforting answer for which we have all been longing," asserts Omer Bartov, Goldhagen is "appealing to a public that wants to hear what it already believes."<sup>11</sup> Christopher Browning writes in similar terms. Goldhagen, he contends, attacks the historical profession in the name of a general public that says: "'We don't want complex answers, we just want an answer. We want to understand the Holocaust as we did fifty years ago—German culture is evil, it created evil people, who committed evil deeds.'"<sup>12</sup> Hans Mommsen

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German-Jewish Dialogue," *German History* 15 (1997), 242; *Hyping the Holocaust: Scholars Answer Goldhagen*, ed. Franklin H. Littell (East Rockaway, N.Y., 1997). The website containing the critical internet discussion of *Hitler's Willing Executioners* is [www.h-net.msu.edu/~german](http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~german).

7. Daniel J. Goldhagen, "Das Versagen der Kritiker," *Die Zeit* (August 2, 1996), 9-14; Goldhagen, "Die Antwort an meine Kritiker ist das Buch selbst," *Der Tagesspiegel* (September 6, 1996); Goldhagen, "A Reply to My Critics: Motives, Causes, and Alibis," *The New Republic* (December 23, 1996), 37-45; Goldhagen, "Germans vs. the Critics," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 1997), 163-166; Goldhagen, "Hitler's Willing Executioners: An Exchange," *New York Review of Books* (February 6, 1996), 40; in new afterword to the "Abacus" paperback edition of his book, he writes that his critics could muster no compelling objections to his case, because "such arguments and evidence do not exist," 463.

8. See, for example, Wehler, "The Goldhagen Controversy," 89.

9. Zimmerman, "Die Fußnote als Alibi," in *Ein Volk von Mördern?*, 147-155; see also Joseph Croitorou, "Gegen Kitsch und Kommerz: Israelische Reaktionen auf Daniel Goldhagens Buch 'Hitlers willige Vollstrecker,'" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (August 9, 1996), 30.

10. Andrei S. Markovits, "Störfall im Endlager der Geschichte: Daniel Goldhagen und seine deutschen Kritiker," in *Ein Volk von Mördern?*; Rolf Breitenstein, "Unwillige Historiker," *Liberal* 3 (August, 1996), 93-95; Otto Köhler, "Der gewöhnliche Deutsche," *Konkret* 6 (1996), 14-16; Ingrid Strobl, "Die Flucht in die wissenschaftliche Abstraktion," *Die Tageszeitung* (September 6, 1996), 18; Susanne Miller, "Die Deutschen—ein Volk von Tätern?," *Neue Gesellschaft—Frankfurter Hefte* (October 1996), 891-893. In the wake of such support, the left-liberal journal *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* awarded Goldhagen its "Democracy Prize," with the country's most prominent postwar social philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, delivering the *laudatio*. See Jürgen Habermas, "Über den öffentlichen Gebrauch der Historie: Warum ein 'Demokratiepreis' für Daniel Goldhagen?," *Die Zeit* (March 14, 1997), 13f; the speeches of the occasion, including those of Habermas and Goldhagen, are collected in *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 4 (April 1997).

11. Bartov, "Ordinary Monsters," 38.

12. Christopher Browning, "Böse Menschen, böse Taten," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (February 6, 1997), 42; for similar comments, see Aschheim, "Reconceiving the Holocaust?," 65.

agrees: "They [the public] don't want to hear the historical truth. They don't want to accept the triviality of this process [of systematic mass murder]. They are far more attracted to myths, which historians are not in the business of making. This is the point of contention."<sup>13</sup> The result of Goldhagen's fixation on ideological anti-Semitism, Bartov claims, is the occlusion of the most significant and disturbing lesson of the catastrophe: that it was less the product of a specifically German pathology than of the modern, technological, and putatively "enlightened" civilization in which we still live.<sup>14</sup>

The intensity of the fracas recalls the controversy surrounding Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*,<sup>15</sup> and it suggests that there is more to the debate than "simply a bad book" ("*Einfach ein schlechtes Buch*": Jäckel) about the Holocaust that became a bestseller. As Bartov's, Browning's, and Mommsen's comments show, fundamental differences concerning the *metahistorical* significance of the Holocaust are at stake. But if that is the case, it is unsatisfactory to chastise Goldhagen as an errant schoolboy with little new to say.<sup>16</sup> For even if the style and substance of many of his strictly historical claims do not bear close scrutiny, the questions he has posed for the study of the Holocaust are not the sort that can be dispensed with by reference to some protocol of facticity or professional orthodoxy.<sup>17</sup> Such questions need to be explicitly thematized. Historians, after all, are no better qualified than anyone else on matters of ideological orientation. These questions have obviously resonated with the general public, and lest the history profession be accused of elitism, it is unsatisfactory to dismiss this lay

13. Hans Mommsen, podium discussion, *Die Deutschen—Ein Volk von Tätern?: Zur historisch-politischen Debatte um das Buch von Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, 'Hitlers willige Vollstrecker'*, ed. Dieter Dowe (Bonn, 1996), 73; see also 68: "Goldhagen's book tends towards manipulation, and also leaves unanswered the question of how the Holocaust was led in a particular direction. And that is indispensable if one wants to discover under which conditions such occurrences can repeat themselves."

14. This is also a central theme of Bartov's recent collection of essays, *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing and Representation* (New York, 1996). I have discussed this book in "Modernity and the Holocaust," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 43 (1997), 441-445.

15. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1965); *Die Kontroverse: Hannah Arendt, Eichmann und die Juden*, ed. F. A. Krummacker (München, 1963); Gertrude Ezorsky, "Hannah Arendt's View of Totalitarianism and the Holocaust," *Philosophical Forum* 16 (Fall-Winter, 1984-85), 63-81. See, most recently, the issue of *History and Memory* 8 (1996) devoted to "Hannah Arendt and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*." The Einstein Forum in Berlin held a conference (June 19-22, 1997) on the "The Historiography of the Holocaust in Relation to Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*." See Ulrike Weckel, "Hannah Arendt's 'Eichmann in Jerusalem': Eine Tagung zur Historiographie des Holocaust," *Werkstattgeschichte* 18 (November, 1997), 101-106.

16. Wehler similarly warns his colleagues against stonewalling Goldhagen: "The Goldhagen Controversy," 80f.

17. Ruth Bettina Birn, "Revising the Holocaust," *Historical Journal* 40 (1997), 195-215, charges Goldhagen with selectively using primary sources. Goldhagen responds to Birn in "The Fictions of Ruth Bettina Birn," *German Politics and Society* 15 (Fall 1997), 119-165. He also contends that Birn's article exceeds the bounds of fair academic criticism, and to the dismay of many historians, he took legal action against her. See Götz Aly, "Streithansel Goldhagen," *Berliner Zeitung* (November 8/9, 1997), 9; Michael Jeismann, "Der Schutz des allmächtigsten Autors," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (November 4, 1997), 41, and Goldhagen's responding letter, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (November 12, 1997), 15. Birn discusses her experience in *Der Spiegel* (November 10, 1997), 266ff.

response with the epithet of “populism.” In their role as public educators, it may be productive for historians to use Goldhagen’s book and its popular impact as an opportunity to reflect on the general and enduring issues of Holocaust research that transcend the current context.

What, then, are these issues? Recent debates have centered on the limitations on and morality of naming and representing an event in literary and historical accounts that, like God, transcends human linguistic capacities.<sup>18</sup> Such epistemological and ethical reservations notwithstanding, scholars continue to think and write about the Holocaust. And in doing so, they work within a “deep structure,” which Goldhagen and his critics articulate. This structure comprises a tension over the positioning of the Holocaust in the two basic narratives that constitute Western historical consciousness since the Enlightenment: a “particularism” and a “universalism” narrative.

Why is this a structure? Because the particular and universal are the only two narrative and explanatory possibilities available to the scholar. Should the Holocaust be explained by cultural factors specific to Germany, as in the classic particularist narrative running from Luther to Hitler? Or should one appeal to general processes: Germany as a typical instance of any modern society? At the metahistorical level, should the Holocaust be narrated into a Zionist story of Jewish vulnerability in the diaspora, or should it be understood as a general symbol of transgression without any particular Jewish or German referent?<sup>19</sup> Because these narratives are the fundamentals of both individual and collective identities, as well as academic historical discourse, the apparently disengaged rhetoric of the latter can never be divested entirely of identity politics.

Fortunately, the historian’s is not an “either-or” choice: like personal and collective identity (one is, for example, always German *and* human), most historical scholarship is a blend of both narratives. The Holocaust is necessarily a part of the history of Germans and Jews, on the one hand, and of humanity, on the other.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, these narratives generate considerable ideological heat in the field, because many scholars insist that the *essential* or *unique* meaning of the Holocaust is illuminated by the narrative and commensurate explanatory strategies to which they are committed. In doing so, they provoke a reaction from those who incline to the opposite narrative. This weighting of the Holocaust is the bone

18. See, for example, George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (New York, 1966); *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York, 1988); James E. Young, *Writing and Re-writing the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990); *Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World*, ed. Peter Hayes (Evanston, Ill., 1991); *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution,”* ed. Saul Friedländer (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Dominick La Capra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994); Robert Braun, “The Holocaust and Problems of Historical Representation,” *History and Theory* 33 (1994), 172-190.

19. For examples of the former, see Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *What Is the Use of Jewish History?*, edited and introduced by Neal Kozodoy (New York, 1992); Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford, 1994).

20. Rainer Erb, “Unangenehme Fragen neu gestellt: Anmerkungen zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 44 (1996), 826-832.

of contention, because of its unparalleled capacity to legitimize and disrupt personal and group identities, and it is indisputably a factor in the current controversy: "The Holocaust emanated from Germany, and was therefore principally a German phenomenon," insists Goldhagen, leading Steven E. Aschheim to conclude that "Goldhagen . . . returns the Shoah to the Jews," and Norman Finkelstein to accuse Goldhagen of Zionist apologetics. Hans-Ulrich Wehler charges Goldhagen with advancing "quasi-racist" arguments and of raising the old saw of German collective guilt, but Dan Diner disagrees, complaining that for too long the Holocaust has been viewed as a general "human-historical problem."<sup>21</sup> The current debate is so polarized because Goldhagen and his critics are arguing about these contending narratives as much as they are disputing "the facts." In order to advance the discussion, it is necessary to gain some distance from each narrative by understanding the reasons for their continuing attraction. As we will see below, they captivate with their compelling but divergent answers to the question of the relationship between structure and agency, circumstances and intentionality, in the causation of the Holocaust, and implicitly, with the strategies they suggest for the prevention of similar catastrophes in the future.

## II. THE DEEP STRUCTURE OF HOLOCAUST SCHOLARSHIP

These narratives are expressed in the *ideological-intentionalist* interpretation of the Nazi period and Holocaust, on the one hand (the particularism narrative), and the *structural-functionalist* approach, on the other (the universalism narrative).<sup>22</sup> This is a well-known division in the literature on Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, so we need not rehearse the much-discussed arguments on both sides.<sup>23</sup> It is necessary, however, to reveal the deeper level of disagreement that accounts for the division in the first place. This is the question of intention and the commensurate weight accorded to human agency and structure in the explanation of events and, thus, of individual and collective responsibility for Nazi

21. Goldhagen, "A Reply to My Critics," 42; Aschheim, "Reconceiving the Holocaust?," 62; Finkelstein, "Goldhagen's 'Crazy' Thesis," *New Left Review* 224 (July/August 1997), 39-88; Wehler in *Ein Volk von Mördern?*, 200; Diner cited in Thomas Assheuer, "Die Wiederkehr der Schuldfrage?," *Frankfurter Rundschau* (May 10, 1996), 10. See also Diner, "Hannah Arendt Reconsidered: On the Banal and the Evil in Her Holocaust Narrative," *New German Critique* 71 (Spring-Summer, 1997), 177-190; and Peter Novick, "Holocaust Memory in America," in *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History*, ed. James E. Young (Munich and New York, 1995).

22. This typology is intended to include not only the superannuated intentionalist-functionalist opposition regarding the causation of the Holocaust, but also broader interpretive patterns of National Socialism in general, much along the lines suggested by Geoffrey Barraclough in "Mandarins and Nazis," *New York Review of Books* (October 19, 1972), 37-42; "The Liberals and German History," *New York Review of Books* (November 2, 1972), 32-36; and "A New View of German History," *New York Review of Books* (November 16, 1972), 25-31.

23. On the controversy, see, for example, Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (London and New York, 1993), 88-107. For an overview of recent Holocaust research, see *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation*, ed. David Cesarini (London and New York, 1994).

crimes.<sup>24</sup> Here we are dealing with very basic, precritical orientations to the problem of evil, which historians bring to bear on the problems they study. On the particularism side, as Immanuel Kant claimed, a moral imperative exists to demand that “great events have great causes,” because the irrationality of fortune renders the human condition a “farcical comedy” and is therefore an affront to human dignity.<sup>25</sup> Human dignity, in turn, implies moral responsibility, which requires an emphatic sense of agency. Catastrophes must have an author, whether a God, a nation, or an individual, if we are to make moral sense of the world. And the longer a certain intention can be said to have existed, the more defining it is of a particular narrative and identity. A God, a nation, or an individual is an agent, broadly speaking, that can bear guilt. But a process like “the dialectic of Enlightenment” or a phenomenon such as “modernity” is not an agent and cannot be the bearer of an intention, and, therefore, of guilt. For this reason, ideological-intentionalists combine scholarly objections with moral indignation when an emphatic sense of authorship of the Holocaust is questioned by structural-functionalists.<sup>26</sup>

What are the relevant features of the ideological-intentionalist position? Dominant in the immediate postwar decades, when the contrast between Germany and the Western allies appeared so stark, the ideological-intentionalist interpretation possesses six characteristics: first, to invest ideology, especially anti-Semitism, with great causal significance, and therefore to highlight the prior intentions of the Nazis;<sup>27</sup> second, to stress their agency in the establishment of a totalitarian state and perpetration of the Holocaust; third, to see Germany’s pathology in its divergence from the ideological pattern of the West, where liberal ideas had triumphed and “normal,” “modern” societies had developed; fourth, to use explicitly moralistic rhetoric; fifth, to see Jews as the primary victims of Nazi persecution; and sixth, to define the uniqueness of the Holocaust in ideological terms.<sup>28</sup>

24. Berel Lang, “The Concept of Intention and the Final Solution,” in *Remembering for the Future*, ed. Yehuda Bauer *et al.* (Oxford, 1990), III, 2558-2562. See also his *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago, 1990).

25. Immanuel Kant, “An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?” in *On History*, ed. L.W. Beck (Indianapolis, 1963), 141. I owe this reference to Hans Kellner, “‘Never Again’ Is Now,” *History and Theory* 33 (1994), 127-144.

26. Lucy Dawidowicz, “Perversions of the Holocaust,” *Commentary* 88 (October 1989), 56-60; Karl Dietrich Bracher, “Holocaust—ohne Hitler?,” *Die Politische Meinung* (February 1997), 45f; Joachim Fest, “Der Auftrag kam von Hitler,” *Die Woche* (November 29, 1996), 38; Raul Teitelbaum, “Kofferträger der ‘Endlösung,’” and Till Bastian, “Deutsche Duckmäuser,” *Die Woche* (December 6, 1996), 38.

27. Saul Friedländer, “From Anti-Semitism to Extermination: A Historiographical Study of Nazi Policies Toward the Jews and an Essay in Interpretation,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 16 (1984), 1-50; also see the lucid discussion in Michael Marrus, “Reflections on the Historiography of the Holocaust,” *Journal of Modern History* 66 (1994), 92-116.

28. For the cultural function of this interpretation in the USA, see Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer, “‘Great Men’ and Postmodern Ruptures: Overcoming the Belatedness of German Historiography,” *German Studies Review* 18 (May 1995), 253-273; Jarausch and Geyer were responding to Kenneth Barkin’s views in “Bismarck in a Postmodern World,” in the same issue, 241-251.

In relation to the Holocaust in particular, ideological-intentionalists focus on the frequently and explicitly stated ambition of Hitler to eliminate German Jewry and his role in the actual process. Anti-Semitism, the antimodern ideology *par excellence*, was the core of the Nazi regime, and when the time came, the vast machinery of government was directed by Nazi elites to prosecute the “war on the Jews.” By this theory, the explanation of the Holocaust coincides neatly with the agency of those responsible for its perpetration. Act followed intention in a linear diachronic fashion. The Holocaust was anything but an accident, and there is no question of who was responsible for it.<sup>29</sup> This explanation of the Holocaust is therefore not a particularly complex matter. The lesson this position teaches is that the “normality” of Western nations prevents a recurrence of such an event. Germany’s task after 1945 was to follow suit by abandoning its “illiberal” political culture and becoming suitably Western.

The structural-functionalist view became current during the 1960s, when the postwar consensus on the unquestioned health and “normality” of Western societies was attacked from the left, which had grown weary of the pieties of totalitarianism theory. This approach, which has won “predominant influence” in Germany, attacked the political implications of the ideological-intentionalist orientation on two fronts.<sup>30</sup> Not only did that orientation’s national terms of reference obscure problems with Western modernity, it also hindered Germans from coming to terms with their past. For by insisting on the centrality of Hitler and ideology, Germans were able to apologetically disavow their own complicity in the Nazi regime; they were able to suggest that the Nazis took Germany “by surprise” from without; and they were able to obscure the structural and cultural continuities obtaining from before 1945 that formed the Federal Republic, and which warranted scrutiny. Structural-functionalists therefore have an explicit *critical* intention (Hans Mommsen calls contemporary history [*Zeitgeschichte*] “a critical project of enlightenment”<sup>31</sup>), a point that has been noticeably absent from the debate so far, in which they have been mistakenly situated in the revisionist tradition of those who would play down German responsibility for the Holocaust.<sup>32</sup>

29. Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews* (New York, 1975); Karl Dietrich Bracher, “The Role of Hitler: Perspectives of Interpretation,” in *Fascism: A Reader’s Guide*, ed. Walter Laqueur (Berkeley, 1978); Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley, 1984); Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the ‘Final Solution’* (London, 1991).

30. Wolfgang Wipperman, *Wessen Schuld?: Vom Historikerstreit zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse* (Berlin, 1997), 103.

31. Hans Mommsen, “Zeitgeschichte als ‘kritische Aufklärungsarbeit’: Zur Erinnerung an Martin Broszat,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 2 (1991), 141-157; also see his comments in “Kein Auftrag zur ‘Endlösung,’” *Die Woche* (December 13, 1996), 38: “It is still a taboo to question Hitler’s power . . . that for many years was used by the German nation as an alibi to diminish its own political and moral betrayal.”

32. For an example of this reading, see Heidi Zogbaum, “The Germans and Daniel Goldhagen,” *Quadrant* [Melbourne] (October 1996), and, of course, Goldhagen himself: see, especially, the foreword to the German edition of his book, reprinted as “Appendix 3” in the “Abacus” paperback English edition. In fact, Goldhagen’s critics (Mommsen, Jäckel, Wehler, for example) are precisely those who supported Jürgen Habermas against revisionism in the “Historians’ Dispute” of the mid-1980s. See

Still, the structural-functionalist explanation of the Holocaust undermines the commonsense understanding of intention that ideological-intentionalists trade on, and this is what is at stake in the debate today. As Berel Lang has explained, it requires two conditions. First, that the intention is explicitly and consciously related to a distinct goal and is independent of the goal. In the context of the Holocaust, this means that “a single consciousness aware of each element of [the ‘Final Solution’s’] practice or of its overall goal” needs to be shown to have existed; and that the intention was articulated before the realization of the goal.<sup>33</sup> Lang calls this the “external” model of intention, because the intention is autonomous and prior to its realization. Let us see how the structural-functionalists complicate the question of responsibility that this model of intention implies by examining, in turn, their answer to the six features of the ideological-intentionalist interpretation.

First, with respect to the centrality of ideology, they note that anti-Semitism was a necessary but insufficient ingredient in the explanation.<sup>34</sup> In fact, the anti-Semitism that led to pogroms in eastern European countries was largely absent in modernized Germany. Yet only Germany unleashed such a comprehensive, systematic, and industrial style of killing. What distinguishes the Holocaust from a pogrom is the fact that Germany was a modern, industrial state with an efficient bureaucracy. Accordingly, in the structural-functionalist explanation, the bureaucrat, rather than the ideologue, plays the predominant part in determining the precise features of the so-called “Final Solution.” Indeed, for Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat, National Socialist ideology in general and Hitler’s anti-Semitism in particular were “metaphorical,” whose “formal” and “substanceless” character permitted them to serve as lightning-rods and integrating-mechanisms for otherwise irreconcilable social grievances and resentments. The significance of ideology is its predominantly manipulative function, rather than any putative content.<sup>35</sup> Hitler certainly had no intention during the 1930s to systematically murder European Jewry: the increasingly harsh anti-Semitic measures during this

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Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988). This misunderstanding may be accounted for by the fact that these orientations turn on different political axes in Germany and North America. In the former, intentionalists, like Andreas Hillgruber, are often conservatives, while in the latter they tend to be liberals. This fact explains why a leading social democrat and left-liberal, like Peter Glotz, is also critical of Goldhagen’s book. See his review, “Nation der Killer?,” in *Ein Volk von Mördern?*

33. Lang, “The Concept of Intention and the Final Solution,” 2559, 2562.

34. Uwe-Adam Dietrich, *Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf, 1972); Karl Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policies Toward Jews, 1933–1939* (Urbana, Ill., 1970); Martin Broszat, “Hitler and the Genesis of the ‘Final Solution’: An Assessment of David Irving’s Thesis,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 13 (1979), 73–125; Hans Mommsen, “The Realization of the Unthinkable: The ‘Final Solution of the Jewish Question’ in the Third Reich,” in *The Policies of Genocide: Jewish and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld (London, 1986), 97–144.

35. Interview with Hans Mommsen, *Die Woche* (November 15, 1996), Mommsen, “Ein schlecht getarnter Bandit,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (November 7, 1997), 12; Martin Broszat, “Soziale Motivation und Führer-Bindung des Nationalsozialismus,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 18 (1970), 392–409.

period were spontaneously formulated to satisfy the hardliners in his own party, rather than to implement a genocidal blueprint or timetable. The decision for a systematic genocide was “forced” (*Sachzwang*) upon the Nazi regime as a way out of self-inflicted logistical crises arising from the cancellation of the massive population re-settlement program in the east, which was in turn caused by the failure of the military campaign against the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> The Holocaust was, therefore, a particular solution to an extraordinary administrative problem, rather than the execution of a prior intention.

Second, with regard to the question of agency, no author can be said to have intended the precise outcome in any meaningful sense. In a process of “cumulative radicalization,” rival bureaucratic agencies vied for power and prestige by proposing ever more extreme solutions to the “Jewish Question.” Hitler’s role is accordingly diminished.<sup>37</sup> Browning similarly maintains that “when jealous subordinates . . . were desperately trying to anticipate the will of the *Führer* in the Jewish question in order to opportunistically advance their own careers, a chain of command requiring obedience to the *Führer*’s orders was superfluous. Initiative from below obviated the necessity for orders from above.”<sup>38</sup> It is as if the process of bureaucratic interaction itself led to the Holocaust without anyone actually intending it in the external sense: “the systematic mass-extermination in the end *urged itself* as a way out of a chain of spectacular failures.”<sup>39</sup> Hitler furnished the legitimating ideology, to be sure, but the actual substance of the Holocaust was the achievement of bureaucrats, eager to please their master, and willing to undertake any measure to advance their careers.<sup>40</sup> Rather than simple and transparent, the Holocaust is, as Raul Hilberg insists, an opaque and complex process, which can only be understood from the perspective of the perpetrator.<sup>41</sup>

36. Götz Aly, *“Endlösung”: Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995). Hans Mommsen has claimed Aly’s interpretation for the functionalist camp. See his “Spitze des Eisbergs,” *Die Zeit* (May 26, 1995), 17, and Mommsen, “Umvollungspläne des Nationalsozialismus und der Holocaust,” in *Die Normalität des Verbrechens*, ed. Helge Grabitz *et al.* (Berlin, 1994), 68-84.

37. Hans Mommsen, “Der Nationalsozialismus: Kumulative Radikalisierung und Selbsterstörung des Regimes,” *Meyers Enzyklopädisches Lexikon*, (Mannheim, 1976), XVI, 785-790. The Holocaust, he thinks, was not “Hitler’s work.” See Mommsen, “Schuld der Gleichgültigen: Die Deutschen und der Holocaust—Eine Antwort auf Daniel Jonah Goldhagens Buch,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (20/21 July 1996): feuilleton supplement, 1f.; Ian Kershaw, “‘Cumulative Radicalisation’ and the Uniqueness of National Socialism,” in *Von der Aufgabe der Freiheit: Politische Verantwortung und bürgerliche Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Festschrift für Hans Mommsen*, ed. Christian Jansen, Lutz Niethammer, and Bernd Weisbrod (Berlin, 1995), 323-337.

38. Christopher Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office* (New York, 1978), 184; Ian Kershaw has called this phenomenon “working towards the Führer.” See his “‘Working Towards the Führer’: Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship,” *Contemporary European History* 2 (1993), 103-118; Browning proposes a moderate functionalist position in “Beyond ‘Intentionalism’ and ‘Functionalism’: A Reassessment of Nazi Jewish Policy from 1939-1941,” in *Reevaluating the Third Reich*, ed. Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (New York and London), 211-233.

39. Mommsen, “Schuld der Gleichgültigen.” Emphasis added.

40. See, in particular, Hans Mommsen, “Kein Auftrag Hitlers zur ‘Endlösung,’” *Die Woche* (December 13, 1996), 38.

41. Hilberg was first struck by the omnipotence of bureaucracy as a student of Hans Rosenberg in New York in the late 1940s. He asked Rosenberg to relate his expertise on the Prussian state to the

And this archetypal perpetrator is the cold, calculating bureaucrat. It is difficult to make a strong agent of him, however, because the circumstances of his action diluted his intention and agency, and this bears on the problem of evil. Structural-functionalists do not conceive of Nazi evil as “demonic,” a “negative sublime,” or in terms of “satanic greatness,” because they deny that the external model of intention applies to the facts of the Holocaust. A new concept of evil is necessary for a radically new type of perpetrator: the so-called desk-perpetrator (*Schreibtischtäter*), who systematized the killing procedure without himself being a monstrous personality. Accordingly, they follow Hannah Arendt’s controversial proclamation in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that Nazi evil is “banal,” by which they hold not only that Eichmann was a banal man, but that evil can be done by those who do not necessarily believe in what they are doing. Men like Eichmann, so Arendt contended, were not bloodthirsty killers or ideological fanatics, but careerist civil servants, whose faculty of judgment and sense of personal responsibility had been effaced by their imbrication in administrative mechanisms, which removed them from reality and the concrete. Such an evil is the incubus of modern, putatively “normal” societies.<sup>42</sup>

Structural-functionalists have put Arendt’s insight to good use. “Hannah Arendt,” writes Mommsen approvingly, “formulated the concept of ‘the banality of evil’ in relation to the Holocaust, in order to make clear that the perpetrators acted in the first instance with a bureaucratic mentality, and only in the second instance from ideological imperatives.”<sup>43</sup> They were motivated more by the standards of administrative efficiency and perfection than ideological conviction. The decision to systematically gas millions of Jews issued from “Eichmen” (that is, men like Adolf Eichmann), Mommsen argues, who sought to kill Jews “humanely,” rather than let them perish by epidemic and starvation in the ghettos into which they had been driven.<sup>44</sup> In short, there is neither agent nor intention for the Holocaust in the external sense, and this is its disburbing lesson.

Browning has extended this picture of the perpetrator beyond the bureaucrat to an altogether different type of character: the trigger-pulling executioner, who cannot be said to have been removed from the victim by the mediation of bureaucracy, and with whom Goldhagen is preoccupied. In *Ordinary Men: Reserve*

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Holocaust and was met by the economical reply that its causes were “complex.” This insight, he relates, became a “fundamental assumption” of his research. See Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory* (ms. 1994), translated into German by Hans G. Holl as *Unerbetene Erinnerung: Der Weg eines Holocaust-Forschers* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 51ff.

42. See the discussion in Richard Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge, Eng., 1996), 137ff.

43. Mommsen, “Schuld der Gleichgültigen.” See also Mommsen, “Hannah Arendt und der Prozess gegen Adolph Eichmann,” *Eichmann in Jerusalem: Ein Bericht von der Banalität des Bösen*, transl. Brigitte Ganznow (Munich, 1986), i-xxxvii; cf. Browning, *The Foreign Office and the Holocaust*, 178f; see also Raul Hilberg, “The Bureaucracy of Annihilation,” in *Unanswered Questions: Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews*, ed. François Furet (New York, 1989), 132.

44. Hans Mommsen, podium discussion, *Die Deutschen—Ein Volk von Tätern?*, 66; Mommsen “Die Deutschen und der Holocaust,” in *ibid.*, 22f.

*Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, he investigated the murderous wartime activities of a battalion of police auxiliaries from Hamburg.<sup>45</sup> Its profile, about 500 civilians with a slightly greater proportion of Nazi party members than in the German population as a whole, allowed him to speculate how “ordinary citizens” might behave when placed in extraordinary circumstances. And placed in such circumstances they were. For the battalion fell under SS control and was ordered to shoot tens of thousands of Jews living in the scattered villages and towns of Poland. Although untrained for the grisly task and afforded the opportunity to take up other duties, the great majority of men followed orders, some with wanton brutality.

Does Browning use the same explanatory strategy with these men as he did in his earlier study of Nazi bureaucrats? By and large he does, and this is the burden of Goldhagen’s criticism of the book.<sup>46</sup> The extraordinary circumstances in which the men were placed, rather than a conceded pre-existing anti-Semitic orientation, were decisive. Drawing on social-psychological research on group behavior in extreme situations, especially the Milgram tests, Browning concludes that the members of the battalion were ordinary men (hence the title of his book), who, through a combination of peer pressure, conformity, and the dehumanization of the enemy, were induced to commit the unthinkable.<sup>47</sup> Although he did not wish to exculpate these men by suggesting that anyone in such circumstances would behave in the same way (“This story of ordinary men is not the story of all men”), he nevertheless concludes by suggesting darkly that the conditions of modernity conspire to erode human agency and render us vulnerable to barbarism.

In every modern society, the complexity of life and the resulting bureaucratization and specialization attenuate the sense of personal responsibility of those implementing official policy. Within virtually every social collective, the peer group exerts tremendous pressures on behavior and sets moral norms. If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become killers in such circumstances what group of men cannot?<sup>48</sup>

Mommsen, who explicitly endorses Browning’s interpretation, also links the Holocaust to modernity. “The bureaucratically-inflected processes that led to the implementation of the Holocaust therefore stand as an omen [*Menetekel*] of the irruption of barbarism, even under the conditions of modernity, which affords no moral insurance.”<sup>49</sup> The problems that the Holocaust raises are not specifically German problems. What was specifically German, maintains the former, was not some unique strain of anti-Semitism, but a backward political culture and tradi-

45. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1992).

46. The telling title of Goldhagen’s review of Browning is “The Evil of Banality,” *New Republic* (July 13/20, 1992), 49-52.

47. See also his overview, “Beyond Warsaw and Lodz: Perpetrating the Holocaust in Poland,” in *Perspectives on the Holocaust: Essays in Honor of Raul Hilberg*, ed. James S. Pacy and Alan P. Wertheimer (Boulder, Colo., 1995), 75-90.

48. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 189.

49. Mommsen, “Schuld der Gleichgültigen.”

tion of bureaucratic obedience (*Dienst im Gliede*), which enabled extremists to seize power, whose goals were then implemented with striking efficiency even by people who did not necessarily hold extreme anti-Semitic views.<sup>50</sup> While German elites are guilty of cooperating with the Nazis, the majority of Germans, however, were largely “indifferent” to the fate of their Jewish fellow-citizens.<sup>51</sup> The key issues, then, are not ideological, but political and bureaucratic in nature. Götz Aly spoke for many when he wrote that “my research, like that of Hans Mommsen or Raul Hilberg, focuses on the many-sided structures of domination of the Third Reich.”<sup>52</sup> We need to understand the structures that allowed the Nazis to come to power and that enabled a systematic and industrial “solution” to the so-called “Jewish Problem.” This is the structural-functionalist answer to the ideological-intentionalist position’s preoccupation with the history of German anti-Semitism, and it serves a critical purpose in the present. For as Detlev Peukert reminds his readers, “dwelling accusingly on a specific German set of preconditions for fascism—conditions which have meanwhile reassuringly vanished from the past—appears as a particularly easy way of evading the question of the individual’s own sense of involvement and concern for its significance for his own behavior.”<sup>53</sup> The problem with the particularism narrative is that in blaming all on Germany, it forsakes critical attention to the sources of oppression and genocide in modern societies *today*. Hence the disbelief of structural-functionalists that Goldhagen can give postwar Germany a clean bill of health, because anti-Semitism has all but disappeared. Can he be so blind to the fact that there is more to the Holocaust?

The structural-functionalist agenda thus demands a detached, sober style. Focusing on the brutality and other pogrom-like features of the Hitler regime will not illuminate those mechanisms that made it work and implicated so many Germans.<sup>54</sup> In any case, the behavior of Germans was by no means unique, as the numerous genocides and ethnic cleansings since 1945 depressingly demonstrate. Structural-functionalists therefore forsake the victim’s perspective for that of the perpetrators, and so eschew the fourth aspect of the ideological-intentionalist position: their explicit moral language.<sup>55</sup>

50. Mommsen, podium discussion, *Die Deutschen—Ein Volk von Tätern?*, 66.

51. Hans Mommsen, “The Reaction of the German Population to the Anti-Jewish Persecution and the Holocaust,” in *The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World*, ed. Peter Hayes (Evanston, Ill, 1991), 141-151. This is why Mommsen titles his response to Goldhagen “Schuld der Gleichgültigen” (“the Guilt of the Indifferent”).

52. Götz Aly, review of *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, *Mittelweg* 36 5 (December 1996–January 1997), 49.

53. Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, transl. Richard Deveson (New Haven, Conn., 1987), 17.

54. Hence the title of the essay collection in memory of Martin Broszat: *Mit dem Pathos der Nüchternheit: Das Institut für Zeitgeschichte und die Erforschung des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Klaus-Dietmar Henke and Claudio Natoli (Frankfurt am Main, 1991).

55. These issues came to a head nearly fifteen years ago in Saul Friedländer’s well-known exchange with Martin Broszat over the “historicization of National Socialism.” In line with the universalism narrative, the functionalist Broszat recommended “de-demonizing” the scholarly study of the Nazi regime by approaching it like any other historical phenomenon, and especially under the

Fifth, in the structural-functionalist approach, Jews no longer figure as the primary victims of Nazi racial policy. As an impressive body of recent research testifies, the Nazis' biological utopia demanded the elimination of many other "non-Aryan" groups and a thorough "eugenic cleansing" of the German population itself.<sup>56</sup> The ideological-intentionalist preoccupation with the anti-Semitic dimension of the Holocaust thus obscures the radically comprehensive ambitions of the Nazis. In these circumstances, Detlev Peukert considered a hierarchy of victims to be inappropriate.

The thesis of "uniqueness" of the "Holocaust" is . . . to be rejected, because it intentionally or unintentionally places the victims of the National Socialist extermination machine in a hierarchy. Measures of extermination, like the exterminatory goals of the National Socialists, were many-sided and were never limited to the eradication of the Jewish people. With regard to the number of victims, the consequences of their persecution, and the mercilessness of their stigmatization, the suffering of the Jewish people is especially striking. But the gypsies were just as relentlessly persecuted. And the limitless serial killing began with the mentally and physically disabled, the so-called "life unworthy of life."<sup>57</sup>

The decentering of Jewish victimhood was also a feature of a controversial book by Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung*.<sup>58</sup> Drawing on newly-discovered documents of middle-ranking Nazi bureaucrats in Poland, they argued that the broader object of German policy during the war was not an ideologically-motivated genocide of Jews, but an economically-driven plan of mass population resettlement and extermination to benefit ethnic Germans, which included the state-sponsored starvation of tens of millions of Slavs. Racial ideol-

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aspect of modernization theory. By contrast, the intentionalist Friedländer articulated the particularism narrative by claiming that morality, not "historical understanding," must determine the historian's questions, and that in this case, the moral point of view was indented to the victim's perspective. Their letters are collected, in translation, in *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate*, ed. Peter Baldwin (Boston, 1990). For a recent commentary, see Jörn Rüsen, "The Logic of Historicization," *History and Memory* 9 (Fall 1997), 113-146.

56. Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wipperman, *The Racial State: Germany, 1933-1945* (Cambridge, Eng., 1991); Benno Müller-Hill, *Murderous Science: Elimination by Scientific Selection of Jews, Gypsies, and Others, Germany, 1933-1945* (New York, 1988); Ernst Klee, 'Euthanasie' im NS Staat. *Die Vernichtung 'lebensunwerten Lebens'* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983); Michael Kater, *Doctors under Hitler: The German Medical Profession in Crisis during the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1988); Paul Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, Eng., and New York, 1989); Sybil Milton, "The Context of the Holocaust," *German Studies Review* 13 (1990), 269-283; Mario Biagioli, "Science, Modernity and the 'Final Solution,'" in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed. Saul Friedländer (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: 'Euthanasia' in Germany, 1900-1945* (Cambridge, Eng., 1994); Henry Friedländer, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill and London, 1995); Michael Zimmerman, *Rassenutopie und Genozid: Die Nationalsozialistische 'Lösung der Zigeunerfrage'* (Hamburg, 1996).

57. Detlev Peukert, "Alltag und Barbarei: Zur Normalität des Dritten Reiches," in *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte?*, ed. Dan Diner (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), 54; Peukert, "The Genesis of the 'Final Solution' from the Spirit of Science," in *Re-evaluating the Third Reich*, ed. Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (New York, 1993), 234-252.

58. *Vordenker der Vernichtung: Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine europäische Ordnung* (Hamburg, 1991).

ogy dovetailed neatly with economic imperative, to be sure, but the “instrumental reason” of rational economic calculation, rather than a specifically German ethnic hatred, was the decisive factor in unleashing the Holocaust.<sup>59</sup> In a later book, *Endlösung*, Aly dropped the emphasis on economic rationality for a greater focus on the demographic plans of the Nazis, for whom Jews were only “the tip of the iceberg.”<sup>60</sup>

Sixth, structural-functionalists define the uniqueness of the Holocaust in non-ideological terms. Unprecedented was the mobilization of state resources in a systematic manner to exterminate certain groups. The form rather than the content is its most striking aspect.

What are the metahistorical implications of the structural-functionalist approach? If abstract and impersonal structures are to blame for the Holocaust, if it was unplanned or even an “accident,” and if Jews did not stand in the center of Nazi plans, then it is difficult to plausibly situate the Holocaust in the particularism narrative. As Lang avers,

To insist on the demands cited by the Functionalists as determinants of intentions would in fact insure that not only was the Final Solution not “intentional”—but virtually no collection of corporate actions, in settings as complex as those defined by relations among modern states in a technological age, could be judged to have been intentional; the very concept of intention would be challenged. The latter implication indeed seems a constant presence in the formulation of the Intentionalist position.<sup>61</sup>

Even so, the overwhelming evidence that this research program has been able to assemble for its theses has convinced many. Saul Friedländer, for example, has modified his view about the timing of the fateful decision and has taken on significant elements of what might be called the “minimalist” functionalist findings, including Mommsen’s point about the indifference of the German population to the fate of Jews, even if reservations remain about the implications of effacing individual and collective agency in the perpetration of the Holocaust.<sup>62</sup>

Such reservations have to do with a less compelling “maximalist” functionalism. Because of their culture-critical intentions, structural-functionalists tend to essentialize the modern, bureaucratic, and scientific dimensions of the Holocaust, and therefore its form at the expense of its content. They *have* to insist on the indifference of the German population to the Holocaust and the ideological neutrality of the desk-perpetrators if they are to make the metahistorical point about the “banality of evil.” The same goes for the bureaucratic dimension of the Holocaust. “The great achievement of Raul Hilberg,” writes Christopher Browning, “was to show that the Holocaust was *at its core* a bureaucratic and

59. Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, “Sozialplanung und Völkermord” and “Wider die Unterschätzung der nationalsozialistischen Politik,” *Vernichtungspolitik*, ed. Wolfgang Schneider (Hamburg, 1991).

60. Aly, “*Endlösung*.”

61. Lang, “The Concept of Intention and the Final Solution,” 2562.

62. Saul Friedländer, “Introduction to the English Edition,” Philippe Burrin, *Hitler and the Jews: The Genesis of the Holocaust*, transl. Peter Southgate (London, 1994); Friedländer, “Hass war die treibende Kraft,” *Der Spiegel* [special edition] (1992), 38ff.

administrative process that encompassed every aspect of public life in Germany.”<sup>63</sup>

This maximalism is difficult to justify. If, as Browning and Mommsen readily concede, the German middle class was indentured to conventional anti-Jewish stereotypes that rendered it vulnerable to Nazi overtures, why insist that the modern, bureaucratic, or scientific aspects of the Holocaust are somehow its essence? Moreover, while the Holocaust may have been organized by sober civil servants (Mommsen’s “Eichmen”), who did not intend the Holocaust in the external sense, can it be said to have been an unintended policy? Structural-functionalists have yet to provide a compelling account of intentionality in the Holocaust. These remain the open questions in their research program.<sup>64</sup> Let us see how Goldhagen attempts to answer them.

### III. GOLDHAGEN’S PROBLEMATIC

First it must be noted that Goldhagen does not deny the legitimacy of researching the political circumstances that occasioned the rise of National Socialism. The Holocaust, he acknowledges, would not have happened without the Nazis. But neither would it have happened without at least the toleration of their anti-Semitic program by the majority of Germans and without the active participation of many more. It is all very well to point to the “twisted path to Auschwitz,” but why was there a potential for such an anti-Semitic escalation in German society to begin with (479)? Goldhagen is also interested in the readiness of “ordinary Germans” to kill Jews anywhere in Europe, and especially in the cruelty with which they did so. Their motivation, he claims, has not been adequately treated in the scholarly literature, and virtually all of his reviewers have agreed with him. So far, so good.

But is it the purpose of his efforts to add a pebble to the pile of stones? Does Goldhagen seek only to answer open questions? When he writes that the problem with the deprioritization of anti-Semitism is that its effect is “to dedemonize Nazism, to transform the Nazis into just another brutal regime: different in degree but not in kind” and that the literature requires a “radical revision,” one gets the impression that his objections are more than academic (9).<sup>65</sup> He has, in fact, a metaphysical problem with structural-functionalism, because it makes difficult the particularist rendering of the Holocaust to which he is committed. This posture leads him to construct his project in certain terms. Explicitly *not* a histo-

63. Browning, “Böse Menschen, Böse Taten.” Emphasis added.

64. Similar criticisms have been made by Ulrich Herbert, “Labour and Extermination: Economic Interest and the Primacy of Weltanschauung in National Socialism,” *Past and Present* 138 (1993), 144-195; Jan-Philipp Reemtsma, “Nationalsozialismus und Moderne,” in *Vertuschte Vergangenheit: Der Fall Schwerte und die NS-Vergangenheit der deutschen Hochschulen*, ed. Helmut König, Wolfgang Kuhlmann, and Klaus Schwabe (Munich, 1997), 162-181; Hermann Lübke, “Rationalität und Irrationalität des Völkermords,” in *Holocaust: Die Grenzen des Verstehens*, ed. Hanno Loewy (Hamburg, 1992), 71-82.

65. Daniel J. Goldhagen, “False Witness,” *New Republic* (April 17, 1989), 44.

ry of the Holocaust, let alone an archivally-based account of the police battalions or other “front-line” perpetrators, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* resists rather than engages the structural-functionalist problematization of agency, ideology, intentionality, and responsibility in the Holocaust. Instead of reconceptualizing these themes for complicated, bureaucratic processes like the Holocaust, Goldhagen presents us with a theory-driven recasting of the conventional, external model of intention.

How does he do this? First, he attempts to demonstrate the existence of an agent that can be said to be the author of the Final Solution. As the structural-functionalists have rendered implausible an emphatic sense of authorship among governmental elites, he finds it in “the Germans,” an anthropological-cultural construction that he invokes throughout his book. This agent is incarnated in individual Germans, whose agency he also needs to stress. “I recognize that the perpetrators were not automatons or puppets but individuals who had beliefs and values about the wisdom of the regime’s policies which informed the choices that those individuals, alone and together, made.”<sup>66</sup> Second, he argues that the intention to kill Jews existed chronologically prior to the act in the nineteenth-century appearance of “eliminationist anti-Semitism” as a central component of German culture (German culture as “pregnant with murder”[75]).

#### IV. GOLDHAGEN’S ARGUMENT

Goldhagen, the political scientist, relies on a particular methodological apparatus. He has consistently complained that historians have failed to understand his intentions here. It is all the more curious, therefore, that his most important methodological assumptions are not highlighted and explicitly justified. Judging by the jargon he employs, Goldhagen relies on a blend of three sources: rational choice theory, behavioralism, and cultural anthropology.<sup>67</sup> Rational choice theory thematizes the preferences of subjects, the choices they make in satisfying these preferences, and the constraints placed upon those choices. *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* is suffused with the language of preferences, choices, and constraints. Rational choice reinvests the individual with the agency and autonomy that the concern with bureaucratic structures and social psychology plays down. With behavioralism and cultural anthropology, by contrast, he is able to link the individual to the collective by grounding individual preferences in the national culture that conditions the individual: not “structures,” but “cognition and values” move people to commit mass murder, he writes (21). Because “cognition and values” are historically specific, it is possible to infer the relevant content of

66. Goldhagen, “A Reply to my Critics,” 38. “My book,” he announces, “goes against the grain of many . . . of the critics’ outlooks and of the existing literature on the Holocaust. It shifts the focus of the investigation away from impersonal institutions and abstract structures (which is where it has overwhelmingly been located) directly onto the actors.”

67. Goldhagen does, to be sure, acknowledge his reliance on Clifford Geertz’s method of “thick description,” and it is discussed in Volker Pesch, “Die Künstlichen Wilden: Zu Daniel Goldhagens Methode und theoretischem Rahmen,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 23 (1997), 152-162.

German culture by working backwards from the behavior of Germans, which, according to the inductive approach of behavioralism, reflects the choices they made, which in turn are expressions of preferences. Behavior is explained preferentially, and preferences are explained culturally. By limiting his analysis to national terms of reference, he situates the Holocaust back in the particularism narrative, and he is able to conjure the first limb of the external model of intention: the collective consciousness able to possess an intention and bear guilt, namely, “the Germans.”<sup>68</sup>

The point of this social-scientific method is to generate operationalizable hypotheses about particular behavior that can be tested “empirically.” Such a hypothesis is the causally active “independent variable” that explains the established empirical facts (that is, the anti-Semitic behavior of Germans), which are called “dependent variables” (18). These are Goldhagen’s basic methodological assumptions, explicable to political scientists, but largely unfamiliar to historians.<sup>69</sup>

Having raised the question of the perpetrators’ choice, Goldhagen must convince the reader that they were not “just following orders,” that is, that these actors possessed agency. They were not forced to kill, he stresses, and the nature of the killing meant that theirs were particularly stark choices (18). To highlight this dimension, he eschews the detached language of functionalist analysis for graphic descriptions of the butchery. This aspect of the argument, which he calls the “phenomenology of killing,” affords the reader a good opportunity to experience Goldhagen’s characteristically harrowing and morally indignant style.

[C]onsider how intense the psychological pressure not to slaughter such people would have been had these men been opposed to the slaughter, had they indeed not seen the Jews deserving of the fate. They had just heard from their commander that he was willing to excuse those who wanted to demur. Instead of accepting his offer, they chose to walk into a hospital, a house of healing, and to shoot the sick, who must have been cowering, begging and screaming for mercy. They killed babies . . . . None of the Germans has seen fit to recount details of such killings [during their postwar trials]. In all probability, a killer either shot a baby in its mother’s arms, and perhaps the mother for good measure, or, as was sometimes the habit during these years, held it at arm’s length by the leg, shooting it with a pistol. Perhaps the mother looked on in horror. The tiny corpse was then dropped like so much trash and left to rot. A life extinguished. (215f; cf. 15, 21f)<sup>70</sup>

68. Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, 479: “An explanation of the Holocaust must . . . ground the Holocaust as a development of German history.”

69. For behavioralism, see Albert Somit and Joseph Tanenhaus, *The Development of American Political Science: From Burgess to Behavioralism* (Boston, 1967); for rational choice theory, see John C. Harsanyi, “Rational-Choice Models of Political Behavior vs. Functionalist and Conformist Theories,” *World Politics* 21 (1969), 513-538; *Rational Choice Theory: Advocacy and Critique*, ed. James S. Coleman and T. J. Fararo (London, 1992); M. Hechter, “The Role of Values in Rational Choice Theory,” *Rationality and Society* 6 (1994), 318-333.

70. However plausible this kind of prose may be in the context of Goldhagen’s theoretical apparatus, the following statement from *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* is surely less defensible against accusations that he shamelessly appeals to the emotions of readers: “The Germans made love in barracks [in the camps] next to enormous privation and incessant cruelty. What did they talk about when their heads rested quietly on their pillows, when they were smoking their cigarettes in those relaxing

In assessing this behavior, Goldhagen entreats his readers not to regard these Germans as members of the same civilization “as ours,” but as members of a foreign culture. An “anthropological” distance is required to appreciate the causal role of culture. Once again, the Holocaust is detached from the universalism narrative (for which the point is that “they are like us”) and situated back into the particularism one. He concludes that the readiness to kill in the face of such human and moral proximity cannot be adequately explained by social-psychological theories like “peer pressure” or “intoxication.” On the contrary, he insists, it exhibits a willingness or preference to kill Jews whenever the occasion permitted it. There is little chance in such circumstances that the killing could be halfhearted. If you killed in this manner, it meant that you agreed Jews had to die; if you did not, you could take up other duties. Only a minority of men took the latter course of action. The question of what motivated the police auxiliaries is therefore not difficult to answer. A “monocausal” explanation suffices, and it is anti-Semitism (416). This conclusion, once again, is the fruit of the inductive approach of behavioralism (279).

It remains to ascertain whence this preference came. As we know, the behavioralist and anthropological approach on which Goldhagen relies allows him to trace the action of perpetrators to the German culture in which they were socialized. What is it about this culture that disposed so many Germans to support the Nazi anti-Semitic program and behave so sadistically? It is the fact that German culture was characterized by a particular brand of anti-Semitism, which he calls “eliminationist.” This anti-Semitism, which marked national life at least from the middle of the nineteenth century, was a “cognitive model” that held Jewish and German cultures to be incompatible and that required the former to be “eliminated” if the latter was to flourish. By Goldhagen’s extraordinarily broad definition, eliminationist anti-Semites included not only the direct forerunners of Nazis, but also enlightenment liberals (“anti-Semites in sheep’s clothing” [58]), who advocated the emancipation (legal equality) of German Jews. Such progressive thinkers were eliminationist, too, because they maintained that the acceptance of Jews in German society depended on the forsaking of their cultural particularity and becoming emphatically German (76).<sup>71</sup>

Goldhagen’s point is that virtually all sections of German culture shared a “collective unconscious” about “the Jewish Problem,” whose only solution was the “elimination” of Jews, whether by assimilation, deportation, or physical extermination. These solutions, according to Goldhagen, were “rough functional equivalents.” But eliminationist anti-Semitism was no static syndrome. The example of some German liberals who became openly anti-Semitic after German unification shows that “*the eliminationist mind-set tended towards an extermina-*

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moments after their physical needs had been met? Did one relate to another accounts of a particularly amusing beating that she or he had administered or observed, of the rush of power that engulfed her when the righteous adrenalin of Jew-beating caused her body to pulsate with energy?” (339).

71. For a nuanced account of the emancipation process, see Reinhard Rürup, *Emancipation und Antisemitismus: Studien zur ‘Judenfrage’ der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987).

tionist one” (70f, original emphasis, 89). In other words, the anti-Semitism of Nazis and ordinary Germans were *qualitatively similar*, deriving as they did from the same understanding of “the problem.”<sup>72</sup> The Nazi “solution” was just more extreme (127).

The genocidal potential of eliminationist anti-Semitism was thus in place well before the Nazis came to power, and, according to Goldhagen, it is the “independent variable” that explains the “readiness of Germans to support and take part in the eliminationist measures of the 1930s and 1940s,” as well as their manifest cruelty to Jews.<sup>73</sup> Eliminationist anti-Semitism is the source of the perpetrator’s will and decision to kill. This is his operationalizable hypothesis, and by licensing claims that German culture was “pregnant with murder,” it fulfills the second requirement of a common-sense intention by tracing its articulation by a consciousness, subject, or agent *before* its realization (75).

This type of anti-Semitism is also the basis for Goldhagen’s definition of the Holocaust’s uniqueness. It lies in the largely successful attempt to eradicate an innocent people based *purely* on ideology. In all other genocides, by contrast, the victims were involved in a class or ethnic struggle (412ff). Not just the kind of racism that appears regularly in ethnic conflicts, as with the former Yugoslavia, but the singularly “demonic, hallucinatory and metaphysical” anti-Semitism, which meant Jews everywhere had to die for the good of the world, is the hallmark of the Holocaust. Not the method of killing, but the will to kill, is the key issue.<sup>74</sup>

In keeping with the social-scientific method he employs, Goldhagen must test this hypothesis against the evidence (376). To that end, he chooses three cases of “artisanal killing” to demonstrate the independent influence of eliminationist anti-Semitism: the police battalions, the labor camps, and the death marches. It is not difficult for Goldhagen to show that the perpetrators were anti-Semitic in the genocidal manner of the Nazis. Jews were singled out by the police battalions from other victims for particularly brutal treatment; they were worked to death in labor camps when they could have been usefully exploited for the war effort; and their guards sadistically continued the death marches in the last days of the war despite orders to the contrary.<sup>75</sup> The reader comes away with the impression that, whatever other cluster of factors might have motivated the perpetrators, anti-Semitism was certainly the foremost. It is difficult to maintain that they did not intend their behavior towards their Jewish victims.

72. Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, 74: “It is incontestable,” he writes, “that the fundamentals of Nazi antisemitism . . . had deep roots in Germany, was part of the cultural cognitive model of German society, and was integral to German political culture.”

73. Goldhagen, “A Reply to My Critics,” 41.

74. *Ibid.*

75. It should be noted, however, that Ruth Bettina Birn has disputed the plausibility of Goldhagen’s interpretation of the evidence he adduces to substantiate his claim in these three case studies. See her “Revising the Holocaust.”

## V. GOLDHAGEN'S CLAIMS

Although he does not distinguish clearly between them, Goldhagen makes two separate claims based on this putative substantiation of his hypothesis of eliminationist anti-Semitism. At the moderate end, he successfully explains the suggestability of the German population to Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda and its readiness to support, or at least tolerate, the regime's "eliminationist program" of de-emancipation in the 1930s (7, 127). This is an important point to make: widespread anti-Semitism was indeed an enabling condition of the Holocaust: such an ambition would surely have been unrealizable in a country without this pernicious syndrome. And it accounts, at least in part, for the readiness of the perpetrators to kill Jews when they were ordered to do so (480). Would an Australian policeman, for example, have done so, without an anti-Semitic socialization? This is the reasonable "minimalist" thesis in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, which structural-functionalists have left as an open question, but with which many would agree. Here we see the advantage of Goldhagen's focus on the agency of the perpetrators. Tracing the history of conventional anti-Semitism, in addition to the more rabid varieties, is quite legitimate in this context. Had Goldhagen stopped there, his would have been a significant, if relatively unsensational, addition to the literature.

But this claim is insufficient to restore the common-sense, external notion of intention, because it cannot identify a collective subject or single consciousness that intended the act, nor can it trace its articulation beforehand. So Goldhagen makes a second, "maximalist" claim, which goes much further and is the real source of the controversy. It is that "the Germans" actually supported the Nazis' "exterminationist" program and condoned the perpetrators' behavior "as contented members of an assenting genocidal community, in which the killing of Jews was normative and often celebrated" (406, 448); that eliminating Jews was Germany's "national project" and that its historical culture was, from the middle of the nineteenth century, "pregnant with murder"; and that "the Germans"—and only "the Germans"—were a people of murderers, or, at least, of potential murderers.

By what reasoning does he support these extraordinary claims? He deduces that, because many perpetrators were "ordinary Germans" and not an SS elite, their actions show how most Germans would behave if given the chance (208). In the language of the rational choice theory he uses, once the *constraints* of bourgeois society had been lifted in the "contact" situations, the *preferences* of Germans could be pursued without inhibition. And the preference of Germans was to kill Jews. Goldhagen, to be sure, concedes that without the Nazis, Germans would never have dreamed of systematically exterminating Jews. But the ease with which they became Hitler's willing executioners attests to the *qualitative similarity* of their anti-Semitic preference structure with that of National

Socialism.<sup>76</sup> “The conclusion of this book,” he writes, “is that antisemitism moved many thousands of ordinary Germans—and would have moved millions more, had they been appropriately positioned—to slaughter Jews” (9). With his particular methodological apparatus, he suggests that the immediate context of the killing was only the occasion for the expression of the pre-existing, deeply held, and historically rooted preference to torture and kill Jews. *Pace* Browning, these circumstances did *not* play a role in changing the perpetrators’ preference structure. *All* the Nazis did, writes Goldhagen, was to “overcome [the] ethical inhibitions” of the population, by “lifting . . . the [ethical] code’s constraints” (70, 128, 397). The Germans’ “underlying,” “dormant,” “pent-up,” “pre-existing” anti-Semitism was “mobilized,” “unshackled,” and “activated” by the Nazis (418f, 443, 446, 479).

#### VI. DOES HIS ARGUMENT WORK?

How would one “test” his maximalist claims? The knock-down rebuttal has been provided by Peter Pulzer in his review of Goldhagen: had the members of the conservative resistance to the Nazis succeeded in their July 1944 attempted coup, they would have certainly stopped the Holocaust, despite their own well-known anti-Semitism.<sup>77</sup> It is one thing to be a Christian anti-Semite or disillusioned liberal, who may have tolerated or even welcomed the dissimilationist measures of the Nuremberg laws, and quite another to be a genocidal killer and supporter of the physical extermination of every last Jew in Europe. Goldhagen’s model of eliminationist anti-Semitism elides this crucial difference. This is the problem with calling the different “solutions” to the “Jewish Problem” “rough, functional equivalents.” It is impossible for Goldhagen to base his wilder statements on conceptual grounds alone. He needs to gather concrete evidence, as a historian would, that ordinary Germans on the home front actually supported mass shootings and gas chambers, and that is something a theoretical model cannot do. The maximalist claims do not hold, and I know of no scholar who has accepted them.<sup>78</sup> A model is not a smoking gun.

76. Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, 87: “Whatever else Germans thought about Hitler and the Nazi movement, however much they might have detested aspects of Nazis, the vast majority of them subscribed to the underlying Nazi model of Jews and in this sense (as the Nazis themselves understood) were ‘Nazified’ in their view of Jews.”

77. Pulzer, “Psychopaths and Conformists,” 20f. For a recent treatment of the Jewish experience in Germany before and after emancipation, see Pulzer’s major work, *Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1848-1933* (Oxford, 1992). In relation to the conservative resistance, see Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, *‘Um der Ehre willen’: Erinnerungen an die Freunde vom 20. Juli* (Berlin, 1994), in which she relates that some of the plotters decided to kill Hitler after witnessing mass shootings of Jews on the eastern front.

78. This is also the position of Jan Philipp Reemtsma, who otherwise praises Goldhagen’s book as a “necessary provocation.” See his “Die Mörder waren unter uns,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (August 24/25, 1996): feuilleton supplement, 1. Habermas, too, in a laudatory address about Goldhagen nevertheless rejected his inference that the Germans were a “people of murderers”; Habermas, “Über den öffentlichen Gebrauch der Historie,” 14. Hannes Heer, who supports the general thrust of Goldhagen’s critique of the historical profession and postwar German “myths,” thinks his argument is tautologous: “Die große Tautologie,” *Die Tageszeitung* (September 4, 1996), 15.

Goldhagen might reply that one could have put almost any German at the time in the shoes of perpetrators and he or she would have behaved in the same way. This is the behaviorist answer, and it is not without plausibility, as the evidence he adduces suggests. But it is equally true for a number of other European populations at the time. Pulzer's example of the conservative resistance indicates that the "independent variable" is not anti-Semitism, but the immediate circumstances of the killing, as the structural-functionalists have always pointed out. These are the circumstances that explain how the Luxembourgers, whom Christopher Browning found in Reserve Police Battalion 101, were just as willing executioners as their German comrades. They operated in extreme conditions, and they had their heads stuffed with of all sorts of racist nonsense. True, a pre-existing conventional anti-Semitism was no doubt a factor in their suggestibility. But this does not prove the *qualitative similarity* of Nazi and conventional anti-Semitism, as Goldhagen would have us believe. These extreme circumstances are not the occasion for the release of pre-existing preferences, but the occasion for the development of new ones. Christian-bourgeois norms were not just moral inhibitions preventing the expression of a latent, genocidal anti-Semitism: they were a *qualitatively different* preference structure altogether.<sup>79</sup> The Nazis knew that their anti-Semitism was not the source of their popularity, and it worried them. It is no surprise that they endeavored to keep secret the details of the "Final Solution."

If all this is true, then the singularity of the German case, which it is Goldhagen's purpose to establish, is open to question. For if it was equally possible to enlist other Europeans as willing executioners, then something other than a specifically German form of anti-Semitism must be at work. What Goldhagen writes about ordinary Germans could be written about many ordinary Europeans of the time. There is no German *Sonderweg* on these terms. He admits, to be sure, that many non-Germans participated in the Holocaust and explains away his cursory treatment of them by pointing out that only Germany made it government policy and imposed it on Europe. Quite so. Nobody maintains that any other country could have perpetrated such an enormity. But this reasoning hardly engages the salient issues. For it raises the tricky question of how and why the Nazis came to power, which is explicitly and emphatically *not* the subject of his book. Such a research program is, of course, that of the structural-functionalists.

In worrying away like a terrier at a bone on the particularism narrative, Goldhagen presents an account of the Holocaust with the sound of only one hand clapping. Why the Germans did it is answered by the question-begging, tautologous assertion that the Germans intended it. The questions that logically follow remain systematically unanswered: why was anti-Semitism such a strong cultural ideology in Germany? Given the complicity of other European countries in delivering up their Jews to Eichmann and given the large number of non-German willing executioners, what was so special about Germany? What is the connec-

79. See Lübke, "Rationalität und Irrationalität des Völkermords," 87.

tion between anti-Semitism and the modernization process?<sup>80</sup> What is the relationship between anti-Semitism and the other victims of Nazism, who were also murdered on purely ideological grounds? Was there an “eliminationist anti-homosexuality”? How far back could one trace it in German culture? Anti-homosexuality from Luther to Hitler?<sup>81</sup>

Goldhagen’s methodological underpinnings are also unsuccessful. He needs rational choice models to stress that individual Germans made conscious choices and that they were not determined by abstract structures. He also needs behavioralism and cultural anthropology for his collective agent. But they are incommensurable. For behavioralism and cultural anthropology insist that the preference of Germans can be accounted for by their *unconscious* formation in German culture, which undermines individual agency: their choices cannot have been of the calculating sort required for strong individual agency. And the rational choice emphasis on the latter implies the possibility of *conscious* choice, which detracts from the emphasis on the determining formation of preferences by the national culture. By investing anti-Semitism with ontological status—eliminationist anti-Semitism as prime mover—Goldhagen undermines the agency and responsibility of his individual agent, which he elsewhere takes pains to establish.<sup>82</sup> This incongruous methodological brew results in nonsensical sentences like the following:

The autonomous power of eliminationist antisemitism, once given free rein, to shape the Germans’ action, to induce Germans voluntarily on their own initiative to act barbarously towards Jews, was such that Germans who were not even formally engaged in the persecution and extermination of Jews routinely assaulted Jews physically, not to mention verbally. (449)

## VII. CONCLUSION

Goldhagen’s attempt to restrict the Holocaust to the particularism narrative by recasting the external model of intention is unsuccessful. But need matters be left at a polarized stand-off?

His supporters in the public sphere are obviously dissatisfied with a scholarly consensus that makes it very difficult to talk of intention, agency, and responsibility in relation to the Holocaust. Yet these are among the most burning issues that this historical experience raises. Goldhagen’s failure to rethink the problem

80. William W. Hagen, “Before the ‘Final Solution’: Toward a Comparative Analysis of Political Anti-Semitism in Interwar Germany and Poland,” *Journal of Modern History* 68 (June 1996), 351-381. See also Jörn Rüsen, “Den Holocaust erklären—aber wie?,” *Frankfurter Rundschau* (June 25, 1996), 11, who objects that Goldhagen’s argument makes “impossible” any connection between the Holocaust and modernity.

81. For compelling arguments in this vein, see George M. Kren, review of *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, *American Historical Review* 102 (April 1997), 473; for non-Jewish victims of Nazism, see *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*, ed. Michael Berenbaum (London, 1990).

82. I owe this insight to Majid Sattar.

of a Holocaust that was neither intended, in the external sense, nor an accident, means that we need to rethink the concept of intention. Berel Lang has suggested an answer by conceiving of intention “internally.” Intentions, he observes, possess no ontological status prior to their realization, because any test of whether an intention has been realized falls victim to an infinite regress. Intentions, in fact, are discernible only in the unfolding of acts themselves. Complex organizations, but also individuals, “discover” their intentions in the process of acting in certain contexts: “intentions often . . . evolve as functions of action—as the actions themselves evoke a consciousness of ends (or intentions) not previously envisioned.” On this view, one can grant the structural-functionalists that no prior intention existed among the Nazis to annihilate European Jewry before 1941. But after the invasion of the Soviet Union, the establishment of the death camps, the systematic transportation of innocent people to them from all over Europe, and their subsequent murder, how could one claim that there was no intention to murder Jews and the other targets of National Socialism? As Lang puts it, “the intention is *there*, in the ‘facts’ themselves, agreed on by Functionalists now as well as by Intentionalists.”<sup>83</sup>

This definition of intention requires the balanced consideration of the agency (ideology) of the perpetrators and the structures (circumstances) in which they operated. A danger in the current debate is that the polarizing effect of Goldhagen’s exaggerated emphasis on the power of anti-Semitism might make ideologically centered arguments implausible. We can therefore welcome two recent contributions on the subject that present sober and differentiated analyses, approximating to an “internal” conception of intention: Ulrich Herbert’s long-awaited biography of the Nazi ideologue and functionary Werner Best,<sup>84</sup> and the first volume of Saul Friedländer’s survey of Germans and Jews under Nazism.<sup>85</sup>

Already hailed as “a landmark in the historiography of National Socialism,”<sup>86</sup> Herbert’s work shows that Best’s ideological make-up—a combination of *völkisch* nationalism and “heroic realism,” a cool and objective (*sachlich*) anti-Semitism without personal hate, which differed considerably from the mob variety of Streicher and the SA—contained its own built-in dynamic for radicalization. Before he became a Nazi in 1930, Best often wrote of “annihilating” (*vernichten*) Germany’s inner and outer enemies, but he never conceived of a systematically murderous solution until circumstances led to that conclusion. That such a “solution” was conceivable at all, however, cannot just be attributed to the failure of *Generalplan Ost*: it was a potential rooted in the structure of his thought. Goldhagen is trying to make a similar point about ideology in his construction of eliminationist anti-Semitism. But in the intemperateness of his zeal,

83. Lang, “The Concept of Intention and the Final Solution,” 2561.

84. Ulrich Herbert, *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft, 1903-1989* (Bonn, 1996).

85. Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-39* (London, 1997), 3-6.

86. Peter Longerich, “Das Portrait einer Generation?,” *Neue Politische Literatur* 42 (1997), 11.

he casts his net too wide, assimilating liberal anti-clericalism, Christian anti-Semitism, and the genocidal variety of National Socialism.

Friedländer, by contrast, distinguishes carefully among “ordinary Germans,” traditional elites, and the Nazis themselves. Endeavoring to separate the generally European from the typically German, he concludes that distinctive was not the continuity of conventional anti-Semitism in the broader German population—most of Europe was infected by this legacy of Christianity—but the apocalyptic or redemptive version of the Nazis. So was the readiness of elites to cooperate with their early discriminatory legislation in the 1930s, resentful as they were of Jewish professional success. But the very fact of this assimilationist success suggests that there were more complex processes going on in Germany than we learn from the pages of *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*.

The paradoxes and processes at work in the Holocaust cannot be captured by a onesided reliance on structure or agency, circumstances or ideology. Such are its enormity and multidimensionality that no aspect of it can be singled out at the expense of others. If it is not a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma, then neither is its “true” meaning or lesson readily apparent. And yet, precisely because the Holocaust symbolizes the ultimate act of transgression and is narratively polyvalent, the temptation is often too great to resist capturing it in the straitjacket of interpretation. When that happens, academic debate becomes the assertion of metahistorical commitments with insufficient reference to the historical specificity of the events themselves.<sup>87</sup> The so-called “Goldhagen debate” will move beyond its current stalemate when some of its participants jettison their residual essentialism.

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87. Gunnar Heinsohn, “Auschwitz ohne Hitler?,” *Lettre International* (Summer 1996), 21-27.