

# A reply to my critics: Motives, causes, and alibis

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At the end of March, my book *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* was published, with several unexpected results. I did not anticipate that a scholarly book would become a best-seller not only in the United States but also in Germany and a half dozen other countries, or that it would produce so much discussion here and abroad. I expected that the book would receive criticism, since it argues that central aspects of our understanding of the Holocaust need to be revised, but I was taken by surprise by the vitriolic and sometimes wild nature of some of the critics' writings.

The book shows that the German perpetrators were ordinary Germans coming from all social backgrounds who formed a representative sample of adult Germans in their age groups; that not a small number of Germans, but a bare minimum of 100,000 Germans and probably many more, were perpetrators; and that these ordinary Germans were, by and large, willing, even eager executioners of the Jewish people, including Jewish children. It also shows that the eliminationist anti-Semitism that moved these ordinary Germans was extremely widespread in German society during and even before the Nazi period. The basic eliminationist anti-Semitic model held that Jews were different from Germans; that these putative differences resided in their biology, conceptualized as race, and were therefore immutable; that the Jews were evil and powerful, had done great harm to Germany and would

continue to do so. The conclusion drawn by Germans who shared this view was that Jews and Jewish power had to be eliminated somehow if Germany was to be secure and to prosper. The German perpetrators of the Holocaust were motivated to kill Jews principally by their belief that the extermination was necessary and just.

That is the core argument of my book, an argument that is grounded in extensive research on the perpetrators, particularly their own testimonies as given to the authorities of the Federal Republic during postwar legal investigations and trials. It is the perpetrators themselves who tell us of their voluntarism in the slaughter, of their routine brutalities against helpless Jewish victims, of their degrading and mocking of the Jews. It is they who tell us of their boasting, their celebrations, their memorializations of their deeds, including not the least of which are the many photographs which they took, passed around, put in their albums and sent home to loved ones.

This record of the perpetrators' own words and photographic images forms the empirical basis of my book and its conclusions.

The response to my book has ranged from highly positive to respectfully critical to brutally disparaging. What is striking about some of those who have criticized my book is that much of what they have written and said has either a tenuous relationship to the book's contents or is patently false. Some of the outright falsehoods include: that little is new in the book; that it puts forward a monocausal and deterministic explanation of the Holocaust; that its argument is ahistorical; and that it makes an "essentialist," "racist" or ethnic argument about Germans. None of those allegations is true.

My book's critics fail with their attacks in the most fundamental ways. They avoid the central issues. They fail specifically to address my book's real purpose, findings and conclusions. Many of the principal individual charges that they do put forward are hollow. And the general positions that they adopt regarding Germans' roles in the persecution and extermination of the Jews are not only untenable but also implausible. I will consider each of these failings in turn.

Thousands of books, monographs and articles have been written on Nazism and the Holocaust. Yet the questions of why many tens of thousands of ordinary Germans from all walks of life, Nazis and non-Nazis alike, killed, tortured and degraded Jews with zeal and energy, and why only a minuscule number availed themselves of the opportunities to withdraw from the unimaginably gruesome killing, have scarcely been broached by historians. Most would agree that these are questions of great importance, that no explanation of the Holocaust can be called adequate if it does not contain satisfying answers to them. Yet those who search for such answers in the writings of my scholarly critics, such as Steven Aschheim, Omer Bartov, Yehuda Bauer, Raul Hilberg, Fritz Stern, Robert Wistrich and others, indeed in the writings of nearly all historians of this period, with the notable exception of Christopher Browning, will be disappointed.

My book goes against the grain of many (though not all) the critics' outlooks and of the existing literature on the Holocaust. It shifts the focus of the investigation away from impersonal institutions and abstract structures (which is where it has overwhelmingly been located) directly onto the actors-onto the human beings who committed the crimes and onto the populace from

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which these people came. And this forces people to come to grips with the most central and troubling questions of the Holocaust.

I acknowledge the humanity of the actors in a specific manner that others do not. My book eschews the ahistorical, universal explanations of social psychology-such as the notions that people obey all authority, or that they will do anything under peer pressure-that are often invoked, against so much evidence, when accounting for the perpetrators' actions. Instead, I recognize that the perpetrators were not automatons or puppets but individuals who had beliefs and values about the wisdom of the regime's policies which informed the choices that these individuals, alone and together, made. My analysis is predicated upon the recognition that each individual made choices about how to treat Jews. It therefore restores the notion of individual responsibility.

My book also takes seriously the real historical context in which the German perpetrators developed their beliefs and values about the world, beliefs and values that were critical for their understanding of what was right and necessary in the treatment of Jews. For these reasons, it is imperative to learn as much as possible about the German perpetrators' views of their victims and about the choices that they made, as well as about the views of Jews that were generally present in their society. This leads to two sets of questions central to the understanding of the Holocaust. The first set of questions is about the perpetrators: What did they believe about Jews? Did they look upon them as a dangerous, evil enemy or as innocent human beings who were being treated unjustly? Did they believe that their treatment of the Jews was right and necessary? And, if so, why? The second set of questions is about Germans

during the Nazi period: How many were anti-Semites? What was the character of their anti-Semitism? What did they think of the anti-Jewish measures of the 1930s? What did they know about and think of the extermination of Jews?

What is striking about the literature on the Holocaust is that, with some exceptions, these central questions about the mentality of the actors are not addressed directly, systematically and thoroughly. Yet any work that fails to answer these questions cannot plausibly claim to explain the perpetration of the Holocaust. Any critic of my book who does not address these questions with systematic counter-evidence and argument is avoiding its central issues. Almost none of my critics propose any answers to the relevant questions regarding the perpetrators (and this negligence is especially glaring among the German critics).

The few who do address these questions often provide laundry lists of factors (“obedience to authority,” “peer pressure,” “routinization,” “rationalization,” “siege mentality,” “brutalization,” “intoxication,” and so on), many of which are little more than unilluminating clichés that were postulated before significant research had been done on the perpetrators. These and other concepts have been mechanically slapped onto the perpetrators without their real meaning or applicability to the actual deeds being sufficiently investigated. For decades, these and other such notions (“totalitarianism,” “the banality of evil”) have substituted for knowledge, have hindered in-depth empirical investigation into the perpetrators’ motivations and have kept the perpetrators at a comfortable arm’s length.

The purpose of the central investigation of my book is to uncover and explain the perpetrators’ pattern of actions, which includes the pattern of their

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choices, This enterprise, which is informed by the methodology of the social sciences, should be recognized as the primary explanatory task when studying the perpetrators. I have been able to adopt this approach because, against the existing accounts of the perpetrators, I accept the premise upon which it depends, namely the recognition that individuals are responsible agents who make choices. Since this is my book's purpose, it begins with a reevaluation of the explanatory task, which includes the assertion that, until now, those who have written about the Holocaust have specified it incorrectly.

For it is not just the killing that needs to be explained, but also something which others have not recognized: the virtually limitless cruelty that the perpetrators inflicted upon their victims and that was a constituent feature of the Holocaust, as central to it as the killing itself. As the testimonies of survivors show, and as the killers with their testimonies themselves confirm, the perpetrators brutalized Jews in the extreme. This brutality had no utilitarian purpose. It was-and this needs to be emphasized again and again-nearly ubiquitous, inflicted by the overwhelming majority of Germans who had direct and extensive contact with Jews. To beat and to degrade Jews was, among their German keepers, normative. As the head woman guard of one death march at the very end of the war testified, even though the guards had received direct orders not to kill and torture the emaciated, sick and dying Jewish women, all of the German women guards "carried rods and all of them beat the [Jewish] girls."

Why were the Jews not put to death in the same manner in which common criminals are executed? Why did ordinary Germans not act as modern hangmen do, who administer death in a prescribed quasi-clinical manner,

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swiftly, without torment and with minimum pain-in the manner in which the ordinary Germans who killed the mentally ill and others in the so-called Euthanasia program sometimes made efforts to kill? The ordinary German perpetrators of the Holocaust, by contrast, routinely sought to inflict maximum pain on Jews. This, and much other evidence from the Nazi period, and from other historical instances of mass killing, shows that such cruelty is not integral to the task of killing, but that the frequency, the character and the intensity of perpetrators' cruelty vary greatly with the perpetrators' conception of the victims. Even if Germans had not killed millions of Jews, the amount of sustained, inventive, wanton, voluntary cruelty and degradation that they inflicted upon the Jews would be seen as one of the great crimes in history and would in itself demand an explanation. Yet no historian has thought it necessary to put this phenomenon at the center of study.

My emphasis on the perpetrators' cruelty is fundamental in three respects.

It shows that any explanation of the perpetration of the Holocaust that leaves out this constituent feature is fundamentally inadequate. In the language of social science, it shifts the dependent variable, namely, the kinds of actions and outcomes that must be explained. And it drives the central task of the book, namely to explain the actions of the perpetrators. My assertion about the centrality of the perpetrators' cruelty is essential both for assessing the character and conclusions of my study and for how we conceive of the Holocaust. Yet my book's critics, by and large, give no notice of it, and none of them ever grapples with its implications.

In my book I laid out not just my purpose but also my assumptions, my methods, my interpretive framework, the nature of the available data, and

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how I reason to my conclusions. In order to provide an explanation that accounts for the many facets of the Holocaust, I have examined and integrated three levels of analysis: the actions of individuals, the character of institutions of killing and the overall course and character of the program of extermination. I have examined in detail different institutions of killing (police battalions, “work” camps, death marches and, more generally, the revolutionary institution of the camp), each of which reveals different features of the Holocaust, by combining in-depth case studies with broader empirical analyses of the general features of each institution.

The critics respond as if it is insufficient that I have written a wide-ranging study of the perpetration of the Holocaust. Although their own works contain no methodologically rigorous comparative studies, many of them suddenly deem extensive comparison to be necessary for my book, and therefore decree it to be self-disqualifying on this ground. It is true that my book is not a work of systematic comparison with other genocides. It is about the Holocaust. Yet the critics do not mention that I attend to comparative features internal to the Holocaust (the Germans’ differential treatment of Jewish and non-Jewish victims, the different institutions of killing and the actions of different perpetrator groups), and to comparisons between the Holocaust and other genocides. I agree that a variety of methodologically rigorous comparative studies have yet to be undertaken by scholars in the field, but the central comparative issues that I do raise-including the features of the Holocaust that make it singular and how my explanation does account for them in a comparative perspective-are plain in my book for all fair-minded readers to see. Moreover, the critics themselves offer no explanations of the



Holocaust's distinctive features, which until now they have not even recognized in their own writings.

My book is unusual among studies of the Holocaust for incorporating the insights and theories of the social sciences. An entire chapter is devoted to the exposition of a new framework for analyzing anti-Semitism; and in a methodological appendix I discuss the interpretive problems involved in evaluating the testimonies of German killers of Jews. My critics and I work in a field with little explicit discussion of method and theory, but they write as if such issues are not discussed in my book and are not important. They disparage and dismiss my book as simplistic. They may be confused in believing that a simple explanation means a simplistic study.

Many horrific and complex outcomes have simple causes. The complexity of the specification of the problem and of the manner of its study, on the one hand, and the complexity of the answer or explanation, on the other hand, are logically unrelated. Simple explanations are not to be rejected merely because they are simple or with the dismissal that "we know that things were much more complex." My book is a challenge to much that "we know." The call for complexity is sometimes the refuge of those who find certain conclusions unpalatable.

And if some deem my explanation simplistic, then they must demonstrate that a better one exists. But my critics say that my explanation is wrong without providing any coherent alternative. Not a single critic even attempts to account for the perpetrators' cruelty with its specific features; not a single critic provides any explanation of his own for the voluntarism and the zeal of the perpetrators (even those who acknowledge that I have demonstrated

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this); not a single critic addresses with some alternative explanation the multiplicity of actions shown to require explanation. Critics charge me with being dismissive of the work and explanations of others. What the critics do not say is that, far from being dismissive of them, I demonstrate that the conventional explanations cannot account for the actions of the perpetrators and the other central features of the Holocaust to which they pertain.

The conventional explanations suffer from a slew of disqualifying conceptual and empirical problems, including a common flawed analytical structure that their proponents simply assume: that the perpetrators did not believe that the slaughter was necessary and just and, therefore, that it must be shown how men could be induced to kill against their will. Put simply, if the perpetrators were anti-Semites who believed that the extermination of Jews was right, then all the situational factors so commonly asserted (without evidence) to have moved the killers are irrelevant. This is a fundamental point: if a person has a preference to carry out an act, then his action, his willingness to act, is to be explained by his preference, and not by hypothesized incentive structures, whether they be positive or negative incentives. By assuming away the perpetrators' consent, instead of investigating whether indeed it existed, those who put forward the conventional explanations exclude from consideration what must be considered to be a critical hypothesis.

My book's penultimate chapter is an examination of the capacity of the rival explanations to account for the findings, point by point. (Not a single critic even mentions this assessment.) It shows that the only way to account for the perpetrators' actions, as well as for the distinctive and comparative features of the Holocaust, is by recognizing that they, ordinary Germans, were motivated

by a virulent form of anti-Semitism that led them to believe that the extermination of the Jews was necessary and just. And it shows that the other explanations are conceptually untenable and, most importantly, definitively belied by the facts. Yet some of the critics put forward several of the old explanations in criticism of my conclusion. Some examples of this include the frequently invoked “peer-pressure” explanation, for which even Christopher Browning, its champion, fails to present any actual evidence. He constructs it out of thin air. None of the men in Police Battalion 101 ever mentions peer pressure as a factor in their thousands of pages of testimony. And this is the single case study on which he (and all those who rely on his study) bases his general conclusions.

Another example comes from Omer Bartov, writing in these pages. He repeats his pet theory that the German perpetrators became brutalized, but he fails to mention that this theory is refuted in my book. It can be put forward only by someone who knows or cares little about the actual circumstances of the perpetrators’ actions. Many of the perpetrators never saw battle, and thus were never gradually brutalized by the horrors of war or by their own immersion in the slaughter of others. In other words, the circumstances that Bartov alleges to be the cause of brutality and murderousness toward others simply did not exist for many tens of thousands of the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Aside from the many other conceptual and empirical problems with this notion (such as why the same perpetrators routinely treated different victim groups differently, which cannot be accounted for by an undifferentiated impulse to violence and brutality), Bartov has mechanically applied to the perpetrators the hypothesis that he generated from his (in my view, problematic) study of members of the German Army in the Soviet Union.

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Even though the perpetrators of the Holocaust by and large killed in circumstances that render his hypothesis moot, and even though, as far as his writings suggest, he himself has never done any research on them, he declares by fiat that his hypothesis is correct.

Steven Aschheim, writing in *Tikkun*, repeats the untenable notion that the killing was “facilitated by a quite unideological state of mind, a form of intoxication (Rausch).” While this might sound profound, Aschheim has not studied the perpetrators of the Holocaust and appears to have no evidence to adduce in support of his notion. This is typical of the many critics who freely speculated about what went on in the Holocaust’s killing fields. The truth is that the killers of Jews were not Rausch-besotted, unideologized men driven by a frenzied, diffuse bloodlust. Their murderousness was for the most part confined to Jews. They were not unreasoning. Their killing was not an Amok-like spurt of blind rage. They killed continually for weeks, for months, even for years. In their leisure time, in their clubs, in their recreational activities, on their furloughs, they discussed and reflected on their vocation as the annihilators of the Jewish people. They formed, according to the late Helmut Krausnick, the former doyen of German historians of Nazism, a *Weltanschauungstruppe*, a cohort of conscious ideological killers.

The critics’ assertions are ahistorical notions that wrest people from their sociohistorical contexts.

They imply that any group of people, regardless of their socialization and their beliefs, could be parachuted into the same circumstances and would act in exactly the same way toward any arbitrarily selected group of victims. That is the logic of their criticisms. To the small extent that these criticisms seem

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even superficially plausible for some subset of the perpetrators, they are each belied by the deeds and the circumstances of action of thousands of other perpetrators. Many, if not most, of the German perpetrators were not in the kinds of cohesive units that are necessary for Browning's "peer pressure" argument. Torturing, boasting, taking photographs and celebrating cannot be accounted for in this way. Many of the perpetrators were in no way previously "brutalized" in Bartov's sense, yet they often killed Jews with zeal and gusto at their very first opportunity. Many of them acted in a manner that defies this notion of "unideological" "intoxication." Compare these theorizings to the words of a German policeman serving in the Krakow region who testified that his compatriots "were, with a few exceptions, quite happy to take part in shootings of Jews. They had a ball!" and who makes clear that they were motivated by "great hatred against the Jews; it was revenge...." Not peer pressure, not "brutalization," not "unideological intoxication" but anti-Semitic hatreds led them to want to revenge themselves for the harms that they fantasized that Jews had done to their country.

Compare the critics' theorizings with the conclusions arrived at by Dieter Pohl in *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941-1944*, his new and extensive study of the annihilation of the Jews of East Galicia. "It can scarcely be doubted that the overwhelming majority of the personnel of the occupation had already at the time of their arrival in East Galicia succumbed to the antisemitic *Zeitgeist* of the thirties.... Of decisive importance for the persecution of the Jews, for the translation of these attitudes into actions must have been the antisemitic conversation (*Kommunikation*) within the apparatus of occupation. Here there was, strictly speaking, no one who was opposed to antisemitism. Documents and testimonies of witnesses of

extremely diverse origins show that in 1941/1942 a consensus existed that the Jews `must be gone' (weg müssen). Only a few Germans preserved at that time a clear vision of the actual situation and escaped the demon (Ungeist) .... “ And Pohl writes that “many active perpetrators deemed themselves so strongly legitimized that they boasted of their murders in public.”

Many of my critics have directed their fire overwhelmingly at my account of anti-Semitism in German society. Many of them write as if showing that my conclusions about the scope and the character of German anti-Semitism are wrong would mean that they and the readers need not deal with my treatment and conclusions about the perpetrators. This stance is intellectually untenable. Even if some would conclude that I am not entirely correct about the scope and character of German anti-Semitism, it does not follow that this would invalidate my conclusions about the evolution of the program of extermination, about the nature of the institutions of killing, about the perpetrators and their motives, about the character of the Nazi revolution. The central part of the study, about the perpetration of the Holocaust, logically, can stand on its own and must be confronted directly.

Turning now to my account of anti-Semitism: I argue that an eliminationist form of anti-Semitism became extremely widespread in Germany already in the nineteenth century. By the time Hitler came to power, the model of Jews that was the basis of his anti-Semitism was shared by the vast majority of Germans. That is why Hitler succeeded with frightening ease in accomplishing the task that he had proclaimed in one of his earliest speeches (August 13, 1920) of converting Germans' hitherto inactive anti-Semitic sentiments into a genocidal impetus. Hitler declared that the “broad masses” of Germans

possess an “instinctive” anti-Semitism. His task consisted in “waking, whipping up, and inflaming the instinctive [anti-Semitism] in our Volk” until “it decides to join the movement which is ready to draw from it the [necessary] consequence” and that consequence, he intimated elsewhere in the speech, ought to be the death penalty for that “parasitical people.”

My conclusions about German anti-Semitism follow from my conceptualization of the nature of anti-Semitism, which the critics do not bother to mention, namely that a culturally shared model of Jews held them to be unalterably different from Germans and dangerous, and that, therefore, they had to be eliminated somehow if Germany were to be secure and prosper. Whatever the differences that existed in the pernicious qualities that different Germans (including Austrians) attributed to Jews in their accounts of the putative Jewish danger, it is this model that is crucial for understanding the readiness of Germans to support and take part in the eliminationist measures of the 1930s and 1940s.

Instead of addressing this argument and acknowledging the overwhelming evidence that supports it, the critics pitch their criticisms at a conceptual level and with evidence that has little bearing on it. This is odd. Part of the problem might be that those who have written about anti-Semitism extensively, even Aschheim and Wistrich, appear to lack any coherent conceptual apparatus to distinguish among different kinds of anti-Semitism and to relate anti-Semitic beliefs to anti-Jewish actions. The two central questions are: Were most Germans eliminationist anti-Semites? And what was the relationship between these beliefs and Germans’ support for the regime’s various eliminationist policies? My critics do not address these obviously central questions either in

their reviews (or their other writings). Instead, they fly off onto tangents, such as Wistrich's assertion, in *Commentary*, that a crucial issue is whether anti-Semitism in Austria was more virulent than in Germany.

My assertions about the reach of anti-Semitism in Germany before the Nazi period is supported by the works of some of the most distinguished scholars of anti-Semitism (which are cited repeatedly in the notes, though these scholars, and the nature of German anti-Semitism before 1933, are almost never discussed in depth by others who write about the perpetration of the Holocaust, including Browning and Hilberg). Where I depart from some of them is not over the extent of anti-Semitism in Germany, but over its content and its nature. This is also true regarding the Nazi period itself, for which the evidence that anti-Semitism permeated German society is overwhelming. As Ian Kershaw has concluded: "To be anti-Semitic in Hitler's Germany was so commonplace as to go practically unnoticed."

My book's critics denounce its conclusions as if they are outlandish, as if there had not been extremely widespread and virulent anti-Semitism in Germany, even though many of the most prominent scholars of German anti-Semitism have drawn similar conclusions about the extent of anti-Semitism in Germany. Pointing to the existence of institutions whose leadership was formally opposed to anti-Semitism, such as the large Social Democratic Party, is no evidence that its supporters were not anti-Semitic. Workers and others could vote for the Social Democratic Party because of their economic program even though their eliminationist anti-Semitism was not shared by the leadership of the party. Any student of voting behavior knows that individuals' attitudes on single issues cannot be inferred from their votes. As the Social Democratic



Party's own report from 1936 lamented: "anti-Semitism has no doubt taken root in wide circles of the population.... The general antisemitic psychosis affects even thoughtful people, our comrades as well."

Still, it should be said that the existing data regarding anti-Semitism in Germany are less than ideal, which means two things: that legitimate disagreements can exist about its extent and its nature, and that the conclusions drawn depend greatly on the methodology and the interpretive framework being employed. It is precisely because of the latter that I have taken pains in my book to lay out my methodological and interpretive approaches explicitly. But whatever exact conclusions might be drawn, the data cannot possibly support any view that denies that anti-Semitism was decisively widespread in Germany during the Nazi period, that the images put forth of Jews in the public sphere were hallucinatory in content, that much of the anti-Semitism that existed in Germany was virulent, and that many wanted to eliminate Jews, even by utterly radical means. My critics, however, attack me for putting forward just this view. Most seem now to agree that anti-Semitism was a necessary cause of the Holocaust, yet they make very little effort to specify how exactly it influenced the many aspects of Germans' participation in the persecution and extermination of the Jews.

It is hard to believe that anyone could make the charge that there is little that is new in my book. I have already suggested a number of ways in which the book is novel. These include the new interpretations that the book offers and its use of much new source material—which even one prominent German critic, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, acknowledges and chides other critics for denying. He also wonders aloud why German historians have not themselves done

similar investigations. After all, there were at least 100,000 perpetrators who served in an array of different kinds of institutions yet there is almost nothing written about them. But my critics pretend that everything has already been done and that the state of our knowledge is perfectly adequate. They constantly refer to Browning's book, though it is a case study of only one unit and dubious as the source of general conclusions, because his book is all they have to go on.

Until now no one else has discussed seriously the number of people who perpetrated the genocide. Neither Aschheim, nor Bartov, nor Bauer, nor Browning, nor Hilberg, nor Wistrich nor any of the other critics has given a serious estimate of the number of Germans involved. The critics do not bother to inform their readers that I am the first to discuss the numbers (and the problems of providing an estimate), let alone to convey to readers the significance of the findings or of the fact that we have had to wait until 1996 to learn one of the most elementary facts about the Holocaust.

The general charge of a lack of novelty is no less false than the critics' specific charges, such as Bartov's whopper that I make the claim that I am "the very first scholar ever to have written on the perpetrators." This is a common technique, which Bartov and others use repeatedly: attribute to me indefensible views that I have never put forward which then can be used to show that my work is outlandish or intemperate. As Bartov well knows, I do not maintain that mine is the "first study of the perpetrators." But it is the broadest and most general study of them. Throughout the book, and explicitly in Chapter Five, I discuss and refer to previous studies of the perpetrators in

individual institutions of killing. It is hard to understand how an honest person who has read the book could assert what Bartov says here.

Similarly, it would take many paragraphs to show the falsity of Wistrich's invention that I maintain that "Germans after 1850 were obsessed with nothing [my emphasis] but the elimination of Jews from their society."

Pseudo-profound, condemnatory yet empty phrases, such as Aschheim's "vilifying mystique of the Germans" or Bartov's charge that mine is "a bizarre inversion of the Nazi view of the Jews as an insidious, inherently evil nation" also litter the reviews. One might ask Aschheim what exactly "vilifying mystique" means, and how he would ground this woolly charge in the text of my book? By the way, it is not "vilifying" to say that anti-Semites were anti-Semites and that Germany in the 1930s was populated by an enormous number of antiSemites.

Bartov's monstrous charge that I have done to Germans what Nazis did to Jews begins with a gross mischaracterization of what I do write. I never say or in any way imply that Germans are an "inherently evil nation" or that Germans "were normally monsters." Bartov's charge (which Browning and Kristen Monroe echo) indicates that his analogical reasoning has short-circuited or that his intent is to vilify. There are only two possible ways in which this comparison could be true. Bartov must believe either that (1) what I am saying about anti-Semitism in Germany is wholly false, because the Nazis' descriptions of Jews were entirely fantastic, baseless fantasies of fevered and malevolent minds imputing to the Jews a biologically rooted boundless will and capacity for evil; or that (2) what I am saying about Germans is partly true, which would mean that some of Germans' eliminationist anti-Semitic

litany about Jews was true. If Bartov, Browning and others who have attacked me in this way want to stand by this criticism, then they should explain how one or the other of these statements is true.

The Holocaust emanated from Germany and was therefore principally a German phenomenon. This is a historical fact. An explanation of the Holocaust must obviously ground the Holocaust as a development of German history, which other treatments of the perpetrators, such as Browning's (and Bartov's treatment of the German Army during the Second World War), do not do. Where, in their works, is there any serious investigation of the notions of the world which Germans brought to their tasks or of the society and political culture from which they came? This makes the charge by Bartov, Stern and Wistrich and by those who champion Browning's book that my work is ahistorical particularly curious. Germany during the Nazi period was a society governed by notions of humanity and the social world that were profoundly different from our own. Any historically grounded account of the Holocaust or Nazi Germany must discuss in-depth the profound alterations in consciousness that were taking place and the genesis of these changes, a discussion which is noticeably absent from most treatments of the perpetration of the Holocaust.

It should be recognized, however, that the Holocaust was not-contrary to what some critics pretend that I say-the inevitable outcome of that history.

Aschheim asserts, without any evidence, that I present a "teleology" in which the Holocaust was "a long-brewing national project of `the Germans.'" I never write anything of the kind. What I do write is that the elimination of the Jews (which could take many forms other than mass murder, such as expulsion)

from Germany was something that many people in Germany had wished for a long time. The evidence for this is overwhelming, and it is to be found in my book. The book is also clear that, had the Nazis never come to power, then the Holocaust would not have happened. Had there not been an economic depression in Germany, then the Nazis, in all likelihood, would have never come to power.

The Holocaust, like the Nazis' own ascension to power, was historically contingent. Many developments had to occur-developments that were not inevitable-for the Holocaust to happen. Hitler's moral authority was crucial for making the leap to the genocidal variant of the eliminationist ideology, something which the vast majority of Germans never would have contemplated on their own. Aschheim asserts this as a point of novel criticism against me, even though it is central to my own argument, as stated on page 447 of my book. His claim that I present anti-Semitism as a "disembodied, autonomous force determining the course of modern German history" is a gross misreading of my book. There is nothing deterministic about it.

wish to be clear. No adequate explanation for the Holocaust can be monocausal. Many factors contributed to creating the conditions necessary for the Holocaust to be possible and to be realized. Most of these factors-how the Nazis gained power, how they crushed internal opposition, how they conquered Europe, how they created the institutions of killing and organized the slaughter are well known, and so, as is explained in my introduction, I do not dwell on them. Instead, the book focuses on the motivational element of the Holocaust. It argues that the will to kill Jews derived, for Hitler and for

those who implemented his murderous plans, principally from a single, common source, namely a virulent anti-Semitism.

How that anti-Semitism was mobilized and expressed depended on a host of other factors-material, situational, strategic, ideological-and these are discussed in depth, especially in the analysis of the evolution of the regime's antiJewish policies and of the character of Jewish "work" during the Nazi period. The regime and the perpetrators produced complex and sometimes inconsistent policies and actions toward Jews. This occurred precisely because they were acting upon their anti-Semitic animus simultaneous to pursuing other goals, and because the political, social and economic contexts in which they acted often placed practical restraints upon their actions.

Explaining the Holocaust and its many features requires, therefore, attention to many factors other than anti-Semitism. Yet whatever the influence of such factors was upon the formation and implementation of the Nazis' anti-Semitic program, the source of the will of the Nazi leadership, and of the ordinary Germans who executed the policies to persecute and to kill Jews, did not derive from these other factors. It derived principally from the actors' common hallucinatory anti-Semitism. In the definitive words of a man from one police battalion, speaking for himself and all his comrades, "The Jew was not acknowledged by us to be a human being." The Holocaust occurred in Germany because three factors came together.

First, the most committed and virulent anti-Semites in history took state power and decided to turn murderous fantasy into the core of state policy. Second, they did so in a society in which their essential views of Jews were widely shared. Third, it was only Germany that was in the geo-military

situation to carry out a genocide of this sort. Had either of the first two factors (or the third) not obtained, then the Holocaust would not have occurred, certainly not as it did occur. The most virulent hatreds, whether it be anti-Semitism or some other form of racism or prejudice, do not issue in sustained systematic slaughter unless a political leadership mobilizes those who hate into a program of killing. So without the Nazis the Holocaust would not have occurred and anti-Semitism in Germany would have remained relatively dormant. But without a broad willingness among the ordinary Germans to tolerate, to support and even, for many, first to contribute to the utterly radical eliminationist persecution of Jews in the 1930s (about which the critics are silent, since this period shows unequivocally that the vast majority of Germans supported “elimination”) and then, at least for those who were called upon, to participate in the slaughter of Jews, the regime would never have been able to kill 6 million Jews. Both factors were necessary. Neither was, on its own, sufficient. Only in Germany did they come together.

This makes clear why the extent and the substance of anti-Semitism in other countries is not relevant for explaining why Germany and Germans perpetrated the Holocaust. However anti-Semitic Poles, French or Ukrainians were, a regime bent upon exterminating Jews did not come to power in their countries. Since people’s anti-Semitism or other kinds of virulent prejudices alone, when not harnessed to a state policy of violent persecution and killing, have produced pogroms and riots but have never produced a genocide, it borders on the nonsensical to believe that anti-Semitism alone would have done this elsewhere in Europe. For this reason, the critics are wrong when they assert that a comparative analysis of anti-Semitism is necessary for explaining why anti-Semitism in Germany but not elsewhere had such

catastrophic consequences. Looking at this from another perspective: if anti-Semitism elsewhere in Europe had been the same as in Germany, or even more virulent, it would not change the German story. The existence of much anti-Semitism elsewhere in Europe does explain, however, why the Germans found so many people in other countries who were willing and eager to help them kill Jews. Many critics, particularly Browning, routinely point to the complicity of non-Germans in the Holocaust, as if showing that there were anti-Semites elsewhere would somehow prove that the widespread anti-Semitism in German society had nothing or little to do with moving the German perpetrators or would somehow make me wrong to focus my study on the German perpetrators. The first conclusion does not follow, and it betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of social scientific method. As I have elaborated elsewhere in an exchange with Browning, the crucial analytical issue is not to explain why some others acted as Germans did, but to explain why there is variance in people's actions, namely why different groups acted differently toward the same victims. This establishes that the killers' conception of the victims and the deed matters, that their willingness to kill matters. Regarding my focus on the German perpetrators, what can be said about them-no Germans, no Holocaust-cannot be said about any other national group. So it is entirely appropriate to concentrate a study on them.

My book never invokes or even hints at any ethnic, racial or biological notion of Germans. It posits nothing about some eternal German "national character." All of these notions are inventions of critics such as Bartov (and Franklin Littell), who claims that mine is an "essentialist view" of Germans who acted as they did because of "what they [were]." These critics never provide any textual evidence from my book to substantiate these charges. They cannot. In

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stark and direct contrast to the critics' imputations, I emphatically make clear in my book that my argument focuses on the beliefs and the values that existed in Germany in a particular time, which were part of German political culture as it was then constituted, and which informed how Germans responded to the anti-Jewish measures of the Nazi period. To say that most Germans were anti-Semites in the 1930s is no more essentializing than to say that most Germans today are supporters of democracy. Both are empirically based, accurate generalizations about most, though not all, Germans.

As I have repeatedly made clear, I believe that political cultures change, as German political culture has changed during the Federal Republic, The Federal Republic has seen an enormous decline and transformation in the character of anti-Semitism, and a concomitant development of a genuine democratic ethos, each of which is explicable using the same framework I use to explain why so many Germans were anti-Semitic in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. Critics such as Wistrich are wrong to maintain that political cultures themselves cannot evolve under fifty years of new political institutions with entire generations being socialized with new beliefs and values in a new educational system. Theirs are the unhistorical views. The survey data document this transformation, not only with regard to anti-Semitism but also democratic values. Fifty years, in this respect, is a long time.

I maintain that the perpetrators who, uncoerced, chose to mock, degrade, torture and kill other people, and to celebrate and memorialize their deeds, did so because they hated their victims, held them to be guilty and believed that they were right to treat them in these ways. The position of all those who say that I am wrong is that people who acted in these ways did so even though

they did not hate their victims, even though they held them to be innocent, and even though they did not believe that they were right to do so. In the face of the perpetrators' volunteering, their acts of torture, their zeal and energy in killing Jews, their celebrations of the deaths, and their testimony to all of this, what do phrases like "peer pressure" have to do with the reality of the Holocaust? What does it have to do with the reality of the ordinary Germans in Police Battalion 309 wantonly rounding up and then burning to death hundreds of defenseless Jews in the great synagogue of Bialystok? In a remark uncharacteristic for the alleged reluctant killer who had never been "brutalized" because this was his first contact with the fantasized enemy, one of the genocidal killers exulted: "Let it burn, it's a nice little fire [schones Feuerlein], it's great fun." How does "peer pressure," in the sense of reluctantly carrying out a task that one condemns because one supposedly does not want to let down one's buddies, get translated into the reality of the virtually boundless, unnecessary, collective suffering of the Jews at the hands of the ordinary German perpetrators who, as one survivor puts it, "always came to us with whips and dogs"?

The oddness of the critics' view of the perpetrators is set in sharp relief when seen from another perspective. When people think about any other mass slaughter or genocide, in Rwanda, in the former Yugoslavia, in Turkey, in Cambodia, people naturally assume that the killers believed that what they were doing was right. Indeed, in these and other instances of large-scale mass slaughter, as in the Soviet Union or the massacre of the Indonesian Communist Party, it is recognized that the two necessary genocidal conditions that I mentioned earlier—a perpetrator group that hates the victim group and a political leadership bent upon mass killing—have been present. The only

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perpetrators of genocide or mass slaughter about whom people routinely assert the opposite, namely that they did not believe that they were right to kill, are the German perpetrators of the Holocaust.

This odd situation cries out for an explanation, which might be demanded of all who propagate it. I am saying that, in this sense, the German perpetrators were like the perpetrators of other mass slaughters. It is the denial of this-against so much evidence-that is curious, that should be controversial. It is also worth noting that not a single critic has ever addressed this comparative issue, though I have put it forward again and again in writing and in panel discussions.

Why, it might be put to all the critics, has the fact that no German perpetrator was himself ever killed, sent to a concentration camp, jailed or punished in any serious way for refusing to kill Jews not been at the center of every discussion of the Holocaust? I published an article on this in 1985 (many critics erroneously claim that I simply follow Browning, whose book appeared in 1992); and before me Kurt Hinrichsen in 1971 and Herbert Jager in 1967 demonstrated this historical fact. In my book, I show that the German perpetrators of many units knew that they did not have to kill, because their commanders informed their men that they could exempt themselves from killing without suffering retribution. The men themselves tell us so in their postwar testimony. But the possibilities available to the perpetrators to exempt themselves from the killing, which is perhaps the central fact about the perpetrators of the Holocaust, is curiously absent from almost every work ever written on the Holocaust.

The reception of my argument among survivors of the Holocaust is also worth noting. Many have affirmed to me that the ordinary Germans with whom they came into contact were, with some exceptions, not mere obeyers of orders or coldly uninvolved executioners, as so many historians have argued. The victims remember the perpetrators bristling with hatred of Jews and killing them with joy. This is a common theme of the vast body of books, memoirs and testimonies of the survivors.

Indeed, one of the serious omissions of much of the historiography of the perpetration of the Holocaust (but not, obviously, of the historiography that focuses on the plight of the Jews) is its failure to draw on the accounts and the testimonies of the victims. Slaves and victims of violence and repression are indispensable witnesses. They can tell us whether their victimizers acted with gusto or reluctantly, with relish or with restraint, whether they abused their victims verbally or performed their tasks with detached taciturnity. No historian would dare write of the conduct of American slave masters without drawing on the available accounts of slaves. Yet many historians of the perpetrators of the Holocaust and of Nazism rarely, if ever, listen to the voices of Jews recounting the manner of their treatment at the hands of the ordinary German practitioners of the Holocaust. Hilberg openly disparages their testimony, which he deems to be of little or no historical value. As my book reveals, the respective accounts of the survivors and of the perpetrators regarding the willingness, the zeal and the cruelty of the perpetrators actually often reinforce one another.

On the topic of anti-Semitism in Germany, my critics' position is similarly difficult to defend. I am maintaining that in a country where for generations

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there was a vast outpouring of institutionally supported eliminationist anti-Semitism, with virtually no institutionally supported positive public image of Jews available, that many in Germany shared this view of Jews and that their beliefs informed what they were willing to tolerate and to do when called upon by the Nazi regime. (Even in a survey in 1946, 61 percent of Germans were willing to express views that classified them as racists or anti-Semites.) The critics are maintaining that most Germans were immune to eliminationist anti-Semitism, that the anti-Semitism did not substantially influence Germans' attitudes toward the persecution of the Jews, and that the anti-Semitism had little to do with the perpetrators' actions. This would be akin to maintaining that the official, public racism of the American South was not shared by most whites and that it had little or no influence upon the attitude of whites, or even slave masters toward blacks, and on their treatment of them. Who would believe this about the American South? Whose position regarding anti-Semitism in Germany should be controversial, mine or that of the critics?

It is my critics who cannot deal with complexity. Consider what Bartov seems to think is his most telling and profound objection to my book (which Wistrich also puts forward): the reduction of the complexity and all of the comparative features of the Holocaust that need to be explained to "industrial killing," which has become one of the uninvestigated cliches about this period. Bartov and the others do not understand that any explanation must account systematically for the aspects of the Holocaust which are different from other genocides and for those which are similar-and that slapping a simple label, one big defining feature, onto the Holocaust violates the canons of historical explanation. Here, too, Bartov ignores the facts. The Germans began the

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genocide by shooting Jews by the hundreds of thousands. They continued to shoot Jews en masse while the gas chambers functioned. Had they never deployed gas chambers, they would have likely killed almost as many Jews. As it was, they did kill over 40 percent of their Jewish victims by means other than “industrial killing.” All this is in my book.

It was the will and the motivation to exterminate European Jewry—just as it was the will of Hutus to slaughter Tutsis in Rwanda—the will, and not the means, by gas or gun (or, in Rwanda, machete)-that is the crucial issue. Bartov’s and Wistrich’s position would be similar to saying that the defining feature of a murder today is not why a person chooses to kill someone in the first place, why he develops his views of his victim and of the desirability or necessity of his victim’s destruction, or why perhaps he mocked, tortured and photographed the victim, but instead why the murderer chose to use one of many available weapons. The catchy but ultimately analytically empty phrase “industrial killing” tells us nothing about why the German state and so many Germans devoted themselves and so many of their resources on an unmatched scale to killing a group of people who bore them no enmity and with whom there was no objective conflict whatsoever (which is a very rare historical occurrence). This issue-the issue of will-is the crucial issue, and my critics tellingly do not address it.

Israel Gutman is an eminent historian of the Holocaust, director of the Research Center of Yad Vashem and the editor of the Encyclopedias of the Holocaust. He has asked an interesting question. He began his review of my book in Ha’aretz by quoting some of the more outrageous things that have been said about it, and continued: “All these hostile and condemnatory

reactions raise the question, if both the form and the content of the book are devoid of any value, why have the pillars shaken? Why did so many and good scholars mobilize themselves for a campaign of criticism and pillorying? . . . The truth is that the book attracted upon its appearance the interest of the broad public because it raised anew in an unequivocal manner central questions, which had, intentionally or unintentionally, been pushed aside or were glossed over by the main body of Holocaust scholarship.” That my book’s critics cannot even bring themselves to acknowledge this says a great deal about the quality of their criticism. Gutman’s question is a good one. Why are the pillars shaking?

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<b>Title:</b>	A reply to my critics: Motives, causes, and alibis
<b>Summary:</b>	Daniel Jonah Goldhagen defends his book, "Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust," from the many critics who have claimed the book says nothing new, reduces the reasons for the Holocaust or makes a racist argument against Germans. The truth about the book is that it received so much attention from critics because it raised new questions that had been pushed aside by conventional Holocaust scholarship.
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