

Goldhagen, Daniel Jonah (1996). *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf

4--They acted from conviction, according to their inner beliefs.

4--The Germans' persecution of the Jews culminating in the Holocaust is thus the central feature of Germany during the Nazi period.

5--The overall objective of this book is to explain why the Holocaust occurred, to explain how it could occur.

6--The study of the men & women who collectively gave life to the inert institutional forms, who peopled the institutions of genocidal killing must be set as the focus of scholarship on the Holocaust and become as central to investigations of the genocide as they were to its commission.

8--The fate of the Jews may have been a direct outgrowth of a worldview shared by the vast majority of the German people.

9--Germans' antisemitic beliefs about Jews were the central causal agent of the Holocaust. They were the central causal agent not only of Hitler's decision to annihilate European Jewry but also of the perpetrators' willingness to kill and brutalize Jews.

13--Conventional explanations (treat Germans) as if they had been people lacking a moral sense, lacking the ability to make decisions and take stances. They do not conceive of the actors as human agents, as people with wills...Any explanation that fails to acknowledge the actors' capacity to know and to judge, namely to understand and to have views about the significance and morality of their actions, that fails to hold the actors' beliefs & values as central, that fails to emphasize the autonomous motivating force of Nazi ideology, particularly its central component of antisemitism, cannot possibly succeed in telling us much about why the perpetrators acted as they did.

14--The humanity of the perpetrators, namely their capacity to judge and to choose to act inhumanely...The perpetrators, "ordinary Germans," were animated by anti-semitism, by a particular type of antisemitism that led them to conclude that the Jews *ought to die*...The perpetrators, having consulted their own convictions and morality and having judged the mass annihilation of Jews to be right, did not *want* to say "no."...

Interpreters of this period make a grave error by refusing to believe that people could slaughter whole populations--especially populations that are by any objective evaluation not threatening--out of conviction.

15--This period can be approached with the critical eye of an anthropologist disembarking on unknown shores, open to meeting a radically different culture.

20--Most important is the question of whether or not the perpetrators believed their treatment of Jews to be just and, if so, why.

21--It is cognition and values, and only cognition and values, that in the last instant move

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someone willfully to pick up his hand and strike another.

22--The second item to bear in mind, always, is the horror of what the German were doing. The re-creation of the phenomenological reality of the killers is crucial for any explication...the extraordinary phenomenology of the perpetrators' existence and the powerful motivations that must have impelled Germans to silence such emotions so that they could kill and torture Jews, including children, as the did (most persons cannot even bear to *read about* the gruesome accounts of the operations).

23--What conditions of cognition & value made genocidal motivations plausible in this period of German history? What was the structure of beliefs and values that made a genocidal onslaught against Jews intelligible and sensible to the ordinary Germans who became perpetrators?

28--Why can we not believe that many Germans in the 20th century subscribed to beliefs that appear to us to be palpably absurd? Why not approach Germany as an anthropologist would the world of a people about whom little is known?

29--Most societies throughout history have been governed by absurd beliefs at the center of their cosmological & ontological notions of life, which their members have held axiomatically.

33--Cognitive models--beliefs, viewpoints & values, which may or may not be explicitly articulated--nevertheless serve to structure every society's conversation. People are guided by their culturally shared cognitive models.

34--"Abstract" anti-semitism is actually *concrete*, because it guides perception, evaluation and the willingness to act.

35--Anti-semitism is always *abstract* in its conceptualization and its source (being divorced from actual Jews), and always *concrete* and *real* in its effects.

37--By rejecting Jesus, by allegedly having killed him, the Jews stood in defiant opposition to the otherwise universally accepted conception of God and Man, denigrating and defiling, by their very existence, all that is sacred.

38--Identifying Jews with evil, defining them as violators of the sacred and as opposed to the fundamental good towards which people ought to strive, demonizes them, producing a linguistic, metaphorical, and symbolic integration of Jews into the anti-semites' lives. Jews are not just *evaluated* according to a culture's moral principles and norms but become *constitutive* of the moral order itself, of the cognitive building blocks that map the social and moral domains, which come partly, yet significantly, to depend for their coherence on the then prevailing conception of Jews.

Conceptions of jews, by being integrated by non-Jews into the moral order and hence the underlying symbolic and cognitive structure of society, take on ever wider ranges of meaning, meaning that accrues ever greater structural coherence and integrity. Much that is good becomes defined in opposition to Jews and, in turn, comes to depend upon maintaining this conception of Jews. It becomes difficult for non-Jews to alter the

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conception of Jews without altering a wide-ranging and integrated symbol structure, including important cognitive models, upon which people's understanding of society and morality rest. It becomes difficult for them to see the Jews' actions, even their existence, other than as desecration and defilement.

Certain antisemitisms conceive of Jews as beings whose very existence constitutes a violation of the moral fabric of society.

49--As long as Jews rejected the revelation of Jesus, they unwittingly challenged the Christians' certitude in that revelation. If the Jews, the people of God, shunned the messiah that God had promised them, then something was awry. Either the messiah was false, or the people had gone profoundly astray, perhaps tempted by the Devil himself. Christians could not countenance contemplation of the former, so they opted with heart and soul for the latter.

50--If Jews were right, then Christians were wrong...Contemporary Jews indeed rejected Jesus as messiah and the son of God no less than their forebears had, who, according to passionate & continuous Christian teaching and preaching, had killed him. All Jews, by taking this rejectionist stance, implicated themselves in the crime which had been the original consequence of their forebears' denial of Jesus' divinity. Jews became symbolic Christ-killers, were seen as having approved of the crime and, indeed, if given the chance, were considered to be capable of repeating it. And so, the Jews' continuing, daily rejection of Jesus was seen as an act of sacrilegious defiance, as an open, brazen, contemptuous gauntlet thrown in the faces of Christians....

John Chrysostom, a pivotal Church Father whose theology and teachings had lasting import, preached about Jews in terms that would become the stock-in-trade of Christian anti-Jewish teachings and rhetoric, which would condemn the Jews to live in a Christian Europe that despised and feared them:

Where Christ-killers gather, the cross is ridiculed, God blasphemed, the father unacknowledged, the son insulted, the grace of Spirit rejected. If the Jewish rites are holy and venerable, our way of life must be false. But if our way is true, as indeed it is, theirs is fraudulent.

51--The gathering of Jews--of the "Christ-killers"--for prayer and worship is understood as an act of denigration against Christianity, an act of blasphemy and mockery...To characterize the gathering of Jews in this manner is to see their very existence as intolerable effrontery.

51--The Christian conception of Jews was interwoven into the constitution of the moral order of the Christian cosmos and society. The Jews were, by definition, inimical to it, a blight upon it. The very definition of what it meant to be a Christian entailed a thoroughgoing and visceral hostility to Jews, just as it did to evil, and to the devil.

63--That Germans were fundamentally antisemitic is, in light of how knowledge is socially constructed, less astonishing than was the cultural and political centrality of Jews in their minds & emotions. Perhaps the most striking feature of the discussion of the Jews' place in Germany was the obsessive attention paid to the subject, the avalanche of words devoted to it, the passion expended on it.

After all, during the most explosive period of antisemitism vituperation, Jews formed around 1 percent of the German population. Many entire regions of Germany were virtually

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without Jews. Why the fuss at all, and why such a fuss indeed?..No German could extricate himself from the magical spell that riveted his attention on Jews...The *Judenfrage*, the "Jewish Problem"...

54--Jews as heretics.

64-5--The prevailing general image of the Jews held them to be malevolent, powerful, and dangerous. They were parasitic, contributing nothing to society--a central, obsessively intoned notion being that Jews shirked work, performing no productive labor--yet living off that same society, nourishing themselves at their hosts' expense.

The Jews' unwholesomeness contained yet another dimension: Jews were considered to be still more caustic than parasite, which, however deleterious they may be, restrict themselves to taking without returning in kind: the Jews willfully, actively undermined the order of society, corroding its mores and cohesion, and introducing disorder and disharmony into an otherwise well-integrated whole. They were spoilers; wherever Jews spread their influence, depredation followed.

And they were organized. The prevailing German view held Jews to be no just a collection of individual nodes of decomposition but a corporate group, acting in concert, as if with one's will...

The naturalistic, organic metaphorical language so favored by antisemites was fearsome. The Jews were "a rapidly growing parasitic plant that winds round the still healthy tree to suck up the life juice until the trunk, emaciated and eaten up from within, falls moldering into decay. Conceiving of Jews in such organic terms, each as part of one interconnected alien body invasively occupying Germany, tended to constrain Germans from seeing individual Jews as individuals.

66--The concept of "race" provided an as yet unachieved coherence in modern German antisemitism. Previously, a welter of antisemitism charges and understandings of the source of the Jews' perniciousness had characterized the outpouring of anti-Jewish sentiment since the "Jewish Problem" had become a central political theme as a reaction to the movement for their emancipation.

Now, with race, a unifying, easily comprehended, and metaphorically powerful concept at last appeared to integrate those various & inconsistent strands into a comprehensive, consistent explanation of Jewry and its relation to Germany. The cognitive model underlying the notion of race had a number of properties that were particularly suited to antisemites, and dangerous for Jews, and which made it easy to graft onto the ancient antisemitic base.

By pitting Germanness & Jewishness against one another, the cognitive model underlying the notion of race recapitulated the absolute & binary opposition that traditional antisemites had always believed to exist between Christianity and Judaism. Like medieval Christian antisemitism, this new Manichaen division transformed people, the Jews, into a central cultural symbol, the symbol of all that was awry in the world.

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67--From the description of Jews, abounding in organic metaphors of decomposition, it would be hard to recognize that human beings were at issue (RK: But the same goes for "the people," and "the country" and "the community," where you are dealing with a *symbol*, rather than with actual human beings...The Jew was that which disintegrated the symbol, nation).

68--In the latter half of the nineteenth century, it became impossible to discuss the German *Volk* without conjuring up notions of race, and hence of Jewish exclusion from Germany. The concept of "*Volk*" and "race" overlapped and became intertwined, so that it would be hard to define precisely the differences between the contemporary usage and meaning of the two terms. The fusion of Germanness and Christianity, moreover, also stripped away from the ideational repertoire of religious antisemitism the old baptismal standby--the means by which Jews could wash away their imputed sins and renounce their putative nature.

69--The absence of any option other than facing down the Jews was implicit in an archetypal description of this antisemitic ideology, penned in 1877. The German must recognize

that even the most honest Jew, under the inescapable influence of his blood, the carrier of his Semitic morality (*Semitenmoral*) which is fully opposed to your German morality, must work everywhere only towards the subversion and destruction of the German nature, German morality, German civilization.

The eliminationist mind-set that characterized virtually all who spoke out on the "Jewish Problem" from the end of the eighteenth century onward was another constant in Germans' thinking about Jews. For Germany to be properly ordered, regulated, and, for many, safeguarded, Jewishness had to be *eliminated* from German society...The necessity of the elimination of Jewishness was clear to all. It followed from the conception of the Jews as alien invaders of the German body social.

If two peoples are conceived as binary opposites, with the qualities of goodness inhering in one people, and those of evil in the other, then the exorcism of that evil from the shared social and temporal space, by whatever means, would be urgent, an imperative. "The German Volk," asserted one antisemite before the midpoint of the century, "needs only to topple the Jews" in order to become "united and free."

70--The "solutions" that antisemites did propose in the latter part of the nineteenth century ran the gamut from the old liberal hope of causing the Jews to disappear through their total assimilation, to creating new legal constraints on the Jews, including a rollback of the emancipation, to forcible and violent expulsion, and even to total annihilation. All these "solutions" are but variations, enormously different as they may be, on the eliminationist mind-set.

From the antisemites' perspective, though not from that of the Jews, these "solutions" were, with their remaining differences, rough functional equivalents. They emanated from the common belief that German society must be de-Jewified, made *judenrein*, one way or another. The eliminationist mind-set was the logical and actual

product of this belief.

172--The "camp world" was the largest, most novel, and most significant institutional creation in Germany during its Nazi years...The camp system was an ever-expanding world, becoming even more important, more integral to the workings of the new Germany, ever more its defining trait.

319--Because of the Jews' putatively satanic nature, their deaths were also seen as morally laudable.

584 (footnote 62)--As much as the Germans' anti-semitism was the basis of their profound hatred of Jews and the psychological impulse to make them suffer, it obviously does not explain people's capacity for cruelty in the first place or the gratification many derive from it. The Germans' cruelty towards the Jews was so immense that it remains hard to fathom.

70-1--As the content of antisemitism coalesced around the beliefs that the Jews were a race and that the danger that they posed was mortal, in the latter part of the nineteenth century the most prominent antisemitic writers increasingly accepted the logic of their beliefs, calling for nothing less than the Jews' extermination:

The voices which, in accordance with the absolutely negative verdict on the Jewish being, urged merciless persecution and annihilation, were by far in majority and their appeal increased from decade to decade. In their eyes the Jews were parasites and vermin that had to be exterminated. The wealth that they had amassed through thieving and cheating must be wrested from them and they themselves exported for a good profit to a remote corner of the earth, say to Guinea. Some advocated the simplest solution, to kill the Jews; since the duty to defend "morals, humanity and culture" demanded a pitiless struggle against the evil. The annihilation of the Jews meant for most antisemites the salvation of Germany. They were apparently convinced that the elimination of a minority would bring an end to all the miseries and make the German people again the master in its own house.

Klemens Felded, the author of the above passage, has done a content analysis of fifty-one prominent antisemitic writers and publications that appeared between 1861 and 1995 in Germany. The findings are startling. Twenty-eight of them proposed "solutions" to the "Jewish Problem." Of those, nineteen called for the *physical extermination of the Jews*.

...Racial antisemites were indeed convinced, as Felden observes, that the extermination of the Jews was the salvation of Germany (RK: the *meaning* of this connection, the psychological relationship between the extermination of the Jews and the "salvation" of Germany is what my book is about...Why should the destruction of the Jews lead to "salvation?" And yet we all know that there is some connection. When we say, "Kill Jews," we're saying kill the intellect, the voice of reason which tells us omnipotence does not exist, that we shall die...That is the quiet voice of truth, individuality, which negates the "society" and its hysteria).

391--An explanation of the perpetration of the Holocaust must account for...the varied

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persons, institutions, and settings of the perpetration. It must identify features common to the perpetrators that would explain why such relatively uniform action and why *these particular* discrete actions would emerge in varied settings among a large number of heterogeneous individuals. It must explain the smoothness of the overall operation. It must also achieve the following. It needs to integrate the various levels of analysis, namely the remarkable convergence of the overall policy, the frequently uncoordinated local implementation of it, including the character of institutional killing, and the actions of individuals. This is most striking in the domain of Jewish "work"...An explanation must supply the motivational mainspring that is adequate to all of these demands. Finally, it must explain the genesis of this motivation.

392--The conventional explanations do not acknowledge, indeed they deny, the humanity of the perpetrators, namely that they were agents, moral beings capable of making moral choices...The one explanation adequate to these tasks holds that a demonological antisemitism, of the virulent racial variety, was the common structure of the perpetrators' cognition and of German society in general.

393--The German perpetrators, in this view, were assenting mass executioners, men and women who, true to their own eliminationist antisemitic beliefs, faithful to their cultural antisemitic credo, considered the slaughter to be just.

393--Reinhard Maurach's expert legal brief for the defense submitted at the Nuremberg *Einsatzgruppen* trial presented the court with the simple truth: *Einsatzkommandos* had genuinely believed that Bolshevism, with which Germany was locked in apocalyptic battle, "was a Jewish invention and was only serving the interests of Jewry." He made the argument that this provided subjective justification for the Germans' extermination of the Jews, since Germans, perpetrators and non-perpetrators alike, rightly or wrongly, had believed that the preservation of Germany had depended on it.

396--This "hunt," "the likes of which mankind had never seen," was entirely typical for German ghetto clearings...The overwhelming impression of those who ever witnessed a German ghetto clearing was that they were observing not men who were brought to their tasks reluctantly, but men driven by the passion, determination, tirelessness, and enthusiasm of religious zealots on a holy, redemptive mission.

Just as many young men have through the ages volunteered to go to war in order to fight for their countries, so too were Germans willing to volunteer to destroy this cognitively created moral enemy.

397--Germans' beliefs about Jews unleashed indwelling destructive and ferocious passions that are usually tamed and curbed by civilization. They also provided Germans with a moral rationale and psychological impulse to exercise those passions against Jews.

399--The perpetrators' antisemitism thus explains the four significant actions specified by the matrix of authority and cruelty. It explains the Germans' willingness to carry out orders, the initiative they took both in killing and in brutalizing Jews, as well as the general brutality, both institutionally structured and individually produced. It explains the perpetrators' zeal, and why this far-flung operation proceeded so smoothly, for the belief in the necessity and the justice of the genocide provided the energy and the devotion that such operations

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require. ...

The same beliefs moved policy makers, infused and shaped the character of the institutions of killing, and motivated the executors of genocidal policy. Of one mind, confronting their common foe, Germans in face-to-face relations with Jews reproduced the thinking of those who shaped overall policy.

RK: If all Germans were involved, then killing becomes a critique of an entire culture. If most European cultures were antisemitic, the issue becomes a critique of culture itself.

403--Imagine if any western government today were to let it be known to a large heterogeneous group of ordinary citizens that it was setting out to kill, root and branch, another people. Aside from the moral reaction to the information, people would find the announcement simply incomprehensible. They would react as to the words of a madman. Antisemitism in Germany was such that when Germans, participants or bystanders, learned that the Jews were to be killed, they evinced not surprise, not incredulity, but comprehension. Whatever their moral or utilitarian stances towards the killing were, the annihilation of the Jews *made sense to them*.

404--Germans did not merely understand themselves to be carrying out what were considered to be the crazy plans of a criminal madman; rather, they really comprehended why such radical action had to be undertaken, why, in order to safeguard the existence of the *Volk*, the extermination of the Jews was to be a German national project.

410--The Jews were seen as a biologically programmed people of great power, dedicated to destroying Germany, who by constitution and deed forfeited the protection of traditional morality. Security dictated that they had to be killed, and morality permitted (even lauded) such action.