

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

REVISING THE HOLOCAUST*

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Hitler's willing executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust. By Daniel Jonah Goldhagen. London: Little Brown and Company, 1996. Pp. x+622. £20.

I

Questions about the motives of the perpetrators and, by implication, the causes of the Holocaust, have long been in the forefront of academic or non-academic discussions of the Nazi period – from the time of contemporary observers to the present day. A wide range of possible responses to these questions has been put forward, drawing on concepts from a variety of disciplines, such as history, psychology, sociology or theology. Daniel Goldhagen's book on the motivation of the perpetrators of the Holocaust claims to be a 'radical revision of what has until now been written' (p. 9). This claim is made on the book-jacket and by the author himself. His thesis can be summarized as follows: Germany was permeated by a particularly radical and vicious brand of anti-Semitism whose aim was the elimination of Jews. The author defines this as 'eliminationist anti-Semitism'. This viral strain of anti-Semitism, he states, 'resided ultimately in the heart of German political culture, in German society itself' (p. 428). Medieval anti-Semitism, based as it was on the teachings of the Christian religion, was so 'integral to German culture' (p. 55) that with the emergence of the modern era it did not disappear but rather took on new forms of expression, in particular, racial aspects. By the end of the nineteenth century 'eliminationist anti-Semitism' dominated the German political scene. In the Weimar Republic, it grew more virulent even before Hitler came to power. The Nazi machine merely turned this ideology into a reality. The course of its actualization was not deterred by anything save bare necessity: 'the road to Auschwitz was not twisted' (p. 425). When the 'genocidal program' was implemented along with the German attack on the Soviet Union, it was supported by the general German population, by the 'ordinary Germans' – the key phrase of the book – who became 'willing executioners'. They had no need of special orders, coercion or pressure because their 'cognitive model' showed them that Jews were 'ultimately fit only to suffer and to die' (p. 316).

Daniel Goldhagen's book has become an international event. He has been interviewed and quoted, appeared on TV and travelled widely to discuss his work.

* The views expressed in this article are those of the author and not those of the Department of Justice, Canada.

Reviews, both enthusiastic and critical, have poured from the presses in many countries. It is hard to think of a large academic book that has had such a reception and even harder to explain why. The book itself is made up of three parts: an overview of German history and the significance of anti-semitism therein, three case studies, and roughly 100 pages of conclusions. The first, general section has been the subject of most of the attention of reviewers. This review will, therefore, concentrate on the case studies, the sources which Mr Goldhagen has used and the methodology on which the book rests. I only want say one thing with respect to the general issues that Mr Goldhagen raises. His assertion that German antisemitism was unique can only be made by comparing it to other forms of antisemitism. If one claims that only Jews were treated in a special way, one has to analyse the treatment of other victims; if one claims that only German committed certain deeds, one has to compare them to the deeds of non-Germans; if one claims that *all* Germans acted in a certain way, one has to compare the behaviour of different groups in German society. It is odd that a professor of political science makes no attempt to look at his evidence in a comparative framework.

The evidence itself has not been examined by reviewers, because most of them are not familiar with Mr Goldhagen's sources. In fact, the author uses historical documents only to a minimal extent; apart from some Nuremberg documents and a few files from the German Federal Archives, he relies mainly on secondary literature. For his case studies, he uses material mainly from German post-war investigations of Nazi crimes, which are, for the most part, to be found in the 'Central Agency for the Prosecution of Nazi Crimes'¹ in Ludwigsburg, Germany.

The importance of investigation and trial records for research on the Nazi period has been recognized by scholars for more than twenty-five years. However, historians also appreciate that these records must be interpreted critically. Not only are witness statements recollections of things past, and therefore subject to retrospection, but due to the context of a criminal investigation itself, they demonstrate how additional incentives for distorting the truth must be taken into account. Goldhagen's methodology for dealing with statements of perpetrators is to 'discount all self-exculpating testimony that finds no corroboration from other sources'. The bias created by this selection he considers 'negligible' (p. 467, see p. 601, n. 11).

This approach is too mechanical and inadequate for dealing with the complexities of the issue, in particular since Goldhagen's stated aim is to study the complex motivational aspects of murder. Statements about their motives form an integral part of a perpetrator's testimony, and evaluating them is not as easy as sorting out corroborated from uncorroborated facts. A number of other variables have to be considered: (1) the context of the investigation (great differences exist between individual investigations, in part due to the investigative body responsible, when the investigation took place, and in part due to contrived testimonies), (2) the context of the statement (perpetrators often gave different statements, in different settings and at different times, which can differ considerably in content), (3) the manner in which the statement was recorded (statements in the German legal system are not verbatim transcriptions, but are a summary prepared by the interrogator. They are not the words of the person himself. Only in some cases are direct quotations inserted.)

A comparative approach is imperative when evaluating interrogations. Only by reviewing as broad a base of statements as possible are discrepancies, distortions and

¹ Abbreviated as ZStL.

omissions likely to be revealed. Moreover, only the comparative method can place the statements into their proper historical, and individual, context and allow for informed conclusions. In this respect, Goldhagen's study falls short. His evidentiary base is extremely small; for each of his major topics, he has concentrated on only one investigation, or parts of investigations. The number of statements on which he bases his conclusions is fewer than 200, which is a very narrow selection from the tens of thousands of statements in existence on those topics.

In addition, he uses only snippets of indictments, verdicts or case summaries by German prosecutors. He also uses portions of statements from a wide range of investigations which are unrelated to the topics he discusses in the book. In light of this paucity of sources, it is not surprising that Goldhagen's book has neither a bibliography nor a listing of archival sources.

II

The empirical evidence, which Goldhagen marshals in support of his hypothesis, is derived from three aspects of the Nazi era: (a) the Order Police and Police Battalions, (b) Jewish labour and (c) the death marches.

Goldhagen rightly deplores the fact that a comprehensive history of the Order Police in the Nazi period has not as yet been written. The participation of the Order Police in the Holocaust has, however, been dealt with in the major general histories of the Holocaust, as for instance by Raul Hilberg in *The destruction of the European Jews*, or by Browning in his recent study of Police Battalion 101.² Goldhagen, while contending that Police Battalions provide 'an unusually clear window' (p. 181) for the understanding of the genocide, does not think a 'thorough comprehension of institutional development' (p. 181) necessary for an analysis of its significance. Consequently, he has not dealt with any of the extensive materials on the Order Police (apart from four files from the R 19 collection in the Bundesarchiv Koblenz), though he could have avoided a number of basic mistakes through a closer acquaintance with the subject.

Goldhagen's argument asserts the following: police battalions were the 'organizational home of a large number of Germans' (p. 182), who were 'randomly selected' (p. 183); these battalions were 'populated by neither martial spirits nor Nazi supermen' (p. 185). In order to substantiate this, he examines the members of one battalion, 'Polizeibataillon 101', in greater detail. Its members, when sent to Eastern Poland in 1942, were mainly reservists. They were older men, neither over-proportionally party members nor SS members, and, as Goldhagen argues, their collective social backgrounds are such that they can be seen as a representative sample of German society as a whole. They are '...representative of German society – that is, ordinary Germans – in their degree of Nazification...' (p. 207). Despite the controversy in the social sciences as to the presumed correlation between a person's social background and behaviour in a given human situation, Goldhagen turns presumption into premise by abandoning all pretence of examining empirical data. He boldly asserts that this allows for insight into the '...likely conduct of other ordinary Germans' (p. 208). This leap from a limited quantity to a collective quality, by which real events are grossly relativized is rather breathtaking – particularly given the existence of other police

² Christopher Browning, *Ordinary men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the final solution in Poland* (New York, 1992).

battalions which were also active in the Holocaust and were not comprised of reservists, but comprised of career police officers or volunteers.³

Goldhagen's argument develops in the following way: the statements of former members of Police Battalion 101 disclose an incident in which the commander, Major Trapp, explicitly told his men that they did not have to shoot if they did not want to. This was on the occasion of the unit's first mass-shooting of Jews. Obviously, the commander here is unwilling to comply with his orders. A few men availed themselves of the offer not to shoot, the majority did not. This raises the obvious question of what the motives of the complying men were. The motivating force for compliance was, according to Goldhagen, the '...great hatred for the Jews' (p. 425). Goldhagen suggests that they took part because they wanted to kill, and, in one of his many extrapolations on all police battalions, he states that one can '...generalize with confidence...by choosing not to excuse themselves...[that] the Germans in police battalions themselves indicated that they wanted to be genocidal executioners' (p. 279).

During the investigation into their activities, members of Police Battalion 101 gave explanations for their behaviour. They form the core of Christopher Browning's study. These statements point towards a different interpretation of motivation from that supplied by Goldhagen, particularly with respect to the first mass-execution. By and large, the men were not eager to conduct the mass-killing operation, a fact which is corroborated by those who remained behind and did not shoot. But they did participate in the executions, nevertheless. Over time, when mass-killings continued, certain character types emerged: the very few who continued to stand apart, those who enjoyed the killing and who volunteered and gave free reign to their sadistic impulses and those who simply continued on with mass-murder and grew increasingly barbaric. Browning discusses a wide range of explanations for this behaviour, based on socio-psychological concepts, and argues that the most likely explanation is a mixture of peer-pressure, careerism and obedience.

In order to support his hypothesis, Goldhagen is forced to reject not only Browning's interpretation but also the explanations offered in statements themselves. The statements are attacked as '...unsubstantiated, self-exculpating claims' (p. 534, n. 1) and Browning as gullible enough to fall for them. It is noteworthy that a considerable part of Goldhagen's discussion of factual evidence is given over to attacking Browning in unusually strong language. Why has Goldhagen concentrated exclusively on Police Battalion 101 when there are roughly one hundred and fifty investigations of other police battalions to choose from? While it would make sense in the context of a larger study to revisit this one case, it is peculiar to concentrate on this one case when it has already been evaluated by a reputed historian.

In evaluating witness testimony, one can reject or view circumspectly all perpetrators' statements, particularly as to motive. They are a reflection of the perpetrators' self-image based on the desire for exculpation and tainted by retrospection. In doing so, however, one would lose one of the few possibilities available of gaining insight into the mentality of perpetrators, especially in those cases where a perpetrator feels compelled to unburden himself by confessing to his criminal acts and then tries to offer an explanation for his behaviour. Nevertheless, wholesale rejection

³ For instance: Police Reserve Battalion 45, ZStL SA 429 Indictment StA Regensburg I 4 Js 1495/65; Police Battalion 306, ZStL SA 447 Verdict LG Frankfurt 4 Ks 1/71; Battalion 316, ZStL, SA 387, Verdict LG Bochum 15 Ks 1/66.

is a legitimate position. Goldhagen does not avail himself of this option though. He seems to follow no stringent methodological approach whatsoever. This is the problem. He prefers instead to use parts of the statements selectively, to re-interpret them according to his own point of view, or to take them out of context and make them fit into his own interpretative framework.

One example cited by Goldhagen is a letter by a captain in Battalion 101. He considers that it is of the greatest importance: 'This one letter provides more insight... than do reams of the perpetrators' self-serving postwar testimony' (pp. 3–4, 382). The captain complains to his superiors about having to sign a declaration not to plunder. Goldhagen depicts this as significant proof that Germans had a scale of values and were able to make moral choices. However, when one examines this letter in the context of his other correspondence, the captain is revealed to be a malcontent. This letter has no great significance.⁴

Another example of Goldhagen's handling of the evidence is his description of an incident in which one of the officers brought his newly-wed to a ghetto-clearing and mass execution, angering many of the battalion members.⁵ Trapp reprimanded this behaviour publicly. Goldhagen interprets this as merely 'a sense of chivalry' (p. 242) and concern for 'her welfare' (p. 242), because the woman was pregnant. He also insinuates that wives 'participated' (p. 241) rather than simply being spectators of mass-murder, which they were occasionally. Later on in the book, the whole incident is generalized (pp. 267, 378) as a representation of the fact that perpetrators routinely shared their murderous experiences with their wives. This generalization rests on a very small foundation of evidence, and totally disregards the many examples of strict separation by the perpetrators of their 'home life' from their life in 'the East'. This, by the way, led presumably to the disproportionately high number of divorces among perpetrators immediately after the war.

Expressions of shame and disapproval in the statements, if not rejected out of hand for methodological reasons (p. 533, n. 74, in connection with Pol Btl 65), are discredited by Goldhagen as mere expressions of 'visceral disgust' (p. 541, n. 68) and not of 'ethical or principled opposition' (p. 541, n. 68). To illustrate how this view is a misrepresentation and, thus, unacceptable, one need only refer to the statement of the medical orderly of Battalion 101, who, due to his function, did not have to shoot. He is very open and forthright in his interrogation. He describes his feelings with respect to the killing of the sick in a ghetto hospital quite sincerely: 'it was so repulsive/disgusting to me and I felt so terribly ashamed'.⁶ While the notion of 'principled opposition' would make sense when, for instance, dealing with attitudes of the German civilian population, its heuristic value becomes questionable when dealing with a group who, after all, did participate in crimes and can hardly claim 'opposition' of any kind. For an honest statement under similar circumstances, one should more likely turn to one of the tentative and groping explanations Browning analyses, in which the person is very open about what he saw, using descriptions like 'cruel' [grausam], 'murder plain and simple' [glatter Mord], 'a crying shame' [ausgesprochene Schweinerei] and also very candidly talks about his participation in

⁴ ZStL, 208 AR-Z 27/62, III, pp. 379–412. Goldhagen also depicts the content of the letter wrongly.

⁵ ZStL, 208 AR-Z 27/62 V, pp. 1031–38, F.B.; VI, pp. 1359–68, F.B., VII, pp. 1493–96, H.E.; VIII c, indictment StA Hamburg 141 Js 1957/62, pp. 430–47.

⁶ 'Derartig angeekelt und ich habe mich derartig geschaemt.' ZStL, 208 AR-Z 27/62, V, pp. 971–9, F.V. See also Goldhagen's version, p. 546, n. 16.

it. At the same time he describes his frame of mind within the context of the war, i.e. that he could not even imagine refusing to obey an order.⁷ There are even examples of expressions of shame and guilt coupled with self-incriminating statements. One such statement cited by Browning (Browning, pp. 67–8) is, not surprisingly, ignored by Goldhagen.

Using Goldhagen's method of handling evidence, one could easily find enough citations from the Ludwigsburg material to prove the exact opposite of what Goldhagen maintains.

III

Goldhagen uses the activities of Police Battalion 65 as another illustration of his theory that 'the Germans' killed 'any Jew whom they discovered'... with neither 'prompting nor permission' (p. 194), because this reflected 'their own inwardly held standards' (p. 193), their 'internalized... need to kill Jews' (p. 193). As proof, he recounts a number of killings which are contained in the investigation report of a German prosecutor. A reading of this report in full, and not selectively as does Goldhagen, reveals that the activities of Police Battalion 65 mirror the course of the German occupation policy; they implemented whatever orders were given to them at a specific time and place. They killed Jews and Russians in Lithuania and Russia, Jews and Poles in Poland. They deported Jews from Denmark and, at the end of the war in Northern Yugoslavia, they killed Yugoslavs.⁸ The report does not support Goldhagen's interpretation that priority was given to the killing of Jews and that 'every German was inquisitor, judge and executioner' (p. 194).

Individual statements are treated with similar selectiveness. Goldhagen cites the account of one witness who describes how a person was beaten to death, just because the name Abraham appeared in his papers (p. 532, n. 54).⁹ This incident is mentioned on page 2 of the statement, and on pages 3–4, the brutal and sexually sadistic murder of a young girl by one of the officers is described in graphic detail, vividly illustrating the atmosphere prevalent in Russia. Goldhagen makes no reference to it. The victim was not Jewish.

Goldhagen describes the activities of Police Battalion 309 in June, 1941, in Bialystok (pp. 188–191) as '... the emblematic killing operation of the formal genocide' (p. 191). He maintains that the battalion knew of the planned destruction of the Jews before its entry into the Soviet Union. (For a number of years, the majority of Holocaust scholars has endorsed the view that initially an order was given to kill Jewish men and Soviet functionaries which was enlarged after roughly two months to a general killing order, including women and children.) Consequently, when entering Bialystok 'these Germans could finally unleash themselves without restraint upon the Jews' (p. 188), so the whole battalion without any prompting 'became instantaneous Weltanschauungskrieger or ideological warriors' (p. 190). The Jewish quarters were searched, accompanied by many acts of cruelty, the Jewish population was herded into the market place, finally in part forced into the Synagogue, and there burned alive.

Detailed examination of the statements themselves modify this one-dimensional picture and show Goldhagen's conclusions to be without foundation. Goldhagen stresses the importance of the extermination order, and attacks Browning for having

⁷ ZStL, 208 AR-Z 27/62, VI, pp. 1114–28, E.N.

⁸ ZStL, 206 AR-Z 6/62, VIII, Einstellungsverfügung, pp. 2073–97.

⁹ ZStL, 206 AR-Z 6/62, III, pp. 782–5, E.L.

failed to mention it (pp. 529–30, n. 22). However, while some former members of the battalion confirm its existence,¹⁰ others give differing statements, among them the clerk [Schreiber] through whose hands the orders would have had to pass.¹¹ One battalion member changes his story radically in a series of statements, and he speaks of an order to kill all Jews in his final statement only, the one which Goldhagen relies upon.¹² This should arouse the suspicion of a researcher. Closer scrutiny reveals the likely reason for the change of story as a defence strategy of the main defendants. As soon as the investigation commenced, intensive communication between former battalion members took place.¹³ Two defence strategies emerge: to suggest a superior order in support of ‘military necessity’ and to shift blame to the commander, who died during the investigation. This conclusion is corroborated by investigations against other battalions of the ‘Polizei Regiment Mitte’ that, by the end of July, 1941, still murdered male Jews only.¹⁴

The incident described by Goldhagen seems to have been in the nature of a pogrom, caused by a group of officers who, through their proximity to the SS, were ideologically zealous.¹⁵ This is corroborated by two men from the rank and file who say that they were hustled into the action before they knew what was happening to them.¹⁶ One describes how he was disgusted by the burning alive of defenceless people in the synagogue. Since both men confess, their testimony should carry great weight. While Goldhagen only speaks of ‘the Germans’, the perpetrators in this case can be specifically identified. Of the fourteen main perpetrators who stood trial, 13 were career police officers and one came via the Waffen-SS; 8 were party members.¹⁷ One of the two company leaders had been involved, after World War I, with right wing groups such as the ‘Freikorps’ while the other was a SS member in 1933. They can hardly be considered ‘ordinary Germans’.

The inadequacy of conclusions which are reached by not using a comparative approach is clearly illustrated by Goldhagen’s discussion of the decision-making process within the phenomenon of the Holocaust. The lack of a comparative approach also illustrates that he, himself, ignores his own warning about the uncritical use of sources. He is not adverse to using exculpatory statements if it suits his line of argument. Goldhagen, as mentioned above, supports the older view that a general order was given to the Operational Task Forces [Einsatzgruppen] before they set out. His argument,

¹⁰ ZStL, 205 AR-Z 20/60, V, pp. 1339 rs, A. A.; VI, p. 1416, J. B.; 202 AR 2701/65, I, pp. 95–6, H. G..

¹¹ ZStL, 205 AR-Z 20/60, I, pp. 289–90, G. E.; see IV, pp. 1115–16 and IX, indictment StA Dortmund 45 Js 21/61, p. 2303, H. Sch.; III, p. 681 and VII, p. 1926 rs.; R-J. B.; II, pp. 485–6, E. O.; II, p. 514, T. D.

¹² ZStL, 205 AR-Z 20/60, III, p. 764 (1963); XII, pp. 2794–95 (1965); VII, p. 1813 rs (1966), E. M.

¹³ ZStL, 205 AR-Z 20/60, I, pp. 73–7, M. R. p. 78, letter E. W., pp. 177–93; E. W., II, pp. 459–62, H. Sch.; see: Heiner Lichtenstein: *Himmels grüne Helfer. Die Schutz- und Ordnungspolizei im ‘Dritten Reich’* (Koeln, 1990), pp. 86–8. This has happened in other cases concerning Order Police.

¹⁴ Police Battalions 316 and 322, see ZStL SA 387; verdict L. G. Bochum 15 Ks 1/66 and SA 133; verdict LG Freiburg 1 Ks 1/63.

¹⁵ ZStL, 205 AR-Z 20/60, V, pp. 1217–20, H. B.; II, p. 374, A. O.; II, pp. 465–73, H. Sch.; V, pp. 1343–44, J. O.; SA 214, verdict LG Wuppertal 12 Ks 1/67, pp. 60–5.

¹⁶ ZStL, 205 AR-Z 20/60, III, pp. 788–92, R. I. and V, pp. 1280–84, W. L.; IX, pp. 2327–33, indictment StA Dortmund 45 Js 21/61.

¹⁷ ZStL, 205 AR-Z 20/60, IX, indictment StA Dortmund 45 Js 21/61; SA 214, verdict LG Wuppertal 12 Ks 1/67, p. 8, ad R-J. B..

though, is not up to the present level of the international debate on the subject. He bases his opinion mainly on two statements made by former Commanders of Einsatzkommandos, Blume (p. 149) and Filbert (p. 149), as ‘conclusive evidence’ (p. 153). Blume stood trial in Nuremberg, and he was part of a defence strategy organized by Otto Ohlendorf which had as its purpose the proving of an alleged order by Hitler before the murder commenced. The presence of this order was intended to provide the foundation for a defence which used superior orders as an excuse. Alfred Streim has demonstrated the existence of such a strategy by means of a painstaking and thorough analysis of the wide range of statements available. He also showed how statements by the same person could change substantially over time. The Blume and Filbert statements are examples of this.¹⁸ Goldhagen, in his account, accepts uncritically the Ohlendorf line; he wrote a paper on Ohlendorf in his undergraduate degree. Goldhagen habitually dismisses as inadequate the works of the most respected scholars of the Holocaust, yet refers repeatedly to his own B.A. work (p. 583, n. 45). The most telling example of the uncritical use of sources is what Goldhagen announces as ‘what may be the most significant and illuminating testimony after the war’ (p. 393). This testimony corroborates, according to him, that the perpetrators were genuinely motivated by ‘demonological hatred’ against all Jews. The testimony is given by R. Maurach in defence of Ohlendorf in Nuremberg. Again, the best line of defence available, in the face of the indisputable number of murders committed by Einsatzgruppe D, was to claim orders from above and sincere ideological convictions. This, however, does not make this defence, which was rejected at Nuremberg, conclusive proof; the one argument ‘leaving us no choice but to adopt it’ (p. 583, n. 46). In general, Goldhagen seems to have difficulty comprehending that when perpetrators claim to have been motivated by Nazi propaganda, it need not be sincere; it can be a subterfuge or a very plausible line of self-exculpation psychologically. It attempts to supply ‘idealistic’ motives for crimes committed.

IV

In general terms, Goldhagen’s descriptions of the activities of these police battalions entirely ignores the fact that the police units operated in an occupied country during a war and that some of these units had been conducting killings for some time in Poland, or other areas, before being sent to the Soviet Union. This neglect also applies to the examples he uses.¹⁹ The factual, social and historical context in which these policemen operated is entirely omitted. A police environment has a specific culture which is particularly manifest in a para-militaristic setting. One illustration of this is Goldhagen’s attack on Browning who accepted the perpetrators’ explanation of not wanting to appear cowardly if they refused the order to shoot. Goldhagen overlooks entirely the scale of values and perceptions of manly behaviour prevalent in these particular settings at the time. It might be disturbing that somebody would shoot children because he did not want to ‘appear soft’, as expressed in a statement, but it captures something of the atmosphere of the time.²⁰ The framework of permissible action delineated by war and occupation is neglected in the same way. Failing to refuse

¹⁸ Alfred Streim, *Die Behandlung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener im Fall ‘Barbarossa’*, (Heidelberg, 1981); Alfred Streim, *The task of the SS Einsatzgruppen*, volume 4.; Alfred Streim: *Reply to Helmut Krausnick*, volume 6, both: Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual.

¹⁹ For instance, Battalion 309: see ZStL, 205 AR-Z 20/60, II, pp. 462–4, H.Sch. and pp. 482–4, E.O. ²⁰ Ed. E. Klee, W. Dressen, V. Riess, *Schoene Zeiten* (Frankfurt, 1988), pp. 81–3.

a given order is imperceptibly changed into an entirely voluntarist act of Jew-killing. Examples of the voluntary killing of Jews do, of course, exist, but they are not to be seen in the cases to which Goldhagen refers.

The most severe shortcoming of Goldhagen's treatment of the Order Police is that he analyses activities outside of their proper historical and institutional context. In his introductory description of the Order Police, cited above, he states that police battalions are 'most intimately involved in the genocide' (p. 181). How is this a given? A more plausible argument with respect to this can be made for the smaller units of the Order Police, stationed all over the occupied east. They were involved in every step of the ghettoization, exploitation and, finally, murder of the Jewish population over a prolonged period of time. They might have known the victims; they witnessed every detail of the Holocaust. In contrast, mobile units like the police battalions only sporadically moved into a particular region for mass-killings. So why not choose the smaller units instead? If he had used stationary police units as his defining example, his hypothesis would have been devoid of any real content.

The Order Police in the Second World War grew enormously. The shortage of German personnel prevented effective policing of the occupied east. Non-German police forces had to be used to a great degree. The ratio of Germans to non-Germans ranged from between 1:10 to 1:50; in some places it was even higher. The majority were incorporated into the structural organization of the Order Police. In practical terms, the dispersion of limited resources meant that any rural police post would have been manned by a few German, and a much larger group of non-German, policemen. All of them took part in the persecution of Jews. Goldhagen would have had to address the question of what differences are to be seen in their respective behaviour. And the same question can be asked of the police battalions themselves. 'Schutzmannschaften', comprised of non-Germans, had been set up and were assigned the same functions as the German units. For example, Police Battalion 11, mentioned by Goldhagen in connection with its murderous activities in Belorussia in the fall of 1941 (p. 271), was augmented by the Lithuanian 'Schutzmannschaftsbattalion 2/12', manned by Lithuanian volunteers.²¹ Germans and Lithuanians rotated in the killing actions – two companies were shooting while two were guarding. A number of statements of a type Goldhagen habitually accepts (though one might have reservations about such denunciatory statements), refer to the Lithuanians' particular bloodthirstiness.²² Does this mean that Goldhagen's theory of the cognitive models of Germany's eliminationist antisemitic culture applies to Lithuanian cognitive models as well?

v

The second empirical basis of Goldhagen's argument is the fact that Jews were used as forced labour. This part of his book he considers to be the 'toughest test' of his hypothesis (p. 465). He studies conditions in Jewish work-camps, using concrete examples of two camps in Lublin: the Lipowa camp and the 'Flughafen' camp. The many acts of cruelty and torture to which inmates were subjected are described in great detail. Goldhagen sees the economic irrationality of these conditions as a crucial feature. 'Why did Germans put Jews to work?' (p. 283), he asks. 'Why did they not simply kill them?' (p. 283). The answer he gives is that the German 'cultural cognitive

²¹ ZStL, SA 119, indictment StA Kassel 31 Js 27/60, pp. 14–17; Report of the investigations of war criminals in Australia, edited by the Attorney-General's Department, Canberra (1993), pp. 124–9.

²² StA Kassel 3a Ks 1/61. F.W.; E.B.

model of Jews' (p. 285), which was 'ingrained in German culture' (p. 320), did not allow for Jewish work to be rationally motivated but only allowed such work to have 'a symbolic and moral dimension' (p. 285). The view expressed by Hitler, namely, that Jews are 'lazy' and 'parasites', is taken as 'the common view in Germany'. This collective view 'echoed Hitler's' (p. 285) own and led to the wish to make Jews suffer. 'Germans derived emotional satisfaction' from putting Jews to work (p. 284). They enjoyed the 'production of Jewish misery' (p. 320), even if it was counter-productive. 'Jewish "work" was not work ... but a suspended form of death. In other words, it was death itself' (p. 323).

Though not without a certain explanatory potential, Goldhagen's concept of the use of work to inflict gratuitous suffering on a doomed population is vitiated by the examples he cites. The work camps he is describing were operating in 1942/43. At that time, the genocide, i.e. the overall plan to murder the Jewish population of Europe, had been in effect for two years. The idea of making Jews work was not a change in plans but rather a side issue, borne out of the idea of getting the most use of the victims before having them killed. These facts are set out in detail in Goldhagen's main source,²³ in the prosecutor's report. However, the general, immutable plan in which this occurred involved ultimate destruction. Therefore, to compare the Lublin workcamps to slave labour programmes is nonsensical. Slave labour of Polish or Russian people was designed to utilize their work capacity, albeit under the harshest of conditions. Consequently, work conditions varied, in particular, when individual labourers were working on German farms, where some of them were not treated too badly. His premise that a German farmer treating a Polish forced labourer with some decency can be proof of the theory that Germans tortured only Jews, because concentration camp guards ill-treated Jews, is clearly illogical (pp. 313ff.). A more viable comparison to the situation of Slavic forced labourers would be with the situation of those Jews who were, in 1942/43, still within a German environment.²⁴ In order to support his stance that 'Germans were murderous and cruel towards Jewish workers and murderous and cruel in ways they reserved especially for Jews' (p. 315), Goldhagen depicts the conditions of Slavic forced labourers in somewhat too rosy a manner (p. 314). For instance, he ignores the fact that Russian women were forced to abort their unborn children, or were killed when found to be pregnant, even when the pregnancy resulted from rape. He also overlooks the fact that millions of Soviet POWs were starved to death before it dawned on the German authorities that they had a problem with a labour shortage. These and other examples do not support the thesis that Germans dealt with everybody but Jews in a manner that was dictated by economic rationality.

The appropriate comparison for the conditions in the Lublin work camps is the conditions in other camps. Everything Goldhagen describes was a daily occurrence in every concentration camp (which parenthetically existed from 1933 on before and apart from the Nazi policy to kill every person just because they were Jewish): the endless roll-calls during which inmates perished from excessive heat, excessive cold, cruel punishments, public hangings, senseless work which was only meant to exhaust, health-care which was a means of expediting death, and the plethora of arbitrarily inflicted humiliations and tortures from guards. What Goldhagen describes as being inflicted by the 'camp's ordinary Germans' (p. 307) onto 'Jews, and only for Jews'

²³ ZStL, 208 AR-Z 74/60, LIV. Secondary sources exist as well.

²⁴ In detail described in: Victor Klemperer, *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten* (Berlin, 1995), II, pp. 21–48.

(p. 313) reflects what really happened if one replaces ‘Germans’ with ‘guards’ and ‘Jews’ with ‘inmates’. Of course, the behaviour of guards was a reflection of the hatred of Jews, which was at the centre of Nazi beliefs, but it also reflects the multitude of other individual personalized hatreds. Jews were very often the object of the cruelty of guards, but so were gays, people wearing glasses, intellectuals, people with a disability, overweight people, and people who offered any type of resistance.

The Commander of the ‘Flughafenlager’ in 1942/43 was Christian Wirth and the majority of guards were his men. Wirth, who started out as a career police officer, was, from 1939/40 on, one of the central figures in the ‘Euthanasia’ programme, in which mental patients were killed. He moved on to the Lublin district where he was instrumental in setting up death camps. Wirth was an expert in the gassing of people. To refer to Christian Wirth and his subordinates as ‘the camp’s ordinary Germans’ (p. 307) is misleading. In the same vein, the guards in the ‘Lipowa’ camp, who are referred to as ‘an extraordinary lot’ (p. 299), were three quarters SS men, hardened in camp duty.²⁵ In contrast to the behaviour of these men, a group of 15 employees of the SS-company in charge of production in the camp, are depicted by all victims as essentially harmless.²⁶ Goldhagen cannot have missed this telling juxtaposition; he cites the prosecutor’s report in the middle of the page after these facts are set out. How does this fit into Goldhagen’s claim that ‘postwar testimony ... reveals little consciousness of differences in attitude or action between those who were either Party or SS members and those who were not’ (p. 274)?

One additional point should be made in connection with Goldhagen’s description of the Lublin work camps. An all too common feature of his discussion is a use of nearly malicious language for the description of particularly terrible facts, which is presumably intended to be sarcastic detachment. It is wholly undignified. A reader can conclude for him or herself that the murder of forty thousand people within a few days is an enormous crime and that the code-name ‘Action Harvest Festival’ is a travesty, without being told by the author that this was ‘aptly named in keeping with the German’s customary love of irony’ (p. 291) – to name only one of many examples.

One final example comes from the Helmbrechts Camp, in which there were male and female guards. It is reported that sexual relationships between the guards existed. Goldhagen deliberates on this ‘community of cruelty’ (p. 338) as follows: ‘the Germans made love in barracks next to enormous privation and incessant cruelty. What did they talk about when their heads rested quietly on their pillows, when they were smoking their cigarettes in those relaxing moments after their physical needs had been met? Did one relate to another accounts of a particularly amusing beating that she or he had administered or observed, of the rush of power that engulfed her when the righteous adrenalin of Jew-beating caused her body to pulse with energy?’ (p. 339)

VI

The third empirically-based section of this book deals with ‘death marches’. One march, concerning the Helmbrechts Camp, is described in detail. A group of Jewish female inmates were taken on foot, accompanied by male and female guards, through the border area of Germany and Czechoslovakia. No contextual framework for these events is provided; the events are merely related in a narrative style. Conditions on the

²⁵ ZStL, 208 AR-Z 74/60, XLVI, pp. 8400–12, Aktenvermerk.

²⁶ ZStL, 208 AR-Z 74/60, XLVI, pp. 8441–42, Aktenvermerk.

march were terrible, as they had been in the camp. The Jewish women were already emaciated and starving, food and shelter were denied them and they were relentlessly forced to continue marching. A number of them were killed during the march. Even after an explicit order by Himmler to refrain from killing, the murder continued.

Supported by a few similar examples from other death marches, Goldhagen arrives at a general explanation: this irrational, extremely cruel behaviour by ‘ordinary Germans’, directed exclusively against Jews, is proof of the demonological, undying hatred of ‘Germans’ against ‘Jews’. ‘To the very end, the ordinary Germans willfully, faithfully and zealously slaughtered Jews’ (p. 371). He argues that, in this situation, the behaviour of the German guards was entirely irrational, since Germany had already been defeated. He posits that the only reasonable thing in the circumstances would have been a change in behaviour and that the reason for a continuation of the killing must reside in deeper irrational urges.

Goldhagen’s account of the death marches is extremely distorted. In consulting the secondary sources he cites, we quickly encounter a number of facts which contradict the picture drawn. Krakowski, for instance, relates the fact that there were Jewish and non-Jewish inmates on death marches and gives detailed break-downs of the percentages of each group on the marches he mentions. In the period of March–April, 1945, in which the Helmbrechts march took place, Krakowski estimates that 250,000 prisoners were forced to take part in marches, one third of whom were Jewish.²⁷ Other examples, not cited by Goldhagen, show that conditions on all of these marches were very similar, including those with only non-Jewish inmates.²⁸

When compared with investigations of other death marches, one finds that the range of behaviour patterns is much wider than that suggested by Goldhagen. One can find examples for almost any attitude on the part of the guards, ranging from extreme cruelty to what might be considered its opposite, and, also to some degree, of the two attitudes co-existing.²⁹ On an individual basis, guards behaved quite differently from each other, reflecting their own degree of identification with camp behaviour. This is reported to be the case in the Helmbrechts march, although Goldhagen does not mention it.³⁰ The same diversity of behaviour can be observed in the civilian population. In the Helmbrechts march, the German population seems to have been supportive of the victims, offering food and shelter, but all succour was disallowed and thwarted by the guards.³¹ One also finds entirely different behaviour, like the sudden outbursts of animosity and violence towards the miserable marchers, who were already in an desolate condition.³²

A comparative perspective casts further doubt on Goldhagen’s notion that the only rational behaviour for the guards, in the shadow of the imminent defeat of Germany, would have been to either release the inmates or treat them humanely. The extensive

²⁷ Shmuel Krakoski, ‘The death marches in the period of the evacuation of the camps’, in: *The Nazi concentration camps* (Yad Vashem, 1984), p. 482; Krakowski, Death marches, in: *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*.

²⁸ See, for instance, the death march from Wiener-Neudorf, where no Jews were present, Bertrand Perz, *Der Todesmarsch from Wiener Neudorf nach Mauthausen. Eine Dokumentation*, in: *DOW Jahrbuch* 1989, pp. 117–37. ²⁹ Perz, *Der Todesmarsch*, pp. 117–137.

³⁰ ZStL, SA 343, verdict LG Hof Ks 7/68, p. 82; see pp. 58–9 and 210.

³¹ ZStL, SA 343, verdict LG Hof Ks 7/68, pp. 57–9, 82–3, 194–5 and 210.

³² As examples of both types of behaviour: Solly Ganor, *Der Todesmarsch*, in: *Dachauer Hefte* 11, 1995; Peter Sturm: *Evakuierung*, in: *Dachauer Hefte* 11, 1995; Verdict LG Marburg 6 Ks 1/68, ZStL, SA 386; Indictment StA Hannover 11Js 5/73, ZStL, SA 503, Verdict LG Hannover 11 Ks 1/77, ZStL, SA 503.

materials on crimes committed in the last weeks of the war,³³ show numerous instances when the police, SS and German Army members turned, in a rabid and destructive way, not against Jews, but against the German population themselves, i.e. against whomever was showing signs of 'defaitisme'. Hitler's own response to the certainty of defeat was the wish to see the German population destroyed. In this period of chaos and destruction, human behaviour did not seem to conform to what Goldhagen describes as being the only 'rational' way.

VII

Thus far, a close review of Goldhagen's evidentiary base has shown the selective way in which he has interpreted his sources. On a larger scale, the greatest short-coming of the book is that he uses such a small sample of the investigations and sources available. He takes selected parts and blows them up out of proportion. Sweeping generalizations then emerge from these distortions so that they look like an image reflected from a magnifying mirror. However, if he had used a broader source-base and applied the comparative method, a truer picture would have revealed itself. In the last part of the book, a brief section has the heading 'comparative perspective' (p. 406). It does not serve the purpose of making any real comparisons, as Goldhagen only brushes the whole issue aside by applying his own style of argument and logic. He starts out with a question: Could we conceive of Danes and Italians committing the Holocaust? This is a biased rhetorical question since these are the two generally well-known examples of groups who did not participate in the genocide. So why is the question asked? Danes were not enlisted in any of the units that committed mass-murder, so how is it that they can be used in a comparison?

Goldhagen's theory of the motivation of perpetrators is flawed by the absence of any comparison between a German and non-German perpetrator. As mentioned above, the contribution of non-Germans to policing Eastern Europe was substantial, and policing in the context of German occupational policies included the involvement in crimes. Did their behaviour differ? And if so, in what way? For Eastern Europe, comparisons would have been made easier as Germans and non-Germans in police units and posts were working side by side. Comparisons with collaborating police forces, such as with the French, or with allies like the Croatian or Hungarian police, might have been more complex.

A classic example of non-Germans, who fit the picture Goldhagen wishes to paint of Germans, is the 'Arajs Kommando'. Named after their leader, Viktor Arajs, this was a group composed of Latvian men, mainly students or former army officers with right wing political backgrounds. Within days of the arrival of the German forces in Riga, Arajs made contact with the leader of Einsatzgruppe A, Stahlecker, and offered his services. In the following months, his group, officially known as the 'Latvian Auxiliary Security Police', did nothing but kill Jews. They were active in Riga and moved around all of Latvia; parts of the group were sent to Byelorussia. The guards in camps located in Latvia were Arajs Commando members. The killing actions were extremely gruesome, with the perpetrators literally wading in blood, getting drunk during the killing, and afterwards participating in large celebrations. Survivor accounts describe the terrible conditions under which the Jews were kept in the basement of the commando headquarters. There they were tortured, degraded, and raped. All of the

³³ Available in published form, for instance, in the edition of German verdicts by Rueters, also in numerous printed works.

Arajs Commando members were volunteers. They were free to leave at any time.³⁴ Goldhagen offers evasive explanations for non-German perpetrators: 'The Germans had defeated, repressed and dehumanized Ukrainians and there were pressures operating on the Ukrainians that did not exist for the Germans' (pp. 408–9). He also states that the 'German's conduct towards their eastern European minions... was generally draconian' (p. 409). Apart from smacking considerably of standard revisionism, these assumptions certainly do not apply to the Arajs Commando. All the 'typical German' patterns of behaviour like 'rage, lust for vengeance, that unleashed the unprecedented cruelty' (p. 414) were present here as well. How does this fit into Goldhagen's explanatory framework?

Admittedly, the Arajs Commando is an extreme case, but it is by no means an isolated one. Many similar examples exist. Camps in the occupied Soviet Union were run with a minimum of German personnel. The Koldyczewo camp, north of Baranowice in Byelorussia, for instance was run by one German.³⁵ All the other guards were non-German. The camp was operated in the same way as all camps; inmates were tortured and worked to death and large killing actions were conducted. A great number of camps in Soviet territory functioned without German personnel at all and with only minimal supervision. How does this fit into the notion of the 'camp system'... being the German 'society's emblematic institution' (p. 459) and the view of a potential 'Germanic Europe, which essentially would have become a large concentration camp, with the German people as its guards' (p. 459)?

To forestall possible misinterpretation, all of the foregoing certainly resulted from German policies. Orders for Koldyczewo, for instance, were received from the Security Police in Baranowice. The introduction of a comparison with non-German perpetrators does not take anything away from the overall responsibility of Germany for the Second World War and the Holocaust. But it is certainly highly relevant to the question of individual motivation and its root causes.

Goldhagen studiously avoids putting his theory to such a comparative test. Even though it is evident from the footnotes that he is familiar with the investigation on the Arajs Commando and other similarly telling cases, these facts are never mentioned. He simply dismisses comparisons as irrelevant since the Germans were 'the central and indispensable perpetrators of the Holocaust'. This tactic allows him to analyse the motivation of the German perpetrators while excluding a comparison which would have revealed the falsity of his conclusions and, thus, would have denied him the authority to conclude that all this was specifically an expression of the German national character. He then postulates that any research on the behaviour of non-Germans, if it were to be undertaken, would only serve as an illumination of the Germans' actions, because only Germans were 'the prime movers' (p. 409). According to him, this research would not change his results. An argument of immaculate circularity.

Germany was certainly responsible for the Holocaust and it is also clear that Viktor Arajs became a mass-murderer only because of the overall German plan to destroy the Jewish population of Latvia. Yet Goldhagen's procedural negligence, which results in false conclusions, is evident with respect to the policemen in Police Battalion 101 and all other examples discussed in the book as well. Even the concentration camp guards would have stayed in the jobs they held before the Nazi government opened up camps. None of the people discussed here were making policy, they all responded, at least initially, to a given political situation. On the level of the personal response of

³⁴ StA Hamburg 141 Js 534/60, ZStL, 207 AR-Z 7/59.

³⁵ ZSt Dortmund 45 Js 19/6, ZStL, 202 AR-Z 94/59.

individual perpetrators, the question of the overall political and moral responsibility, which lies with Germany, is not relevant.

VIII

In light of his circumscribed and biased use of archival sources, it is perhaps not surprising that Goldhagen is also highly selective in his use of secondary literature. This is seen early on in the book, in the part which is devoted to an overview of German history from the Middle Ages to the Second World War. This part is based entirely on secondary sources. As the main facts of German history are widely known, it does not seem worthwhile to devote too much time on a review of this part of the book. Suffice it to say, that Goldhagen produces a tunnel-vision view of 'this pre-Holocaust age' (p. 70), which leaves no room for either historical context or for a comparative framework. Goldhagen posits an unbroken continuity in Germany from the anti-Judaism of the Christian churches in the Middle Ages to the racial anti-semitism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in which Jews were seen as 'a binary opposite of the German' (p. 55). Consequently, German history appears as one great endless struggle of the Germans against the Jews, regardless of the context. When the Nazis were 'elected to power' (*sic!*) (p. 419), the teleology of German history fulfilled itself. Needless to say, in order to support this view, Goldhagen substantially manipulates the secondary sources he uses.

Goldhagen eliminates the political context of the Nazi movement and ignores the fact that the Nazi regime was a repressive system from the start. There is no reference made to the fact that the Nazis were a right-wing party, promoting conservative and right-wing political views (some of which turn up in the creed of right-wing movements to this day). Indeed, by playing down all political factors, Goldhagen is able to make statements like '... the Nazi German revolution was, on the whole, consensual'... 'a peaceful revolution'... 'the repression of the political left in the first years notwithstanding' (p. 456). This beautifies the realities of the Nazi regime to an uncomfortable extent.

The questions of how widespread and deeply-rooted anti-semitism was, to what extent the German population supported the Nazis' anti-semitic measures and how exactly the persecution of the Jews had an impact on Hitler's and the Nazis' popularity are important ones indeed. They are certainly not resolved. Goldhagen does not contribute to the debate.

IX

Goldhagen's book is not driven by sources, be they primary or secondary ones. He does not allow the witness statements he uses to speak for themselves. He uses material as an underpinning for his pre-conceived theory. The book is driven by the author's choice of language, and it can only be understood by analysing these choices and his generally argumentative style. Verbosity and repetitiveness are the most striking features of the book.

Discursive techniques

Goldhagen uses several techniques to transform his assumptions into what he describes as the ‘unassailable truth’. In particular, the introductory and concluding chapters are full of examples, of which a few must be demonstrated in detail. One is to use a single fact to support an overall generalization. For instance, a protest letter by Pastor Hochstaedter is described as being ‘all but singular’ (p. 433), a ‘tiny, brief flame of reason and humanity... flickering invisibly... in the vast anti-Semitic darkness that had descended upon Germany’ (p. 434). It is used as a foil to ‘cast into sharp relief’ (p. 431) (a favourite expression of the author) the attitude of the Christian churches in general who did not object to the ‘Nazi’s ferocious anti-Semitism’ (p. 435). They were eliminationist anti-semitic themselves. Based on another single document taken entirely out of context,³⁶ he arrives at a sweeping conclusion that the churches gave ‘an ecclesiastical imprimatur of genocide’ (p. 433).

A second technique is the application of a form of reasoning, which is boldly presented as common sense, and therefore as being the only logically possible explanation. Goldhagen maintains that the ‘indifference’ of the ‘German people’ (p. 439) towards the fate of the Jews is a ‘psychologically implausible attitude’ (p. 440) since ‘people generally flee scenes and events that they consider to be horrific, criminal or dangerous’ (p. 440). Thus, since part of the German population watched the burning of synagogues in the November pogrom ‘with curiosity’ – a modifier added by the author (p. 440) – they were not indifferent but rather pitiless (p. 440).

A third technique is a twisted manipulation of the interpretations of other scholars in order to provide foils for his own line of argument. This has already been demonstrated in a number of earlier examples. A particularly striking one, is Goldhagen’s discussion, and rejection, of what he calls ‘conventional explanations’. One of these, according to the author, is the assumption that ‘the Germans were in principle opposed... to a genocidal program’ (p. 385). Raul Hilberg is depicted as ‘an exemplar of this sort of thinking’ (p. 385) because he contemplates the question of how the German bureaucracy overcame its moral scruples (p. 385). After accusing Hilberg of heresy for assuming that ‘the German bureaucracy naturally had moral scruples’ (p. 385), Goldhagen rejects Hilberg’s analysis on the basis that ‘explanations proceeding in this manner cannot account for Germans... volunteering for killing duty’ (p. 385) – which, of course, misses Hilberg’s point entirely.

Another frequent tactic is the omission of a sufficient context or other possible evidence that might be contradictory. Goldhagen mentions celebrations at either the conclusion of large killing actions, as in Chelmno or in Stanislawo, or at a particular stage in the extermination programme, as in Lublin after the 50,000th victim had been killed (at which the ‘Germans’ ‘take joy, make merry and celebrate their genocide of the Jews’ (p. 453). He omits to mention that the same parties took place in ‘Euthanasia’ institutions, as in Hadamar, to celebrate the 10,000th corpse³⁷ or, for that matter, in Grafeneck also.³⁸ The victims of the ‘Euthanasia’ programme were mostly Germans. While this suggests that a possible explanation for this behaviour is the progressive brutalization of members in mass-killing institutions, the available evidence

³⁶ See *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 1933–1944* (Guetersloh, 1948).

³⁷ ZStL, 439 AR 1261/68, Sonderband 19, S.2878–79, I.Sch.

³⁸ Ernst Klee, *Dokumente zur ‘Euthanasie’* (Frankfurt, 1985), p. 119, ZStL, Anlageband 13 AR 179/65, Vernehmungsprotokolle GStA FFM Js 8/61 u. Js 7/63, G.S.

does not support Goldhagen's notion of 'the transvaluated world of Germany during the Nazi period [where] ordinary Germans deemed the killing of Jews to be a beneficent act for humanity' (pp. 452–3). Goldhagen's crowning misrepresentation is the description of such a celebration in Cesis, Latvia: 'On the occasion of their slaughter of the Jews of Cesis, the local German security police and members of the German military assembled to eat and drink at what they dubbed a 'death banquet'³⁹ for the Jews. During their festivities, the celebrants drank repeated toasts to the extermination of the Jews' (p. 453). Goldhagen fails to mention that Latvians and Germans were sitting down at the same table and that one local Latvian police officer instigated target practice at Jews in the course of the festivities. This was viewed with disgust by the German army officers.⁴⁰

Finally, one can even find blatantly false rendering of original text, as when Goldhagen refers to a verse written by a member of Police Battalion 9, which was attached to Einsatzkommando 11a. He states that this member 'managed to work into his verse, for the enjoyment of all, a reference to the "skull-cracking blows" ... that they had undoubtedly delivered with relish to their Jewish victims' (p. 453). These words, found in a disgusting and anti-semitic poem, refer however to 'the cracking of nuts'.⁴¹

The creation of the 'ordinary German'

'Ordinary Germans' is one of the key terms of Goldhagen's book. It rests on the shaky empirical foundation of an evaluation of the social background of members of Police Battalion 101, and on the author's conclusion that the backgrounds of these members do not differ significantly from the social stratification of German society overall. As mentioned in other instances above, one can question whether this equation is correct since it ignores the concrete historical and institutional context of the time. The evidence is not examined by means of comparisons with other units because this would have yielded quite different results. Instead, Goldhagen simply relies on the technique of greater and greater generalization to make his point.

This he does by an indiscriminate use of language. The term 'ordinary German' is used everywhere. Concentration camp guards are 'ordinary German women' (p. 365), all perpetrators are 'ordinary Germans' (p. 371). It becomes apparent that there is no sociological or factual meaning in this term. This is shown to be true in a phrase like: 'other ordinary Germans in the SS and the Party' (p. 178). 'Ordinary German' is nothing but an empty label.

The word 'German', both as a noun and an adjective, is used excessively throughout the book. This is entirely in keeping with the author's view that the specific traits of German culture are the root cause of the Holocaust. He states this right at the beginning of his book where he speaks of perpetrators 'only in the understood context that these men and women were Germans first and SS men, policemen and camp guards second' (p. 7, also p. 6). For Goldhagen, nationality is of the essence. Surprisingly, what is not of the essence is a person's actual activity or function. This is evident in the language he uses: 'Concentration camp guard' becomes 'German guard' and, then, 'the Germans in the camps' (pp. 306, 307, 371). The actual function of the perpetrator in the commission of the crime has been eliminated. Only the

³⁹ 'totenmahl'.

⁴⁰ ZStL, 207 AR-Z 22/70, Sonder bände II, V. L. and III, R. K.; StA Luebeck 2 Js 394/70.

⁴¹ In German: 'Fernder (sic) die Juden und Krimtschaken/verlernen schnell das Nuessknacken', ZStL, 213 AR 1900/66, DokBd IV, p. 672–7.

nationality remains. It should be noted that this same ‘logic’ is not applied to every instance. When describing the attacks on Jews in Vienna after the ‘Anschluss’, Goldhagen uses the term ‘Nazis’, and not ‘Austrians’ (pp. 286–7), for those who are torturing Jews. By the similarly excessive use of the adjective, for instance in the phrase ‘German culture of cruelty’ (p. 255), a further step is taken. It is not German nationals any more who commit cruel acts, but cruelty itself become a German trait. ‘Cruelty’ in the camps is ‘revealing of the Germans’ state of mind’ (p. 308).

By this method of enlarging the meaning and use of the word, ‘German’, Goldhagen is able to make the Holocaust a ‘German national project’ (p. 11). Finally, he combines the two methods. The genocide was committed by ‘Germans’ with the Germans’ ‘general propensity to violence’ (p. 568, n. 108) and all perpetrators were ‘ordinary Germans’, meaning for the author ‘Germany’s representative citizens’ (p. 456). He extends the inference to every other German: ‘the conclusion drawn about the overall character of the members’ actions⁴² can, indeed must be, generalized to the German people as a whole. What these ordinary Germans did also could have been expected of other ordinary Germans’ (p. 402).

Imagination

Goldhagen argues that a full picture of the normal lives of the perpetrators is needed to understand them fully, that they should be shown in every facet of their existence. Only such a ‘thick’, ‘rather than the customary paper-thin description’ (p. 7) can explain their actions. One can only agree with this approach. Certainly, a more detailed and extensive description of perpetrators and, in particular, their mind-set at the time of committing their crimes than can be found in available historical literature would be of the greatest interest. Goldhagen claims to achieve what all previous studies have failed to do, namely, to integrate ‘the micro, meso and macro levels’ of the individual with the ‘institutional and social context’ (p. 266).

For this purpose, Goldhagen examines a number of ‘Daily Orders’ [Tagesbefehle] issued by the Commander of the Order Police in Lublin in the years from 1942 to 1944, which are housed in the archives of the ‘Central Agency’. These ‘Daily Orders’ communicate everyday events, like guard duties, sports events or movies or whatever the commander wants to be made public. Around the fifteen orders he selected, Goldhagen weaves a web of fantasies about the ‘more conventional type of German cultural life’ after the ‘slaughtering [of] unarmed Jews by the thousands’ (p. 263). He speculates on such questions as ‘...how many of the killers discussed their genocidal activities...’, ‘...when they went at night to their wives and girlfriends...’ (p. 268), or as to ‘whether they might have seen the irony in the title of a play “Man Without Heart”’ (p. 270).

Goldhagen has not one shred of a fact to rely on here. Everything is written in the ‘if’ style used in bad historical novels. This is not true historical research.

The reason for the paucity of scholarly writing on the ‘thick lives’ of perpetrators, is not due to the lack of interest on the part of historians. Rather, it is a result of the fact that there is hardly any material available on which to base a study. Occasional finds in investigative files, for example, are so few and far between that the methodical research required would exceed the capacity of any researcher. Ordinarily, scholars accept the limitations that are imposed on them by the sources.

⁴² Of Police Battalion 101, RBB.

X

Goldhagen started out his book with some fundamentally disturbing questions: Why do we believe that Germans are like us? Why do we believe Germany was 'a normal society...similar to our own' (p. 15)? Why assume the 'normalcy of the German people' (p. 31)? These remarks are made without any qualifiers as to a specific historical period. Goldhagen's recommendation is not to assume, but to review the Germans 'with the critical eye of an anthropologist' (p. 15), as if studying a foreign species.

Goldhagen's book abounds with examples of his particular image of 'the Germans'. Suffice it to cite only a few here: the German is 'generally brutal and murderous in the use of other peoples' (p. 315), and is a 'member of an extraordinary, lethal political culture' (p. 456) whose cruelties stand out 'in the long annals of human barbarism' (p. 386). Similar expressions, as graphic as those cited, can be found on almost every page of the book, confirming Goldhagen's image of the counter-species his anthropological view has detected. Goldhagen's book is based on his Ph.D dissertation. Would someone receive a Ph.D. at Harvard who begins by posing the question whether blacks or women are human beings like 'us'?

While the reader is not left in any doubt about 'the Germans', the more interesting question remains: Who are the normal 'we' referred to by Goldhagen in his book? The author never clarifies this explicitly. Instead the author offers his views on how people should normally react and hence how far outside normal human behaviour the perpetrators were. Normal people 'regard and respect' elders (p. 189), feel 'sympathy', pity (p. 357) and the 'instincts of nurturance' (p. 201) towards sick people, towards undernourished people, towards people lying in an exhausted condition on the street. 'After all, there is usually a natural flow of sympathy for people who suffer great wrongs' (p. 441).

Goldhagen's concept of 'natural' human behaviour is striking. One glance at present day American social realities should be enough to raise doubt as to whether sick and weak people do necessarily arouse 'instincts of nurturance'. He ignores the equally evident human potential for evil and destructiveness. In a footnote (p. 581, n. 25) Goldhagen addresses this potential, but sees its acceptance as 'cynicism'. Hence he must attack any socio-psychological concepts that involve the allegedly 'universal psychological and social psychological factors' (p. 390, see also p. 409). He dismisses them as 'abstract, ahistorical explanations...conceived in a social-psychological laboratory' (p. 391, see also p. 389). Milgram's experiments on cruelty are brushed aside as providing 'untenable' (p. 383) explanations.

By denying the possibility that the crimes committed during the Holocaust are within the scope of human behaviour, he places these crimes and its perpetrators outside the realm of human possibility open to others. Only the Germans could have behaved the way they did; nobody else. Their behaviour is 'unfathomable' and outside of 'our' world. As a consequence, it cannot be repeated by someone else. The Holocaust is reduced to a specific historical event, outside of 'our' world, separated from 'us'.

The same can be said of Goldhagen's description of anti-semitism. He insists that it is divorced from any real historical or social framework. On this basis, he rejects explanations which equate economics or 'scapegoat strategies' with motives (pp. 39, 44). In his view, anti-semitism is divorced from reality; it is irrational, wild, and hallucinatory. It is outside of the context of human interaction, and outside the context of human reason. He argues that there is a 'generally constant antisemitism becoming

more or less manifest' (p. 39) so that the observation of the decrease... of antisemitism is not accurate. It represents a 'diminution of antisemitic vituperation' (p. 43) not 'a decrease in antisemitic belief and feeling' (p. 43), only 'a differential expression' thereof (p. 43); a true observation and appraisal of reality has become impossible.

The insistence with which Goldhagen promotes this theory – the word 'must' is in constant use (see pp. 392ff.) – shows the centrality of his argument. Anti-semitism is a demonological, hallucinatory force, out of the reach of ordinary perception. Germans' crimes are outside the realm of human behaviour. This extreme polarization has its consequences. In juxtaposition with the enormity of the injustice done to the Jews, other events take on a much more benign aspect. Jews are slaughtered while non-Jews are killed (p. 195). Non-Jews in concentration camps live 'a life of comparative luxury' (p. 343) and enjoy 'shocking longevity' (p. 340). This is jarring. Worse still is when wider comparisons are drawn. In Soviet Gulags, the 'cruelty of the guards did not even begin to approach that which the Germans inflicted on the Jews' (p. 587, n. 91). Goldhagen presumes to claim that other genocides were actually supported by rational motivation, including the Armenian genocide and the genocide between the Hutus and the Tutsis (p. 412, n. 86, p. 587).

In Goldhagen's view, the Holocaust is both separated from what is considered normal human behaviour and also demonstrates, from the perspective of today, an historical terminableness. Goldhagen's 'we' could not have committed the indignities of the Holocaust, but even 'the Germans' suddenly and drastically changed after the war. Here, Goldhagen's argumentation takes on almost farcical proportions. After drawing the sinister picture of a nation that for centuries was in the grip of 'demonological, hallucinatory antisemitism', of a people impregnated with vicious notions of Jews, the idea of such a sudden behavioural change is unrealistic. The change is due, according to him, to American re-education efforts – the only time any historian has attributed real influence to this programme (pp. 593, n. 53, 582, n. 38). Anybody who knows anything about the real Germany is aware, of course, that the reverse is true. Although Goldhagen's argument is illogical, its function is clear; the Holocaust is now firmly outside the realm of ordinary people's actions and it is over historically. The Holocaust is sanitized.

XI

One of the most striking features of this book is the very broad, narrative style with which events are recounted. Goldhagen states what his intention in having adopted this style was 'to eschew the clinical approach' (p. 22). We should 'describe for ourselves every gruesome image' (p. 22) in order to better understand the reality of the Holocaust. In accordance with this, the author fills page after page with graphic descriptions of gruesome events during mass-murder actions and in camps.

Whether this is really the role of a scholar is doubtful. After all, there is an extensive collection of survivors' memoirs and testimonies, in which we can hear the voice of the victims themselves. In the approach Goldhagen advocates, the historian takes on the position of an intermediary who is nominally interpreting sources. We hear his voice, retelling the events in the light of his own imagination.

More than fifty years have passed since the end of the Second World War. The ranks of Holocaust survivors are getting thinner. More and more, the Holocaust is moving into the realm of interpreters, be they scholars or artists, or simply anyone making use of the lessons history teaches. This transition brings with it an obligation. We, i.e.

people without acute personal involvement – be it as members of the second or third generation – have to resist both the temptation to assume the voice of survivors and the moral authority that goes with it. The Holocaust is the one event with the greatest morally explosive force in the Western world. But its meaning is being diminished by constant trivialization. Everyone can observe daily, for himself or herself, how the terms of reference of the Holocaust are morally abused in political and public life; every abortion clinic is called an Auschwitz. In no way can this process be stopped. The community of Holocaust scholars, however, is under a special obligation to counter the ongoing process of trivialization by scrupulously differentiating between oneself and one's position as a researcher and the object of one's studies, thereby preserving and protecting the meaning of the Holocaust.

Goldhagen's book is not a revision of everything that has been written in fifty years on the Holocaust. A solidly researched work on any of the topics he touches – for instance, on the involvement of the Order Police in the Holocaust – would have been most welcome. As it stands, this book only caters to those who want simplistic answers to difficult questions, to those who seek the security of prejudices.

Why then review the book at such length? It was promoted aggressively in the mass-media, well before it was published and any historian had had a chance to read it. There is no limit to what a professional American marketing strategy can achieve, but to date, hardly any inroads into academia have been made by this book. Its marketing presents a challenge to the scholarly community. When the historical agenda can be dictated by advertising and marketing, professional historians must respond.

The discourse among scholars, as it has evolved over the centuries, respects certain rules: arguments count, not the people pushing them. One discusses the factual value of arguments and does not defame their authors. These rules are well worth defending. One can learn from a time when Einstein's theories, for example, were rejected, not because of the arguments themselves but because their proponent represented 'Jewish physics'. So far, all of the experts in the area of the Holocaust, regardless of their personal background, have been unanimous in severely criticizing Goldhagen's book. That this is the case, fifty years after the fact, and on such a highly emotional and complex subject, is a very hopeful sign.