

P R E F A C E T O T H E U P D A T E D E D I T I O N

Bear with me a moment. I'm not sure you need to read this Preface, but I feel like I need to write it. I need to say something about the title, *Explaining Hitler*. To dispel any doubt, clear up any ambiguity, the unfortunate shadow that irony casts. And by the way, in general, I *like* ambiguity. My longtime favorite work of literary criticism is William Empson's classic *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. I often see eight or more.

And I *like* irony—as long as people get it. But how can one be sure? There was that encounter with one interviewer who kept asking, about this book, “But what’s *your* explanation, what’s *your* explanation?”

Without much success I tried to explain *Explaining Hitler*. Explain that it was a book about the enterprise, the process, the *attempt* to explain Hitler. Something the subtitle—*The Search for the Origins of His Evil*—seemed to make clear. Not about *my* Answer. Not the final solution to The Final Solution. Not my PowerPoint slideshow drawing a clear line from the baby picture of Hitler (on the cover) to the exterminationist Führer in the bunker.

It was (it is) about the *search*. About the differing ways people seek to answer the question “Why?” The differing modes of interpretation, the differing lenses through which one can look at Hitler. And what they reveal about the explainers—about the eyes of the beholders—and the nature of their *failure* to explain Hitler. The way Hitler escaped the nets of the systems brought to bear upon him.

The hopelessly confused and conflicting psychoanalytic modes (was it the bad father or the overprotective mother?). The “psychohistorical” (the discredited “Jewish blood” theory), the psychosexual (the largely discredited Geli Raubal rumors). The ideological (was Hitler’s anti-Semitism the result of nineteenth-century German “racial science” or nineteen centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, or a fusion of both?). The theological (what do the savants of Holocaust theodicy—the search for a *reason* for ultimate evil in a universe supposedly ruled by a just and loving God—tell us?). And the metaphysical: What do we make of George Steiner’s “threefold blackmail of transcendence”?

Not neglecting the disease models (Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal's lifelong, unsupported belief that Hitler contracted syphilis from a Jewish prostitute in Vienna). A sad symptom of the recurrent effort to find a Jew to blame, such as the Australian obsessive who wrote a thick book based upon the supposition that Ludwig Wittgenstein—probably, though not definitely, a classmate of Hitler in middle school and the product of a family that converted from Judaism to Christianity—was somehow to blame.

Or did it all come down to a mosquito bite (the deferred “psychopathic” symptomatology of epidemic encephalitis, a disease Hitler supposedly contracted in the World War I trenches)? Just to name a few, examined skeptically, herein.

Everyone seems to want to have one pet theory of Hitler, almost like a talisman against “the horror of inexplicability” as I call it. A talisman they hold closely, guard jealously. No need to think about it anymore. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve had to answer the question, “Oh, have you read Alice Miller?” (the psychoanalyst whose error-filled Hitler thesis dressed up the discredited “Jewish blood” theory in Freudian terms to explain Hitler).

I came to examine these theories, however flawed as Hitler explanations they might be, for what they reflected of the explainers’ predispositions and concerns. One critic described the book as being about “the cultural processes by which we try to come to terms with history.”

About the flaws, the hidden agendas, the explanations that serve as consolations, or even exculpations (“the perversion made him do it,” “the mosquito made him do it”). The meaningless ascription to him of the term “psychopath” or “sociopath.” The way Hitler had somehow “escaped” all the terminologies, the overconfident theories that sought to pin him down, like some insect specimen. Escaped not in the manner of the “Hitler alive in Argentina” myth but escaped *explanation*.

Why was that? Was he the sort of “exceptionalist” phenomenon that *transcended* explanation—or had we just not *found* the events obscured by history, the missing piece of the puzzle that might constitute evidence for an explanation?

Explaining Hitler, in other words, is not my got-it-all-nailed-down instruction manual. It’s not a biography; it’s more a dissection, well, an examination of biographies—an essay in intellectual history. I do not have the hubris to declare discovery of a Unified Field Theory of Hitler. No Higgs Boson of Hitler. No “Theory of Everything” Evil. That doesn’t mean there won’t—or can’t—ever be one, or that it’s not worth the attempt to further clarify what we mean by Hitler, by evil, by origin. Indeed, as I’ve tried to point out in the book, the attempts often tell us more about ourselves, our own self-images, and our cultural predispositions than some indisputable truth about Hitler. “Cultural self-portraits in the negative” was the phrase I used: Hitler is everything we (hope)

we are not. Thus the desire for explanations that put him beyond the range of “normal” human beings. Beyond the range of *us*.

I don’t believe all explanations lack any merit and I go to great lengths to evaluate what they may have added to our understanding. And yet, and yet. . . . So often so many explanations fall maddeningly, and sometimes even comically, short.

For the record, my approach in *Explaining Hitler* grew out of the intellectual training I had in the practice of “close reading”—the search for resonant ambiguities and conflicts in texts inculcated in me by the last of the so-called New Critics at Yale (Robert Penn Warren, William K. Wimsatt, and the like). A method initially evolved for the study of literature, but which I’ve found transferable, if used with care, to the study of history or as I described it:

close reading of documents, memoirs, police reports, and close listening to the voices of the explainers I sought out, in an effort to hear the unspoken subtext, the significant allusions, the hidden agendas, conflicts, and in particular, the doubts beneath the surface. To sense the nature of the longing that drives the explainers, and the kinds of solace explanations offer.

The problem to which I applied this was the one posed by the Hitler Baby Picture on the cover of this (and the initial) edition of the book. My emphatic choice of cover image. Because it asks the crucial question: How do we get from here (the innocent infant) to there (the genocidal monster)? In other words, what factors shaped the metamorphosis? Or was it a gradual evolution? At what point did Hitler become *Hitler*?

It’s a controversial question. Is it “an obscenity in itself” to ask this question as Claude Lanzmann—the director of *Shoah* and would-be dictator of discourse about Hitler—argues? An obscenity even to try to explain? I don’t agree. I don’t believe one should stifle the innate human desire to make sense of things, even if some things elude our grasp. I don’t believe Hitler and the Holocaust should be removed to some sacralized space apart from history.

Nonetheless, I think I understand where this rage at explanation comes from: because to explain is (always, according to Lanzmann) to excuse—to exculpate. To displace guilt from Hitler to the metaphorical mosquito. To offer a reason for the unreasonable. A step down the path to “to understand all is to forgive all.” I don’t see that this necessarily follows or calls for stifling the human impulse to ask “why.”

In any case, by the time I finished the book, I may have gotten too close to the contradictions in the explanations. All too sure of themselves, yet all too contradictory and often tunnel-visioned, they couldn’t all be true. My friend,

the filmmaker, Errol Morris likes to cite what he claims was the dying declaration of the last survivor of an eccentric monastic community in nineteenth-century Ohio: “It just isn’t possible that all religions can be true, but it *is* possible they all can be false.”

And so I may have, perhaps, been too confident in assuming that readers would not take the title *Explaining Hitler* without an ironic grain of salt. Especially with the subtitle, *The Search for the Origins of His Evil*.

I still like the title, though I’m not sure now to whom I owe the credit. One of the editors I worked with at *The New Yorker* when preparing a ten-thousand-word early version of the Introduction, Robert Vare, Rick Hertzberg, or David Remnick? Still grateful to all of them.

But it’s true I did have a moment of doubt when I wondered if it was a safe assumption that the irony would be apparent. I even talked my publisher (and Amazon, right before publication, in an unusually self-destructive move) into changing the title to *The Search for Hitler*, then changed it back to *Explaining Hitler* at the last minute.

The great aphorism for many writers is from Gide: “Do not understand me too quickly.” For me, “do not misunderstand me too quickly.” Perhaps I should have paid more attention to the possibility of misapprehension. In fact, it was only when I undertook writing a new Preface and Afterword updating the book that I realized the explanatory subtitle was *not* on the cover, only on the inside title page.

I’m glad this new edition has the subtitle on the cover. Just to remove the shadow of a doubt. Meanwhile, the search goes on and I’ll have more to say about new developments in the Afterword. But perhaps the best way to explain *Explaining Hitler* is that, at its deepest level, it’s an attempt to grapple with the project of explaining evil.

A F T E R W O R D T O
T H E U P D A T E D E D I T I O N

Why Hitler Lost the War. Or Did He?

The debates over the “true nature” of Hitler and Hitler’s crimes may never come to rest. They haven’t in the fifteen years since *Explaining Hitler* was first published. But if I had to choose the most significant—and dramatic—recent contribution to the most central debate, it would be an essay on Hitler’s war aims by Sir Richard Evans, author of *The Third Reich at War*, who has become one of the most authoritative sources on the subject.

Published in the December 12, 2013, issue of the *New York Review of Books*, Evans’s essay reasons its way back from Hitler’s conduct of the war, and the German military defeat, to say something important about who Hitler was. Something that had been, in essence, argued by Hugh Trevor-Roper and Lucy Dawidowicz, as one can read in this book. But Evans sharpens the point and reminds us of what I think some historians and intellectuals have lost sight of.

Evans’s essay is entitled “What the War Was Really About” and you could think of it as Evans’s Hitler explanation. One that puts him at one side of what has been perhaps the longest-running schism in “Hitler studies” as Don DeLillo called the field.

Ostensibly it's a review of a book by Yale's Paul Kennedy—one that claims the key to the Allied victory had less to do with some flaw within Hitler, in the Nazis, or in their war plans, than with Allied superiority in technology (Kennedy's title: *Engineers of Victory: The Problem Solvers Who Turned the Tide in the Second World War*). Evans offers respect to many of Kennedy's observations but advances a very different thesis, one that takes us to the very cutting edge, the state of the art of the argumentation about Hitler.

Evans goes beyond the Kennedy thesis to look at other, rival, explanations for Hitler's military defeat, and in so doing reveals just how unresolved so much about the interpretation of Hitler and the Holocaust still is. Was it the Allies' superiority in economic resources that gave them victory? Evans joins Kennedy in rejecting "the crude economic determinism" of that claim. Was it the Allies' remarkable success in cracking the German military codes with the now famous "Enigma" machine? Again, that played a part, Evans believes, but code-breaking has been given a glamorous triumphalist history which, he points out, ignores Allied intelligence failures and German intelligence successes. Was it the Allies' weapons and technological superiority, as Kennedy suggests? "In the end this made little difference," Evans asserts. "German science and technology were second to none in their capacity to innovate," Evans argues.

Then what was it? Evans points to one factor more than any other: the often misunderstood nature of Hitler's war aims. He states his conclusion with finality: For Hitler this was not an ordinary war, "This was a racial war in which the extermination of six million European Jews, not dealt with at all in Kennedy's book because it did not seem to belong to the normal arsenal of military strategy, was a paramount war aim."

"A racial war": In other words, what the late Lucy Dawidowicz called "the war against the Jews" (in her book of that title) was of greater importance to Hitler than the war against the Allies. That was "what the war was really about." And that, according to Evans, more than anything was why Germany lost the war.

The most cited instance of the practical effect of this assessment of Hitler's mind-set was Hitler's continued refusal to allow redeployment (to resupply his crumbling front lines) of the trains crammed full of Jews rolling ceaselessly, relentlessly, to the death camps. (An affirmation of the remarkably prescient insight of the late historian Raul Hilberg: that so much of the truth of what went on can be found in the railway schedules.)

For Hitler, it was not a matter of making the trains run on time so much as making the trains never stop running to Auschwitz and Treblinka. One relatively new aspect of Holocaust study is the horror that happened when the trains finally did have to stop running because the Russians were about

to overrun the mainly Polish-based camps. The full story, much of which was new to me, can be found in Daniel Blatman's 2011 work, *The Death Marches: The Final Phase of Nazi Genocide* (Harvard University Press).

When the camps were disbanded, the large SS and native Polish and Ukrainian guard troops feeding the gas chambers were not redeployed to stave off the Russians. Instead they were ordered to take all the living and half-dead captives on the road in what became the final phase of the Final Solution: the Death Marches. Hundreds of thousands closely guarded, mercilessly beaten, and shot when they couldn't keep up, starved to death while being harried along icy roads to . . . where? There was no sanctuary left safe for killing, but the killing had to continue at all costs. In some ways at least as, if not more, disgusting than at the camps themselves, the Death March commanders didn't have to "follow orders." They had incorporated Hitlerism so deeply, they *wanted* to follow orders. As Evans argues, killing Jews was more important than military objectives. They risked their own lives to continue the murder.

What's worse, Blatman reports, is that not just military men but civilians along the way who gleefully took part in murdering the half-dead Jews. For those, like me, who thought it impossible to be further shocked by Hitler's willing accomplices, reading about the Death Marches introduced a new level of horror.

It is a testament to how deeply dyed the souls of the killers were. Hitler was possessed, some might say, but he was the cause of possession in others. It seems to me a remarkable vindication of what Trevor-Roper argued in the immediate aftermath of the war when he described Hitler as more than anything a messianic "true believer" in his anti-Semitism. A position at first countered by Alan Bullock and others (such as A.J.P. Taylor), who tried to see him as more a cynical "mountebank," an actor, a charlatan, a "realist politician" even (Taylor), who merely used his Jew-hatred opportunistically for popular support.

Though Bullock conceded to me that he had eventually come round to a version of Trevor-Roper's position: Hitler was an actor who came to be possessed by his own act to the point of self-destruction. Bullock also adduced a connection between Hitler's messianic vision of himself as racial savior and the loss of the war. Hitler's suicidal prohibition against even a tactical retreat, such as the one that might have saved his Sixth Army from capture at Stalingrad, was—Bullock believed—a self-inflicted defeat entirely due to his delusion of a messianic destiny that would not be denied or even countenance the idea of a minor tactical retreat. He fell under his own spell.

Yet astonishingly there are those such as Kennedy who somehow think the Jew-hatred—the continent-wide messianic project of extermination "not dealt with at all in Kennedy's book"—was irrelevant to Hitler's conduct of the war.

There is one respect in which I would take Evans's characterization further. A point that Lucy Dawidowicz makes in Chapter 20: Hitler *didn't* lose the war. Not the war Evans, I'd say persuasively, argues was most important to him: the racial war. He won that war. Six million to one. Yes, he committed suicide at the end. (And yes, 50 million others lost their lives so he could win the part of the war he cared about most. Collateral damage.)

Thinking about that suicide now, in the light of 9/11 and the subsequent exaltations of suicide bombing on messianic, theological grounds, does in fact offer a radical new way of characterizing Hitler. In retrospect at least, it's tempting to argue that Hitler was, if not the first, then by far history's *greatest* single suicide bomber. He blew up Europe to kill the Jews in it, even if it meant killing himself and tens of millions of others in the end.

Thinking about Evans's essay, I couldn't help recall a watershed moment for me in writing this book, the one that made me realize how the attempt to explain Hitler involves the attempt to explain evil itself.

It was in the midst of my conversation with Trevor-Roper at the Oxford and Cambridge Club. Trevor-Roper's *The Last Days of Hitler* has remained a landmark early study of the man. It was a retrospective view built upon the physical evidence and the eyewitness testimonies to Hitler's "spell"—what fatal magnetism kept so many down in the doomed bunker to the bitter end? In the process of interviewing the survivors (scouring the bunker and Berlin in the immediate aftermath of the defeat), he conjured up a vision of a strange mesmeric talent and a single unshakable mission. He found, among other documents, Hitler's "Last Will and Testament," which he described as a defining document. It called on the German people to never cease fighting "the eternal poisoners of the world," the Jews, thus defining himself with his last words as a man who held one mission above all else.

In any case, I decided to ask Trevor-Roper what I feared might seem a simplistic question but turned out to be a gateway to the entire realm of the philosophy of evil and its theodicy: "Do you think Hitler knew," I asked Trevor-Roper, "that he was doing wrong when he committed his crimes?"

"Absolutely not," Trevor-Roper said with asperity. "He was convinced of his own rectitude." The logic of this, traceable back to Socrates, is that evil is impossible because those who commit evil *acts* always believe they are doing good, however mistaken they might be. Only in literature, in Iago ("motiveless malignancy"—Coleridge) or Richard III, do we find those who commit evil for the pleasure of it, for the hell of it. Many of my encounters in the book are taken up with the ramifications of this question. Since writing the book, I've come to believe more strongly that evil is not a concept to be dispensed with, but that what we call evil inheres in ideas, in ideologies that motivate the commission of evil acts, under the guise of providing for the collective good. The

real question is what heightens susceptibility to evil ideas? More on this, but first:

What We Can Learn from the *Downfall* Parodies

One critic described *Explaining Hitler* as, in part, about “the cultural processes by which we try to come to terms with history.” How have we succeeded and failed since *Explaining Hitler* was published? How has the image of Hitler (and our perception of the reality) evolved? Forgive me, but I must begin with what can only be called a meme.

I’m speaking of what may be the single most replicated moving image of Adolf Hitler on the planet. For the past five years, for better or worse, it has been the most frequent way that Adolf Hitler has been brought back to life in the new century: as a YouTube parody meme, the one based on a four-minute clip from the German film *Downfall*, featuring Bruno Ganz as Hitler in a ravaging, demented, and deluded rant delivered in the Berlin bunker when he finally realizes all hope for military survival is lost.

If you’re not among the half billion or so viewers of one of the scores of variations of this meme, the parody aspect comes from the fake subtitles Photoshopped onto the clips. The new subtitles have Hitler raging, not about the crumbling of the Russian front, but about, shall we say, lesser things. Things of more contemporary and trivial relevance. To cite a few examples, there are parodies with titles like “Hitler Rants About New PlayStation 4 Defects,” “Hitler Rants About Being Taken by a Nigerian E-mail Scam,” and “Hitler Rants About Kanye West Interrupting Taylor Swift’s VMA Acceptance Speech.”

The demonic reduced to the trivial. But the genius of the parodies is that *they trivialize the trivialization*. For their effect they depend on Hitler occupying a preeminent place in the hierarchy of evil, and in some peculiar but effective way they restore “the real Hitler” to a place beyond capture by pop culture or web snark. Even Bruno Ganz has praised their “creativity.”

“The Real Hitler.” Of course, that is the problem. That is the question without a satisfying answer. Something we may not fully know but something upon which we project our worst conception of humanity. Even if we know not the explanation, we know there is something there that has to be contended with, incorporated into our view of history and human nature. But at a perhaps irrecoverable distance from ourselves. In its place, the place of a purported “real Hitler,” we project upon him, as in a Rorschach, “a cultural self-portrait in the negative,” I’d called it.

The YouTube parodies are not a trivial development. Cultural processing is going on here! The parodies are no mere “viral” memes, most of which have the lifetime of mayflies. The *Downfall* parodies have, on the contrary, become a

sturdy go-to trope, a communal way of perpetuating a running commentary on how trivial so many of the concerns of our culture are. A virtual medium unto itself. Which paradoxically, it seems to me (some may disagree), doesn't diminish Hitler. They depend on, for their apparently robust continued effect, placing Hitler in a separate category, thus preserving him as a category of one.

They've lasted decades in Internet time. The fact that they are so robust may be less an example of processing than of our culture's continuing inability to "process" Adolf Hitler. Just the fact that we can somehow contain him by caricaturing him and caricaturing the caricature demonstrates a desire to distance ourselves from facing whoever the "real" Hitler might be.

Which, in a way, is a good thing. That Hitler still resists "processing," resists being made an exemplar of some system, whether psychological, sociological, ideological, hypnotic, or epidemiological (the post-encephalitic syndrome). That he has not been successfully subject to reductionism, the real target of my skeptical analysis of Hitler explanations.

The Spell

The recent (non-parodic) history of Hitler explanations has been mixed. Evans's essay, which restores to primacy a way of looking at Hitler that has been obscured of late, is important. But as far as learning more about Hitler himself, his "thought world," there have been valuable, massive biographical/historical studies, all worthy, by Ian Kershaw, Saul Friedländer, and Evans himself, all of which add depth of detail but, as they often admit, leave a black hole in the center, a Hitler-shaped shadow.

There are a few works I'd like to single out among those I've read (by no means a comprehensive survey). Timothy Ryback's *Hitler's Private Library*, an especially thoughtful study, adds to the familiar list of Henry Ford's *The International Jew* and its source, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, another name whose prominence I'd missed.

In an admiring review of Ryback, Jacob Heilbrunn cites "the one book among Hitler's extant prison readings that left a noticeable intellectual footprint in '*Mein Kampf*': a well-thumbed copy of 'Racial Typology of the German People' by Hans F. K. Günther, known as 'Racial Günther' for his fanatical views on racial purity."

Add to this one unexpected, almost forgotten, work. I'd been asked to write an introduction to a fiftieth-anniversary edition of William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, a longtime bestseller when published in 1961, that had shaped my and subsequent generations' picture of Hitler and the war for some time thereafter. (It was completed just before Eichmann's capture.) It was a work I had read long before writing this book and, probably would not

have reread it if I hadn't been asked by its publishers to contribute an introduction. But I found myself impressed with Shirer's reporter's eye. For Hitler. For the still inexplicable power of the "spell."

Even for Eichmann before he became Eichmann, the icon of evil, and of controversy over evil. Before his capture, when he was known to Shirer as Karl—his rarely used first name. Shirer had his number in a way Hannah Arendt never would. He found the key damning document that recorded the testimony of a fellow officer who quoted the Lord High Executioner of the Final Solution toward the end of the war. Eichmann not experiencing any regret or any of the misattributed "banality." Instead, with a vengefully triumphant snarl (he knows who's really won the war), Eichmann declared "he would leap laughing into the grave because the feeling that he had five million people on his conscience would be for him a source of extraordinary satisfaction." O happy Eichmann.

Of course, not the Eichmann of Hannah Arendt ("the world's worst court reporter," as I've described her), who credulously bought into his "poor schlub" pen pusher defense—just following orders, moving things along deep within the bureaucracy, "nothing against the Jew" facade. Just doing a job, according to Professor Arendt, equally credulous about her feverishly devoted "ex-Nazi" lover Heidegger, for whom she used her influence to help in his sham postwar "de-Nazification."

Subsequent definitive discrediting of the "banality of evil" cliché by David Cesaroni's *Becoming Eichmann* and by Bernard Wasserstein's revelations in the *Times Literary Supplement* on how often Hannah Arendt depended on overtly anti-Semitic sources in her work should have put to bed that antiquated and meretricious "banality of evil" phrase. (Although it does deepen the mystery of how someone as brilliant as Arendt undeniably was could have been so willingly misled.) Not that banality doesn't exist, it just didn't exist in any respect in Eichmann's case.

But the larger lesson of Shirer's prescience here is that somehow those who were eyewitnesses, those who were ear witnesses as well (like George Steiner, who tells me in Chapter 17 that he was so transfixed just from hearing Hitler's voice on the radio in 1930s Vienna, that he knew); they all somehow knew something beyond the ken of those who experienced it secondhand.

There is a phrase I neglected to use in the first edition: *Führerkontakt*. The transformative personal charisma that turned his rival, Berlin-based Goebbels, into a gibbering sycophant in a single meeting, according to Goebbels's own diary. *Führerkontakt* that had mind-scrambling effects on august German General Staff strategists and radiated out from the inner circle to all those tens of thousands in Sportzplatz- and Nuremberg-style rallies within the sound of his voice, the access to his appearances in real time. Different, almost incomprehensible, to those of us consigned to a remote viewing.

This is one reason why I found the first-person perspective of the courageous Cassandra-like reporters of the anti-Hitler *Munich Post* (to whom I pay my respects in the “Poison Kitchen” chapter) so invaluable. Sifting through the crumbling original issues of the paper I found in the basement of a Munich archive, seeing the rise of Hitler through their eyes, I felt an almost palpable sense of that spell. I still feel not enough recognition has come to their efforts to investigate and publish the truth about Hitler, particularly from the world of journalism for whom there are few greater models of heroism. I still recall the chill I felt when I came across their September 9, 1931, issue that published excerpts from a secret Nazi Party document that first used the word for “Final Solution”: *Endlösung*. The fact that few seemed to realize its implications does not excuse ignoring their achievement. It’s true that has begun to change—one of the things I’m most proud of about this book. Indeed, a former mayor of Munich did his Ph.D. thesis on them and at least one entire book (albeit in Portuguese) has been inspired by my account. Yes, Woodward and Bernstein took on Nixon, but those reporters took on Adolf Hitler and the entire Nazi Party.

Distance does not always give wisdom but can create a fog of obfuscation as the once fashionable, bureaucratic, or “functionalist” school of the relation between Hitler and Hitler’s Holocaust was reduced to calling the murder of the Jews a mere matter of logistics. More economically efficient to work them to death and then dispose of them than to feed them or relocate them.

Comparative Evil

Moving beyond Hitler, there are concentric circles of controversies about the consequences of Hitlerism and how to put the Holocaust in perspective. Consider for instance two books that deal not with *what* happened but with how to integrate—or separate—two overlapping mass murders. Hitler’s murders of the Jews and Stalin’s murders of just about everyone.

Two of the most interesting writers on these questions, Alvin Rosenfeld and Timothy Snyder, have differing, though not necessarily contradictory, ways of talking about the Holocaust, its centrality, and its uniqueness.

Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands* expands the timeline of what is conventionally known as the Holocaust years, usually thought of as 1939 to 1945.

Snyder contends that the time span should be extended back to the early thirties, and defined more geographically than ethnically. Which means including what is now regarded as Stalin’s deliberate mass starvation of the Ukrainian peasant populace (the “kulaks”) beginning in 1931. A series of decrees caused mass starvation in the millions and even cannibalism among the desperate, decrees most historians have come to characterize as deliberate attempts to murder the recalcitrant “bourgeois” peasant farmers of the Ukraine.

The Ukrainian atrocity has become a major subject of historical study and has been given by some its own Holocaust-related name: “the Holodomor.” The darkness of the crime still shadows that bloody land.

Snyder places this slaughter on the continuum of subsequent Stalinist mass-murder frenzies including the Great Purges of the mid-'30s, which cost millions their lives in summary executions and gulag starvation. And then the meshing of two mass-murdering nations in the wake of the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, which led to the almost immediate murder of hundreds of thousands of Poles and the beginning of the murder of millions of Jews.

It is hard not to read Snyder's work without trying to deny that human nature could give rise to such insane, relentless slaughter. But one can't.

It is true that Snyder's conflation of the Holodomor, the Purges, and the murder of the Poles tends to make the Holocaust of the Jews part of a continuum rather than a stand-alone horror. It raises profound questions about how we establish a hierarchy of evil acts. Is an order about agricultural administration that seems to deliberately seek starvation the same as rounding up and gassing Jews in a hands-on way?

Alvin Rosenfeld has some concerns about this. Not about Snyder's work specifically, but about whether the Holocaust should be conflated with other mass murders. And about the denatured domestication of the Holocaust. In the way its memory is transmitted. In his dramatically titled but always incisive work *The End of the Holocaust*, Rosenfeld takes on what might be called the ahistorical cultural assimilation of the Holocaust into the anodyne language of “man's inhumanity to man,” “intolerance,” and the like. Formulations that manage to elide the rather significant and distinct aspect of Hitler's extermination: anti-Semitism.

I've called this sense of the dilution of the particular meaning of the Holocaust a kind of Faustian bargain, in which the sometimes specious “universalizing” of the Holocaust, or incorporation into a generic “mass murder” category, is achieved by denaturing its actuality.

Rosenfeld is not afraid to contend with the fact that, as he writes, “with new atrocities filling the news each day and only so much sympathy to go around, there are people who simply do not want to hear any more about the Jews and their sorrows. There are other dead to be buried, they say.” The sad, deplorable, but, he says, “unavoidable” consequence of what may be the necessary limits of human sympathy is that “the more successfully [the Holocaust] enters the cultural mainstream, the more commonplace it becomes. A less taxing version of a tragic history begins to emerge, still full of suffering, to be sure, but a suffering relieved of many of its weightiest moral and intellectual demands and, consequently, easier to be . . . normalized.”

What are those weighty moral and intellectual demands? For one thing, I

think the Holocaust demands of us that we not lose sight of the fact that it was not just another tragedy in war-torn Europe and clashing nationalisms. At the heart of Rosenfeld's argument is that anti-Semitism has a two-millennium-long history (at least), one that has produced a continuous slaughter of Jews, and Hitler's holocaust should be seen in that light, as not an aberration but a culmination of a disease of Western civilization that transcends ordinary violence. And that the Holocaust portended not an end but a beginning.

Rosenfeld quotes Imre Kertész, the Hungarian Holocaust survivor and novelist: "Before Auschwitz," Kertész writes, "Auschwitz was unimaginable. That is no longer so today. Because Auschwitz in fact occurred, it has now been established in our imaginations as a firm possibility. What we are able to imagine, especially because it once was, can be again."

That chilling last sentence tempts me into a discussion of the contentious "second Holocaust" controversy, one I stirred up when I wrote an essay essentially saying what Kertész was saying: No matter how many times and how many Jews (and non-Jews) aver "never again," it *can* happen again. The only thing that has changed is that now we know that it can happen at all.

But when I wrote the words "second Holocaust" (a phrase I found in Philip Roth's novel *Operation Shylock*), some were horrified that anyone could imagine—even utter—such a phrase. "Ethnic panic," shrieked Leon Wieseltier, who regards himself as the Holocaust discourse police. A fear of facing the possibility, of even uttering the phrase, a fear I characterized as "second Holocaust denial."

In fact Rosenfeld, a far more learned figure on the subject, devotes the final section of his book to taking up and elaborating upon the necessity of confronting the potential for such an atrocity. As has the Israeli historian Benny Morris, who mordantly observed that "this time" a second holocaust would be much easier to accomplish: A single thermonuclear weapon could kill 6 million Israeli Jews in six seconds with a strike on Tel Aviv, rather than the six years it took Hitler.

One recurrent question the Snyder and Rosenfeld books cause us to face again is the question of comparative evil. Hitler vs. Stalin: It's not a competition, but it can be a way for us to evaluate what we think is worst about what human beings are capable of. What we talk about when we talk about evil.

Do we measure it by body count? A case could be made that Stalin's death toll (and indeed Mao Zedong's) is greater than Hitler's (unless we add to Hitler's ledger the 50 million deaths from the war he started in 1939). Or do we also have to factor in the question of deliberation, intent, "agency"? Hitler's murder of the Jews could be said to be more "hands-on" (machine-gunning and gassing, the Death Marches), while Stalin's engineered starvation of the Ukraine (like Mao's massive famines during "The Great Leap Forward") was

more a remote-control manipulation (and denial) of resources that caused a populace to shrivel and die (amidst the horror of cannibalism) without hands-on killing. Hands-off killing can be just as bad or worse. But as the first great exposer of Stalin's crimes, Robert Conquest, one of the first English writers to document even in a preliminary way the massive death tolls from Stalin's purges and starvations, said to me, "Hitler's just feels worse." After reading Snyder's *Bloodlands*, one acolyte of Conquest said to me that it still "feels" a little worse, but by a little less.

I've tended to believe that it doesn't diminish Hitler's evil or the horror of the Holocaust to acknowledge crimes of equal magnitude but of different methods. Indeed I believe that if we err we should err on the side of seeking commonality with victims of other genocidal horrors, mass murders, and the like (Rwanda, Native Americans, African slavery, etc.) rather than seek to find differences that separate us from their suffering.

I would reject, however, one argument put forward in the comparative-evil discourse by apologists such as the postmodern Marxist-sophist Slovoi Žižek. He has argued that Stalin's crimes are less deplorable than Hitler's because they sprang from communism's "good intentions" gone awry while Hitler's were merely from racism. Alas, Hitler, too, saw himself as someone with "good intentions," someone "convinced of his own rectitude" as Trevor-Roper put it. He saw himself as a savior of the human race from a plague, a disease. The Jews were "a bacillus" and he was a heroic Dr. Pasteur. Himmler called the SS exterminationists not an army of racist genocidal murderers but "courageous" for having to do the "hard task" of eliminating the infection. Žižek's arguments are that of a rationalizer of mass murder.

If the question of comparative evil is a worthy if perhaps unresolvable one, the search for the origin of Hitler's evil, as adumbrated in the subtitle, has not turned up much that can be called illuminating since publication of the book. In fact, I've felt as though I've had to play a kind of "whack-a-mole" with old discredited Hitler theories that kept resurfacing.

For a time after this book's publication it seemed like I'd become the designated default debunker for various documentaries on cable channels about "new" Hitler theories. Yes, I spoke about the questions I thought important on the BookTV channel, on *Charlie Rose*, on NPR, and in a Peter Jennings documentary on the twentieth century that I remember as particularly well done.

But every year or so, one of the Hitler myths would crop up and I'd go on a cable doc to discredit it: the "Jewish blood," the "gay Hitler," the "one-testicle theory," the "survival in Argentina myth"—the evergreen tale that took new life from some declassified FBI documents from the late '40s, which seemed to take seriously an "eyewitness" who thought he'd seen Hitler and Eva Braun holed up in a hotel in Argentina. (As I've written, some of these tales, like the

survival myth, are of emblematic or anthropological value: Hitler *has* survived in some respects, but as a dark presence in some southern hemisphere of our brain.)

Someone has to do it. But I do draw the line. As I was writing this Afterword I was contacted by a French documentarian who said he was preparing a Hitler film that he said would examine, “with great prudence,” the myth that as a youth Hitler had spent a year in Liverpool, England, with his half-sister, a myth based on a fabrication by Hitler’s “black sheep” half-nephew William Patrick Hitler. One that had been utterly discredited. I sought to explain to the French documentarian that this would be like examining “with great prudence” the belief the earth was flat.

Perhaps the most poignant consequence of a misreading (or myth-reading) of an aspect of my book was the case of Norman Mailer and Geli Raubal. According to Mailer’s biographer, J. Michael Lennon, “Rosenbaum’s book turned Mailer’s head.” He quotes Mailer as saying that “long after the details had faded from my mind the feeling of the book remained.” Until then “I was absolutely intrigued with the idea of Montaigne as a Jungian.” I suppose it’s possible to say that I should feel some satisfaction in sparing us Mailer’s unlikely attempt to prove Montaigne was a Jungian. But here is where the story gets poignant. Mailer decided on the basis of reading *Explaining Hitler* that he would focus on the murky Geli Raubal relationship (about which, I should reiterate, I concluded there was unlikely to have been a sexual relationship nor did Hitler murder or have her murdered, though he may have driven her to suicide). Nonetheless, this was going to be the core of a vast three-novel Mailer trilogy, the first of which, *The Castle in the Forest*, he completed before his death, the second of which he was working on when he died. As it happened, Mailer and I had shared an editor at Random House, David Ebershoff, who was up in Provincetown when Mailer passed away and told me he’d discovered, on Mailer’s writing desk the day he died, an open copy of *Explaining Hitler* next to Mailer’s reading glasses. Sad.

The Baby Picture

If explanations—or most—were unsatisfying, incomplete, or reductive, it can be said they were often worth examining for the fears they projected and reflected: what they told us about ourselves and our culture.

And all were really seeking an explanation for the Baby Picture.

I’ll never forget Claude Lanzmann, the director of *Shoah*, the nine-and-a-half-hour Holocaust documentary, shouting at me, accusatorially, in his Parisian flat: “There is even a baby picture of Hitler!” Virtually aghast at the very idea that there could be such a picture, because it would insidiously ensnare

people into the evil enterprise of trying to explain why—why that innocent infant evolved into a genocidal monster.

Lanzmann rejected any such “understanding,” preferring a Hitler who sprang full-blown like a demon in our midst. Almost like Macbeth, not “of woman born,” Hitler not of human formed. A hostility to the baby picture, almost disclaiming the picture’s right to exist because of its misleading potential. All of which led, after the French publication of the book, to my clash with Lanzmann, which the Parisian magazine *Le Figaro* called “L’Affair Rosenbaum.”

Of course, it is true, many explanations become exculpations, but I would suggest that does not deny, *prima facie*, the validity of the search to know more than we do. Or entail forgiveness no matter how much we know. Maybe we will never know all, never know enough, but it won’t necessarily be because we’re dealing with a supernatural creature beyond human explanation. It may be because human nature has more profound depths than we imagined. Or it may be that we lack some crucial piece of his personal history.

But *something* or some things made Hitler want to do what he did. It wasn’t a concatenation of impersonal, external forces, a kind of collective determinism. It required his impassioned desire for extermination, even at the potential cost of defeat for Germany. It required him to choose evil. It required free will.

It required Hitler to make a continuous series of choices, the ultimate source of which may always be shrouded in mystery. We will likely never know, for instance—barring some discovery in a “lost safe-deposit box”—what went on between Hitler and the alleged hypnotist, Dr. Forster, said to have treated him at the time of the World War I German surrender. We have only Ernst Weiss’s fascinating novelistic speculation to go on, and it can’t be counted as proof, although it may be my favorite unsolved Hitler mystery (see Introduction). In fact, we lack proof, and the most salient clues might be lost in the mists of history. We just may never know with certainty what made Hitler *Hitler*. And worse, we may never know why we don’t know: whether it’s because of a missing piece of biographical evidence, or an inability to evaluate the evidence we have. It’s beyond frustrating not knowing whether we might. Yes, the phrase made famous by Donald Rumsfeld: “unknown unknowns.”

A phrase that must make us content with what Keats called “negative capability”—the ability to live with uncertainties without an “irritable” reaching for certainty. That word “irritable”: such a stroke of genius in characterizing the doggedness the most single-minded explainers display in defense of their certainties. (A phrase, by the way, that Fitzgerald cribbed from Keats when he declared “the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind” without needing to embrace one or the other. Only two? With Hitler, there are dozens, or at least a dozen worth holding in mind and considering.)

A Regret

One regret I have about the original edition: I did not deal with the deeply misguided regard for Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, perhaps the most fraudulent aspect of the conventional wisdom about what might be called "Hitler culture."

Chaplin's meretricious and in fact genuinely, historically damaging *The Great Dictator* is a film I'd seen long before focusing on this book and had taken for granted the conventional wisdom and knee-jerk approbation. And forgotten it. But its "courage" is one of those myths that really needs re-examining because it persists to this day. The myth that *The Great Dictator* was a bold challenge to Hitler or that it somehow damaged his cause. Quite the opposite.

It may be too late, but I feel an obligation to set the record straight. I'm recalling now how shocked I was when, after being invited to "present" a showing of it at the Harvard Film Archives, I actually watched it for the first time in years.

It was shocking on two levels. First, the fact that in his alleged anti-Hitler satire, who does Chaplin blame for the hostility his Hitler character has for the Jews? Jewish bankers! Jewish bankers turned down the Great Dictator and it's all about getting even with those Jews. The Jews' misfortune was their own fault, in effect. That's Charlie Chaplin's Hitler explanation. That's what he told America at that crucial moment in October 1940 when the film was released. People seem to forget this when they get all misty-eyed about how great *The Great Dictator* is. Which is why I believe it needs to be dealt with, and what better place than here?

It's fascinating that the film-buff community is so blinkered by apolitical estheticism they never speak of this when heaping unwarranted praise on this mendacious film. Or do they just not want us to notice the "Jewish banker" moment so we can appreciate the great genius without reservation?

They must know. The Chaplin groupies have seen it all too many times. It's shocking in another way if you consider it in the context of history. When I tried to point out Chaplin's "Jewish banker" Hitler theory on a "social media" thread, the film's defenders *didn't* seem disturbed by this. When I pointed it out at the Harvard Film Archives, the emblematic response was from a film theory-addled questioner who posited that the entire film was really about Chaplin's resistance to the end of silent films. Seriously!

But the real damage of this alleged satire was done at the time of its release, in its successful trivialization of Hitler. Chaplin trivialized his "Great Dictator" by "revealing" what a sentimental, foolish softy he was, dancing with a globe balloon. Nothing to be seriously alarmed by. Not a threat that required resistance. Just the Little Tramp being a little bit mean to the Jews.

The film was released at a time when the appeasers and America Firsters, many of them anti-Semitic and pro-fascist, were trying to keep the United States out of the struggle against Hitler. Another fact overlooked by the Chaplin groupies: The film won an award from the right-wing pro-appeasement Daughters of the American Revolution, because of Chaplin's mistakenly celebrated "pro-peace" speech, a speech, which was really at that time, in that context, an argument not for peace but instead for not fighting Hitler. It called on the soldiers and workers of the world not to take up arms against anyone (including Hitler), which was why it was also celebrated by the Communist Party, then promoting the odious Hitler-Stalin pact, which also argued against the anti-fascist struggle (until the Soviet Union was attacked, of course). Hitler was murdering people, and Chaplin was telling the world not to resist, the Stalinist line at the time.

Godwin's Law and "Feel-Good" Holocaust Stories

One of the fascinating things I discovered in the course of writing this book was the reluctance of scholars and savants to use the word "evil" in regard to Hitler. Some years after writing the book and studying the question of evil, on a fellowship at Cambridge where I got to converse with scientists and theologians on this tormentingly complex matter, I ended up writing a long essay I called "Rescuing Evil." It was an attempt to find a rationale for rescuing the idea of freely chosen "wickedness" (the technical philosophical term) from the determinists and materialists who would instead explain away evil as the purely neurochemical, physiological product of the brain.

"Neuromitigation" the great contrarian writer Raymond Tallis called it in an essay in the London *Times Literary Supplement*, and alas that is the way "scientific" studies of evildoers are heading. Blame it all on a brain defect. Neuroscientists would have a field day with their fMRI machines and Hitler's brain. Sooner or later they'd claim to find some fragment of gray matter responsible for it all. Instead, we have a gray area, a fog, a *Night and Fog*, to cite Alain Resnais's groundbreaking Holocaust movie, that we may never penetrate, and physics alone may never explain.

Does Hitler's apparently unequalled evil entail certain linguistic obligations? That is the question raised by Godwin's Law, whose Internet ubiquity I was not aware of when writing the initial edition.

Godwin's Law is something that's come into prominence with debate about the devolution of discourse on websites. For those unfamiliar, Godwin's Law has now entered the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but here since it is an Internet phenomenon is a somewhat more expansive (and net-native) Wikipedia entry: "Godwin's Law (also known as Godwin's Rule of Nazi Analogies or Godwin's

Law of Nazi Analogies) is an assertion made by Mike Godwin in 1990 that has become an Internet adage. It states: ‘As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches 1.’”

I’m sure you’ve seen examples of such comparisons: bans on high-fructose sodas are “just like Nazi Germany,” so-and-so politician “adopts Hitler’s technique of the big lie.” As I write, a bill has been introduced into the Israeli Knesset, of all places, to ban the use of the words “Hitler,” “Nazi,” or their variants as disparagement because they denature the reality. While I can see the logic of the proponents—that the usage has trivialized the originals—I just find it wrong in most cases to ban speech of any kind.

No Hitler analogies then? Yes, they can trivialize, but on the other hand, a blanket, ironclad rule denying the use of Hitler or Nazi analogies removes them from significance in contemporary discourse entirely. It consigns Hitler to the YouTube parody realm and virtually sacralizes Hitler analogies by prohibiting them, like Claude Lanzmann prohibiting Hitler explanations. Yes, such comparisons are most often hyperbole, but the value of a concept like hyperbole is that it at least acknowledges that there may in fact be some *ultima Thule*, some distant but real mark of the existence of ultimate evil. A dark pole star.

Godwin’s Law may suggest that no comparison to Hitler or Nazis is ever valid, which removes them from referentiality entirely. Removes them from having any validity as comparison, when for instance in fact the reason the world does have plutonium atomic clocks (or however they keep Greenwich Mean Time now) attests to the value of having some absolute standards by which we can measure things.

Another way of dematerializing Hitler’s crime, another development, another means of “cultural processing” I had not anticipated when I wrote this book is the rapid growth of what might be called the “Feel-Good Holocaust Genre.” Ones that may not have you leaving the movie theater humming the tunes, so to speak, but which “lift the spirit,” demonstrate the noble side of human nature in the face of evil. Do we need these demonstrations if they end up giving us the message that Hitler shouldn’t disturb our faith in human nature? That Holocaust stories should somehow make us think better of our fellow human beings? Dammit, Hitler *should* disturb our faith in human nature. If he doesn’t, he’s not Hitler, or you’ve erased and effaced him and made him serve as a convenient talisman for your self-congratulatory, self-serving “humanity.”

The shock of the moral and historical idiocy of Roberto Benigni’s *Life Is Beautiful* “heartwarming” Holocaust fantasy still remains with me. (I wrote an essay about Chaplin and Benigni, whose triumphalist clowning at the Oscars, dancing not just on the chairs but, metaphorically, on the graves of the dead, I still find disgusting beyond belief. I called it “The Arrogance of Clowns.”) It

was probably Spielberg's *Schindler's List* that opened the floodgates for teary, uplifting Holocaust tales. As someone put it, Spielberg made a movie about one Christian saving 400 Jews instead of a movie about a continent of Christians killing 6 million. Not that the Schindler story shouldn't be told, but that one, the one that climaxed with a teary, colorful celebration of the Schindler survivors in the land of Israel, was given preeminence. A happy ending to a Holocaust movie!

Afterward, the cheap and tawdry feel-good Holocaust books and movies came surging in like a flood. Some were complete fabrications. Some, like *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, trivialized the reality of the death camps to create a "Holocaust Lite," a Child's Garden of the Death Camps.

And then, to cap it off, there was the pop-sophistry of Malcolm Gladwell's uplifting Holocaust story. The world's leading purveyor of oversimplifications about human nature offers us, in *David and Goliath*, a supposedly heartwarming story of poor villagers who protected some Jews during the war. Gladwell's lesson: "It was not the privileged and the fortunate who took in the Jews in France. It was the marginal and the damaged, which should remind us that there are real limits to what evil and misfortune can accomplish."

You know what we need reminding of, Malcolm Gladwell? Setting aside the ahistorical generalizations about who did and didn't do what for the Jews under what circumstances. What we need to be reminded of, what the French people finally needed to remind *themselves* of, is how most of them happily collaborated with the Nazis in serving up the Davids to the German Goliath. That this fact is more important than some spurious lesson about "the limits of evil" you toss in as if we know what "the limits of evil" are.

The Holocaust wasn't *It's a Wonderful Life*, an event to be exploited for heartwarming anecdotes. Life was not beautiful and human nature, if anything, exceeded all imaginable expectations of evil's limitlessness. The lesson of the Holocaust should be to question whether there *are* any limits to human evil.

In this connection, I would like to add a corrective, or rather an extension, of a remarkable defining statement about the Holocaust by the German writer W. G. Sebald. He's most well-known for his book about the firebombing of Dresden—someone I had thought was part of the exculpatory "moral equivalence" tendency in postwar German culture. But then I came upon that remarkable statement. When asked whether it was possible to think too much upon the Holocaust, Sebald said, "No serious person thinks of anything else." A line meant to shock, yet shock value is not always valueless. It was a kind of hyperbole, of course. We all think about lunch and dinner, too, but it's clearly meant to signify that this was an overwhelming change in how we should think about human nature, a change whose nature and extent need careful

if not constant consideration from those who take the nature of human nature seriously. To which I would add, “No serious person takes these pathetic little reassurances about human nature (such as Gladwell’s) seriously. They are the consolations of fools, and those who peddle them should be ashamed of themselves.”

The Rise and Rise of Holocaust Denial

But the appeal of these false hopes for human nature cannot be denied. All these moments of micro-compassion, these stories, might be true locally, but they are false globally; they are the moral equivalent of Holocaust denial.

Which brings us to the subject of Holocaust denial and the ongoing argument about the history of evil.

The continued rise of Holocaust denial: that may well be the most remarkable Hitler-related development since the first publication of this book. And not just the massive Internet-bred tidal wave of toxic filth that washes up on websites worldwide along with instant access to *Mein Kampf* (17 million copies printed by some estimates—even before Internet distribution) or the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Judging from Google hits and chat room stats, there are more people who believe in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* than ever.

When the first edition of *Explaining Hitler* came out, Holocaust denial was mainly the province of skinhead neo-Nazis, addled pseudo-intellectuals, and one individual whose anti-Semitic pseudo-history one can observe in my David Irving chapter. (In April 2000, a British judge issued a ruling in a libel trial involving the courageous writer Deborah Lipstadt which said Irving was “an active Holocaust denier; that he is anti-Semitic and racist, and that he associates with right-wing extremists who promote neo-Nazism.) But now Holocaust denial has not only the allegiance of the addled and Machiavellian anti-Semites but a vast new audience who have endowed it with a geopolitical rationale. An ideological agenda for anti-Semitic anti-Zionism: The Jews invented the Holocaust in order to guilt-trip the world into giving them sovereignty over Israel. You would be surprised (or perhaps not) to discover how prevalent some variety of this narrative has become among those who want to de-legitimize and ultimately erase the state of Israel (and usually “remove” its Jews, as well).

An entire nation, Iran, has seen its leadership endorse this version of Holocaust denial. Even, notoriously, sponsoring a worldwide conference of Holocaust-denying “scholars” to substantiate this fabrication. A nation which, of course, denies that the original Holocaust happened but nonetheless has leaders who have endorsed the idea of perpetrating another one. As early as 1999, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former president of Iran,

announced that he did not fear a nuclear exchange with the state of Israel, because, although Iranians might lose millions of lives, there would be millions left alive and a billion and half Muslims in the world, but in Israel, there would be “nothing left on the ground.” Something that’s useful to remind those who quibble that a later Iranian leader, Ahmadinejad, who expressed his fervent hope that Israel would be “wiped off the map,” merely meant that the state, the regime, the lines on the map would be erased. It was just a metaphor. . . .

Hitler lives in threats to repeat his crime.

And it is worth remembering, as well, when there is talk about how the new “moderate” Iranian leader, Hassan Rouhani, has backed off the official state stance of Holocaust denial. No, rather he has said that he would just “leave it to the historians” (“let the historians reflect”) as to how many, if any, Jews had been killed by Hitler. This “not taking a position,” applying the much-derided “he said/she said” doctrine to the question of the Holocaust’s facticity, is one of the subtle new guises Holocaust denial has taken.

Meanwhile, if you want the final word on the matter, the true position of the state from the mouth of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the one who truly rules Iran, there’s a sickening statement posted on his English-language website as I write that denounces “the myth of the massacre of the Jews known as the Holocaust.” Case closed.

Holocaust Inconsequentialism

But more subtle and more insidious versions of Holocaust denial have continued to emerge in the decade or so since this book was first published. I’d like to talk about the varieties of Holocaust denial by expanding upon the discussion I had in the book about “the history of evil” with philosopher Berel Lang.

Lang is one of the most brilliant and courageous thinkers I encountered in writing this book. Emeritus Chairman of the Philosophy Department at New York State University’s Albany campus, he is an exacting writer who tangles with the most complex and perplexing questions. I was fortunate to come upon a brief essay he wrote on the question of whether there could be “a history of evil,” which means: did evil evolve? Beginning with the first murder, Cain and Abel, and reaching an end point in Hitler. Is it possible to imagine an evil greater, more malignant than Hitler’s? How does one measure evil? By quantity—body count? By intent? Is there an algorithm? The technical philosophical term for the *ultima Thule*, the endpoint of evil, is “malignant wickedness,” which means the conscious desire to do evil knowing that it’s evil. Not with Trevor-Roper’s conviction of rectitude.

Can we envision a qualitative point beyond that, beyond Hitler, or merely a quantitative one?

In my conversation with Lang, I had suggested Holocaust denial might be considered a further step in the evolution of evil because it owned the evil of the Holocaust—amongst themselves, most deniers know it's a cruel anti-Semitic game—yet demonstrated that it was possible to torment the souls of the dead beyond the grave. Holocaust denial not only robbed the graves of their bodies but condemned those who had been murdered to characterization as liars and fabricators, twisted the knife into their already violated souls.

Lang had countered by saying he thought he'd come upon a subtler, more insidious sort of Holocaust denial: "Holocaust indifference." It was a phrase he used when writing about the postwar career of Martin Heidegger, once a world-renowned philosopher for his almost incomprehensible, some said incoherent, meditations on Being, Time, the World Spirit, and human identity. Heidegger had also shown himself an eagerly sycophantic Nazi follower once Hitler came to power, getting himself appointed rector of the University of Freiburg where he gave pro-Hitler lectures wearing a Nazi uniform, denounced Jews, and got the Jews on the faculty fired forthwith.

After the war, after exploiting his prewar love connection with Hannah Arendt (as credulous and deceived about Heidegger, it seems, as she was about Eichmann) to obtain de-Nazification, he settled into a quiet, bucolic existence, occasionally issuing polemics mainly about the evils of industrialized agriculture. Sounding, as some have mocked him, like a locavore *avant la lettre*. Industrialized agriculture was evil. Nothing about industrialized murder or what it might have meant for the World Spirit. It might as well not have happened, but he's okay that it did. Holocaust indifference.

Indeed, as Lang found to his incredulity, not once did this man who pronounced on history and human nature with such sweeping majesty find it in him to utter or indite a single word about the murder of 6 million Jews in which he shared complicity with all others who wore the Nazi uniform and saluted (and enabled) Hitler. Holocaust indifference! Worse than denial because the knowledge is there and yet it doesn't make a difference.

I found myself thinking of another variation on this, which I call "Holocaust inconsequentialism." It was Cynthia Ozick who called my attention to the phenomenon. Five years after the publication of *Explaining Hitler* I published a five-hundred-page compilation of essays on contemporary anti-Semitism to which Ms. Ozick contributed a stunningly powerful afterword, in the course of which she singled out for particular scorn a remark made by Ian Buruma, the British journalist.

In writing about the 1981 Israeli raid on Saddam Hussein's nuclear reactor at Osirak, Buruma, in a caustic aside, called it shameful and unnecessary that Menachem Begin, the prime minister who ordered the raid, had alluded to the Holocaust as one of his justifications for preventing the development of weaponizable nuclear fuel at the reactor. What Begin had said at the time was

that in making a terribly difficult decision he knew would be (initially) condemned by most of the world, but he was thinking about the million and a half children murdered in the Holocaust. And how much it weighed on his mind that a single Iraqi nuclear weapon derived from Osirak fuel enrichment (the whole purpose of the plant) would put an entire new generation of Israeli children and citizens in peril of a Second Holocaust. Was it shameful, as Buruma contended? No, it was Buruma, Ozick argued, who exhibited a shamefully “obstinate indifference to the moral realities of human behavior and motivation.”

Holocaust indifference. For some reason, Buruma felt the need to scold Begin. For what? For acting on the basis of history, a history that made Begin’s forebodings more, rather than less, likely, as Kertész pointed out. That something so incomprehensible and unimaginable had actually happened once meant it was no longer unimaginable that it could happen again.

Buruma was shaming Begin for the crime of making a historical analogy. “Is the imagination’s capacity to connect worthy of such scorn?” Ozick wrote.

Thus the more inclusive category of “Holocaust inconsequentialism.” The Holocaust happened in history but for one reason or another one is not allowed to use or allude to its facticity in making judgments about how to act in the future (Godwin’s Law of Geopolitics?). No denial it existed, just denial it should have any consequences. One can see Holocaust inconsequentialism even—or especially—in those like Claude Lanzmann who attempt to sacralize the Holocaust, to privatize it for their own personal construal, denounce anyone who deviates from his approach.

And it is here we come to what I believe is the most urgent mission of this Afterword: to set the record straight on Lanzmann’s blatant misinterpretation of one of the great writers on the Holocaust, Primo Levi.

“L’Affair Rosenbaum”

It wasn’t my idea of a Parisian affair, but that was the banner headline—“L’AFFAIR ROSENBAUM”—across two facing pages of an issue of the Parisian glossy news magazine *Le Figaro* that appeared shortly after the French publication of this book. A debate on facing pages between me and Claude Lanzmann over the issue of Hitler explanation, the legitimacy of which (as you can see in chapters 6 and 7) Lanzmann has declared himself Final Arbiter and Lord High Executioner of all others. A debate that came down to my exposure of his misreading of the words of Primo Levi. If I risk repetition, so be it, for all I know some may only read this Afterword and Primo Levi deserves justice.

Levi, you probably know, is an Auschwitz survivor, one of the most highly regarded writers and thinkers about the Holocaust. At issue were the chilling words Levi heard harshly thrown in his face on his first day in Auschwitz,

the words Lanzmann utterly misread to support his war against the question “Why?”

I have made it my mission, in homage to Levi (such a more complex and interesting thinker than Lanzmann), to distinguish what Levi was actually trying to say on this crucial question from Lanzmann’s opportunistic obfuscation, since Lanzmann’s misrepresentation of Levi is still quoted as if it were gospel. And he conspicuously avoided the challenge I made to the reading in his contribution to *Figaro*’s “L’Affair Rosenbaum.” So let me briefly compress the way Lanzmann distorts the Primo Levi aphorism. It is no small point; it is at the heart of the debate of the question of explanation, the very epistemology of it.

In his book, *If This Is a Man*, Levi tells the story of his first day at Auschwitz. No food or water for days. Freezing cold, but dying of thirst, he opened a window in his confinement hut to break off an icicle outside for water. An SS Camp guard shouted at him to stop. *Verboten!*

To which Levi had the temerity to ask “Why?”

In response to which, Levi writes, the SS guard harshly told him, “*Hier ist kein warum*” (“Here there is no why”). Which Levi takes as meaning “Here—in the Auschwitz/death camp world, a world ruled by SS mass murderers—there is no why, no asking questions.” Because any question was a challenge to authority. The power of the guard is absolute—one could be executed simply for asking why a guard asks one to do something.

And so yes, in the death camps there was no “Why,” no one was permitted to ask for explanation. But Levi did not wish to deny “Why” to everyone outside of Auschwitz. Not to himself or others. He devoted the rest of his life and his eloquent words to seeking an answer to the question “Why” and if he did not find one (there is a dispute about whether he died from an accidental fall or killed himself), it is tragic to see a central tenet of his thought misrepresented.

But Lanzmann—either out of obtuseness or opportunism—misuses Levi’s quote to indict all explanation—all attempts to ask “Why”—even by Jews, even by Auschwitz survivors. Indeed I describe in chapter 15 how he uses it as a verbal club to personally denounce and cruelly insult an actual Auschwitz survivor in a public forum—for wishing to explore the question. In *Le Figaro* I once again taxed him with the misappropriation of an SS death camp guard’s words to assail Jews who ask “Why” as well as appropriating the moral authority of Primo Levi to do so. And then demanding that we follow his command, the Lanzmann variation of the SS command as if it were a Commandment writ on a stone tablet: No “Why,” Now and Forever.

Instead, he bloviates with immense self-sacralizing self-importance: “The Holocaust is first of all unique in that it constructs a circle of flames around itself,” he says, “the limit not to be broken because a certain absolute horror

is not transmittable." Because the horror is not utterly and totally transmittable, we must not attempt to transmit *anything* about it! We must be content just to know it exists. But how do we know it exists if it is not "transmittable"? By watching *Shoah*, Lanzmann's film! Seriously! That seems to be the only permissible way. By putting a circle of flame around the "untransmittable," Lanzmann succeeds in doing what the inconsequentialists and the deniers also do—removing the Holocaust from history, from a search for origins, from the scrutiny of, and effect upon, subsequent history.

It's madness. But Lanzmann exploits the unexamined moral seriousness he ascribes to himself—and has ascribed to him—for having made a nine-and-a-half-hour film about it. Intellectually he has little more going for him than that epic running time, a length that people have unfortunately mistaken for wisdom. It's a disgrace that he is allowed to get away with his high-flown sophistry to silence all others on the subject.

Someone needs to speak up for the traduced spirit of Primo Levi. If not now, when?

The Degenerate Artist

I'd like to add a final thought that came to me only recently about the nature of Hitler's evil, whether it can even be called evil, and whether we believe evil exists. A question that is intimately bound up in the question of whether we believe free will exists. The specific impetus for this final thought, not a final solution but a possible one, was the discovery in Munich in early November 2013 of a huge collection of stolen or "appropriated" art that had been hidden in a house by a Nazi specialist in "degenerate art."

You're probably familiar with the story. Most of the pieces seemed to have come from the notorious 1937 Hitler-inspired exhibit. It was a treasure trove of work by artists now recognized as some of the greatest of the twentieth century. Picasso, Renoir, Munch, Chagall, and the like. The kind of art Hitler hated and he commissioned a museum exhibit entitled "Degenerate Art" to prove to the German people the dangers of Jewish-inspired modernism. Apparently some 1,500 pieces of this now priceless treasury were found hidden in the Munich home of a man named Gurlitt, who had gathered them and supported himself by periodically selling them.

The whole affair made me think about the relationship between Hitler and art and evil again. The problem with calling Hitler evil is the problem of consciousness and free will. The trend of late has been to deny free will's ability to choose evil. (Denial again!) Evil choices and evil acts are now said to be the product of a defect to be found in the *DSM-V* or locatable on an fMRI scan. The product of determinism, not choice. I had advanced a notion in the book that one of the most heuristic ways of looking at Hitler was to see him as he saw

himself from the very beginning in Vienna: as an artist. A failed artist, but one who was then able to put himself in a position where he could create a kind of art of evil.

“Art of evil” in this context is not an empty phrase. In one sense, he was using genocidal means to re-sculpt the human genome by carving off entire chunks (Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, Slavs). Ascribing to Hitler an artistic consciousness is important in the discourse about the very possibility of evil. In an age when neuroscience is replacing evil with neural-defect diagnoses like psychopath and sociopath, which see evil as the result of brain defect or malformation. With free will considered an illusion, there is no evil because there is no choice, only determinism. Artistic consciousness may be its last validation, the last refuge from determinism. It is hard to ascribe every efflorescence of artistic consciousness, every brush stroke or musical note or poetic image, to some materialist or behaviorist syndrome in the brain.

The “Degenerate Art” collection reminded me of something Berel Lang had said about the connection between the artistic consciousness and the Holocaust. Not surprisingly, he began by quoting Primo Levi: “Primo Levi used the phrase ‘needless violence’ to describe the death camp experience. It’s the element of gratuitousness but it’s more than gratuitousness. There seems to be this imaginative protraction, elaboration one finds best exemplified in art forms and which in art we usually take to be indicative of a consciousness, an artistic consciousness.”

I thought of the sign on the gate above the entrance to Auschwitz: *Arbeit Macht Frei*. A deliberate work of artistic (demonic ironic) artistry. My response then was to think that the notion of an art of evil implies a knowing, conscious choice to turn evil into art. Not convinced of one’s rectitude but of one’s evil-doing. And so it came to me, something I hadn’t thought of before. Perhaps one illuminating way to characterize Hitler’s evil is to think of him in his own terms, to use his own rubric against him: Adolf Hitler: “Degenerate Artist.” A degenerate artist of evil.

Postscript

Noted without comment:

On April 13, 2014, a long-time Ku Klux Klan hate monger shot three dead at a Jewish Center complex in Kansas City on the eve of Passover. From the *New York Times* story the following day: “[the suspect] Mr. Miller was taken into custody on Sunday afternoon at a local elementary school near Village Shalom, the police said. In video taken by KMBC, a local television station, the suspect yelled ‘Heil Hitler!’ while sitting in a police car.”

N O T E S

Introduction: The Baby Pictures and the Abyss

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- p. xii. “The mountebank Hitler of Alan Bullock’s initial vision.” See chapters 4 and 5 for an extended discussion of these differences.
- p. xii. “Dawidowicz . . . Browning.” See chapter 20.
- p. xii. “a controversial Russian autopsy.” This was first disclosed in Lev Bezymenski, *The Death of Adolf Hitler* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968).
- p. xiii. “culture, which produced Goethe . . .” Bill Clinton, speech at dedication of U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, April 22, 1993.
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- p. xv. “The more I learn . . .” Alan Bullock, interview with author.
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- p. xx. “They sent to his widow, Sophie . . .” Johannes Steiner, statement to author.
- p. xxi. “near-ultimate evil.” Yehuda Bauer, interview with author.
- p. xxi. “If he isn’t evil . . .” Alan Bullock, interview with author.

- p. xxii. "transworld depravity." See, for instance, Alvin Plantinga, "God, Evil, and the Metaphysics of Freedom," in *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 164–93.
- p. xxii. "Hitler was convinced . . ." H. R. Trevor-Roper, interview with author.
- p. xxii. "a tendency first articulated." Plato, *Protagoras*, trans. W. C. Guthrie (New York: Penguin Books, 1956), 345e–346a.
- p. xxii. "Hitler thought he was a doctor!" Efraim Zuroff, interview with author.
- p. xxiii. "If evil is defined as conscious wrongdoing." Dr. Peter Loewenberg, interview with author.
- p. xxiv. "thought-world." Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery, from the first German edition [1906] (New York: Macmillan, 1948).
- p. xxv. "Gordon Craig and John Lukacs." See Gordon A. Craig, *The Germans*, rev. ed. (New York: Meridian Books, 1991), and "The War of the German Historians," *The New York Review of Books*, January 15, 1987 (on the *Historikerstreit*); and John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), particularly chapter 3, "Reactionary and/or Revolutionary."
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- p. xxvi. "Gertrud Kurth." Gertrud Kurth, interview with author (see chapter 8).
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- p. xxxv. "Bungling Jewish Doctor Theory." See chapter 13.
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- p. xxxviii. "the threefold 'blackmail of transcendence.'" George Steiner, *The Portage to San Cristóbal of A.H.* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1983), p. 185.
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Chapter 1: The Mysterious Stranger, the Serving Girl, and the Family Romance of the Hitler Explainers

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Chapter 2: The Hitler Family Film Noir

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Chapter 3: The Poison Kitchen

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Chapter 4: H. R. Trevor-Roper

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- p. 254. "According to the laudatory introduction." "The Obscenity of Understanding," p. 474.
- p. 254. "One observer of the crusades." Dr. Sean Wilder, telephone interview with author.
- p. 254. "His reply to a questioner at a seminar at Yale." *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991): 94.
- p. 255. "an acolyte's vituperative assault on Binion's book." Sabine Prokhoris, "Une histoire en quête de Führer," trans. Masha Belenky, *Les temps modernes* 555 (October 1992): 92–109.
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- p. 255. "Binion believes the misspelling." Rudolph Binion, interview with author.
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- p. 256. "the ruling enterprise of Binion is obscene." Claude Lanzmann, interview with author.

- p. 256. "The obscenity of this question is stressed by Claude Lanzmann." Prokhoris, "Une histoire en quête de Führer," 93.
- p. 256. "catalogue of insults." Ibid., pp. 93–109, trans. for author by Masha Belenky.
- p. 257. "method as final solution." Ibid., p. 109.
- p. 258. "There are some pictures of Hitler as a baby too." "The Obscenity of Understanding," p. 480.
- p. 259. "I don't say that the Holocaust is an enigma." Claude Lanzmann, interview with author.
- p. 260. "the question of 'why' is a fundamental human function." Dr. Sean Wilder, interview with author.
- p. 261. "deploring the 'mystification' of the Holocaust." See Yehuda Bauer, "Is the Holocaust Explicable?" *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5.2 (1990): 145–55.
- p. 262. "described in a *New York Times* story." Roger Cohen, "Book on Nazi Murder Industry Stirs French Storm," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1993, p. 3.
- p. 262. "Klarsfeld . . . called the Pressac book." Ibid.
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- p. 263. "his own staged and crafted catharsis." In *Shoah*, Lanzmann persuaded the long-retired barber from Treblinka to cut hair in a barbershop setting while Lanzmann hectored him into tearful recollections.
- p. 263. "(*The Times* reporter told me he stood by his story . . .)." Author's phone conversation with Roger Cohen.
- p. 263. "Yehuda Bauer told me." Interview with author.
- p. 264. "in an essay entitled." Yehuda Bauer, "On the Place of the Holocaust in History," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 2.2 (1987): 209–20, at p. 210.
- p. 264. "a collection of essays on *Shoah*." *Au sujet de Shoah* (Paris: Belin, 1990).
- p. 265. "the locus classicus of his attack on explanation." Lanzmann, "Hier Ist Kein Warum."
- p. 265. "a story he takes from Primo Levi's memoir." Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, p. 29.
- p. 265. "here is what Lanzmann makes of this story." Lanzmann, "Hier Ist Kein Warum."

Chapter 15: Dr. Louis Micheels

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- p. 268. "a documentary film about Dr. Wirths." Produced in the Netherlands by Rolf Orthel and Hans Fels.
- p. 268. "Our feeling of love." Micheels, *Doctor #117641*.
- p. 269. "I thought Munch was important." Micheels, interview with author.
- p. 269. "These are questions Robert Lifton addresses." Robert Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
- p. 269. "Dr. Micheels's wife told me." Interview with author.

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- p. 270. "Lanzmann conceded that he was 'violent, very violent.'" Ibid., p. 480. (He means verbally.)
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- p. 271. "Lanzmann told the audience." "The Obscenity of Understanding," pp. 479–80.
- p. 272. "He cites a discussion between Elie Wiesel." Ibid., pp. 481–82.
- p. 273. "the film was . . . a hoax." Dori Laub, ibid., p. 494.
- p. 273. "one member of the audience rose." Ibid., pp. 489–90.
- p. 274. "He confined himself that night." Ibid., pp. 490–93.
- p. 275. "I found I had an ally in Tzvetan Todorov." Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996).
- p. 275. "Primo Levi spent forty years . . ." Ibid., p. 277.
- p. 275. "something he's written on the subject." Micheels, letter to Cathy Caruth, cited to author.

Chapter 16: Emil Fackenheim and Yehuda Bauer

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- p. 281. "a couple of powerfully argued polemics." Bauer, "Is the Holocaust Ex-plicable?" and "On the Place of the Holocaust in History."
- p. 281. "an increasing number of commentators." Bauer, "Is the Holocaust Ex-plicable?" p. 145.
- p. 283. "no way that there can be an all-powerful." The classic statement of the problem of omnipotence for theodicy can be found in J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64 (1955): 200–212.
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- p. 284. "a survey of the debate." Bill Bruinooge, "The Holocaust as a Challenge to Belief," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (1989): 192–200. The phrase "does not remove God from the dock" comes from John Roth in *When God and Man Failed*, ed. Harry Cargas.
- p. 285. "How do you explain a person anyway?" Emil Fackenheim, interview with author.
- p. 285. "It was there, Fackenheim has written." Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, pp. 206–7.
- pp. 285–86. "The fiction was still maintained." Emil Fackenheim, interview with author.
- p. 286. "His theory of 'radical evil.'" Fackenheim's vision of radical evil differs from both Martin Buber's and Hannah Arendt's uses of the term in that it does not have an origin within man; it takes a force beyond psychology or therapy to ameliorate a being as powerful and inexplicable as God. See Laurie McRobert, "Emil Fackenheim and Radical Evil," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58.339 (summer 1989): 325–39.

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- p. 287. "An exchange of letters with writer Terrence Des Pres." Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).
- p. 288. "I read people like the Auschwitz commandant." Rudolf Höss, *Death Dealer* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1992).
- p. 289. "J. P. Stern . . . took issue." Stern, *Hitler*.
- p. 289. "You know Robert Waite's book?" Waite, *Psychopathic God*.
- p. 289. "What Waite actually wrote." Ibid., p. 482.
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- p. 291. "The insistence on the Holocaust's uniqueness." Elizabeth Domansky, "'Kristallnacht,' the Holocaust, and German Unity," *History and Memory* 4.1 (Spring/Summer 1992): 60–84, at p. 79.
- p. 293. "Heinz Höhne, the historian of the SS." Heinz Höhne, *The Order of the Death's Head* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970), pp. 182–84.
- p. 293. "a League of Nations official." Carl Burckhardt, cited in ibid., p. 184.
- p. 293. "Fackenheim cites Himmler's belief." Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, p. 211.
- p. 294. "the masseur Felix Kersten." Felix Kersten, *The Memoirs of Dr. Felix Kersten*, ed. Herma Briffaut, trans. Dr. Ernst Morwitz (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1947).
- p. 294. "Waite's formulation." Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, pp. 232–33.
- p. 295. "Herbert Luethy's 1954 *Commentary* essay." Reprinted in Norman Podhoretz, ed., *The Commentary Reader* (New York: Atheneum, 1966).
- p. 295. "Fackenheim goes on to declare." Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, pp. 232–33.
- p. 296. "Elie Wiesel is famous for a stunning image." Elie Wiesel, *Night* [1960] (New York: Random House, 1973).
- p. 296. "In a Yom Kippur 1997 essay." Elie Wiesel, "A Prayer for the Days of Awe," *The New York Times*, October 2, 1997, p. A19.
- p. 298. "Some, like Rabbi Richard Rubenstein." See Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

Chapter 17: George Steiner

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- p. 300. "It scared the hell out of me." George Steiner, interview with author.
- p. 301. "an account in the London *Observer* of the play." London *Observer*, February 21, 1982. The reviewer, Victoria Radin, spoke of "a storm of applause and shouts of 'bravo.' I think they were in some measure for Hitler as much as [Alec] McCowen [the actor who played Hitler]."
- pp. 303–4. "An admiring introduction . . ." Nathan A. Scott, Jr., in *Reading George Steiner*, ed. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., and Ronald A. Sharp (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).
- p. 304. "greatness. . . . The shocking massiveness." Ibid., p. 1.

- p. 304. "the honors in the . . . academic community." Steiner has since been appointed to a special chair in Comparative Literature at Oxford.
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- p. 305. "persuasively challenged by Lawrence Langer." L. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, pp. 109–24.
- p. 308. "Sir Leslie specifically calls Hitler." Steiner, *Portage to San Cristóbal*, p. 12.
- p. 308. "actor to the end." Ibid., p. 10.
- p. 308. "Don't let him speak." Ibid., pp. 47–48.
- p. 308. "Hitler's own Hitler explanation." Ibid., pp. 179–89.
- p. 308. "My racism was a parody." Ibid., p. 182.
- p. 309. "The Jew invented conscience." Ibid., p. 184.
- p. 309. "What were our camps compared with that?" Ibid., pp. 184–85.
- p. 309. "some 'singular demon.'" Ibid., p. 186.
- p. 309. "Our terrors were a village carnival." Ibid., p. 188.
- p. 309. "Gentlemen of the tribunal." Ibid., p. 189.
- p. 310. "One final full paragraph." Ibid., pp. 189–90.
- p. 310. "playing with fire." Hyam Maccoby, interview with author. See chapter 18.
- p. 311. "when Steiner permitted the novel to be staged." An adaption by Christopher Hampton, at the Mermaid Theater, London, February 1982.
- p. 311. "excellent early study of the question." Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sim: The Reader in Paradise Lost* [1967] (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- p. 314. "Sidney Hook gave [Norman] Podhoretz an interview." Sidney Hook, "On Being a Jew," *Commentary* 88.4 (October 1989): 28–36.
- p. 314. "he demanded it be kept posthumous." Hook said: "This part I don't want published until I'm dead." Ibid., p. 36.
- p. 314. "If we [the Jews] had disappeared." Hook's words were "I've found myself thinking about the crazy Zealots . . . what if the whole Palestine Jewish population of that time had gone down fighting? Just think what we would have been spared, two thousand years of anti-semitic excess. . . . Under some circumstances I think it's better not to be than to be." Ibid., p. 36.
- p. 315. "Benzion Netanyahu demonstrated." In *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York: Random House, 1995).
- p. 317. "Bainbridge's challenging novel." Beryl Bainbridge, *Young Adolf* [1978] (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1995).

Chapter 18: Singling out Christianity

- p. 319. "People go on about this jolly festival." Hyam Maccoby, interview with author.
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- p. 321. "a piece in *Commentary* that created an uproar." Maccoby, "Theologian of the Holocaust," and "Letters from Readers," *Commentary* 75 (March 1983).
- p. 323. "There's [John] Charmley now." John Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993).
- p. 324. "a devil and the devil's workman." Pope Gelasius I, cited in Hyam Maccoby, *Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1992), p. 6.
- p. 325. "Woe to that man." Mark 14:21.
- p. 325. "field of blood." Matthew 27:3–10.
- p. 325. "intestines bursting out of his body." Acts 1:18–19.
- p. 326. "entered by Satan." Luke 22:3.
- p. 326. "taken possession by the Devil." John 13:2.
- p. 326. "a newspaper column by Pat Buchanan." Pat Buchanan, *New York Post*, December 14, 1994, p. 25.
- p. 327. "a doctoral thesis I'd seen." Schmeller, "Hitler's View of History."
- p. 328. "Daniel Goldhagen's concept of 'eliminationist anti-Semitism.'" See discussion in chapter 19. Goldhagen defines this against Christian anti-Semitism in the sense that Christian anti-Semites at least profess to be satisfied with conversion of Jews. Racial, eliminationist anti-Semites are satisfied only by Jews' deaths.
- p. 328. "In his book on the Judas question." Hyam Maccoby, *The Sacred Executioner: Human Sacrifice and the Legacy of Guilt* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1982).
- p. 328. "Jews are killed because of Christian guilt." Ibid.
- p. 330. "theologians such as Rosemary Ruether." See, for instance, Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide* (San Francisco: Seabury Press, 1974).
- p. 330. "Of all the attacks." Hyam Maccoby, "George Steiner's Hitler," *Encounter*, May 1982, pp. 27–34.
- p. 330. "Hitler . . . 'becomes a full blown Steinerian . . .'" Ibid., p. 31.
- p. 330. "misleading piece of anti-Jewish propaganda." Ibid., p. 30.
- p. 331. "colossal miscalculation." Ibid., p. 30.
- p. 334. "Richard Rubenstein." Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*.
- p. 334. "Rubenstein singled out Rabbi Leo Baeck." Rubenstein, phone conversation with author.
- p. 335. "Cynthia Ozick . . . stressed to me." Cynthia Ozick, letter to author.

Chapter 19: Daniel Goldhagen

- p. 337. "Goldhagen's just-published book." Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*.
- p. 338. "Langer is the author of a study." Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*.
- p. 338. "often thought of strangling them." Lawrence Langer, author's notes, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum forum, April 8, 1996.
- p. 339. "pregnant with murder." Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, p. 75.

- He goes on to say: "The only matter that cannot be ascertained is . . . how many Germans subscribed to it" at what point. But, certainly, state-encouraged murder began as early as 1933.
- p. 340. "Columbia's Fritz Stern." Fritz Stern, "The Goldhagen Controversy," *Foreign Affairs*, November–December 1996, pp. 128–38.
- p. 340. "pretentious . . . shrill and simplistic." *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- p. 340. "For Goldhagen . . . Hitler was Germany." *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- p. 341. "the book's boast to have solved a problem." According to Goldhagen, "explaining why the Holocaust occurred requires a radical revision of what has until now been written. This book is that revision," cited in *ibid.*, p. 128.
- p. 342. "a letter from Hilberg." This letter was actually written to Henry Friedländer. Friedländer is the author of *The Origins of Nazi Genocide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
- p. 342. "Kweit goes further, too." Author's notes, Holocaust Memorial Museum forum.
- p. 342. "Hilberg says, 'I take exception . . .'" Kweit, citing Hilberg's letter to Friedländer, *ibid.*
- p. 342. "Hilberg's lifework, his three-volume history." Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, rev. ed. (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985).
- p. 343. "Goldhagen dismisses . . . the 'five conventional explanations.'" Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, pp. 379–85.
- p. 343. "Hilberg as 'an exemplar . . .'" *Ibid.*, p. 385.
- p. 345. "Bauer cited . . . George Mosse." Author's notes, Holocaust Memorial Museum forum.
- p. 345. "It's not Goldhagen's fault." *Ibid.*
- p. 345. "the risk of ending up like Arno Mayer." Arno Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* (New York: Pantheon, 1988). Mayer's book does have its defenders, although it seems to me a peculiar backhanded way of recuperating Marxism by portraying Jews as martyrs more for their "Bolshevism" than their Jewishness.
- p. 346. "the lurid headline . . . in *Der Spiegel*." *Der Spiegel* 21, May 20, 1996.
- p. 346. "*Die Zeit*." The weekly ran a series on the Goldhagen debate from April 11 through June 24, with a reply from Goldhagen to his critics on August 2.
- p. 346. "Goldhagen abruptly canceled the NYU meeting." "Forum on Holocaust Canceled After Author Withdraws," *The New York Times*, May 7, 1996.
- p. 347. "Sir Isaiah Berlin has written." Berlin, *Against the Current*.
- p. 347. "Norman Cohn . . . author of a study." Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, p. 194.
- p. 347. "Cohn defines Hitler's Austrianness." *Ibid.*, p. 194.
- p. 348. "There were regional variations in anti-Semitism . . ." Daniel Goldhagen, interview with author.
- p. 350. "Ireread Weber's famous essay." Max Weber, "The Nature of Charismatic Domination." In *Weber: Selections in Translation*, ed. W. G. Runciman, trans. Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 226–50.
- p. 350. "his right to rule." *Ibid.*, p. 227.

- p. 351. "Erich Goldhagen . . . a 1972 essay." Erich Goldhagen, "Pragmatism, Function and Belief in Nazi Anti-Semitism," *Midstream*, December 1972, pp. 52–62.
- p. 351. "Goldhagen *père* cites numerous instances." Ibid., p. 57: In May 1943, Goebbels's office distributed "secret circulars" ordering "the Propaganda officials of the party . . . to increase and intensify the anti-Semitic 'enlightenment' of the populace," which, by the son's thesis, should scarcely have been necessary.
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- p. 352. "Saul Friedländer . . . 'redemptive anti-Semitism.'" In Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*.
- p. 353. "Breitman suggested to me." Richard Breitman, interview with author and later telephone conversation.
- p. 353. "Professor Richard S. Levy's study." Richard S. Levy, *The Downfall of the Anti-Semitic Political Parties in Imperial Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).
- p. 355. "I'm Very Proud." Henryk Broder, *Der Spiegel* 21, May 20, 1996, pp. 58–59.
- p. 355. "Broder . . . begins." Ibid., p. 59.
- p. 356. "Levy told me that he thought." Levy, phone interview with author.
- p. 357. "mail from Professor Berel Lang." Berel Lang, "Holocaust Memory and Revenge: The Presence of the Past," *Jewish Social Studies* 2 (Winter 1996): 1–20.
- p. 357. "How could it be that revenge was *not*." Ibid., p. 2.
- p. 357. "An ambitious plan by . . . partisans." Ibid., pp. 4–5.
- p. 357. "what he calls 'displaced.'" Ibid., pp. 9–10.
- p. 359. "A second cover story in *Der Spiegel*." *Der Spiegel* 33, August 12, 1996, pp. 40–55.
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- p. 359. "Consider some other changes." Ibid. (trans. Alexander Stengel).
- p. 360. "He'd just reviewed the book." Berel Lang, review of *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Moment*, May 1996.
- p. 360. "[Lang] felt the exaggerated nature of its claim." Berel Lang, interview with author.
- p. 360. "The Rage That Elie Wiesel Edited Out of *Night*." E. J. Kessler, *The Forward*, October 4, 1996, pp. 1, 10.
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- p. 361. "Not so, the scholars Eli Pfeffercorn and David Hirsch contend." Eli Pfeffercorn and David Hirsch, "Elie Wiesel's Wrestle with God," *Midstream* 43.8 (November 1997): 21ff.
- p. 361. "And Wiesel himself denied to *The Forward*." *The Forward*, October 4, 1996, p. 10.
- p. 362. "Goldhagen denounced Browning's 1992 book." Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, "The Evil of Banality," review of *Ordinary Men*, by Christopher R. Browning, *The New Republic*, July 13–20, 1992, pp. 49–52.
- p. 363. "the late . . . Lucy Dawidowicz argued." See extensive discussion of her thesis in the following chapter.

- p. 363. "Goldhagen emphasizes the moment." Hitler's speech, "Why Are We Anti-Semites," August 13, 1920, cited in Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, p. 134.
- p. 364. "Yehuda Bauer argues for March 1941." Yehuda Bauer, interview with author.
- p. 364. "Breitman . . . May 1941." Breitman, *Architect of Genocide*.
- p. 364. "a new study by German scholar Peter Witte." Peter Witte, "Two Decisions Concerning the 'Final Solution to the Jewish Question': Deportations to Lodz and Mass Murder in Chelmno," trans. B. Richardson, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 9.3 (Winter 1995): 318–45.
- p. 364. "For a period of six months . . ." Ibid., p. 320.
- p. 364. "Hitler's decision to deport the Jews . . ." Ibid., p. 321.
- p. 365. "A recent claim by . . . Christian Gerlach." See *The New York Times*, November 21, 1998, p. 4.
- p. 365. "appears to be a misinterpretation." Author's conversation with Richard Breitman. Breitman does not explicitly call it a misinterpretation: that's my interpretation of his tentative comments.
- p. 366. "People have lost *their* Holocaust." Christopher Browning, interview with author.
- p. 366. "an illuminating recent book." Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power*.
- p. 367. "Hitler's triumph, Turner argues." Ibid., p. 176.

Chapter 20: Lucy Dawidowicz

- p. 369. "my conversation . . . about his account of Hitler's decision." See especially Christopher Browning, "Beyond Intentionalism and Functionalism: The Decision for the Final Solution Reconsidered," in *The Path to Genocide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- p. 369. "I think he was a true believer." Browning, interview with author.
- p. 370. "the recent article by Peter Witte . . ." Witte, "Two Decisions."
- p. 373. "In her important . . . study." Dawidowicz, *War Against the Jews*.
- p. 373. "She finds Hitler using 'esoteric language.'" Ibid., p. 151ff.
- p. 374. "an English major who read Wordsworth . . ." Diane Cole, interview with Lucy Dawidowicz, *Present Tense*, autumn 1983, pp. 22–25.
- p. 376. "The Final Solution had its origins . . ." Dawidowicz, *War Against the Jews*, p. 150.
- p. 376. "How does one advocate publicly . . ." Ibid., p. 151.
- p. 378. "the comment Hitler made to one Josef Hell." Cited in Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, p. 116n, from notes by Hell in the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, ZS 640, folio 6. Hell's description of Hitler's vision of his plans is worth quoting at length as a counterweight to those who argue that Jew-hatred was a secondary or tactical matter for Hitler: "If I am ever really in power," he told Hell, "the destruction of the Jews will be my first and most important job. . . . I shall have gallows after gallows erected. . . . the Jews will be hanged one after another, and they will stay hanging until they stink. . . . As soon as they are untied the next group will follow and that will continue until the last Jew . . . is exterminated."

- p. 379. "Hitler's oratorical talents and anti-Semitic presentations . . ." Dawidowicz, *War Against the Jews*, p. 151.
- p. 379. "the code words he used for Jews . . ." Ibid., p. 152.
- p. 380. "her friend and colleague . . . Ruth Wisse, pointed out." Ruth Wisse, interview with author.
- p. 380. "She begins her analysis." Dawidowicz, *War Against the Jews*, pp. 152ff.
- p. 380. "1919 letter to a Munich man." Ibid., pp. 16–17.
- p. 381. "In August 1920 . . . Hitler told an audience." Hitler, "Why Are We Anti-Semites," cited and discussed in *ibid.*, pp. 17–20.
- p. 381. "she cites an April 1922 speech." Ibid., p. 154.
- p. 381. "She understood, as a historian." Ruth Wisse, letter to author.
- p. 381. "Consider a fascinating address Hitler made." Ibid., p. 93.
- p. 382. "her literary executor Neal Kozodoy." Neal Kozodoy, telephone conversation with author.
- p. 383. "Dawidowicz puts Kristallnacht in the context." Dawidowicz, *War Against the Jews*, p. 93.
- p. 383. "A seventeen-year-old Polish Jewish student." For an important sympathetic reconsideration of Herschel Grynszpan's role, see Michael Marrus, "The Strange Story of Herschel Grynszpan," *American Scholar* 57.1 (Winter 1988): 69–79.
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- p. 384. "A.J.P. Taylor's book." A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* [1961] (New York: Macmillan, 1982).
- p. 385. "his 'declaration of war against the Jews.'" Dawidowicz, *War Against the Jews*, p. 106.
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- p. 392. "Robert Conquest's . . . account of Stalin's crimes." Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- p. 392. "just feels worse." Robert Conquest, telephone conversation with author, citing a remark he originally made to a French newspaper.
- p. 392. "The reason people refused to see Stalin." Himmelfarb, interview with author.

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

My father died in 1990, before this book took its final form, but it was something he disclosed to me several years earlier that might have, as much as anything else, set me on the path I've taken. His parents were Hungarian Jews who came to America before the First World War. The Holocaust was something he rarely if ever spoke of. Few did in the fifties and sixties when I was growing up in suburbia. But at a family gathering late in 1982, not long before a stroke incapacitated him, he told me something that surprised and puzzled me: a cousin from a French branch of his family had died in the Nazi genocide. This puzzled me in two ways: why hadn't he mentioned it before; and why did he mention it then? A mystery I never really resolved. Not that the tenuous family connection should have made a difference, but I think it did mark a moment when I came to feel that all Hitler's victims were, in a sense, part of my (very) extended family. And at a time in my life when I felt somewhat adrift both as a person and a writer, in retrospect my father's words surely played a role in my decision to begin investigating the man who murdered them. But even if it hadn't, I'd want to pay tribute to that gentle man Henry Rosenbaum with his unique sense of humor, of melancholy and absurdity, for all he's meant to my life. And I'd like to thank as well my mother, Evelyn, indefatigable spark plug and beloved teacher, for putting up with both of us with grace and tolerance. I owe an immense, immeasurable debt of gratitude and love to my sister, Ruth, without whose moral support, wisdom, and advice I could not have survived the crises that plagued me while working on this book.

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A B O U T T H E A U T H O R

Ron Rosenbaum was born in Manhattan and grew up in Bay Shore, Long Island, New York. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Yale, in English Literature, specializing in the 17th-century metaphysical poets, and went on to study English literature on a Carnegie Fellowship at Yale Graduate School before leaving to take up writing full time.

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