

# THE NAZI HOLOCAUST

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Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews

Edited by Michael R. Marrus

Series ISBN 0-88736-266-4

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# THE NAZI HOLOCAUST

Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews

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## 3. The “Final Solution”: The Implementation of Mass Murder Volume 1

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Edited with an Introduction by

Michael R. Marrus

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Westport • London

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The publisher wishes to acknowledge all the individuals and institutions that provided permission to reprint from their publications. Special thanks are due to the Yad Vashem Institute, Jerusalem, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, and the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, for their untiring assistance in providing materials from their publications and collections for use in this series.

## **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

The "Final solution" : the implementation of mass murder / edited by Michael R. Marrus.  
p. cm. — (The Nazi Holocaust ; v. 3)  
Includes index.  
ISBN 0-88736-255-9 (v. 1 : alk. paper). — ISBN 0-88736-256-7 (v. 2 : alk. paper).  
— \$ (set)  
1. Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945) 2. Holocaust Jewish (1939–1945) — Causes.  
3. Jews — Government policy — Germany — History — 20th century. 4. Germany  
— Ethnic relations. I. Marrus, Michael Robert. II. Series.  
D804.3.N39 vol. 3  
940.53'18 s—dc20  
[940.53'18]

89 12249  
CIP

## **British Library Cataloging in Publication Data**

The 'Final Solution' : the implementation of mass murder. — (The Nazi Holocaust; v.3).  
1. Jews, Genocide, 1939–1945  
I. Marrus, Michael R. (Michael Robert) II. Series  
940.53'15'03924  
  
ISBN 0-88736-255-9 v.1  
ISBN 0-88736-256-7 v.2  
ISBN 0-88736-266-4 set

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Meckler Corporation, 11 Ferry Lane West, Westport, CT 06880.  
Meckler Ltd., Grosvenor Gardens House, Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0BS, U.K.

Printed on acid free paper.  
Printed in the United States of America.

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# Series Preface

The Holocaust, the murder of close to six million Jews by the Nazis during the Second World War, stands as a dreadful monument to mankind's inhumanity to man. As such, it will continue to be pondered for as long as people care about the past and seek to use it as a guide to the present. In the last two decades, historical investigation of this massacre has been unusually productive, both in the sense of extending our understanding of what happened and in integrating the Holocaust into the general stream of historical consciousness. This series, a collection of English-language historical articles on the Holocaust reproduced in facsimile form, is intended to sample the rich variety of this literature, with particular emphasis on the most recent currents of historical scholarship.

However assessed, historians acknowledge a special aura about the Nazis' massacre of European Jewry, that has generally come to be recognized as one of the watershed events of recorded history. What was singular about this catastrophe was not only the gigantic scale of the killing, but also the systematic, machine-like effort to murder an *entire* people — including every available Jew — simply for the crime of being Jewish. In theory, no one was to escape — neither the old, nor the infirm, nor even tiny infants. Nothing quite like this had happened before, at least in modern times. By any standard, therefore, the Holocaust stands out.

While Jews had known periodic violence in their past, it seems in retrospect that the rise of radical anti-Jewish ideology, centered on race, set the stage for eventual mass murder. As well, Europeans became inured to death on a mass scale during the colossal bloodletting of the First World War. That conflict provided cover for the slaughter of many hundreds of thousands of Armenians in Turkey, a massacre that Hitler himself seems to have thought a precursor of what he would do in the conquest of the German *Lebensraum*, or living space, in conquered Europe. Still, the extermination of every living person on the basis of who they *were*, was something new. For both perpetrators and victims, therefore, decisions taken for what the Nazis called the "Final Solution" began a voyage into the unknown. As the Israeli historian Jacob Katz puts it: "This was an absolute *novum*, unassimilable in any vocabulary at the disposal of the generation that experienced it."

For more than a decade after the war, writing on the Holocaust may be seen in general as part of the process of mourning for the victims — dominated by the urge to bear witness to what had occurred, to commemorate those who had been murdered, and to convey a warning to those who had escaped. Given the horror and the unprecedented character of these events, it is not surprising that it has taken writers some time to present a coherent, balanced assessment.

The early 1960s were a turning point. The appearance of Raul Hilberg's monumental work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, and the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 stimulated debate and investigation. From Israel, the important periodical published by the Yad Vashem Institute [Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority], *Yad Vashem Studies*, made serious research

available to scholars in English. German and American scholars set to work. Numerous academic conferences and publications in the following decade, sometimes utilizing evidence from trials of war criminals then underway, extended knowledge considerably.

As a result, we now have an immense volume of historical writing, a significant sample of which is presented in this series. A glance at the topics covered underscores the vast scale of this history. Investigators have traced the Nazi persecution of the Jews before the implementation of the "Final Solution," showing links both to Nazi ideology and antisemitic tradition. They have indicated how the Germans coordinated their anti-Jewish activities on a European-wide scale in the wake of their territorial conquests, drawing upon their own bureaucracy and those of their allies, enlisting collaborators and various helpers in defeated countries. They have also devoted attention to the victims — whether in East European ghettos or forests, in Central or Western Europe, or in the various concentration and death camps run by the SS. Finally, they have also written extensively on the bystanders — the countries arrayed against the Hitlerian Reich, neutrals, various Christian denominations, and the Jews outside Nazi-dominated Europe.

The volumes in this series permit the reader to sample the rich array of scholarship on the history of the Holocaust, and to assess some of the conflicting interpretations. They also testify to a deeper, more sophisticated, and more balanced appreciation than was possible in the immediate wake of these horrifying events. The literature offered here can be studied as historiography — scholars addressing problems of historical interpretation — or, on the deepest level, as a grappling with the most familiar but intractable of questions: How was such a thing possible?

\* \* \*

I want to express my warm appreciation to all those who helped me in the preparation of these volumes. My principal debt, of course, is to the scholars whose work is represented in these pages. To them, and to the publications in which their essays first appeared, I am grateful not only for permission to reproduce their articles but also for their forbearance in dealing with a necessarily remote editor. I appreciate as well the assistance of the following, who commented on lists of articles that I assembled, helping to make this project an educational experience not only for my readers but also for myself: Yehuda Bauer, Rudolph Binion, Christopher Browning, Saul Friedländer, Henry Friedlander, Raul Hilberg, Jacques Kornberg, Walter Laqueur, Franklin Littell, Hubert Locke, Zeev Mankowitz, Sybil Milton, George Mosse, and David Wyman. To be sure, I have sometimes been an obstreperous student, and I have not always accepted the advice that has been kindly proffered. I am alone responsible for the choices here, and for the lacunae that undoubtedly exist. Special thanks go to Ralph Carlson, who persuaded me to undertake this project and who took charge of many technical aspects of it. Thanks also to Anthony Abbott of Meckler Corporation who saw the work through to completion. Finally, as so often in the past, I record my lasting debt to my wife, Carol Randi Marrus, without whom I would have been engulfed by this and other projects.

# Introduction

This section presents some of the important texts in the scholars' debate over the origins of the "Final Solution." Clearly, much less is known about the decision to begin mass killing on a European-wide scale than about its implementation. Given Hitler's secretiveness about the murder of Jews and his reluctance to commit his orders to paper, historians have had some difficulty tracing the precise course of decision making on the issue. But the range of difference among writers has narrowed as more evidence has come to light. All of the historians represented here see Hitler's personal role as extremely important; they differ, however, on whether they see European-wide mass murder as the result of a determined plan or of specific historical contingencies. They differ as well on the role of various agents in the Nazi hierarchy, and the extent to which the latter acted independently to initiate and to extend the process of mass murder.

This section also offers the reader a glimpse of the murderous bureaucracy at work — what Raul Hilberg, dean of Holocaust historians, has called "the machinery of destruction." Various contributors have posed questions about the social and intellectual background of the perpetrators, and also the nature of administrative apparatus associated with the "Final Solution." These essays also illustrate the gigantic scale of the murderous enterprise, involving countless participants, from railwaymen to ordinary soldiers, from jurists to Foreign Office officials, from the civilian managers of ghettos to doctors carrying out the racial projects of the Third Reich. The Nazis mobilized an entire army of participants, and the study of what moved these people is one of the important challenges for historians of the Holocaust.

Finally, several of these essays help set the Nazis' assault on European Jewry in the context of other population projects of the Third Reich. While not detracting from the singularity of anti-Jewish policies which has already been discussed, these contributions show how the "Final Solution" fit within a wider framework of racist, misogynist, and Social Darwinist enterprises, with often independent murderous results.



Part One  
The Decision  
for the Final Solution



Tim Mason

Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy  
about the Interpretation of National Socialism \*

For the past eleven years or so a subterranean debate has been going on among German historians of National Socialism. It has been growing increasingly bitter, and yet it has not really come out into the open, as a debate with a clear literary form. One has to trace its erratic public progress through a series of book reviews and odd passages within articles in journals and anthologies. The debate has reached such a pitch of intensity that some historians are now accusing other historians of "trivializing" National Socialism in their work, of implicitly, unwittingly, furnishing an apologia for the nazi regime<sup>1</sup>. This is perhaps the most serious charge which can be made against serious historians of the subject. Since the historians so accused have not the least sympathy for fascist causes, past or present, but are on the contrary progressive in their political positions, the debate is not a political slanging match (although in a strange way it is that too) — it raises in an acute and bitter form fundamental questions about modes of historical understanding and methods of interpretation, and fundamental questions about the moral and political responsibility of the historian.

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to this partly hidden debate; to put forward in the form of theses (rather than of extended and documented historical arguments) a critique of both positions in the controversy; and to suggest that the terms of debate can be and should be transcended. It is not an easy subject to write about. The issues concerned are both abstract and highly emotive, at once theoretical and personal, scholarly in one form and the engine of harsh professional in-fighting in another. It is beyond the scope of this paper to give an historical account of the origins and development of the controversy and the purposes which it has served: although it is a somewhat artificial procedure, the positions adopted and the arguments deployed will be abstracted from their context of the pressures within (and acting upon) the German historical profession. This does not make for good intellectual history but it does guide our concern away from the purely polemical uses to which the charge

\* I am deeply grateful to Jane Caplan and Wolfgang J. Mommsen for their detailed advice and criticism in the revision of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Thus among others, *Karl Dietrich Bracher*, *Tradition und Revolution im Nationalsozialismus*, in: *Manfred Funke* (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte*, Düsseldorf 1977, p. 18. The customary German term is „Verharmlosung“.

of "trivializing" National Socialism has been put, and towards the central theoretical conflicts — the argument is worth confronting at its most serious and difficult level, which should not be lost sight of amid the grape-shot and the imprecations. It is still going on and the issues are not closed.

Unlike the debates of the the 1960s on theories of fascism, debates in which marxist concepts were the main focal point, this more recent German debate is not in any straightforward sense political or ideological in character. We have to do with two different schools of *liberal* thought about historical work and about the responsibility of the historian, rather than with a confrontation between two antagonistic views of history which entail or grow out of totally opposed political commitments. And yet the differences are fierce, sometimes also sharp. Although the debate about "trivialization" is different in kind from and owes no overt intellectual or political debts to the preceding controversies over marxist theories, in both cases the role of impersonal forces in historical development, the role of collective processes as opposed to self-conscious decisions in determining political outcomes, is at the centre of the argument. If for no other reason than this, marxists cannot afford to ignore the current dispute among liberal historians.

The historians under attack for offering an unwitting apologia for National Socialism have been called functionalists<sup>2</sup>. The label is not strictly appropriate since, unlike the schematic writings of self-consciously functionalist authors, those of Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat do not pass over human agency in politics and do not assign historical and moral responsibility for nazi policies to blind forces and pressures<sup>3</sup>. However, the label is worth retaining as a rough form of shorthand: it indicates the emphasis which these historians have placed on the machinery of government and its effect upon decision-making in the Third Reich, on the dynamic interaction of the different component institutions of the regime and of the different forms of political power on the structure of nazi politics. The "cumulative radicalization" of nazi policies which ended in total war and genocide, the progressive selection for implementation of only the destructive elements within the regime's *Weltanschauung*, are portrayed not as the work of a deliberate dictatorial will, but rather as the consequences of the way in which the nazi leadership conceived of political power and of the way in which political power was organised in the Third Reich: the dominant tendency was a striving towards "politics without administration", or towards

<sup>2</sup> See the contribution of *Klaus Hildebrand* to this volume.

<sup>3</sup> Contrast on this point the emphasis which *Martin Broszat* does allow to agency in: *Soziale Motivation und Führer-Bindung des Nationalsozialismus*, in: *VjhZG* 18 (1970), pp. 329—65, with the full-blown functionalism of *Ludolf Herbst*, (*Die Krise des nationalsozialistischen Regimes am Vorabend des Zweiten Weltkrieges und die forcierte Aufrüstung*, in: *VjhZG* 26 (1978), pp. 347—92) in which the sub-systems have taken over from the people.



the substitution of propaganda for administration<sup>4</sup>. The traits of systematization, regularity, calculability inherent in the construction of a comprehensive administrative base for the dictatorship, were perceived, particularly by Hitler, Himmler and Goebbels, as limiting factors, as constraints, actual or potential, on their power as they understood it. The regime thus characteristically produced both non-policies or evasions which were of great political consequence at a later date (civil service policy; economic policy in the late 1930s; treatment of the Jews 1939—40), or sudden and drastic decisions which had not been prepared in the governmental machine and thus both disrupted existing policies and practices and had quite unforeseen administrative and political results, which latter in turn called for further ill-considered decisions (*Reichskristallnacht*, occupation policies in Poland). These characteristics of the political system were enhanced in the late 1930s by the consequences of earlier decisions to establish special new agencies and jurisdictions directly responsible to Hitler, whenever political tasks of especial urgency or interest arose (Himmler's career to 1936, DAF, Ribbentrop's Office, Todt: *Autobahns*, Four Year Plan, Speer: cities). This trend was symptomatic of the disintegration of government into an aggregation of increasingly ill co-ordinated special task-forces; it also reinforced the fragmentation of decision-making processes, since lines of political responsibility became increasingly blurred as ministerial and party jurisdictions expanded, were fractured, eroded and contested. That ministers learned of important decisions from the newspapers is significant less of their personal (or collective) dispensability, than of fundamental changes which were taking place in the processes and procedures of government and administration. There was less and less co-ordination.

It is argued by those suspected of "trivializing" Nazism that Hitler was the beneficiary rather than the architect of the increased powers which necessarily devolved upon the institution/person of the Führer in step with these changes. Hitler certainly did not encourage his subordinates to collaborate politically with each other (unless it was a case of them resolving a disagreement which he did not wish to adjudicate); he personally had a decisive preference for creating new organs of state to carry out specific projects, for choosing "the right man for the job" and giving him powers to carry it out, regardless; and there is no doubt that he carefully sought out men who were loyal to/dependent upon him for all top positions in the regime. But it does not follow from this that his power grew out of consistent application of the maxim "divide and rule". The relevant political and institutional divisions needed no nurturing — they had been present in the nazi movement before 1933 and had been greatly augmented by the "legal" seizure of power. Within the regime they took the form

<sup>4</sup> These points have been repeatedly emphasised by *Hans Mommsen*, *National Socialism — Continuity and Change*, in: *Walter Laqueur* (ed.), *Fascism. A Reader's Guide*, London 1976, p. 179—210.

of conflicts for particular powers, in which Hitler was generally recognised as arbiter, a role which he more often found tiresome or awkward than profitable. Göring became convinced that he wished to take as few decisions of this kind as possible.

More important as a source of power was his personal popularity, but while this shielded him against ultimative contradiction by ministers and generals, it was not much help in the practical business of selecting goals, reaching decisions and making policy. It may on the contrary have been a real obstacle to policy making: Hitler's sense of dependence upon his own popularity was so great and the possibility that that popularity might be sharply diminished by specific decisions was so difficult to assess in advance, that the cult of the Führer may well have been conducive to governmental inaction in internal affairs: Hitler was certainly careful not to associate himself with any measure which he thought might be unpopular, and to prevent the enactment of many such proposals, put forward by government agencies<sup>5</sup>. In this sense Hitler can be said to have been a "weak dictator"<sup>6</sup>: dependence upon his personal popularity for the political integration of German society under the dictatorship circumscribed the regime's freedom of action.

His power to co-ordinate policy in an effective manner was further limited by his characteristic deference to the senior leaders of the nazi movement. It was not just that he enjoyed their company and trusted their political instincts: he continued to consider himself an agent of the movement, and, in that sense, dependent upon/beholden to it. The dissolution of governmental policy-making procedures marked out a political space around Hitler which the movement's leaders were able individually to occupy — their advice was usually taken seriously, and their requests for the extension of their own particular jurisdictions or for specific policy initiatives were frequently granted, quite regardless of their (usually problematic) relationship to existing institutional arrangements or policies. It is of decisive importance in this connection that the leaders of the movement were in no way united among themselves; they were neither an organised group with regular functions, nor were they pursuing practical common goals. Their policy concerns were limited to their own jurisdictions, and they were frequently in competition with each other. In no sense did they furnish a possible basis for general policy-making. They were agreed only on the desirability of making Germany, in particular the country's government and administration, "more national socialist".

This latter goal was intrinsically and irreducibly vague; in practice it could at best be defined negatively in the persecution of the designated enemies of the

<sup>5</sup> I have pointed to some of the evidence for this in: *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich*, Opladen 1977, ch. VI.

<sup>6</sup> Hans Mommsen first used this term in: *MGM 1* (1970), in a review essay which helped to start the present controversy.

cause. More important, the anti-practical nature of the *Weltanschauung* meant that the most radical steps on any issue were always those which could be presented as "most national socialist" — there was no practical yardstick for judgement. Thus *radicalism*, and, in society at large, continual political *mobilisation*, became ends in themselves, substitutes of a kind for policy goals. While Hitler was clearly not antipathetic to this trend, he was not, it is argued, its self-conscious or purposeful author. The decay of policy-making institutions combined with the specific contentlessness of the ideology to generate a larger historical process, which, once firmly in motion, was not fully in the control of those who held power — not, because the (dis-)organisation of political power, the manner in which decisions were reached and the normative power of the demand for the most radical solutions all limited the effective range of choice. In the absence of policies, political improvisation, especially in occupied Eastern Europe, rested upon the deployment of extreme physical violence, which handicapped the prosecution of the war. There were no coherent war aims, only a number of mutually contradictory ones (race war/military conquest). There was no way within the regime to resolve the contradictions.

The central point in this "functionalist" position is an insistence upon the fact that the way in which decisions are reached in modern politics is vital to their specific outcomes, and thus vital to the historian for an understanding of their meaning. Only in retrospect and without consideration of decision-making do policies appear to *unfold* over the years with a necessity which is *coherent*. Nor, given the high degree of interdependence between all sectors of public life, can this be a matter of individual decisions to be taken a "case studies" or "models": uncoordinated, unprepared, and arbitrary decisions, decisions taken with regard only to a single project or goal (e.g. the Siegfried Line 1938; the battle fleet 1939) and without reference either to side-effects or to their impact upon other imperative projects, always further fragmented the processes of policy-making, making them cumulatively more arbitrary in their character, more violent and radical in their implementation, more conducive to competitive struggle among the executive organs of the regime. Policy-making on this analysis is simply not comprehensible as the enforcement of consistent acts of dictatorial will — the view that it can be so comprehended is superficial and does not do justice to the available evidence on the conduct of politics in the Third Reich.

"Intentionalism" is the name which has been given by "functionalists" to the position of those historians who regard the consistent dictatorial will as being of the essence of national socialist rule.<sup>7</sup> The difference between the two schools of thought was first and most clearly exemplified by the controversy over responsibility for the Reichstag Fire, a controversy which has engaged an enormous amount of time and energy, although the significance and con-

<sup>7</sup> See Hans Mommsen, in: *Funke* (ed.), p. 33.

sequences of the event are not a matter of dispute. In the absence of conclusive evidence about the identity of the arsonist(s), two different hypotheses have been constructed which rest upon and reinforce two fundamentally different interpretations of nazi politics. For intentionalist historians (who on this issue, as on others, are a politically most heterogeneous group) the Reichstag Fire is a part (a very important part) of the deliberate erection of a bestial dictatorship, a necessary preparation for war and for crimes against humanity: it is in alleged conformity with these later acts that the arsonists should have been nazis. There is thus a presumption of intention and responsibility on their part. To deny this is to under-rate the capacity of nazi leaders for pre-meditated evil and to run the risk of making the regime appear less monstrous than it was. If, on the other hand, the opposite inference is drawn from the inconclusive evidence, if there was no nazi arsonist, the fire and its consequences stand in alleged conformity with that swift and ruthless opportunism, with that capacity for violent improvisation and for seizing the main chance regardless of wider consequences, which, it is argued, was the hallmark of all later nazi decision making. And it is these traits, not calculated intention, which offer the key to the cumulative radicalization of the regime towards world war and genocide. This particular controversy is thus about fundamentals.

The "intentionalist" position appears to be less difficult to summarize than that of the "functionalists", if only because these historians have been less explicit about their methods. They are in essence those of classical liberal and conservative historiography. Intentionalist writers are far from rejecting all of modern political science, but in this controversy it is the most basic elements of their historical understanding which are at stake. In their recent essays Karl Dietrich Bracher and Klaus Hildebrand are largely concerned with the intentional actions of Hitler, which, they believe, followed with some degree of necessity from his political ideas<sup>8</sup>. They formulate the question: why did the Third Reich launch a murderous war of genocide and the destruction of human life on a hitherto unprecedented scale? They come in the end to the conclusion that the leaders of the Third Reich, above all Hitler, did this because they wanted to do it. This can be demonstrated by studying early manifestations of their *Weltanschauung*, which are wholly compatible with the worst atrocities which actually occurred in the years 1938—1945. The goal of the Third Reich was genocidal war, and, in the end, that is what National Socialism was all about. From this it seems to follow that the regime is "unique", "totalitarian", "revolutionary", "utopian", devoted to an utterly novel principle for the public order, scientific racism. The leaders, in particular Hitler, demonstrably wanted

<sup>8</sup> See Bracher's essay in the volumes edited by Funke and Laqueur, cited above; Hildebrand's essay in Oswald Hauser (ed.) *Weltpolitik II*, Göttingen 1975, and in the volume edited by Funke.

all this, and it is thus, as Hildebrand has recently suggested, wrong to talk of National Socialism; we should talk of Hitlerism.

This approach does not lead its advocates to concentrate narrowly upon nazi race and occupation policies, nor upon Hitler himself. They range widely in their writing, but the above point is their central point of reference. And having identified the problem in this way, intentionalist historians then appear to stand back from their subject and to meditate on the enormity of the regime's crimes, on the enormity of the destruction of human life. This entails trying to *understand* National Socialism, for an intentionalist historian *must* understand (in the German sense of *verstehen*). In this case understanding is possible only through an empathy born of hatred. This probably yields a less sure type of understanding than does an empathy born of respect or admiration, but given the historical personages concerned, there is no choice but to take those risks. They then invite their readers to hate and abhor too. This is where the political and moral responsibility of the historian comes in: it is clearly implied that it is the historian's public duty to write in this way. Faced with genocidal war, historians should not emphasise decision-making procedures, administrative structures or the dynamics of organisational rivalries. These things were at best secondary. To make them a vital part of a general interpretation of National Socialism is to trivialize the subject, to write morally incompetent history. What really matters is the distinctive murderous will of the nazi leadership.

Since the historians who write from this vantage point have, in a tactical sense, taken the offensive in the controversy, their position should be subjected to a critique first. Two general comments seem to be called for, and then a number of specific criticisms will be raised.

First, the intentionalist attack on the incorporation of functionalist types of explanation into our understanding of National Socialism proposes, implicitly but clearly, a retreat by the historical profession to the methods and the stance of Burckhardt. On the evidence above all of his "Reflections on World History" (a book which greatly impressed anxious conservatives when it was re-issued in the late 1930s) Burckhardt saw the historian's task as to investigate, to classify and to order, to hate and to love and to warn — but *not*, except upon the smallest of scales, to explain. This approach had almost no explanatory power at all. The attempt at explanation in any and all of the various different traditions of rationalist historiography seems to be put on one side in intentionalist writing on National Socialism. The view that Hitler's ideas, intentions and actions were decisive, for example, is not presented in these works as an argument, but rather as something which is both a premise and a conclusion. It can perhaps be said that historians have a public duty to attempt to explain, and that informed explanatory reasoning about the past (however indirect or surprising its routes may be) has its own moral purpose and power. This is not generally questioned with respect to other topics in modern history, however much argument there may be about specific types of explanation.

The second methodological point concerns the role of individualism in ethics and the social sciences. Following the arguments of Steven Lukes, methodological individualism simply cannot work as a way of giving a coherent account of social, economic and political change<sup>9</sup>. Marx, Weber, Durkheim and their successors buried this approach with a variety of different funeral rites, and still it lives on, on borrowed time — a commodity with which historians are especially generous. Unless virtually the whole of modern social science constitutes an epochal blind alley, "Hitler" *cannot* be a full or adequate explanation, not even of himself. To dismiss methodological individualism is *not*, of course, to abolish the category of individual moral responsibility in private or public life: explanation is one thing, responsibility something else. As Isaiah Berlin points out, even advocates of determinism continue to *behave* as if individuals were fully free and responsible agents: it is a necessary assumption for human interaction<sup>10</sup>. But it is an impossible *basic* assumption for the writing of history, for it would require us to concentrate upon the actions of individual free agents in such a way as to elevate them to the status of prime cause, and to deny that we can in some respects better understand the significance of the actions of people in the past than they themselves could. Such a history would banish all processes of change and constitute the subject as "one damn choice after another".

Thus to argue that the dynamic of nazi barbarism was primarily institutional and/or economic does not entail any denial that Hitler was a morally responsible political leader who made choices which were inspired by distinctive malevolent intentions — it is only to insist that his will cannot carry the main burden of explanation. And by the same token, to insist in detail upon the unique character of his political will and intentions does not of itself establish an argument about the importance of these attributes in an account of National Socialism. That requires a comprehensive social, economic and institutional history.

In addition to these general observations there are a number of specific objections to the intentionalist position. The first is both technical and obvious, but it must be continually re-stated. The hypothesis that Hitler was the sole author of all the crimes of the Third Reich cannot be proved in the most mundane sense — the source materials are inadequate both in quantity and in quality to prove it. At this elementary level we know less about Hitler's control over German policy, much less about his motives and calculations, than we know about the conduct of most other nineteenth- or twentieth-century political leaders. For this reason alone, an analysis of his choices and of his influence is exceptionally difficult to execute. Caution is always called for, areas of inescapable ignorance emerge everywhere. It is particularly difficult to assess how far subordinates were able to bring influence to bear upon him, how

<sup>9</sup> Steven Lukes, *Individualism*, Oxford 1973, esp. ch. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, London 1969, pp. ix—lviii.

suggestible or complaisant to insistent requests or proposals he was. The inadequacy of the sources in this sphere (which is of vital concern to an intentionalist interpretation) is a direct consequence of the fragmented and informal character of the decision-making procedures referred to above, as well as of Hitler's personal aversion to the written word: motives were rarely formulated, reasons rarely given, policy options rarely recorded as such, the origins of policy initiatives rarely disclosed. Concerted policy-making would have produced more and better records of calculations and intentions.

Second, even before radically different methods of interpretation are considered, it must be pointed out that, at a very simple level, the sources which we do possess on Hitler's goals and intentions can be read in very different ways, depending upon the different kinds of other historical knowledge which is brought to bear upon these texts. To come to the very few good records of Hitler's policy statements between 1936 and 1941 from the papers of the Ministries of Labour and Economics and of the War Economy Staff is a very different intellectual experience from coming to the same texts from the papers of the Foreign Office or of the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial. Ideally one ought to come at the texts from all of these angles, and more, but in the meantime there are legitimate grounds for provisional disagreement about the meaning of the evidence concerning what Hitler thought he was doing. There are different, sometimes contradictory emphases in the evidence. Disagreements on these points will be clarified by further contextual research (why did Hitler make the speech to the press in November 1938? why did his Reichstag speech of 30 January 1939 take that particular form?), rather than by further philological research. Meanwhile these sources can be interpreted in different ways, even if one confines oneself to a literal reading.

There is however, third, no reason why sources should be read *solely* in a literal manner. Intentionalist historians tend to do so — they identify the goals and choices of their historical actors by reading the words on the page in the archive and assuming that they can only mean what they appear to mean on a common-sense reading. Intentions are established by taking the relevant sources at their face value (at least wherever a literal reading yields internally coherent sense). This is one of the reasons why Martin Broszat's designation of *Lebensraum* as an ideological metaphor has aroused such indignation<sup>11</sup>. (Insofar as he is thought to be belittling what happened in German-occupied Russia, he was simply been misunderstood.) He was attempting a partly functional analysis of Hitler's stated intentions, arguing that the full political significance of his words on this subject is of a different order from their literal meaning: that the goal of *Lebensraum* served as a focus for boundless political mobilization. Broszat may or may not have clinched this particular argument, but that type of approach to the interpretation of ideas and sources is not only legitimate;

<sup>11</sup> Broszat, *Soziale Motivation*, p. 407.

it is essential. Notions of symbolic meaning are commonplace in psychology and literary criticism, and a variety of efforts have been made in order to systematize techniques for eliciting symbolic or hidden meaning — and thus for redefining the "intentions" being studied. While work of this kind is not easy and seldom yields indisputable conclusions, it can, as Klaus Theweleit has shown, greatly enlarge our understanding of motivation and human agency<sup>12</sup>. And it is precisely the exceptional quality of nazi politics, the compulsive repetitiveness and the extremes of violence, which make non-literal interpretations seem so urgently necessary and literal readings so unsatisfactory, simplistic. What *were* Hitler's intentions in his hate-filled outbursts against "the Jews"? Various suggestions have been made of motives and meanings which perhaps lay behind or went beyond the anti-semitic words on the page, but which do comprehend these words<sup>13</sup>. To deny in principle or to disregard the possibility of analyzing evidence of intentions in a complex manner and of thus identifying intentions which are not explicit in the sources, to say, that is, that Hitler ordered the extermination of the Jews and instigated other racial policies because he wanted to, is a form of intellectual surrender. Intention is an indispensable concept for historians, whether they are determinists or not, but we do not have to take people in the past at their own word concerning their intentions. The realm of their self-consciousness as presented in historical sources is not trivial, but it does not define the limits of our understanding. It is a starting-point; it constitutes a problem, not an answer.

This point can perhaps best be illustrated from that branch of historical enquiry which has hitherto been the pre-eminent stronghold of intentionalist research and writing — the study of foreign policy. Klaus Hildebrand's book, "*Vom Reich zum Weltreich*", is in parts sensitive to the effects of pressure-groups on policy-making, but it concentrates very strongly upon the evolution of Hitler's intentions and it eschews functional analysis of foreign policy. Hitler is presented as an uneasy amalgam of two character-types: the ruthless, aggressively calculating strategist, and the obsessive doctrinaire ideologue. This dual personality havers during the decisive stage of nazi foreign policy, 1938—1941, between two quite different paths of conquest. Why? I cannot find in Hildebrand's work a satisfactory answer to this question. My failure to find explanations may well be due to my own short-comings as a reader, but for the moment the extended re-enactment of Hitler's restless strategic intentions in these years does not make sense. Alternative goals and tactics crowd in on each other; means and ends change places at bewildering speed; and all changes in

<sup>12</sup> *Klaus Theweleit, Männerphantasien*, 2 vols., Frankfurt a. M. 1977.

<sup>13</sup> The suggestions which seem most helpful and most capable of further development detect strong elements of self-hatred in Hitler's anti-semitism. See *Norman Cohn, Warrant for Genocide*, London 1967, pp. 251—268. The weakness of much other psychological work does not invalidate this approach to the texts.



policy can be comprehensively rationalised. In the course of a single day, 21 May 1940, for example, Hitler is recorded as making two completely different statements about fundamental strategic priorities to two different military leaders; the inconsistency is allowed to pass without comment by the historian<sup>14</sup>. Elsewhere Hildebrand suggests the possibility of knowing Hitler's mind almost on a week-to-week basis. There are, it seems, in principle reasons for everything the Führer does or says (or omits to do), reasons which are usually reconstructed in the interrogative mode by an elaborate process of intuitive/empathic speculation. But one is very little the wiser. There are many reasons why Hitler is and is not interested in overseas colonies... The outcome is a detailed picture of confusion.

A literal reading of the sources on Hitler's strategic intentions leaves several dimensions and questions out of account. It lacks insight into the real anxieties, confusions and uncertainties of Hitler himself. (Would this detract from his responsibility?) By treating every recorded utterance as though it were carved in marble it makes his foreign policy seem more confusing than it would if at least some utterances were read as *evidence of confusion* (and not of intention). A literal reading also lacks insight into Hitler's habitual, though not universal, deference to the interests and views of his immediate advisers and subordinates while he was talking to them. For this reason alone he was unlikely to hold out the same strategic prospects to both Halder and Raeder in their separate discussions on 21 May 1940. This pervasive and evasive complaisance was, for all that it was non-committal and revokable, an important part of policy-making in the Third Reich. That is, Hitler's latent, as opposed to manifest, intention in making many pronouncements was probably to avert dissension within the regime, to encourage or mollify his subordinates. Last, an intentionalist diplomatic history skirts around the question of the basic expansionist dynamics of the regime — economic and military dynamics, the dynamics of political mobilization, forces which made it impossible for the Third Reich to stop anywhere short of total defeat. While it is possible to identify the decisions and the reasoning behind them which originally set these dynamics in motion (1933—1936), one must ask whether they did not later emancipate themselves from their creators. If it is true, or even only a useful hypothesis, that the process of nazi territorial expansion created its own momentum, and that this momentum could at best be guided but not held under control by the leadership, then the relative importance of Hitler's musings on alternative goals, strategies and power constellations is diminished. While it was clearly not a matter of indifference which territory and which people the Third Reich at any one point in time devoured next, the history of the years 1938—1942 strongly suggests that there *had* to be a next victim. Perhaps the ambivalences of Hitler's foreign policy and strategy in these years, the changes in emphasis and direction, the

<sup>14</sup> Klaus Hildebrand, *Vom Reich zum Weltreich*, München 1969, p. 643.

promiscuity of aggressive intentions can be seen as a product of, or response to this expansionist imperative. The appearance of control and of historic choice may be in large part appearance, the practised posture of the dictator. This loosely functionalist approach suggests that much of the source material, which in the intentionalist account is presented as reasoning prior to action, is better understood as symptom of the internal and external pressures for further aggression and conquest. If none of the above criticisms have any weight, it is difficult to see how historians of World War II can talk about the causes of developments, as well as about the reasons for policy decisions.

The fourth criticism of intentionalist writing concerns decision-making processes and the power structure. It seems to me simply wrong, mistaken, contrary to the evidence to argue that enquiries in this field shed little light on the great facts about the Third Reich. The methodological principle that it is essential to study policy-making processes in order to understand any specific outcome or decision, has been brilliantly stated and illustrated by Hans Mommsen; and its value has been demonstrated beyond doubt and in a wealth of detail by Wilhelm Deist and Manfred Messerschmidt in their new study of re-armament and foreign policy, a study un-touched by functionalist theory but full of general implications for our understanding of the power structure<sup>15</sup>. It is true that there are pitfalls in this type of analysis: in the study of decision-making processes it is possible to get entrapped within the fascination of that subject, and to fail to place the results in a wider context of interpretation; and, more important, if the debate about polycracy is reduced to a discussion of how polycratic or monocratic the Third Reich was, if polycracy is understood as a *static* concept which will help only to produce a cross-section of the complex layer-cake of power structures, then this concept will indeed be of little use to historians. But the work to those attacked for trivializing National Socialism has *not* fallen into these pits. Hans Mommsen has moved the discussion about polycracy into its proper dynamic political context. He has shown, though not yet in an extended historical account, how this discussion illuminates the formulation of policy and the selection of goals in the Third Reich — and not just the regime's secondary goals.

If this point is correct, it must be concluded that the study of institutions and decision-making processes and enquiry into the polycratic nature of national socialist rule form an essential part of a liberal/moral history of the regime and its crimes. They are not in themselves alien considerations or factors, nor are they morally neutral. To introduce them into a moral historical enquiry is simply to insist that the responsibility of political leaders needs to be and can be more widely defined than reference to their policy intentions alone will

<sup>15</sup> *Wilhelm Deist et al.*, *Ursachen und Voraussetzungen der deutschen Kriegspolitik*, vol. 1 of the series: *Das deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, ed. by Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Stuttgart 1979.

allow, defined to include the workings of institutions. From this it follows that the moral responsibility of the historian can be more widely defined too. The monstrous will and administrative diletantism were, at the very least, necessary to each other. It seems trivial to resist this line of enquiry.

Finally there is one immanent argument against the intentionalist case. Hitler can be demonstrated to have known that a great deal depended for the nazi regime upon his own capacity to exaggerate his personal domination: his capacity to exaggerate it *both* to the elite in the closed meetings where policy was announced or debated, *and* also to his popular audience. Hitler well understood his own function, the role which he *had* to act out as "Leader" of the Third Reich. He was good at the street theatre of dictatorship; it is arguable that he transformed himself into a function, the *function of Führer*. Several aspects of his behaviour in this respect are well documented: his aversion to identifying himself in public with any specific policies (other than the major foreign policy decisions); his reluctance to refuse requests or reject suggestions from the old guard of the party leadership; his calculated use of his own personal popularity in conflicts within the regime; his evasiveness when faced with conflicts which were hard to arbitrate. He always appeared more ruthless, more cold-blooded, more certain than he actually was. This role-playing aspect of Hitler's power, his instrumental attitude to his own person, is not, of course, the whole Hitler-story. But it is a very important part of it. However one may read his intentions, there is no doubt that Hitler was *also* a "good functionalist". And this is, at the level of "*Verstehen*", an important fact about the personality to whom intentionalist historians would attach such overriding importance: that personality was in large measure a self-consciously constructed role, the nature of which was conditioned by the nature of the regime.

The present weaknesses of the "functionalist" position are not, I believe, those held up for disapprobation by intentionalist critics. They are quite different. The first is a vulnerability rather than a weakness. We do not yet have a full-length historical study along these lines. Aside from Martin Broszat's "*Der Staat Hitlers*" (which, because it could touch only lightly on foreign and military affairs, does not fully meet the points now raised by Bracher and Hildebrand), the position has been worked out in essays and articles. An unambiguous demonstration of the fruitfulness of the approach will be achieved by a large-scale study. But this is an extremely difficult intellectual undertaking, much more difficult than to give an account of this or that policy in its development and implementation. It requires a sustained analysis of the (shifting) relation of interdependence between the human agents and their power structures, a relation of a peculiarly complex kind. Aside from conceptual precision, aside from source materials the significance of which is often overlooked in conventional studies, this work also needs a language which is capable of conveying clearly the complexity of its findings — it cannot get by with the vocabulary of intention, calculation and consequence, and the mechanistic vocabulary of functionalist

sociology is positively unhelpful<sup>16</sup>. Thus the promise may take some time to be fulfilled.

Second, and more important, there are ambiguities and difficulties in the formulation of the liberal functionalist position. Hans Mommsen writes, for example, of the dynamic expansive power of the Third Reich:

The root of these forces lay in the movement's own apolitical and millennial dynamics and also in the antagonistic interests among the various groups in the National Socialist leadership.

While this is a suggestive sentence, it is not an analytically clear statement of a hierarchy of determining causes, nor does it specify a non-causal relationship between the two "roots". A passage on the bases of Hitler's position as Führer raises similar difficulties:

Playing off rival power blocks against one another was not so much a matter of securing his own omnipotence, but rather done for the satisfaction of an instinctive need to reward all and any fanatical pursuit of an end, no matter whether institutionally fixed competences were ignored or whether, an advantage having been gained, its bureaucratic safeguards were sacrificed to over-dynamics<sup>17</sup>.

There are, so to speak, too many things going on in that sentence for one to be quite sure what importance the author is attributing to the different factors. What was the relationship between the existence of the rival power blocks and Hitler's "instinctive need"? — Were the rival power blocks a condition for the articulation of the instinctive need? Had the need contributed decisively to their creation in the first place? Or can the two in the end not be distinguished in this way? Indistinctnesses of this kind grow out of real difficulties of historical interpretation, but they also point to a continuing uncertainty about the explanatory power of the approach. If the presentation is not *analytically* clear it tends to become just a description of a particular mode or style of the exercise of dictatorial power.

Third, the so-called "functionalists" have written rather little about the German economy, and have not integrated this theme into their overall schema. Given their concern with the dynamics of dictatorial power and expansion, this is, to say the least, surprising.

As indicated at the start, marxist historians and political theorists seem to have paid little attention to this debate between two schools of liberal historians; they have also written rather little about nazi genocide, the subject which raises the question of agency and cause in its most acute form. There is no compelling reason for this. Marxism offers a dynamic theory of the development of all modern industrial capitalisms, which incorporates, or rests upon, a structural

<sup>16</sup> The difficulty of Broszat's prose in „Soziale Motivation“ clearly reflects the intellectual difficulty of specifying the relationships which he is analysing.

<sup>17</sup> *Laqueur* (ed.), pp. 183, 198.

(some would argue "functional") analysis of these systems. The dynamic element introduces human agency, and human agency is central to Marx's writings:

Men do make their own history, but they do not make it as they please, not under conditions of their own choosing, but rather under circumstances which they find before them, under given and imposed conditions. (18th Brumaire)

This sentence ought to introduce all biographical studies of Hitler! It formally encapsulates intentions and structures, and suggests the necessity of relating the two in historical writing. However, if intentionalist writers all too often ignore or misunderstand the "given and imposed conditions", marxists have paid too little attention to "men do make their own history" when they have been concerned with the ruling class and the holders of power. This deficiency in giving an account of intentions and actions is a weakness in marxist work on fascism; but the weakness is not inherent in the theory as such, for the challenge can be met by further research along the lines of the various non-literal ways of reading sources referred to above<sup>18</sup>. It is an urgent task, for studies which exhaust themselves with the conditions which "permitted" certain developments, or made certain policies "possible" or "necessary" fall short of historical explanation; they cut off before reaching those human actions which actually require explanation — mass murder. But it is the stopping short which is mistaken, not the original effort.

What was permitted by conditions, or was possible, must be analysed, and it is here that marxism offers a more comprehensive framework than an approach which concentrates heavily upon political institutions and decision-making processes. We need to understand how it is decided what the available options are, which political leaders can choose among. Which alternative possibilities in the Third Reich were never even entertained as such by the leadership? Which got lost in the lower ranks of the bureaucracy or party and were thus never presented as policy options? <sup>19</sup> These non-decisions are an important part of any system of power. They define the parameters of possible intentions at the top of the system, which are almost always narrow at that level. It is in this analytically difficult area that the economy and the state need to be taken as a whole in the study of the Third Reich, for the dynamic of economic development played a primary role in the filtering out of impossible options, in determining what it was that could be decided in terms of policy.

I cannot develop this argument in detail here, either in the form of a specific historical analysis or in that of a theoretical discussion. A few historiographical remarks must suffice. A marxist approach, which attaches pre-eminent weight to the processes of capital accumulation and class conflict is neither outflanked

<sup>18</sup> See above, p. 31 f.

<sup>19</sup> *Joachim Radkau*, *Entscheidungsprozesse und Entscheidungsdefizite in der deutschen Außenwirtschaftspolitik 1933—1940*, GG 2 (1976/1), pp. 33—65, makes a first, stimulating but empirically unsatisfactory attempt to ask questions of this kind.

nor contradicted by some of the more important conclusions of liberal functionalist writing. It can on the contrary broaden their scope by identifying background economic determinants and conditions of state action. David Schoenbaum, for example, has developed an influential argument around the contradictions between the provisional achievements of the regime and many of the movement's original declared aims and policies<sup>20</sup>: in the late 1930s autobahns, Salzgitter, intensive technological innovation, concentration in industry and rapid urbanisation stood as consequences of a programme which had included the corporate state, rural settlement, some degree of de-urbanisation and, at a political level, notions of the liberation of a nationalist citizenry among its serious goals. It must be insisted upon that the points which were not achieved (were filtered out) ran strongly counter to the most elementary processes of capitalist accumulation. And these processes should not be reduced to the formula "requirements of re-armament". In this instance the workings of the economic system can be seen in a broadly determinant role, which can be exemplified in part by the activities of the heads of leading industrial concerns. With respect to the "selection of negative goals", to the emergence of the race war as a dominant part of nazi political practice, it is a question rather of economic conditions and constraints than of determination. The genocidal tendency in the original programme was one of the few which the regime did pursue with extreme logical rigour. It was also probably less disruptive of the capitalist system than, for example, a fully fledged attempt to 'return' to a small-scale artisan/peasant economy would have been. This is *not* to argue that genocide was enacted for that reason, nor to imply that there is little more to be said about it. It is to make a suggestion concerning the background processes of the selection of negative goals, of the practical definition of what was and what was not possible. The mass destruction of life in the extermination camps and in occupied Poland and Russia does not seem to have had really serious negative effects upon the German economy in the short term. Would it all have been different if there had been large numbers of skilled engineering workers and technicians among the Jews of Germany? Questions of this kind are necessary in order to identify limiting conditions as precisely as possible.

At one level the argument concerning nazi foreign policy can be put less tentatively than the above remarks. In anticipating and accounting for the war of expansion in the late 1930s, the explanatory power of pressures which in their origin were economic was apparent to many actors and observers. Thus

<sup>20</sup> *David Schoenbaum, Hitler's Social Revolution, London 1967.* In anticipation of the present controversy, this book was immediately attacked in exactly the same way that the work of Mommsen and Broszat is now being attacked. See the superficial, moralizing review by *Heinz Lubasz, New York Review of Books* [vol. XI no. 11] who failed to understand that one can attempt to explain mass murder without actually writing about it at length.

the argument that the decisive dynamic towards expansion was economic does not in the first instance depend upon the imposition of alien analytical categories on a recalcitrant body of evidence, nor in the first instance upon the theoretical construction of connections between "the economy" and "politics". For the years 1938—1939 a very wide variety of different types of source materials discuss explicitly and at length the growing economic crisis in Germany, and many of the authors of these memoranda, books and articles could see the need to speculate then about the relationship between this crisis and the likelihood of war. The view that this was a major urgent problem was common to many top military and political leaders in Germany, to top officials in Britain, to some German industrialists and civil servants, to German exiles and members of the conservative resistance, and to non-German bankers and academics. The nature of the relationship between economic crisis and war is not easy to specify precisely. I do not for the moment see a need to modify my own view that the timing, tactics and hence also the strategic confusion of Hitler's war of expansion were decisively influenced by the politico-economic need for plunder, a need which was enhanced by the very wars necessary to satisfy it<sup>21</sup>. This appears to me to have been the basic logic of Hitler's foreign policy and strategy in the decisive period 1938—41; without a firm conception of it, the institutional dynamics of the regime and the various specific intentions of Hitler remain less than comprehensible. This is, of course, *not* to argue that Hitler was "forced to go to war" in the sense of not wanting to, but rather that the wars which the Third Reich actually fought bore very little relation to the wars which he appears to have wanted to fight: and that this was so, because of domestic pressures and constraints which were economic in origin and also expressed themselves in acute social and political tensions. Human agency is defined or located, not abolished or absolved by the effort to identify the unchosen conditions.

But then the will and the intention still have to be specified. It may be helpful here if we can find ordering concepts for the analysis of National Socialism, which *both* capture objective processes (capital accumulation, institutional darwinism, expansionism) *and* also relate clearly to the self-consciousness of the political actors. One such bridging concept is "struggle", which incorporates notions of both competition and war. Competition and struggle were of the essence of economic and institutional processes, and they furnished one context of social life in general — the individual struggle for advancement and advantage, social mobility. In war too struggle appeared as an inexorable process. Struggle was also for the nazi leaders a basic intention, the title of Hitler's book.

<sup>21</sup> See *Mason, Sozialpolitik*, ch. VI. I understand *Jost Dülffer's* criticism as, rightly, adding a further dimension (the arms race) to this analysis, not as offering a substitute interpretation: *Der Beginn des Krieges 1939. Hitler, die innere Krise und das Mächtesystem*, in: GG 2 (1976/4), pp. 443—470.

Struggle was, in a distinctive and extreme manner, what their politics was all about, struggle against certain enemies but not struggle for any clearly perceived ends. Politics is struggle, as Hitler says in "Mein Kampf". That one remark *does* perhaps have to be taken literally. But from this distance in time it can legitimately be, must be, related back to wider contexts than its author had in mind — to the highly competitive economic, social and institutional order over which he came to preside and which went under his leadership to destruction.

It might be suggested that just beneath the surface the nazi leadership sensed that their particular struggle was a hopeless one. The enemies were too numerous, and, in the case of "the Jews," they were by Hitler's definition too clever and too powerful *ever* to be beaten, even by the Third Reich. The crucial problem for national socialist politics was to destroy as many enemies as possible while going down fighting to the very bitter end. Genocide was the most distinctively nazi, the most terrible part of an over-arching politics of struggle. And these were the politics of a whole capitalist epoch.

This suggests in conclusion the need for a materialist history of Social Darwinism, a history which sees that subject in terms of economic forces and institutional power, in terms of social and economic practice and individual behaviour (intentions), and not just as a peculiar set of ideas which were influential around the turn of the century. It was that too, but it was also capitalist economic competition, economic and territorial competition between states, ethnic, national and cultural conflict, the struggle for eugenic improvement, the struggle on a group and individual basis for material advantage, respectability, virtue and God's grace. Only then in Germany did it become struggle as war and race war. In this broader sense of an interlocking pattern of structures, forces, ideologies and motives Social Darwinism was, of course, not peculiar to Germany. There are British, American and French versions; liberal conservative, fascist and nazi versions. May be there is the framework for an enquiry here which is both structural and dynamic, and within which the specifically distinctive features and force of the national socialist political will can be precisely identified.

The precision of the identification matters. Contrary to the implication in the charge that "functionalists" or marxists trivialize National Socialism, it is logically and morally possible to hold a system responsible for terrible crimes, as well as those persons who exercised power within the system. While systems of domination and exploitation cannot be represented as individual moral actors can, it can be demonstrated that they generate barbarism. The demonstration of exactly how they have done so is often complex, but complex historical arguments are not indifferent to moral issues just because they are complex. If historians do have a public responsibility, if hating is part of their method and warning part of their task, it is necessary that they should hate precisely.



## The Selling of Adolf Hitler: David Irving's *Hitler's War*

CHARLES W. SYDNOR, JR.

IN the last decade the field of studies focusing on Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist period of German history has been invaded and nearly overrun by an international throng of journalists, essayists, memoirists, apologists, cultists, and hucksters busily engaged in advancing various interpretations, analyses, and portraits of Hitler. Among this group who are not scholars or professional historians, there seems a wide disparity of ability and expertise<sup>1</sup> and an obvious dissimi-

The preparation of this essay was made possible by financial support from the Longwood College Foundation. In addition, this writer owes an outstanding debt to Mr. Robert Wolfe, Chief of the Modern Military Branch of the National Archives, and to the members of his staff for their invaluable assistance in the research and development of this review.

1. At the lower end of the scale in Hitler enterprise publishing are two books by Glenn Infield, *Eva and Adolf* (New York, 1974) and *Leni Riefenstahl, the Fallen Film Goddess* (New York, 1976). The former purports to be "the true story of Adolf Hitler and his mistress, Eva Braun," and the latter "the intimate and shocking story of Adolf Hitler and Leni Riefenstahl." In both works, the writing is so bad and the factual errors so numerous that the superficial and ridiculous conclusions provide comic relief. The eager reader searching for the sizzling details of Hitler's kinky affairs will be disappointed, however, as Mr. Infield is unable to offer any proof of Hitler's alleged sexual depravity—with either Eva Braun or Leni Riefenstahl. The strain these efforts placed on Mr. Infield is most painfully apparent in the Riefenstahl book, where he attempts to translate the title of the anti-Semitic movie *Jud Süß* as "Sweet Jew" (pp. 191, 272).

At the top of this scale are John Toland, *Adolf Hitler* (New York, 1976), and Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler* (New York, 1974). Mr. Toland's book is predictably inclusive, detailed, and well-written, predictably honest—he admits the volume has no thesis—and predictably marred by the wrong kind of original research, gullibility, and analytical feebleness (see especially the description of the *Waffen SS*, pp. 799–800n., paperback ed.). Mr. Fest's volume, which suffers from an almost complete absence of original research, is the subject of a lengthy review by Hermann Graml, "Probleme einer Hitler Biographie: Kritische Bemerkungen zu Joachim C. Fest," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 22, no. 1 (Jan. 1974): 76–92. Indirectly, the weaknesses in the Toland and Fest biographies may be their most valuable assets; their deficiencies reemphasize the work still to be done in Hitler studies before anything approaching a complete biography can be undertaken.

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*Hitler's War*. By DAVID IRVING. New York: The Viking Press, 1977.

Pp. xxxiii, 926. \$17.50

larity of motives and objectives.<sup>2</sup> It is, therefore, difficult to specify common points of similarity or agreement that might characterize this particular genre of Hitler studies (or enterprises). On one point only do the efforts seem to tally, in the unspoken but apparent agreement on an injunction by now axiomatic: Adolf Hitler sells.

This Hitler industry is important to the historian primarily in relation to its impact upon the enormous international interest in Hitler and Hitler's place in German and world history, and in its influence upon the general public's perception of who Adolf Hitler was and what he did.<sup>3</sup> The Hitler industry has both stimulated and been stimulated by what is commonly known as the Hitler wave. Though the focus of interest in the German dictator remains primarily in books, it has expanded into a variety of related fields: television documentaries,<sup>4</sup> motion pictures,<sup>5</sup> records, photo biographies and Hitler magazines,<sup>6</sup> and Hitler-related war games for the fireside hobbyist.<sup>7</sup>

2. This particular point deserves serious scrutiny from the historical community, especially in relation to the recent literature attempting to prove that the Jews really were not murdered. A most recent example is A. R. Butz, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, published in Britain by the Historical Review Press, 22 Ellerker Gardens, Richmond, Surrey. An article addressing the same problem in recent literature in West Germany is Ino Arndt and Wolfgang Scheffler, "Organisierter Massenmord an Juden in Nationalsozialistischen Vernichtungslagern: Ein Beitrag zur Richtigstellung apologetischer Literatur," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 24, no. 2 (Apr. 1976): 105-35.

3. In West Germany, the Hitler interest appears to have had little impact upon secondary-school children's knowledge of the era. See the feature "Hitler wie er nicht war: Das Geschichtsbild unserer Kinder," *Der Spiegel*, Aug. 15, 1977.

4. Among the better documentaries that enlarge upon Hitler's influence upon German and world history is the series of programs *The World at War*, produced by Thames Television of London. This writer has authored a forthcoming ninety-minute documentary, *Adolf Hitler: 1889-1945*, based on research in archival film, and developed and produced, with the aid of a grant, for American public television. For a discussion of the Hitler television phenomenon in West Germany, see Gitta Sereny, "Germany: The 'Rediscovery' of Hitler," *Atlantic Monthly*, Aug. 1978, pp. 6-14.

5. The most recent and controversial of the motion pictures is Joachim C. Fest's *Hitler: A Career*, which has already been seen by more than one million theater patrons in Europe and is due to be released in the United States in 1979.

6. Sereny, *Atlantic Monthly*, pp. 6-14. Among the photo studies are Jochen von Lang, ed., *Adolf Hitler: Gesichter eines Diktators* (Hamburg, 1968), Eng. ed., *Adolf Hitler: Faces of a Dictator* (New York, 1969); and the same editor's *Henry Picker/Heinrich Hoffmann, Hitler's Tischgespräche im Bild* (Oldenburg and Hamburg, 1969), Eng. ed., *Hitler Close-Up* (New York, 1973).

7. The Avalon Hill Game Co. of Baltimore, Maryland, is the major manufacturer of the "simulation" games. Simulations Publications, Inc., of New York has a game, *The Plot to Assassinate Hitler*, which enables participants to stage their own thrilling replay of the events of July 20, 1944.

The major source of interest for serious students of Hitler and the Hitlerian era has to be the growing volume of Hitler enterprise books. The games and gadgets attract no analysis in the mass media, but the commercially published books do. They appear in a blizzard of publicity, and become the subject of extensive magazine and newspaper reviews, book-club selections, and talk-show discussions. Many of these works are exposed instantly to a vast audience, run up hefty sales, and presumably exert some influence upon what the general reading public thinks about Adolf Hitler. Moreover, the marketing hyperbole, the media attention, and the sales figures are used to invest the authors of this genre of Hitler publishing with the status of experts, leaving in the minds of the less conversant the often mistaken impression that these books represent the best in Hitler scholarship.

Commercial imperatives also appear at least partially responsible for two recent additional characteristics in Hitler enterprise publishing: the attempt to exploit commercially novel facts and information about Hitler's life and career, and the first effort to develop a more positive, revisionist interpretation of the Führer. The limits of the exploitation of novelty were amply demonstrated in the autumn of 1977. At that time, Werner Maser, undaunted by the nearly unanimous scholarly denunciation of his Hitler biography and the equally uncomplimentary reaction to his inept editing of Hitler's "letters and notes,"<sup>8</sup> produced a bewildered Frenchman, M. Jean-Marie Loret, who Maser insists is Hitler's illegitimate son by a 1918 liaison with a French peasant girl named Charlotte.<sup>9</sup> (Will this change the score in the undescended ball game?)

More serious, though less surprising, is the formidable recent attempt to present a fully revisionist portrait of Adolf Hitler. Least surprising, perhaps, is that the author is the British writer David Irving, whose bulky *Hitler's War* appeared in England and the United States in the spring of 1977. The outgrowth of Mr. Irving's long fascination with Hitler and Nazi Germany, *Hitler's War* introduced revisionist assertions and conclusions about Adolf Hitler of so startling a nature as to provoke an immediate and furious international controversy in newspapers and

8. See the witty, incisive reviews of Maser's work by Rudolph Binion, "Foam on the Hitler Wave," *Journal of Modern History* 46, no. 3 (Sept. 1974): 522-28, and Robert G. L. Waite in this journal 7, no. 1 (Mar. 1974): 90-94; and the compilation of Maser's errata in the German edition *Hitlers Briefe und Notizen* (Düsseldorf, 1973), listed in "Hitlers Handschrift und Masers Leserfehler," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 21, no. 3 (July 1973): 334-36.

9. See "Son of Hitler?" *Time Magazine*, Nov. 14, 1977, p. 45.

magazines, and on radio and television.<sup>10</sup> Given the emotional immediacy that the whole subject of Hitler still has for so many people, and the general reading public's apparently insatiable Führer fascination, neither the furor that greeted the appearance of *Hitler's War* nor the substantial sales of the book should be viewed as unexpected or contradictory phenomena.

Mr. Irving's book seems, at first glance, a kind of landmark in Hitler studies, a formidable challenge to established views, and a serious work whose revisionist conclusions appear massively and fastidiously documented with original sources. A closer analysis, however, reveals something a bit different.

The foundation of Mr. Irving's thesis, the basis of his attempt to revise Hitler's image in history, is his now well-known contention that Hitler never ordered the physical annihilation of Europe's Jews (p. xiv); that on at least one occasion during the war, November 30, 1941, he specifically ordered that the Jews were not to be liquidated (pp. xiv, 332, 392-93, 503-5, 576); and that the program of extermination that evolved from 1941 on was partly an ad hoc solution—a *Verlegenheitslösung*—undertaken by the SS and Party satraps in the Eastern territories to solve the problems created by the massive deportations of Jews, and partly the work of Himmler, Heydrich, and other SS principals, who carried out the work in secret, behind Hitler's back, and against his express orders (pp. xiv-xv, 326-27, 330-31, 575, 601-2). This conclusion, in Mr. Irving's view, is due partly to the "fact" that Hitler was the weakest German leader in this century (p. xi), whose immersion in running his war kept him from knowing what his subordinates were doing and progressively enfeebled his control over them (pp. xii, xv). It is due

10. Mr. Irving's publishing career has been crowded with controversy. His first book, *The Destruction of Dresden* (London, 1963), created an international sensation with its horrifying tale of the massive Anglo-American triple-blow raids on Dresden on February 13-14, 1945, and the carnage of death and fire that engulfed the hordes of refugees packed into the city. Much in Mr. Irving's account of this Allied "atrocious" (whose exaggerated tone he subsequently acknowledged), has been refuted in a more scholarly and objective work by Götz Bergander, *Dresden im Luftkrieg* (Cologne, 1977). Two of Mr. Irving's subsequent books, *Accident: The Death of General Sikorski* (London, 1967) and *The Destruction of Convoy PQ 17* (London, 1968), resulted in successful legal actions against him. The first suit was prompted by his contention that the Polish General Sikorski's death in a plane crash at Gibraltar in July 1943 was the probable result of an assassination engineered by Winston Churchill and the British government. The second resulted from his conclusion that negligence by a Royal Navy officer was responsible for the loss of the ill-fated Allied convoy on the Arctic run to Murmansk.

additionally to the "fact" that Adolf Hitler as a human being was much less than the monster that postwar historians have made of him.

Thus, Mr. Irving's Hitler was a fair-minded statesman of considerable chivalry, who never resorted to the assassination of foreign opponents<sup>11</sup> (p. xiii), who never intended to harm the British Empire and genuinely wanted peace with Britain after June 1940 (pp. xv-xvi), and who attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941 only as a preventive measure to forestall Stalin's aggressive designs against Germany and Europe (pp. 236-40). In addition, Mr. Irving's Führer, though at times vacillating, was a strategist and tactician of inspired genius, who was nearly always right (except on those occasions when he took the advice of the General Staff), while his small-minded, pig-headed generals were nearly always wrong, and moreover shamefully ungrateful in joining in the plot of July 20 and in blaming Germany's defeat on Hitler by doctoring their diaries and writing their critical postwar memoirs (pp. xviii-xxi).

Hitler's brutal treatment of conquered Poland was no more than the result of his pique over British stubbornness in not accepting his peace offer in the autumn of 1939 (pp. 37-38, 70); his euthanasia program to dispose of the feeble-minded and incurably ill was dictated by Germany's wartime need for hospital bed space (pp. 20-23), and justified by the fear that Allied saturation bombing would demolish the lunatic asylums (pp. 848-49). (How Allied saturation bombing was foreseen in 1939 is not explained.) The "hardening" of Hitler's wartime attitude toward the Jews Mr. Irving ascribes to the sinister influence of the Führer's unsavory associates—Bormann, Goebbels, and Himmler—and to Hitler's anger over the massive Allied bombing of Germany's cities and civilian population, which he blamed on the Jewish-manipulated governments in London and Washington (pp. 509-10). Hitler's most brutal policies, therefore, were either a response to perfidious Allied actions, or were conducted in his name, but without his knowledge, by his unscrupulous subordinates.

Mr. Irving's Hitler, moreover, was a man capable of genuine warmth

11. In the Introduction (p. xiii), Mr. Irving reasserts what Professor Trevor-Roper has called the "stale and exploded libel" about General Sikorski's "assassination" as if it were an established fact. See Professor Trevor-Roper's analysis of Mr. Irving's career and review of *Hitler's War*, in the *Sunday Times Weekly Review*, June 12, 1977. The chronological convenience of Mr. Irving's book (1939-45) spares him the embarrassment of explaining Hitler's role in the murder of Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss. See especially Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-36* (Chicago, 1971), pp. 103-5.