

UNANSWERED

Nazi Germany and

QUESTIONS

the Genocide of the Jews

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From Anti-Semitism to Extermination

*A Historiographical Study of Nazi Policies
Toward the Jews and an Essay in Interpretation**

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Over the past decades, the volume of recorded history dealing with the extermination of the Jews of Europe has reached considerable proportions. This applies equally to the history of the roots of Nazi anti-Semitism and its development, of Nazi policies toward the Jews, of the "Final Solution" as such, or the attitudes and reactions of German society, the neutrals, or the Allies during the war, of the Church, of Western society in general, and also of the victims, the Jews, as they faced the growing peril and the ultimate catastrophe. Studies and publications have multiplied, historical approaches have evolved and changed with time.¹ Today, in fact, one can perceive clearly distinct ways of considering these issues—one could almost speak of different schools of thought.

As far as Nazi anti-Semitism and the policies of the Third Reich toward the Jews are concerned—the only aspect of the problem which will be considered here—any global evaluation of the historical studies published since the end of the war cannot but aim at answering one

* I wish to thank my friends and colleagues Yehuda Bauer, Dov Kulka, Hans Mommsen, Dina Porath, and Aharon Weiss for their help at various stages of the preparation of this paper. For earlier presentations of some of the issues dealt with in this paper, see Saul Friedländer, "Some Aspects of the Historical Significance of the Holocaust," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 1, Fall 1976; "De l'Antisémitisme à l'Extermination: Esquisse Historiographique," *Le débat*, no. 21, September 1982; for the final section, under the heading "Some Comments," see also my Introduction to Gerald L. Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley, 1984).

central question. Do these studies make it possible to insert the events under consideration into the framework of a global and coherent historical explanation, or do they provide only very fragmentary insights, which do not lend themselves to a significant synthesis and, ultimately, to an overall understanding? In other words, does what Isaac Deutscher wrote some fifteen years ago still apply today?

For the historian who attempts to understand the holocaust of the Jews, the most important obstacle is the absolutely unique character of this catastrophe. It is not only a matter of time and of historical perspective. I doubt that in a thousand years people will better understand Hitler, Auschwitz, Majdanek and Treblinka than we do today. Will they have a better historical perspective? It may be, on the contrary, that posterity will understand all that even less than we do.²

Or should we accept instead the interpretation given some years ago by Raymond Aron?

As for the genocide . . . I would say that its apparent irrationality results from a false perspective. Hitler had proclaimed many times, particularly on the first day of the war, that the Jews would not survive a war which they, according to him, had initiated. . . . If one is prepared to admit that the liquidation of the Jews, the Jewish poison, the corrupting blood, was Hitler's primary aim, the industrial organization of death becomes rational as a means toward this end, genocide. Instrumental rationality is amoral by its very nature, or morally neutral. Once the genocide had been established as the aim, the materials, the men, and mostly the means of transportation needed for this enterprise had to be diverted from the logistics of the armed forces.³

These two opposing positions are the implicit foundation of the historiography of our subject. But, insofar as the more specific evaluation of this historiography is concerned, one can consider it at two different levels of analysis: that of the global interpretations of nazism, and that of the more limited but no less controversial interpretation of the anti-Jewish measures taken by the Nazis, considered from the viewpoint of their concrete evolution and internal dynamics. We shall discuss the issues of the global level in brief, and approach the controversies over the origins and development of concrete policies in somewhat greater detail.

Anti-Semitism in the Global Interpretations of Nazism

At the level of global interpretations of nazism, one can distinguish between three major approaches: explanations drawn mostly from Ger-

man history; those using the concept of "fascism"; and those which consider National Socialism as a facet of "totalitarianism."⁴ Within each of these approaches we find more or less systematic attempts to integrate Nazi anti-Semitism into the general explanatory framework. We shall briefly mention some of these attempts.

The first of these approaches, that which explains nazism as being mainly the result of a specific German national evolution beginning, for most historians, in the nineteenth century, sometimes places German anti-Semitism at the very core of its interpretation (some of these interpretations, in fact, take German anti-Semitism, German racial or "völkisch" thinking, as a starting point of what is either an explicit or an implicit interpretation of the roots of National Socialism).⁵

That Nazi anti-Semitism cannot be explained without this national background goes almost without saying. However, the difficulty lies in assessing the significance of those roots, the relative importance of the völkisch ideology, and the place of anti-Semitic themes and attitudes within German society, be it during the Wilhelmine period or under the Weimar Republic. Only such an assessment, linked to the various studies of German public opinion and the Jews under the Third Reich, would allow us to understand the possible interaction between the Nazi drive against the Jews and German society. The roots of Hitler's own ideology are essential in an interpretation of Nazi policies. However, an evaluation of the explicit or implicit support given to his policies concerning the Jews, at various levels of the population, is another aspect necessary for the interpretation, one directly linked to the question of the national roots of anti-Semitism and their relative importance. The available studies on this crucial matter may lead to quite different conclusions.

First of all, in assessing the importance of German anti-Semitism at the end of the nineteenth century and up to World War I, one has to take into account recent studies on France which reveal very similar themes, attitudes, and initiatives of various anti-Jewish groups.⁶ This implies having to look for a specific German evolution during the war years and the Weimar Republic; but the precise importance of the diffusion of anti-Semitism in German society during this period remains unclear. We don't have an overall systematic study of the subject. The many studies dealing with aspects of the issue do not provide an entirely coherent picture. We know, for instance, that the German anti-Semitic parties disappeared on the eve of the war,⁷ and that anti-Semitic themes decreased at the outset of the hostilities. We are also aware of the subsequent sharp increase in anti-Jewish agitation between 1916 and 1924.⁸ The significance of anti-Semitism during the decisive period of the early

1930s is less than clear. According to William Sheridan Allen's study of the rise of nazism in a small town near Hanover, it played only a minor role,⁹ but it seems more significant in other regions.¹⁰ Regional differences appear to be an important element of the interpretation,¹¹ as we shall notice when we deal with public opinion and the Jews under the Third Reich.¹² One conclusion at least seems plausible from the information that has been gathered about German anti-Semitism prior to 1933: extreme racial anti-Semitism in its Austrian or German garb certainly fed Hitler's ideology and that of the "true believers" within the Nazi Party,¹³ but it offered latent rather than active support to the policies against the Jews, which unfolded from 1933 on, as far as its prevalence among the general population is concerned. In fact, as we shall see, for some historians there isn't even a necessary link between Hitler's ideology and the unfolding of the anti-Jewish policies of the Nazis to their ultimate end. Acceptance of this view would exclude the ideological roots of nazism as an explanation for the development of Nazi policies toward the Jews.

Some of the studies which minimize the role of the national ideological background tend to stress the importance of *traditional social structures* (the bureaucracy, the army, the judiciary) in the development of Nazi policies, but the function of the *traditional* element in the evolution of the anti-Jewish policies is not always clearly explained.¹⁴ All in all, few of the global interpretations of nazism completely dismiss the national background in dealing with the Nazis' anti-Jewish policies, but the importance of that background is often difficult to assess.

Of all the generalizing interpretations of nazism, the one which places the Hitlerian phenomenon within the wider category of "fascism" still remains the most current.¹⁵ It has a Marxist and a non-Marxist version, and in both cases Nazi anti-Semitism, because of its singularity, represents a serious obstacle to this particular type of generalization. Many theoreticians of fascism solve the problem by disregarding it completely: their theories circumvent the obstacle and more or less avoid mentioning it (except for a few words, when necessary).¹⁶ Others do recognize the difficulty, but nonetheless look for the common ground of fascism, "the fascist minimum."¹⁷ Finally, there are those who have tried to integrate Nazi anti-Semitism into the framework of their general theory.

The inclusion of Nazi anti-Semitism within the framework of a non-Marxist theory of fascism can adopt three different focal points: reducing it to a more fundamental ideological characteristic; explaining it through

the particular inner dynamics of fascist parties and regimes; and comparing it with similar attitudes toward outside groups evident in other fascist movements and regimes.

Ernst Nolte, in his monumental study *Three Faces of Fascism*, makes the most systematic attempt to reduce Hitlerian anti-Semitism to the common ideological denominator of all fascist movements: anti-Marxism. For Nolte, Nazi anti-Semitism was but the extreme form of the antibolshevism of "radical fascists":

Hitler always succumbed to an ungovernable passion on the subject of bolshevism. He regarded it as the most radical form of Jewish genocide ever known. . . . According to Eckhardt's book, Hitler had specified another bolshevism ahead of Lenin's as an origin—that of Moses!¹⁸

Nolte's quotations give the impression that Hitler's anti-Judaism determined his antibolshevism, rather than the other way around.

A recent publication of all the early texts of Hitler, up to *Mein Kampf*, allows a better evaluation of the relative importance of anti-Judaism and anti-Marxism. References to the Jews are approximately three times more numerous than those related to bolshevism, communism, or Marxism.¹⁹ This brings us back to the obvious difference between National Socialism and other types of fascism: in nazism, anti-Semitism occupies a central and particular place. And in fact the Jews, not the Marxists, were the target of both Hitler's first, and last, ideological statements. While the Soviet Union and the European Communist parties were temporary allies between 1939 and 1941, and the idea of a separate peace with Stalin was frequently discussed toward the end of the war, any "arrangement" with the Jews was absolutely unthinkable from Hitler's viewpoint. Finally, we have the most explicit statement, from Martin Bormann, on the relation between anti-Judaism and anti-Marxism:

National-Socialist doctrine is entirely anti-Jewish, which means anti-Communist and anti-Christian. Everything is linked within National Socialism and everything aims at the fight against Judaism.²⁰

Racial anti-Semitism—we reach now the second approach to an interpretation of Nazi anti-Semitism within the framework of fascism—existed in Germany since the end of the nineteenth century. Its transformation from the stage of hazy theory to that of systematic policy required structural conditions which, according to Hans Mommsen, for instance, are those of fascist regimes:

It is not enough to consider [Nazi anti-Semitism] as a more radical variety [of preexisting tendencies]. . . . One has to inquire into the structural conditions which allowed it not to remain at the level of propaganda declarations or at that of outbursts of "savage" radicalism.²¹

To explain these necessary conditions, Mommsen refers to the structure of the Nazi Party and of the Nazi system. This structure, in his opinion, is typical of fascist parties and regimes: a direct link between the various dignitaries and the supreme leader, but vaguely defined areas of authority and therefore constant rivalries and internal fights creating a process of "cumulative radicalization."²² In that sense, the fight to control "Jewish affairs" led to a growing radicalization in this field, which would explain the "Final Solution" as an ultimate outcome of the internal dynamics of a fascist regime. ²³ We will later revert to the problems posed by the "cumulative radicalization" theory. Suffice it to say here that even if we admit the existence of such a process within the Nazi regime and the explanation offered by Mommsen, we hardly notice it in the only other full-fledged fascist regime, that of Italy. As far as Italy is concerned, one could possibly speak of "cumulative radicalization" up to 1939, and of "cumulative moderation" (at least within the party) from 1939 to 1943, when Mussolini was dismissed with the help of the Fascist Grand Council (the short-lived Salò "Republic" being a direct Nazi product).

Finally, an attempt has been made to compare Nazi anti-Semitism with the racism of Italian fascists toward the Africans, the Slavs (Trieste, Fiume), and the Germans of South Tyrol, the difference in degree being explained by the war situation.²⁴ One may wonder why Italy at war did not attain the same results as Germany and, all in all, question the seriousness of this kind of comparison for the sake of maintaining a unified concept of fascism. In fact, as Karl Dietrich Bracher has written:

A general theory of fascism will always remain questionable when confronted with this problem [Nazi anti-Semitism and the extermination of the Jews]. . . . While [Italian] fascism centred around the quest of the strong state, *Stato Totalitario*, as the basis of a renewed *Impero Romano*, Hitler's basic notion was the primary role of the race, the racist foundation of a future empire, for which the organization of a strong state was no more than instrumental—never an end in itself.²⁵

In the Marxist conception of nazism as fascism, Nazi anti-Semitism is assigned an even less coherent place than in the non-Marxist theory of fascism. First of all, it includes political propaganda camouflaged as

history: in a certain Soviet "historical" rendition of the last twenty years, the Nazis are found on the same side of the barricades as the Zionists, against their common victim, the Jewish masses. The aim of the Nazis does not matter; that of the Zionists is simple: to collaborate in the extermination of the majority in order to allow a small minority to reach the shores of Palestine and help in the creation of the Zionist state.²⁶

On another level the Marxist view of fascism tries very systematically to insert Nazi racism and even the extermination of the Jews into the framework of an ideological orthodoxy. Within this framework the "Final Solution" cannot but be the result of the planned policy of heavy industry, thereby reaping enormous benefits (by the exploitation of a slave-labor force, constantly renewable according to needs, and by the confiscation of Jewish property, etc.). This position, often found in East German historical writing,²⁷ does not take into account the obvious fact that the extermination of European Jewry deprived German war industries and the German war economy in general of a considerable labor force, and in the Eastern territories in particular, of crucially important skilled manpower.²⁸ The "Final Solution" meant a loss for the German war economy, which was compensated only to a very small degree by the partial exploitation of Jewish slave labor and the property seized from the victims.²⁹

Another Marxist approach consists of interpreting the persecution of the Jews as a method used by the Nazis, and therefore by German capital, to deflect the attention of the masses from the absence of any significant social change and from the endemic crises of the system. In this context anti-Semitism would be fulfilling the same role as external aggression, that of a necessary derivative. But here again, the thesis contradicts the most obvious facts. One knows today that the social transformation wrought by nazism was much more important than was thought immediately after the war.³⁰ One is also aware, as we shall later show in some detail, that the public was not particularly enthusiastic about the anti-Jewish persecutions.³¹ And, as far as the ultimate stage of these policies—the extermination—is concerned, it certainly was not aimed at deflecting anybody's attention, as it was kept absolutely secret.³²

"Totalitarianism" is the third major approach for a global interpretation of nazism. As a matter of fact, "fascism" and "totalitarianism" are not opposite concepts: Italian fascism proclaimed itself "totalitarian" from the very outset. However, the contemporary analysis of nazism tends to consider these concepts as representing opposite outlooks. In essence, fascism implies the centrality of ideology (anti-Marxism and

antiliberalism), and totalitarianism the centrality of the instruments of control and domination, as such. Thus, contrary ideological systems could appear more similar than opposed (Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany).³³

At first glance, totalitarianism seems to offer a better global explanation of Nazi policies toward the Jews than does fascism, for instance, but the difficulties soon become apparent in this case too. The interpretation within the framework of totalitarianism can use two main themes. According to the first theme, it is not a fundamental ideological motivation, but rather the will for total domination over individuals and groups that drives the totalitarian system to oppress its victims and to choose them accordingly. When control requires it, the destruction of this or that group is decided upon indifferently. The enemy to be annihilated becomes a functional element within the system of total domination—in order to terrorize a whole population or to galvanize its energy, any one group, then another, may be chosen in a more or less arbitrary way.³⁴

The bureaucratic machinery is the most efficient instrument of totalitarian power and terror; bureaucracy with its banal servants whose only ambition is to fulfill their task as efficiently as possible; bureaucracy which, once set in motion, can lead from the most elementary identification measures to total extermination.³⁵ The most diverse studies confirm the crucial role of German bureaucracy in the persecution and destruction of the Jews, e.g., Raul Hilberg's classic work, Hannah Arendt's essay on Adolf Eichmann, H. G. Adler's study of the deportation of the Jews of Germany, Christopher Browning's research on the role of the German Foreign Office in the destruction process, or Joseph Walk's compendium of the laws and decrees dealing with or relating to the Jews during the Nazi regime.³⁶

But the "totalitarian" interpretation of the anti-Jewish policies of the Nazis also faces major difficulties, the main ones being the centrality of anti-Jewish ideology for the leaders of the party, and the nonfunctionality of the enemy within the Nazi system.

There is no need to state once again how deep-seated Hitler's anti-Semitic passion was and what an essential role his anti-Jewishness played within his entire ideological system.³⁷ The same could be said of Goebbels and Himmler,³⁸ as well as of an important part of the Nazi elite. "In the theory and the method of mass extermination," writes Karl Dietrich Bracher, himself a proponent of the "totalitarian" interpretation of Nazism, "the racist ideology of National Socialism had become an aim in

itself."³⁹ If that is so, then the interpretation of the Nazi persecution of Jews within the framework of totalitarianism confronts a major difficulty. The classical theory of totalitarianism, as presented by Hannah Arendt in the early 1950s, postulates a growing ideological emptiness as one penetrates into the center of the system—the totalitarian leader supposedly does not believe in his ideology; ideology is merely used to control and mobilize the masses or, at best, the outer periphery of the totalitarian party.⁴⁰ The Nazi system does not correspond to this model as far as the role of anti-Semitic ideology was concerned. Moreover, if anti-Semitic ideology was of central importance to Hitler and part of the leadership of the party, then the explanation of the persecution and extermination of the Jews must be sought outside the constitutive elements of the totalitarian system: *the totalitarian framework is the means of destruction, not its basic explanation.*

Moreover, the centrality and autonomy of the anti-Jewish ideology in Nazism resulted in a situation where the "enemy" was not a functional concept⁴¹ and could not be replaced, at will, by another target. The Jewish enemy was the prime unchangeable target, exterminated in utter secrecy, a sacred aim and not an instrument for the achievement of some other end.

Considering these various approaches, it seems that no global interpretation of Nazism can integrate Nazi anti-Semitism and Nazi policies toward the Jews without encountering major problems. *In fact, Nazi anti-Semitism and Nazi policies toward the Jews place a question mark on the validity of the main global interpretations of Nazism.*

Nazi Policies: The Contending Approaches

Most historians do not work at the level of global interpretations but at that of the concrete interpretation of facts within their immediate context, of decisions in relation to one another, of a policy in terms of its internal coherence. Since the end of the 1960s, the historiography of National Socialism at this level, in the Federal Republic in particular but in other Western countries too, has tended to adopt two opposite positions: "intentionalism" and "functionalism."⁴²

For the intentionalists there is a direct relationship between ideology, planning, and policy decisions in the Third Reich. As for the absolute centrality of the supreme leader, Adolf Hitler, it is obvious to such a degree that Klaus Hildebrand claims: "One should not talk about Na-

tional Socialism but about Hitlerism."⁴³ The functionalist position, on the other hand, implies that there is no necessary relationship between the ideological basis and the political initiatives of the Nazis. It holds that decisions are functionally linked to each other and to a given state of the political context, that through the constant interaction of various semiautonomous agencies the role of the supreme decision-maker may sometimes be quite limited, and that his decisions often take on the aspect of planned policy only from the vantage of hindsight.⁴⁴ We have the image of a system in which every crucial decision depends on the will of Adolf Hitler on the one hand, and that of a more or less anarchic polyocracy on the other hand.

The opposition between these two theses appears with particular clarity in terms of their interpretations of Nazi policies toward the Jews. For the intentionalists there is, first of all, continuity between the ideology of the 1920s and the final extermination. This linear approach is strongly underlined in Ernst Nolte's *Three Faces of Fascism*, where the author shows that in Hitler's system the Jews, the carriers of bolshevism and, more generally, of all the antinatural forces, had to be annihilated in order to save humanity.⁴⁵ Their extermination is the obvious corollary of ideology in Eberhard Jäckel's study of Hitler's *Weltanschauung*:

Whether it is possible or not to establish a link between the use of gas during the First World War and the gas chambers of World War II, there is no doubt that Hitler's anti-Semitism, as presented in *Mein Kampf*, was marked by war. It was born from the war, it needed war-like methods and had to be realized in wartime; it was therefore logical that this anti-Semitism would find, during the next war, which anyhow was foreseen from the very beginning, its bloody climax.⁴⁶

Sometimes the thesis of a direct link between the initial ideology and ultimate policies finds an even more extreme expression. In Gerald Fleming's recent book, *Hitler and the Final Solution*, the declarations attributed to the young Hitler by his friend, August Kubiczek, are directly related to his annihilation orders during World War II. Fleming states:

There is a direct way leading from the remark made by Adolf Hitler, the student at the Realschule in Linz, to the friend of his youth, August Kubiczek, "this doesn't belong to Linz," as both were walking in the Bethlehemstrasse by the small synagogue, to the Führer's declaration on October 21, 1941, "... if we exterminate this pest, we shall accomplish something for humanity, the meaning of which cannot even be

grasped by our men out there. . . ." A direct way lead[s] from Hitler's anti-Semitism in its Linz formulation of the years 1904-1907 to the first mass executions of German Jews in Fort IX in Kovno on the 25th and 29th of November, as well as on the 30th of November, 1941, at 8:15 in the morning, in the forest of Rumbuli near Riga. . . .⁴⁷

Few historians, even among the staunchest intentionalists, would accept such an extreme linear thesis. But even if the intermediary stages between Hitler's early anti-Semitism and his final policies toward the Jews were numerous and complex, Fleming's position is helpful on one essential point. It reminds us of the implacable aspect of Hitler's anti-Semitism, of its deep and early roots, as well as of its obsessional character. Any attempt to deny that it was an essential factor in the later extermination policies calls for at least as much explanation as the view considering it as a major impetus.

To prove their point, the intentionalists can cite the distinct and rapid succession of stages in Nazi anti-Jewish policies (as well as in other fields, foreign policy being perhaps the most telling example):

The National-Socialist program called for the disenfranchisement of all Jews; anti-Semitic activities were part of its early history. Once in power, the Nazis began the systematic organization of the persecution of Jews. No tactical considerations were allowed to interfere substantially with instituting the boycott of Jews, expelling them from public life, making them subject to special laws, and finally annihilating them.⁴⁸

In addition to discerning a continuity between Hitler's ideology and his policies and pointing to a rapid succession of stages, the intentionalists sometimes assume technical planning. The "euthanasia" program at the beginning of the war, for example, could represent a technical preparation for the "Final Solution." In any event, killing by gas on a small scale certainly led to the idea of using it for mass extermination: "The method that was later used for the mass extermination of Jews by gas was then tried from the very beginning of 1940, during the extermination of people interned in psychiatric institutions, within the framework of the Aktion called 'T4.'"⁴⁹

The major issue which separates the two approaches is that of the actual order to implement the extermination. For those historians who believe there was planning and premeditation, Hitler must have given an order to exterminate the Jews of Europe, one way or another, sometime in the spring or early summer of 1941. For the functionalists, such an

order may have been given much later on in the course of events, but in all probability was never issued at all.

For a presentation of the intentionalist position relating to Hitler's order, let us consider the following statement of Heimut Krausnick:

What is certain is that the nearer Hitler's plan to overthrow Russia as the last possible enemy on the continent of Europe approached maturity, the more he became obsessed with the idea—with which he had been toying as a "final solution" for a long time—of wiping out the Jews in the territories under his control. It cannot have been later than March 1941, when he openly declared his intention of having the political commissars of the Red Army shot, that he issued his secret decree—which never appeared in writing though it was mentioned verbally on several occasions—that the Jews should be eliminated. . . .⁵⁰

The possibility that such an order was issued in the spring of 1941 is made even more plausible by a series of additional concurring indications. At the same time, the Einsatzgruppen (special SS task forces) were instructed to exterminate the Jews in occupied Soviet territory, and a "certain final solution of the Jewish problem" was mentioned in a Reich Main Security Office circular forbidding further Jewish emigration from Belgium and France.⁵¹ Alternatively, the order could have been given in the early summer of 1941, shortly after the German attack on Russia, when Göring instructed Heydrich to prepare the "total solution of the Jewish problem in all the territories under German control."⁵²

No historian today believes that such an order was issued in writing. In its oral form it could have been either a clear instruction passed on to Göring or Himmler, or, more probably, a broad hint understood by everybody. In any event, the intentionalist historians believe that a signal must have come from Hitler to set the "Final Solution" in motion.

For the functionalists, most of the basic tenets of the intentionalist position are improbable. Let us recall, first of all, the common denominator of all functionalist interpretations: the Nazi system was to a great extent chaotic, and major decisions were often the result of the most diverse pressures, without any imperative central planning, forecasting, or clear orders given from the top indicating the aim and means of execution of a given policy.

Within the functionalist mode of interpretation, the existence of a strong anti-Semitic ideology is not denied, but its link to policies is considered to be indirect at most. For Martin Broszat, for instance, Nazi

anti-Semitism had essentially a general mobilizing aim—it was a "fighting symbol," not a direct source of action. It did lead to the "Final Solution," in a way by chance, because slogans so often repeated ultimately had to be carried out:

The stereotypical negative aims were from the beginning the only concrete element around which the Nazi "extremism of the middle" could unite itself, that which allowed it to keep the illusion of a community of action. . . .⁵³ The selection of negative ideological aims during the power seizure and during the later development of the Third Reich . . . meant simultaneously an increasing radicalization, a growing perfection and institutionalization of inhumanity and persecution. . . . But, this process of discrimination could not go on indefinitely. In consequence, the "movement" had ultimately to end in the "final solution." . . . The phraseology had ultimately to take itself on its word and what had objectively been only an ideological instrument for the mobilization of fighting readiness, what had had a sense only in terms of belief in the future, had to be literally realized. . . . The secret extermination of the Jews, with which anti-Semitism as a propaganda instrument was also logically brought to an end, concretized the insane confusion between a fighting symbol and a final aim. . . .⁵⁴

If in Broszat's view ideology leads indirectly to the "Final Solution" through confusing a mobilizing symbol with a concrete aim, for Hans Mommsen the lack of relation between ideology and policies is even greater:

In present-day research the conception is still held that from the beginning Hitler gave a concrete sense to the extermination of the Jews and set it as an ultimate aim. The carefully collected utterances of the future dictator on this issue certainly do not confirm this in any necessary way. . . .⁵⁵

According to Mommsen, Hitler's declarations are no different from those made by any radical anti-Semite since the later part of the nineteenth century, and as far as his actions during the 1920s are concerned, they rather show restraint.⁵⁶ Mommsen does not deny Hitler's hatred of the Jews, but, in his opinion, this hatred was not necessarily the origin of the various measures taken. In fact, he states, "whenever he [Hitler] was confronted with concrete alternatives, he used to act not as an extremist, but to give preference to the less radical solution."⁵⁷ We will revert to these various points. Let us now consider some aspects of the function-

never existed. The "Final Solution," Broszat suggests, was the result of a series of local initiatives aimed at solving local problems (the chaotic situation in the ghettos); it only gradually developed into an overall action:

It thus seems that the liquidation of the Jews began not solely as the result of an ostensible will for extermination but also as a "way out" of a blind alley into which the Nazis had maneuvered themselves. The practice of liquidation, once initiated and established, gained predominance and evolved in the end into a comprehensive "program."

This interpretation cannot be verified with absolute certainty but in the light of circumstances, which cannot be discussed here in detail, it seems more plausible than the assumption that there was a general secret order for the extermination of the Jews in the summer of 1941.

In a footnote to the above lines, Broszat adds: "It appears to me that there was no overall order concerning the extermination of the Jews and that the program of extermination developed through individual actions and then gradually attained its institutional and factual character in the spring of 1942 after the construction of the extermination camps in Poland."⁶²

In Broszat's presentation, Hitler's anti-Jewish ideology is not denied, but, as we have already seen, its direct relation to policies is questioned. According to Mommsen, ideology is even more independent of the dynamics of destruction, which can be explained much better in the context of the previously mentioned process of "cumulative radicalization" resulting from the constant competition between various Nazi agencies, and representing the overall fight for positions of power within the system:

. . . to prevent Jewish property from falling into the hands of the Gau organizations as a result of wildcat "aryanization," Göring, following the November Pogrom . . . gave orders for aryanization by the state; the departments involved hastily busied themselves with supporting legislation, even if only to retain their share of responsibility. The impossible situation created by the material and social dispossession of the Jews caused individual Gauleiters to resort to deportations, regardless of consequences, a move bitterly resisted by the departments concerned. However, the result was not the replacement of deportation by a politically "acceptable" solution, but, on the contrary, the systematic mass murder of the Jews, which no one had previously imagined possible—the most radical solution, and incidentally, one which coincided with Hitler's own wishes.⁶³

alist interpretation of the course of anti-Jewish policies under the Third Reich.

In the words of Karl Schleunes:

During the early years of the Third Reich, no one in the Nazi movement, from the Führer down, had defined what the substance of a solution to the Jewish problem might be. . . . Only in the broadest sense are the anti-Semitic premises of National Socialism useful in explaining the course which a wide variety of Jewish policies eventually took.⁵⁸

Uwe Dietrich Adam, after following in detail the anti-Jewish measures of the 1930s in which, he claims, no clear direction is to be found until 1938—when the SS took over and furthered a systematic emigration policy—reaches a first general conclusion:

One cannot speak of a coordinated and planned policy toward the Jews . . . a global plan concerning the nature, content, and scope of the persecution of the Jews never existed; it is even highly probable that the mass extermination was not an aim that Hitler had set *a priori* and that he tried to achieve.⁵⁹

As an example of this total lack of planning during the 1930s, Mommsen mentions the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. According to him, a foreign-policy declaration concerning the Abyssinian conflict was to be delivered by Hitler at the Party Congress which opened on September 10. This project was abandoned on September 13 at the request of Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath, and it was only then, two days before the closing session of the Congress, that Hitler hastily had the racial laws prepared.⁶⁰

With regard to the crucial events of 1941, the functionalist interpretation is diametrically opposed to the one presented by the intentionalists. In Adam's view the extermination of the Jews in occupied Soviet territory was not necessarily part of a global extermination plan. It was only between September and December of that year, following the situation created by the deportations of Jews from the Reich to the ghettos of the east on the one hand, and the stalled German offensive in Russia on the other, that Hitler decided to replace the "territorial solution" of the Jewish problem with global extermination.⁶¹

Broszat adopts Adam's general description of the 1941 events, but he takes the argument one step further. Whereas Adam concedes that Hitler must have ordered the global extermination of European Jewry some time in the fall of 1941, Broszat believes that such an order probably

In Mommsen's interpretation, Hitler's role in the implementation of anti-Jewish policies and the execution of the "Final Solution" is particularly minimized:

Hitler hardly dealt with the concrete realization of the anti-Semitic program; his occasional interventions do not point to any practical conception and they lay in the line of more extreme reprisals. It is the propagandist aspect which remains for him, as usual, in the foreground. . . .⁶⁴

As for the absence of planning, even the Wannsee Conference of January 1942, usually considered as having established the main operational directives for the global extermination of European Jewry, appears in Mommsen's presentation as rather hazy in this respect.⁶⁵

Some Comments

It may be tempting to seek a synthesis between the intentionalist and functionalist positions.⁶⁶ In fact, functionalism, which stresses the dynamics of a system rather than the central role of a leader, in many ways fits better within the mainstream of modern historiography.⁶⁷ The image it offers of nazism is more "normal," easier to explain: any group can stumble haphazardly, step-by-step, into the most extreme criminal behavior. Beyond the sociological theory of polyocracy and administrative chaos, functionalism confronts us, implicitly, with Hannah Arendt's thesis of the "banality of evil." Functionalists can claim, quite correctly, that their position implies a much broader spread of responsibility for the crimes committed than that recognized by the opposite position which considers Hitler as the prime mover and the only authority.⁶⁸ On the other hand, the intentionalist position implies a key element: premeditation. Planning and premeditation at the top lead, of necessity, to planning and premeditation at various levels of the hierarchy and to no less awareness of the events within the various agencies involved than is implied by the functionalist position.

At the more concrete level of historical inquiry, functionalism has undoubtedly added greatly to our understanding of the chaotic nature of the Nazi system and the complex interactions surrounding various decisions. However, as has been pointed out, while correcting past interpretations which may have been too simple, it went to the opposite extreme by trying to stress autonomous processes to such a degree that the role of

Hitler was almost eliminated.⁶⁹ Some of the functionalist arguments are bolstered by the somewhat obvious fact that even in a monolithic system decisions are constantly subjected to the pressure of the most varied internal and external factors, and that no policy can unfold without false starts, hesitations, tactical adaptations, etc. This becomes even more evident if we admit that the Nazi regime was anything but monolithic in its internal structure. Moreover, as Hans Heinrich Wilhelm has mentioned, the führer's orders were followed but not always without hesitation, the more so because Hitler himself, although set on a line of action, would still continue to muse quite openly about alternative ways of attaining his goal.⁷⁰ Thus the impression of improvisation and haphazardness—the mainstay of the functionalist approach—is created.

Nevertheless, it appears that the available evidence strengthens the traditional, intentionalist position, at least insofar as anti-Jewish policies and the "Final Solution" are concerned. In the matters which obsessed Hitler, those forming the core of his system—conquest of the *Lebensraum*, as well as the all-embracing fight against the Jews—his intervention is felt at all crucial stages, and his declared policies were ultimately carried out, notwithstanding hesitations and obstacles.

Within the limited framework of this historiographical essay, any detailed discussion of the various arguments presented by both sides is impossible. Of necessity, only a few comments will be ventured in response to some of the points presented above. I shall deal with some arguments concerning Hitler's personality and the function of his ideology; a few aspects of Nazi anti-Jewish policies during the 1930s; and, finally, with the discussion concerning the course of events in 1941 and Hitler's direct involvement in the "Final Solution."

In discussing Hitler's anti-Semitism and his role in the anti-Jewish policies of the Nazi regime, many of the historians mentioned here have tried to present an explicit or implicit psychological portrait of the dictator.⁷¹ None of these authors deny Hitler's fanatic anti-Semitism and many stress its pathological aspect. Martin Broszat ranks among those who place the strongest emphasis on the pathological form of Hitler's hatred of the Jews and stress the fact that the more Hitler sensed that the military confrontation was lost, the more he pushed forward what had become the "real" war for him.⁷² There is an obvious element of contradiction between the description of such a basic obsessive hatred on the one hand and Broszat's main thesis concerning the "genesis of the Final Solution" and the absence of an order from Hitler on the other. Why would such a pathological Jew-hater shy away from giving an order

of total extermination? How could he let his subordinates be in sole charge of what was, according to Broszat himself, his main obsession?

Hans Mommsen tries to avoid this logical pitfall not by denying Hitler's fanatic anti-Semitism but by presenting a rather complex psychological picture which one could sum up more or less as follows: Firstly, and this relates to earlier texts by Mommsen, Hitler often did not impose his will, but was something of a "weak dictator."⁷³ In "Die Realisierung des Utopischen," this weakness appears in another form. In many fields Hitler did not avoid decisions, but on the contrary we often witness, according to Mommsen, a kind of "forward flight."⁷⁴ But this did not apply in the case of the Jewish question, on which, for some mysterious reason, Hitler constantly presented his position in chiliastic terms⁷⁵ and hesitated to confront his ideological make-believe world with political and social reality (Hitler . . . *scheute davon zurück, die ideologische Scheinwelt, in der er lebte, mit der politischen und sozialen Realität zu konfrontieren*). This would explain his noninvolvement in the decisions concerning the extermination of the Jews:

Confronted with the real consequences of the extermination of the Jews, Hitler did not react differently from his subordinates—he tried not to take notice of it or to repress it (*Konfrontiert mit den realen Konsequenzen der Judenvernichtung, reagierte Hitler nicht anders als seine Untergebenen—er suchte diese nicht wahrzunehmen oder zu verdrängen*).⁷⁶

The extermination process unfolded through the inner dynamics of the system, as we have already mentioned, and through Himmler's fanatic ambition to realize Hitler's apocalyptic dreams here and now.⁷⁷ In this way the fanatic dreamer remains a fanatic, but, being a dreamer, he is hardly involved in the actual decisions concerning the extermination itself. This explanation runs into difficulty because it fails to take into account known facts about Hitler's personal involvement in the "Final Solution." We shall come back to this later on. However, one may well ask why, for instance, did Hitler request to be kept informed regularly of the operations of the Einsatzgruppen on Soviet territory⁷⁸ and why, on December 21, 1942, was Report No. 51 sent to him by Himmler? It deals with the Einsatzgruppen operations on Soviet territory over the period August through November 1942, and it mentions the execution of 363,211 Jews (according to a note by Hitler's adjutant, Pfeiffer, the report was submitted to Hitler on December 31, 1942).⁷⁹ One also wonders why we have direct orders from Hitler to execute the Jews remaining in

the Rovno district in the Ukraine in 1942.⁸⁰ And, finally, if Hitler shied away from confronting his ideological dreamworld with reality, if he repressed the knowledge of the extermination of the Jews or avoided it for any number of psychological reasons, then one wonders why in his ultimate political declaration, the testament written on April 29, 1945, on the eve of his death, he boasted of this very extermination as the greatest service rendered by National Socialism to humanity.⁸¹ In more general terms the discrepancy between Hitler's absolute ruthlessness concerning the unleashing of the war, the killing of the mentally ill, the orders given about the type of annihilation war to be fought in Russia, and so forth, and his presumed fear of facing reality as far as the extermination of the Jews was concerned, does not carry conviction.

If we move from Hitler's personality to the function of his anti-Semitic ideology as described by Broszat, that is, as an essentially instrumental, mobilizing ideology,⁸² we encounter the same kind of difficulty as previously mentioned. Why would such an obsessive Jew-hater not wish, first and foremost, to implement his anti-Jewish ideology? Why wouldn't that ideology lead to a concrete aim, to a concrete policy? But beyond this logical point, the question arises: whom should this mobilizing ideology have mobilized? The general population? The party members?

As far as the general population is concerned, we know today that although anti-Jewish prejudices were widespread and although the anti-Jewish policies of the regime did not significantly affect attitudes even within German opposition circles,⁸³ these measures did not evoke general enthusiasm. From the Nazi viewpoint the reaction patterns to their anti-Semitism must have been considered mixed at best. Otto Dov Kulka's studies of this issue reveal important regional variations, but some predominant aspects nevertheless emerge: a dislike of disorderly anti-Jewish measures and, therefore, a preference for an orderly, "legal" solution (the Nuremberg Laws), but mostly growing depersonalization, passivity, and inertia.⁸⁴ Ian Kershaw's study, more specifically centered on Bavaria, shows a greater reticence on the part of the population:

The permanent radicalization of the anti-Jewish policies of the regime can hardly be said, on the evidence we have considered, to have been the product of, or to have corresponded to, the strong demands of popular opinion. It led in 1935 and 1938 to a drop in prestige for the Party, which might even have had repercussions for Hitler's own nimbus had he been seen to have supported and sided with the radicals. The radicalization of the negative dynamism, which formed the driving-force

of the Nazi Party, found remarkably little echo in the mass of the population. Popular opinion, largely indifferent and infused with a latent anti-Jewish feeling further bolstered by propaganda, provided the climate within which spiraling Nazi aggression towards Jews could take place unchallenged. But it did not provoke the radicalization in the first place.⁸⁵

Whatever the nuances of public-opinion reactions may have been, it soon must have become clear to the Nazi Party, well informed by the police and the SD (SS Security Service) about the state of mind of the population, that anti-Semitism had no major mobilizing effect and could even have its drawbacks. There remains, therefore, the question of the mobilization of the party itself.

That anti-Jewish actions were an outlet for party radicals, in the spring of 1933, the spring and summer of 1935, and in November 1938, is well documented today.⁸⁶ But was this outlet fostered by the leadership? Were those outbursts encouraged by Hitler? The documentation seems to prove the contrary: in 1933, in connection with the expulsion of the Jews from the civil service, and mostly in connection with their expulsion from the legal profession, Hitler opposed the demands of the radicals, siding with the more restrained proposal of the Ministry of Justice.⁸⁷ In 1935 the Nuremberg Laws were proclaimed, *inter alia* to put an end to the agitation of the radicals.⁸⁸ In his speech to party district chiefs at Ordensburg-Vogelsang, on April 29, 1937, Hitler warned the radicals not to demand of him steps in Jewish matters which he had not carefully planned beforehand.⁸⁹

In November 1938, after the disastrous consequences of the *Kristallnacht* became obvious, Hitler definitively took Jewish matters out of the hands of the party radicals and transferred them to the Göring-Himmler-Heydrich triumvirate,⁹⁰ true radicals indeed, but who did not need anti-Semitism as an outlet, or anti-Jewish initiatives in order to be "mobilized."⁹¹

Nazi anti-Jewish policies of the 1930s do indeed indicate the absence of any precise preestablished plan at the outset and the necessity to act according to a somewhat loose strategy, owing to internal and external difficulties. However, a general aim is quite evident: the segregation of Jews from German society and their expulsion (by voluntary or forced emigration) from German territory. The points of the party program of February 1920 which deal with the Jewish question were, in fact, being

implemented. Ideology expresses itself in concrete measures; there was no backtracking whatsoever. Since we are speaking of an aim and a policy, the problem of Hitler's direct involvement is of importance.⁹² To reach a firmer conclusion concerning this involvement, we would need a study of the 1930s similar to that carried out by Gerald L. Fleming on the period of the war and the "Final Solution." As such a study does not exist (the importance of the general works on Nazi anti-Jewish policies during that period notwithstanding), let us limit ourselves here to a few remarks.

On March 26, 1933, Hitler summoned Goebbels to Berchtesgaden to discuss preparations for the anti-Jewish boycott of April 1. Two days later he again spoke of the forthcoming event with his propaganda minister, indicating what themes should be used in the first substantial anti-Jewish initiative of the new regime.⁹³ With regard to the discussion on the civil-service law and the legal-profession law, we have already noted what Hitler's general stand was; according to Uwe Adam, Hitler probably participated in this discussion, which took place on March 31 or April 1, 1933.⁹⁴ As for the exclusion of the Jews from the legal profession, his rejection of the demands of the radicals is on record.⁹⁵ In fact, we see that throughout 1933 Hitler kept control of the rhythm of the anti-Jewish measures taken, accepting the initiative of a boycott as desired by the radicals, but opposing the extreme measures they urged later, in view of the global political situation.

The Nuremberg Laws are at the heart of the argument over Hitler's interventions during the 1930s. We have seen Mommsen's account, the gist of which was presented already in Bernhard Lösener's report: *the laws were prepared at the very last moment, because the issues which were supposed to be dealt with by Hitler at the closing session of the Party Congress were abandoned two days before the final meeting.*⁹⁶ In fact, reexamination of the sources shows that the racial laws had been in preparation for several months, and that they were discussed at the ministerial level and with Hitler himself. On August 30, 1935, their forthcoming promulgation at the September Party Congress was even reported in the foreign press.⁹⁷

As to Hitler's attentiveness to even the smallest details relating to anti-Jewish policies, one could mention his last-minute deletion of the crucial words "this law applies to full Jews only," when announcing the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor before the Reichstag on September 15, 1935.⁹⁸ One could also point out that during the Anschluss, it was Hitler himself who conceived of forbidding Austrian

Jewish civil servants from taking the new loyalty oaths made to him personally.⁹⁹ Finally, one could indicate that on November 9, 1938, when Ernst vom Rath's death was announced, a Hitler-Goebbels meeting probably took place prior to the unleashing of the anti-Jewish pogrom. But as far as the main arguments dealing with the evolution of the anti-Jewish policies are concerned, the decisive period is obviously that of the war.

As we have indicated, the general aim during the years 1933-39 seems to have been segregation and expulsion. The outbreak of the war was followed by a necessary interval of groping for a new solution in view of the entirely new circumstances.¹⁰⁰ Finally, in the year 1941, when the hesitations seem to come to an end, is that which confronts the historian with the most crucial questions.

Martin Broszat stresses that none of Hitler's principal aides, when interrogated after the war, had any recollection of a verbal order for the overall extermination of the Jews. Moreover, entries in Goebbels's unpublished diaries, when referring to the Jewish problem during the summer and fall of 1941, often allude to an evacuation to camps in Russian territory, but do not mention any extermination order. Finally, still in terms of documentary evidence, Broszat cites, *inter alia*, the controversy between Himmler and SS Brigadier General Uebelhör, in charge of the Łódź ghetto. At the beginning of October 1941, Uebelhör strongly objected to deportations from the Reich to Łódź, because of the overstrained capacity of the ghetto. This controversy would be meaningless if extermination had already been decided upon.¹⁰¹

These arguments have been answered by Christopher Browning. He points out that after the war, Himmler and Heydrich, the main architects of the "Final Solution," were not available for interrogation, and Göring, fighting for his life, would certainly not have admitted that he furthered a global extermination order. The Goebbels diaries were a poor source at best, as Goebbels was known to have been deliberately excluded from Jewish affairs after November 1938 by Göring, Himmler, and Heydrich. On the other hand, a series of references to the preparation, during the summer and fall of 1941, of the "Final Solution" was omitted by Broszat—for instance, after the war both Rudolf Höss, former commander of Auschwitz, and Adolf Eichmann referred to overall extermination plans being worked out during that period. As for the treatment which, according to Broszat, was envisaged for the Jews transferred to the east (death by hunger, overwork, exposure to cold, etc.), it was not very different from an extermination plan. Finally, Göring's order to

Heydrich of July 31, 1941, signifies a global preparation which necessarily entailed exploring various possible methods, hesitations and sudden initiatives, which together may, for a few months, have given the impression of chaos that Broszat takes as a sign of the total lack of planning.¹⁰² But let us turn to the sequence of events as such.

Until the fall of 1941 only the Soviet Jews were systematically exterminated. Adam and Broszat do not regard these exterminations as being necessarily linked to the "Final Solution," although, as Browning points out, the exterminations on Soviet territory represent a manifest "qualitative" change in Nazi policies toward the Jews. Moreover, in the fall of 1941 deportations from the Reich began, mostly to Łódź, Kovno, Minsk, and Riga. Some of the deportees sent to Riga and Łódź were murdered on the spot, near Riga and in the Chełmno (Kulmhof) extermination camp near Łódź (local Jews were included in these killings). It would seem that we are now confronted with the stages of an overall plan, as the extermination process includes Jews transported from Germany to the killing sites. However, as mentioned before, Broszat interprets these killings as having been necessitated by local considerations (the deportations from the Reich increased the overcrowding in the ghettos and the Jews could not be sent further east, because the Wehrmacht's advance in Russia was slowing down). He adds that the very chaotic aspect of the deportations, due to Hitler's sudden desire to see the Reich cleared of Jews as soon as possible, seems to preclude any systematic planning of an extermination process.

In fact, however, the Riga exterminations were not a local improvisation. On November 10, 1941, Heinrich Lohse, the *Reichskommissar* for the Baltic countries, was advised by Himmler, through SS General Friedrich Jeckeln, that these exterminations were to be carried out on his (Himmler's) orders, in accordance with the Führer's wishes ("Tell Lohse that it is my order, which is also the Führer's wish"—"Sagen Sie dem Lohse es ist mein Befehl, was auch Führers Wunsch ist"¹⁰³). Clearly, then, this is no local initiative, but to all purposes, an initiative from Hitler.

The evidence relating to the onset of the Chełmno exterminations is more complex. Broszat reminds us that the idea of exterminating some of the Łódź ghetto Jews in an attempt to solve the problem of overcrowding was already discussed among local SS officers and with the Reich Main Security Office as early as July 1941, when no general plan for the "Final Solution" could yet have existed.¹⁰⁴ Isn't it possible that the exterminations of the fall resulted from the same kind of consideration, developed at a rather low echelon?

In March 1944, according to Gerald Fleming, Wartheland Gauleiter Arthur Greiser (whose domain included Łódź and Chełmno) proudly reported to his führer that practically all the Wartheland Jews had been exterminated (mostly in Chełmno). On November 21, 1942, Greiser informed Himmler that when he had met Hitler he was instructed to "act according to his own judgment" as far as the Jews were concerned. Greiser had had two meetings with Hitler, the first on October 1, 1942, and the second on November 8 of the same year.¹⁰⁵

Greiser's report to Hitler in 1944 clearly indicates that Hitler's statements of October or November 1942 were well understood. On the other hand, as we know, Greiser had initiated the exterminations in Chełmno a year before those meetings. If he had received the same kind of order as Lohse did in the fall of 1941, Hitler's words, a year later, would not make sense. Two possible explanations, of wider significance, come to mind. Either Greiser, or for that matter, Übelhör in Łódź, was not informed of the general plan at that early stage, or—and this could explain Heydrich's own hesitations about the fate of Spanish Jews in France in October of the same year (a case used by Mommsen to challenge the hypothesis of an existing order for general extermination¹⁰⁶)—the manifold concrete situations, as would be the case throughout the following years, led to limited contradictory decisions, notwithstanding the general plan of extermination.

If one moves from individual cases to the general context, the whole picture becomes much more obvious. During the second half of 1941, the Einsatzgruppen exterminated nearly one million Jews in the Soviet Union; 11,000 stateless Jews expelled from Hungary were exterminated at Kamenets-Podolsk during the last days of August 1941; in November, mass killing of Jews deported from the Reich started in Riga and in December the first extermination center, that of Chełmno near Łódź, was set in action. All emigration of Jews from occupied Europe was forbidden (order of October 23, 1941), and construction work on the Bełżec extermination camp in the General Government had commenced. It is also commonly mentioned that in the early fall of the same year the first experiments in killing with Zyklon B gas took place at Auschwitz, this method of liquidation being used mainly on Soviet officers. In view of these converging elements the existence of an overall plan for the extermination of the Jews of Europe, by the fall of 1941, can hardly be questioned any longer: the groping phase had come to an end and the general framework of the "Final Solution" was becoming apparent.

It is within the same context, as much as by itself, that the intent of

the Wannsee Conference—where on January 20, 1942, Heydrich presented to the assembled representatives of various ministries and SS agencies the outline of the "Final Solution"—seems to be unmistakable. The establishment of extermination camps in the General Government in the following months eliminates any possible remaining doubt or vagueness about what was meant at Wannsee.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, what logic dictates, direct evidence confirms. At his trial in Jerusalem, Adolf Eichmann—who was technical organizer of the conference and attended its meetings—was asked by the president of the tribunal what the general sense of the discussion was. He answered: "One spoke of killing, of elimination, of annihilation" (*Es wurde von Töten und Eliminieren und Vernichten gesprochen*).¹⁰⁸

If we admit that the intent of the Wannsee Conference is unmistakable, if we recall that in his opening remarks Heydrich referred not only to the order given him by Göring, but also to Hitler's agreement to start evacuating the Jews to the east, this can only mean one thing: Hitler agreed to the extermination plan. One can hardly believe that Heydrich would present an extermination plan to a whole array of high-ranking civil servants if Hitler had intended a *bona fide* evacuation plan.

The conference was first set for December 9, 1941 (later postponed to January 20, 1942). One has to assume, therefore, that the preparation of the scheme presented by Heydrich must have taken several months, and it seems likely that Hitler's "agreement" was expressed some time in the summer of 1941, at the latest. And Hitler's "agreement," like Hitler's "wish," actually means Hitler's "order," with no necessity for a formal decree. Finally, from an early interrogation of Rudolf Höss undertaken by the British authorities at the time of his arrest, it now appears that when he wrote in his prison memoirs about having heard of an order for the global extermination of the Jews in the summer of 1941, he was not mistaken about the date, as was often thought. It seems that Höss met Himmler in June 1941 and heard from him about a Hitler order to prepare for a general extermination of the Jews.¹⁰⁹

Höss's testimony fits in with the material collected by Gerald Fleming and with the various references to an order from Hitler, coming from the most diverse sources. When in August 1941 Otto Bradfisch, head of Einsatzkommando 8 operating in the Minsk region, asked Himmler who bore responsibility for the executions, Himmler answered, "The orders come from Hitler and, as such, have force of law."¹¹⁰ A year later, when SS General Gottlob Berger, speaking on behalf of the Ministry for the East, suggested that a more exact definition of the term "Jew" should be

France, 600—700,000, to be eliminated" (*Juden . . . abschaffen, Juden in Frankreich, 600—700,000, abschaffen*).¹¹⁸ In fact, in terms of statistics, Himmler was to be better informed at the end of December, when the SS inspector for statistics, Richard Korherr, prepared for him a complete and accurate report on the course of the "Final Solution." In April 1943 the report, updated to March 31 of that year and condensed to six and a half pages, was ready for the Führer. Typed on the special "Führer-type-writer" (which had extra-large letters), the report was submitted to Hitler some time before mid-April 1943.¹¹⁹ According to Eichmann's testimony, when the report was returned to the Reich Main Security Office, it bore the following note: "The Führer has seen. To be destroyed. H.H.[i.e., Heinrich Himmler]." ¹²⁰

Here we must consider the strange contradictions of Nazi camouflage of the "Final Solution." Richard Korherr was asked to delete the word *Sonderbehandlung* (special treatment), which appeared in his report; Rudolf Brandt, Himmler's personal assistant, wrote to Korherr:

He [Himmler] wishes that in no place should one speak of a "special treatment of the Jews" (*dass an keiner Stelle von "Sonderbehandlung der Juden" gesprochen wird*). On page nine, point four, the formulation should therefore be as follows: "Transportation of Jews from the Eastern Provinces to the Russian East: they passed through the camps in the General Government . . . through the camps in the Warthegau" (*"Transportierung von Juden aus den Ostprovinzen nach dem russischen Osten: Es wurden durchgeschleust durch die Lager im Generalgouvernement . . . durch die Lager im Warthegau"*). Another formulation is not allowed. I am sending you back the copy of the report already marked by the Reichsführer SS, with the demand that page nine be changed accordingly and the report be sent back again.¹²¹

One wonders about the inconsistency of the attempts at camouflage. On the one hand, even the code word *Sonderbehandlung* was eliminated from the report sent to Hitler; on the other hand, Himmler referred on several occasions to Hitler's orders when speaking about the total extermination of the Jews. Or, even more paradoxical: in a document sent to Hitler himself, no reference to the "Final Solution" is permitted; but in speeches delivered to wide audiences (not only SS officers, but also regular officers of the Wehrmacht), Himmler quite blatantly refers to Hitler's orders.

It may well be that in the case of the Korherr report the explanation is provided by an instruction issued somewhat later, on July 11, 1943, by the head of the Party Chancellery, Martin Bormann, whereby "in agree-

provided, Himmler rejected the very idea of further definition, which would only impose limitations, and added:

The occupied eastern territories will be freed of Jews (*Juden/rei*). The Führer has laid on my shoulders the execution of this very difficult order. Nobody can take the responsibility away from me anyway, and I therefore forbid any interference.¹¹¹

During the first half of 1944, Himmler made reference to the very difficult Führer order concerning the "Final Solution" in no less than four different speeches (January 26, May 5, May 24, and June 21), three of which were delivered before large audiences of senior Wehrmacht officers.¹¹² According to the testimony of SS Judge Konrad Morgen, when Christian Wirth's special sections were dispatched to the General Government to help Odilo Globocnik in the extermination process, "Himmler is supposed to have of asked each of them to swear an oath of silence and to have told them: 'I have to expect of you superhuman acts of inhumanity. But it is the Führer's will.'" ¹¹³

At the end of December 1941, Bernhard Lösener, adviser on Jewish affairs at the Ministry of the Interior, informed Undersecretary Wilhelm Stuckart that because of the extermination of the Jews in the Riga region, news of which had reached him, he could not remain in his position. Stuckart replied: "Don't you know that these things happen according to the highest orders?" ¹¹⁴ In May 1942, Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the Reich Main Security Office and newly appointed protector of Bohemia and Moravia, and several Abwehr officers met in Prague. In the course of a very heated discussion on the exterminations, Heydrich stated that the Reich Main Security Office was not responsible for the killings; they were being executed on the personal orders of the Führer.¹¹⁵

As mentioned before, on August 1, 1941, Gestapo Chief Heinrich Müller sent the following order to the heads of the four Einsatzgruppen: "Regular reports have to be submitted to the Führer concerning the work of the Einsatzgruppen in the East" (*Dem Führer sollen von hier aus lfd. Berichte über die Arbeit der Einsatzgruppen im Osten vorgelegt werden*).¹¹⁶ We have noted that in December 1942 Report No. 51 was sent by Himmler to Hitler. It deals with the operations of the Einsatzgruppen in Soviet territory for the period August through November 1942, and mentions "363,211 Jews executed" (the report was submitted to Hitler on December 31, according to a note by his adjutant, Pfeiffer).¹¹⁷ During the same month, Himmler noted: "Point (3) Jews . . . to be eliminated, Jews in

ment with the Führer, the 'Final Solution' should in no way be mentioned in any document relating to the Jewish question: mention should only be made of Jews being sent to work."¹²²

Nevertheless, the inconsistency remains. In 1942, in no less than four speeches (January 1, January 30, February 24, and November 8), Hitler himself hinted darkly that his prophecy about the extermination of the Jews in the event of a world war was being fulfilled.¹²³ In April 1943 he more or less admitted to the extermination in his talks with the Rumanian chief of state, Ion Antonescu, and the Hungarian regent, Admiral Miklós Horthy.¹²⁴ In one of his last talks, on February 13, and in the political testament he wrote on the eve of his death, he boasted about it quite emphatically.

There is, finally, indirect evidence of Hitler's attention to the extermination process. For example, Odilo Globocnik, the Higher SS and Police leader in charge of the four extermination camps established in the General Government during 1942, visited the Reich Chancellery in the autumn of that year. A note by Himmler referring to a conference with Hitler on October 7, 1942, bears the following annotation: "Situation in the General Government. Globus [Globocnik's nickname was 'Globus']"¹²⁵ The subject of the conference thus becomes evident.

On April 13, 1943, a proposal to promote Christian Wirth (Globocnik's right-hand man and a specialist in killing by gas—first the mentally ill and then the Jews) to the rank of SS *Sturmabführer* (captain) was submitted to the Main Personnel Office of the SS. The file notes that since the beginning of the war Wirth has been "on a special mission by order of the Führer."¹²⁶

That Hitler could have been unaware of the "Final Solution" up to 1943, as suggested by David Irving,¹²⁷ goes against all evidence; that he gave an oral order for the overall extermination of the Jews of Europe some time in the spring or summer of 1941 is highly probable, but cannot be proved with absolute certainty on the basis of existing documents. We have seen, however, that he was kept informed of the extermination process and made ad hoc interventions in it.

On the limited level of the analysis of Nazi policies, the resolution of the debate between various approaches appears possible. On the level of global historical interpretation, however, the real difficulties remain. The historian who is not encumbered with ideological or conceptual blinkers can readily recognize that it is Nazi anti-Semitism and the anti-

Jewish policies of the Third Reich that gave nazism an essential part of its *sui generis* character. We have noted that the explanation based on the course of German history leaves many questions unanswered, and that "fascism" and "totalitarianism" are hardly adequate categories, in view of the centrality of Hitler's anti-Semitic drive. The consideration of nazism as a "political religion" could eventually offer us a better grasp of some of the issues raised here, if inquiry in that direction is further developed.¹²⁸ In fact, the very difficulty of integrating the "Final Solution" into the framework of global interpretations of nazism has led some historians into the paradoxical position of stressing the absolute centrality of Hitler's racist ideology within the Nazi system and then continuing the interpretation of the main issues posed by nazism without taking the policies against the Jews into account.¹²⁹ All this may well lead us to the conclusion that the destruction of European Jewry poses a problem which historical analysis and understanding may not be able to overcome.

At most one can speak of the emergence, unique to date, of a messianic faith and an apocalyptic vision of history at the heart of the political, bureaucratic, and technological system of an advanced industrial society. Yet here again, the image is false—there was no mass movement with respect to the Jews, not even a crusade of a fanatic sect. Bureaucracy occupied center stage, a bureaucracy indifferent to the destruction, but driven by its leader who, in turn, was moved by the most intense of convictions.

The historian's paralysis arises from the simultaneity and the interaction of entirely heterogeneous phenomena: messianic fanaticism, and bureaucratic structures, pathological impulses and administrative decrees, archaic attitudes within an advanced industrial society.

We know the details of what occurred, we are aware of the sequence of events and their probable interaction, but the profound dynamics of the phenomenon evades us. And what likewise escapes us is the almost immediate disintegration of the political, institutional, and legal structures of Germany, as well as the surrender of the moral forces that by their very nature ought to have been important obstacles to the Nazis in Germany, in other European countries, and in the entire Western world.