

## DISCUSSION

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# The Goldhagen Controversy: Agonizing Problems, Scholarly Failure and the Political Dimension<sup>1</sup>

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When a contentious book with a provocative message has aroused lively, not to say passionate, controversy, it is desirable that any new contribution to the debate should strive to provide as sober and clear a cost-benefit analysis as possible. It is best, moreover, to attend first to the book's merits and achievements, before giving an equal airing to its faults and limitations. In the case of Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* such a procedure is particularly advisable, since the response in the American and German media to this six-hundred-page study of 'ordinary Germans and the Holocaust' has not only been rather speedier than that of the academic world—though scholarly authorities have also, uncharacteristically, been quick off the mark—but has impaired the debate by promptly giving respectability to a number of stereotypes and misconceptions.

The enthusiastic welcome that the book has received from journalists and opinion-formers in America is a problem in its own right, and we shall return to it later. But here in Germany there is no cause for complacency either, since the reaction in the public media has been far from satisfactory. With dismaying rapidity, and with a spectacular self-confidence that has frequently masked an ignorance of the facts, a counter-consensus has emerged. The book, we are repeatedly told, contains no new empirical data, since everything of significance on the subject has long been known; nor does it raise any stimulating new questions. The book's empirical value is 'precisely nil', while the interpretation which the book places on the empirical findings is 'naturally, pure nonsense'. (These two quotations, representative of many others, come from Rudolf Aug-

<sup>1</sup> An abridged version of this essay appeared in *Die Zeit* on 24 May 1996. It is published here with the kind permission of *Die Zeit*.

stein's commentary.) It would seem, then, that there is no need to waste any more time discussing the book than is needed to pronounce a damning verdict. The first of the two claims, however, is alarmingly selective, misleading, even false; while the second warrants, at the least, extended discussion.

The book has not merely—indeed, has perhaps not even primarily—reached an academic audience. (The academic experts, incidentally, have all been highly critical: for example, Omer Bartov, Yehuda Bauer, Christopher Browning, Norbert Frei, Raul Hilberg, Hans Mommsen and Moshe Zimmermann.) It has had enormous public impact, re-igniting discussion of extraordinarily painful problems that are far from having been conclusively resolved. Even though there are valid objections to Goldhagen's work, we should welcome this, instead of automatically seeking to choke off all further discussion of the facts. And we ought also to be capable, in this country, of responding with greater calmness and respect to the moral indignation that has patently motivated the author.

There are at least six reasons why it is worth paying serious attention to parts of Goldhagen's empirical analysis and to some of the questions he raises. He presents three detailed case studies: of police units involved in the 'final solution', of labour camps for Jews, and of death marches undergone by Jews after the extermination and concentration camps had been broken up. Naturally, these three topics have not been entirely overlooked in the highly extensive international research literature on National Socialism and the Holocaust. The outcome of this earlier research, however, can certainly not be said to be satisfactory.

1. With regard to the murder of Jews by 'task forces' (*Einsatzgruppen*), 'special units' (*Sonderkommandos*), SS brigades under Himmler's command and numerous *Wehrmacht* units, the information at our disposal is now fairly detailed (though that has been the case, essentially, only since the 1980s). Those police units, however, that were similarly employed in the full-time daily work of mass murder have, to all intents and purposes, been the subject of only one previous study, Browning's comprehensive and precise analysis of a single police reserve unit, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1992). This is despite the fact that over a period of years about forty such police battalions were operating in Poland and Russia. One might assume that there would have been at least a handful of German dissertations or *Habilitationen* on the subject, but a search for them, among the many thousands of historical studies that have been completed under the auspices of German universities since 1945, will draw a blank. And yet there has been a superabundance of work in conventional political history, from the War of the Spanish Succession to the diplomacy of the Wilhelmine era. Was Goldhagen not right to seek to make up for this deficiency? His work has been repeatedly compared with Browning's and found wanting, but we should remember that half a century had elapsed since the Second World War before Browning's

exemplary collective portrait was published. Is everything really known, then? Sufficiently known to the many, not just to the specialized few? Is there really nothing still left to be discovered? Chapters 6 to 9 of Goldhagen's book supply an answer to these questions.

2. Hitler's Germans set up over ten thousand camps for all manner of 'opponents' of the regime: concentration and extermination camps with numerous ancillary branches, prison camps, ghettos and labour camps. Many of these camps were exclusively for Jews. In Poland alone there were roughly nine hundred and forty labour camps for Jews. Once again, a search for even a handful of dissertations on the subject will be in vain. The six large extermination camps, the well-known concentration camps and the appalling *Wehrmacht* camps that housed millions of Russian prisoners of war have all been the topics of international research. But about conditions in the labour camps for Jews we really know very little, far too little—and the German-language research literature is particularly sparse. Is Goldhagen not right, then, to have pursued the matter, in his Chapters 10 to 12?

3. There were about a hundred death marches westward when the concentration and extermination camps were abandoned, on Himmler's orders, in the winter of 1944–5, in advance of the arrival of the Red Army. If we make the conservative assumption that of 750,000 'inmates', at least a quarter of a million either were killed on the way or perished in some other terrible fashion (though the real figure may have been as high as 375,000), then we have to ask, yet again: where are the academic monographs analysing these processions of apocalyptic horror? Is everything really known? Is it not understandable that Goldhagen should have wanted to do something to fill this gap too? No one with a shred of feeling in his or her body will be able to read his Chapters 13 and 14 and remain unshaken.

4. The inferno of the gas chambers and the mass liquidations was preceded by a seemingly never-ending daily round of cruelty, in which women and children, the old and the helpless, were subjected to extremes of torment. Granted, we know that these tortures took place. But they are commonly discussed only in terms of the destructive operations of large, anonymous bodies that exercised an untrammelled reign of terror. Is Goldhagen not right to insist that we still need to explain cruelty on this mass scale? Cruelty that arose quite suddenly, and then lasted for many years; that involved large numbers of members of a once civilized nation; and that took on many different manifestations between the spontaneous pogroms of early 1933 and May 1945? Studying such behaviour is psychologically very arduous; but the task is no less valid for that.

5. For the same reason, Goldhagen has set himself the goal of bringing individual actors into the forefront whenever possible. He has not monitored face-

less groups like the SS, with their blind faith, or obedient executors of orders, such as the many *Wehrmacht* units that dealt out brutality and murder. Nor has he studied what Hannah Arendt called the 'banality of evil', personified by typical bureaucrats of the 'final solution' such as Eichmann, or the unrestrained fanaticism of demoniacal planners such as Himmler and Heydrich. Instead, his professed aim has been to build up a more vivid picture of the hundreds of thousands of individuals who committed acts of wrongdoing. There is no guarantee, of course, that these individuals will emerge from behind the protective shield of their units. Browning's achievement, certainly, was to have broken through the armour of anonymity in this way. But that scarcely makes it right to brush aside Goldhagen's parallel attempt to give horror a personal face. The task is an extraordinarily difficult one, both methodologically and empirically, but its legitimacy is incontestable.

6. The same applies to the question that has been ceaselessly debated since the 1930s: how deeply was anti-Semitism rooted in the thinking of millions of Germans, and to what extent did it make possible and foster the process that started with social discrimination and led, via psychological harassment, active persecution and pogroms, to a comprehensive 'final solution'? It is clear, as a general principle, that 'world views' (*Weltbilder*)—whether those enshrined in the great religions or the major political ideologies, those dominant in rural society or within the bourgeois business class—play a role in shaping mentalities and governing behaviour. In the case of National Socialist genocide, however, the scope and influence of 'world views' and, most especially, the complex cross-currents created by their interplay with the material and non-material interests and the concrete circumstances and constraints that jointly generate and sustain social action have not been definitively explained and are certainly not 'known'. These, of all matters, deserve precise and methodical further study. Those who are fortunate enough to know the answers in advance should perhaps be reminded of Hegel's famous dictum: 'Once the realm of Appearance has been revolutionized, Reality does not persist any longer.'

It will not do, then, simply to sweep this book aside—whether from the supposed heights of superior knowledge or at the promptings of a repressed desire to keep the horrors of the German past at arm's length. And yet: when all is said and done, we cannot duck out of passing an unambiguous verdict on Goldhagen's central undertaking, his attempt to explain the Holocaust. The same steely passion that imbues his empirical case studies of the plunge into barbarism has induced him to do everything—absolutely everything—in his power to render his 'explanation' untenable. Once again, six main points can be addressed.

1. Goldhagen's principal thesis is that anti-Semitism, based on an ingrained Christian hatred for the 'murderers of Christ', has been endemic among 'the

Germans' since the Middle Ages. It penetrated the deep structures of German social mentality and became a central determinant of German thought and of all areas of German life, including the political culture. It became, in earlier parlance, an indissoluble ingredient of the German 'national character'. If anti-Semitism sometimes seems to disappear from Germany for fifty or a hundred years or so, we should not be misled: the underlying anti-Semitic mentality is continuously being reproduced by processes of socialization and is capable of being re-activated at any time. Moreover, by the early nineteenth century, if not earlier, 'the Germans' had turned this fateful legacy into an 'eliminationist' form of anti-Semitism, which led inevitably towards repression, removal and, ultimately, 'extermination'. This uniquely German brand of anti-Semitism, culminating in the physical annihilation of the Jews, became, we are told, Germany's 'national project'. Every 'ordinary German' harboured this mania for destruction within his breast.

It was not the case, in other words, that Hitler and his dictatorial regime succeeded in gradually getting a sufficient number of Germans to participate in the Holocaust; far from it. The Nazis merely opened the floodgates, enabling 'the Germans' at last to implement their 'eliminationist' anti-Semitism, their unique 'project', with full and merciless rigour.

From this construct of Goldhagen's, everything else follows. Why were there no protests against the discrimination suffered by the Jews during the 'peaceful' first six years of the 'Third Reich'? Because a yearning to discriminate had been present for centuries. Why were there no protests against pogroms such as the *Reichskristallnacht*? Because pogroms had also long been on the agenda. Why were there no protests against the Holocaust? Because the 'eliminationist' anti-Semitism of all 'ordinary Germans' now finally reached its fulfilment. None of these atrocities need astonish us, since 'the Germans' were simply acting out their hatred of the 'sub-human' Jews. And so on: in the light of this all-embracing 'explanation', every problem becomes a pseudo-problem.

2. What is going on here? Goldhagen's 'explanation' is an act of unconditional intellectual surrender. Instead of attempting to construct a serious explanatory model, he provides plain and simple demonization. In a bizarre new variation on the German *Sonderweg* thesis, 'the Germans' are held to have been a pernicious offshoot of the human species since the Middle Ages. They alone were consistent and perfectionist enough to progress from anti-Semitism to a full-dress Holocaust. In effect—though Goldhagen clearly neither intends nor realizes this—the debate about National Socialism and the pursuit of genocide has received a clear racist twist. Not to put too fine a point upon it, the same modes of thinking that were the characteristic property of National Socialism have returned in a new outward guise. For the 'chosen people', who were to be obliterated, read 'the Germans', *qua* degenerate incarnation of evil. The doctrine of collective guilt has been given a sorry new lease of life. And this form of racism in reverse, adamant in its rejection of any kind of effort at

greater understanding, masquerades as would-be objective history of *mentalités*. In fact, it is a species of ethno-cultural determinism; fixated on a mono-causal 'explanation', it is an elevation of dogmatic, ideological history into myth.

There is no attempt to address the complexity of historical situations. Nowhere is there any discussion of the long- and short-term factors that led to the rise of the Hitler movement, or of the stages whereby dictatorship was consolidated, or of the ways in which anti-Semitic ideas were translated into action. Nowhere is there any discussion of the 'cumulative radicalization' of German policy towards the Jews, culminating in the 'final solution'. Nowhere is there any discussion of the links between the brutalization created by the First World War and that created by the Second, notably in the Polish and Russian campaigns; of the connections between concepts of orders and obedience, authority and duty; of the distortion of reality; of the impact of specific circumstances; of group pressures; of the despotic power wielded by middling and petty authorities; of the extent to which people could become 'acclimatized' even to daily mass murder; and the list could go on.

And where does Goldhagen's Procrustean 'explanation' leave the Federal Republic? If anti-Semitism is really so deeply dyed into the mental structures of 'ordinary Germans', and if a century can easily slip by without any anti-Semitic irruptions coming to the surface, then presumably all the efforts to confront and break with the past that have been made since 1945 will have been doomed to failure. Well hidden at the end of the book, in a four-line footnote on page 582, we come across a tiny escape clause: there is, of course, no such thing as a 'timeless German character', the author concedes; and in any case, after the 'loss of the Second World War' it changed 'dramatically'. Elsewhere, indeed, Goldhagen issues a form of apology, acknowledging the success of the Federal Republic in entrenching democracy and strictly outlawing anti-Semitism. These palliating statements, however, are profoundly at odds with the unyielding indictment that is constituted by the remainder of his 600-page book.

3. Why, Goldhagen asks, has the plain truth about the continuity of evil in Germany remained concealed for so long? Simply, he says, because it was quite unwarrantedly assumed that the Germans were one of the civilized nations of the West. The fact that National Socialist dictatorship and the policy of total war led Germans to commit unprecedented crimes against humanity was regarded as something exceedingly hard to explain. But if instead—taking a leaf from recent developments in cultural studies—we view the Germans in the detached way that a cultural anthropologist employs when studying a distant aboriginal tribe, then we see at once that the Germans were different: they were never 'like us'. The proof—frightening in its self-righteousness—is that only the Germans, by virtue of their tradition, carried out the Holocaust. Q.E.D. The supposedly detached approach is actually an entirely circular mode of

thinking, the function of which is to underwrite a purely moralistic value judgement, not to promote analysis and understanding. The successes of Jewish emancipation, the cultural assimilation of Jews into the German educated middle class, their embrace of neo-humanist cultural ideals—these were all illusions that generations of German Jews were foolish enough to believe were realities. How blinded they must have been, to have taken so long before seeing the writing on the wall!

4. Accounts differ as to whether Goldhagen's doctoral thesis, on which his book is directly based, received a prize for the best dissertation in the School of Government at Harvard or (as his publishers maintain) a similar prize awarded by the American Political Science Association. Either way, it was honoured as a dissertation in 'comparative politics'. And yet it is hard to think of a book that displays fewer of the virtues of the comparative method in history and the social sciences. It shuns comparison like the plague. For reasons that are not hard to understand, German anti-Semitism has been scrutinized more closely than anti-Semitism in any other country. Nevertheless, comparative studies of anti-Semitism across Europe before 1933 have been extensive enough to cast doubt on the alleged uniqueness of the German version. If we jettison Goldhagen's obsessive vision of German history as a one-way street and accept Karl Schleunes's notion of a 'twisted road' to Auschwitz, then it becomes far from easy to decide which national brand of anti-Semitism was the most dangerous, the most rabid, the most likely to spread. Was it, to cite only a few examples, the poisonous strain that was prevalent in Hitler's own native Austria? Or the brutal tradition of pogroms found in Russia? Or the French variant (not confined to the Dreyfus Affair)? Or the anti-Semitism characteristic of imperial Germany (whether in its politically organized form or as it filtered down informally into society)? Why were the international anti-Semitic conferences that were held before 1914 so well attended? Why did such large numbers of *Volksdeutsche* and SS volunteers from the occupied countries of Europe—the Luxemburgers in Police Battalion 101, Latvians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Romanians—act as accessories to the German murder of the Jews? Sober comparative historical analysis can help to answer such questions. Goldhagen's assumption of a uniquely German form of depravity explains nothing.

5. Suppose, however, for the sake of argument, that we take Goldhagen's central tenet—that mass murder can be 'explained' by reference to the 'character' of one section of the human species—as the basis for generalizing to other cases. We are then led into a hopeless and dangerous explanatory dead end.

Take, for example, the Turkish massacres of millions of Armenians: instead of trying to provide an explanation in terms of a cluster of very varied causes and motives, should we simply give up and hand the job over to a young Armenian historian, so that he can then trace everything back to the centuries-



old tradition of 'Ottoman butchery'? And what is the application to the war in Kurdistan?

Take the even more appalling decades of millionfold murder under the dictatorship of Lenin and Stalin: instead of trying to provide an explanation in terms of a cluster of very varied causes and motives, should we simply give up and hand the job over to a young Ukrainian historian, so that he can then trace everything back to the centuries-old tradition of 'Russian barbarism'? And what is the application to the war in Chechnia?

Take the near-extirmination of the North American Indians: instead of trying to provide an explanation in terms of a cluster of very varied causes and motives, should we simply give up and hand the job over to a young Navaho historian, so that he can then trace everything back to the tradition of the American 'killer', inaugurated when the first Puritans branded the native Americans as 'children of Satan'? And what is the application to My Lai?

All historians are painfully aware that the rational explanation of mass murder has its limits. But a monocausal approach based on the deliberate, essentialist decision to stigmatize one section of humanity as permanently evil on ethnic, racial and natural grounds is tantamount to a declaration of intellectual, methodological and political bankruptcy.

6. By boxing himself into this corner—a tactic which has been hailed by his wildly cheering fans as a stroke of overwhelming originality—Goldhagen has successfully contrived to avoid even posing the main questions that arise concerning National Socialism and the Holocaust, let alone providing any answers that might have marked an advance on those that have been given before. What are these questions, with which historians have been struggling for the past half-century?

How and why was a modern European state capable, in the middle of the twentieth century, of planning and carrying out the industrially organized mass murder of six million Jews, male and female, adults and children? Why did this happen in Germany, alone of all industrial and civilized states? Why did so many members of the elite groups in society co-operate? Why did the bureaucracy continue to perform so smoothly? Why did special units and regular troops commit murder with such efficiency and ruthlessness? Why did so many industrial firms, and the giant railway system of the Reich, play a part in the implementation of the policy? And why did a civilized nation give birth to the regime that was Hitler's dictatorship, supporting it or at least making an accommodation with it until the spring of 1945? Why did the members of this society either remain apathetic about their Jewish neighbours and the way they were treated, or become hostile? Why did they seek to learn as little about mass murder as they could?

Nor does Goldhagen take into consideration the huge, complex edifice of National Socialist race and population policy—a submerged iceberg, the full dimensions of which have become apparent only during the past decade and



a half. 'Hitler's willing executioners' did not murder only Jews, although that act of genocide was undoubtedly a unique event in world history. Millions of Slavic *Untermenschen*, gypsies, homosexuals and people with hereditary diseases or mental disabilities were also killed. The National Socialists pursued brutal programmes of eugenics, euthanasia, sterilization and 'ethnic cleansing'. The 'advance planners of extermination' (in Götz Aly's phrase) had cold-bloodedly projected a 'loss' of more than thirty million Slavs in the event that the *Generalplan Ost* ('General Plan East'), to say nothing of the *Generalsiedlungsplan* ('General Land Settlement Plan'), extending to the Urals, was carried out. Only the fact that the triumphal progress of Hitler's armies was turned into total defeat saved the Russians and other peoples from genocide on a colossal scale. Altogether, the National Socialist regime's planning and execution of its policy of extermination went even further, and was even more inhuman, than was assumed until the early 1980s. To repeat: the Holocaust was, for the reasons stated, mass murder of a unique kind. But is it proper, in a book of this sort, to gloss over so blatantly all questions of comparison?

It is more than merely irritating that Goldhagen finds it necessary to deliver impenitently arrogant strictures to all other historians who have written about National Socialism and the Holocaust, for the sake of talking up the novelty value of his own book. (We shall make no mention here of the disastrous number of empirical errors he makes concerning the history of German anti-Semitism and the rise of National Socialism, nor of the pitiful single page he devotes to Hitler's seizure of power, nor of much else besides.) In discussion at the Holocaust Museum in Washington in early April 1996, he explicitly endorsed the shrill fanfares of publicity that accompanied the book's publication, including claims that he had produced 'a work of the utmost originality and importance' that would 'forever change our understanding of the greatest horror of the twentieth century'. But Goldhagen's scholarship is actually an unashamed reversion to the state of play in 1950 (when the prevailing slogan was 'From Luther to Hitler'), while almost all of the work that has been done by the leading scholars and thinkers of the present day is the target of his condemnation (for instance, studies by Uwe Adam, Martin Broszat, Raul Hilberg, Michael Marrus and Hans Mommsen). Indeed, the more closely other such authors impinge on his project (as in Browning's case), the more harshly he judges them, to the extent of disputing their scholarly integrity and insinuating on their part an almost indecent degree of empathy with their subject-matter. Equally instructive, however, is the fact that a large number of relevant works are not discussed by Goldhagen at all; clearly, their commitment to distinctions and nuances is incompatible with his reductionism (cf., for instance, writings by Aly, Bartov, Bauer, Bein, Benz, Berding, Bock, Greive, Heilbronner, Kulka, Kwiet, Levy, G. Mosse, Poliakov, Puhle, Rürup, Schleunes, Schmuhl, Volkov and Zimmermann).

The existence of such an unusually large and sophisticated body of scholar-

ship should surely have given the supervisors of this dissertation pause; it should have been sufficient to knock on the head the whole concept of a nation as evil incarnate, bent on destruction. The whole purpose of having supervisory procedures in the academic world is to ensure that any new piece of work is empirically up to date and that its arguments mark a useful advance on the current debate and stand up to rational scrutiny. But as Yehuda Bauer, one of the 'grand old men' of Holocaust research in Israel, has said: just what was going on at Harvard? Stanley Hoffman, the first supervisor, is a brilliant political scientist; his field is France since the First World War, and particularly since the Second. Sidney Verba, the second supervisor, is also a respected political scientist, an expert in 'political development'. The third member of the triumvirate, Peter Hall, is a specialist in political economy. The Harvard historian Simon Schama, whose encomia grace the book's jacket ('phenomenal scholarship', 'unavoidable truths', 'will permanently change the debate' on the Holocaust), is a specialist in the early modern period, noted for his work on the 'golden age' of Holland in the seventeenth century. None of these scholars is an expert on National Socialism and the Holocaust. They may have found Goldhagen's three case studies empirically convincing, but it is quite another thing for them to have countenanced his dismissive attacks on the real experts and, especially, his demonization of 'the Germans'. How would these scholars have reacted if a book with a similar range of shortcomings had been published in their own field—even though the book had successfully undergone its academic rites of passage, been awarded a prize, been reprinted several times and been hailed as an earth-shaking achievement?

The episode raises the whole question of quality control in the academic world. The non-specialist reader needs to be able to feel that basic monitoring mechanisms are functioning properly. A dozen years ago we had the case of David Abraham in Chicago and Princeton, when there was bitter controversy before criticisms of a slipshod piece of work on the fall of the Weimar Republic carried the day. Then, in 1992, came the case of Liah Greenfeld, who, in a comparative study of nationalism in five countries, re-asserted the uniqueness of German nationalism and portrayed the 'final solution' as a 'built-in' outcome, the inescapable end-point of a one-way journey from Herder to the Holocaust; this work was accepted and praised by illustrious figures from Harvard's 'community of scholars'. And now, with Goldhagen, we have reached a new low. It is not amusing to witness yet another failure of Academe's system of checks and balances.

The Goldhagen affair has not just been a dispute about historical interpretation and the preservation of scholarly standards; it has also taken on an indisputably political dimension. For some sections of the American public, the book has been a quasi-scientific confirmation of deep-seated resentments and prejudices. The less familiarity readers have had with the nuances and qualifications of research, the more impassioned their approbation has been. Goldhagen cannot have been unaware of the existence of these emotions, and it

tells us a great deal about his sense of responsibility as a politically conscious political scientist that he has been prepared to assist the media in the way that he has.

Above all, the international response tells us once again that Germans should be under no illusions: even though fifty years have elapsed since the Second World War and the Holocaust, our past is still very much alive and capable of coming back to haunt us. Many people in Germany felt, at the time of the commemorations of 1995, that the past had been sufficiently discussed, or even 'overcome'; certainly, that it had more than begun to 'pass away'. For the foreseeable future, however, it is not going to pass away, despite all proper attempts to 'historicize' it: it has been too monstrous an interlude in human history.

And what of the response in Germany? Goldhagen has made things very easy for his critics by proffering an 'explanation' and a style of argument that are so easily faulted. Judging from the treatment he has received so far, it is only too likely that the flimsy defences he has erected around his thesis will be torn apart by the combined onslaughts of the experts. He has done immense damage to the cause of Holocaust research, both within the academic community and among a wider public. That does not mean, though, that we can summarily dismiss his empirical case studies or some of the important questions that he raises. His book cannot be simply written off as the arrogant, iconoclastic work of a young political scientist who thinks he is making a brand-new discovery with everything he touches. It will not do to say that his teachers should have got him to see the light by telling him: 'What is good isn't new, and what is new isn't good'—however fair such a harsh indictment of his work would have been.

Several writers, seeking to take the edge off the controversy, have said that a repetition of the *Historikerstreit* of ten years ago is neither likely nor necessary in the present case, since the requisite scholarly ammunition is lacking. The *Historikerstreit*, however, was not a matter of pure scholarship alone: it was, first and foremost, a dispute about fundamental political questions, conducted partly by means of historical arguments.

The political element in the treatment that Goldhagen's book has so far received in the German media lies in the dubious consensus that has emerged. Not only have the crudity and dogmatism of the book been repudiated—that response has been entirely appropriate. What is worrying is the way in which, at the same time, all attempts to conduct a substantive debate about the factual questions raised in Parts III to V of the book—which extend, it should be remembered, to two hundred pages—as well as about important, as yet quite unresolved methodological problems, have been resisted; indeed, how almost every plausible reason that has been advanced for treating the book seriously has been rejected out of hand. It is the quality of political debate in our country that is at issue here: can we acknowledge the legitimacy of Goldhagen's challenge—and some heavily entrenched stereotypes and prejudices may need to

be overcome before that happens—while nevertheless insisting firmly on the complete failure of his own ‘explanation’? Is the answer really to consign his book to the bottomless pit, for being ‘too much for the majority of reunited Germans to take’?

*(Translated by RICHARD DEVESON)*