Those who reflect on the nature of the Holocaust will confront the question of its uniqueness. Was the Holocaust the culmination of over 2,000 years of active anti-Semitism and persecution, or was it unique, forming a radical break from the past?

Both sides of this ancient historical debate, continuity versus change, are important. Certainly there is much continuity with the past. Indeed, the Holocaust was made possible, in large part, because German history had shown a continuum of virulent anti-Semitism. It is of course true that anti-Semitism existed in every country of the Western and Slavic worlds. But in no country in the world did so many influential leaders over so long a time champion so vicious a hatred of the Jewish people.

Martin Luther, for example, preached hatred and persecution of the Jews 400 years before Hitler. As early as 1543 Luther demanded that Jewish synagogues and schools be set afire, that their silver and gold be taken from them, their houses and prayer books seized and destroyed, that brimstone and pitch should be thrown upon them, and that they be driven away "like mad dogs"—a program which Adolf Hitler would put into practice on a national scale beginning with the infamous Reichskristallnacht of November 9-10, 1938, a date which, by a quirk of chronology, fell on Luther's birthday.

For centuries Catholic bishops and priests joined Lutheran pastors in thundering against an imaginary "Jewish menace." Indeed, the anti-Semitic record of both Christian confessions is one of the most appalling chapters in the entire history of religion. Published statements made by
saints of the Catholic Church were later used as texts for scurrilous anti-Semitic broadsides. Saint Gregory of Nyssa (d. 396) described Jews as "slayers of the Lord, murderers of the prophets, haters of God, advocates of the devil, a brood of vipers." St. Ambrose, Augustine's teacher, said that Jewish synagogues should be burned to the ground and boasted that he personally had set fire to one. St. John Chrysostom (d. 406) called Jews "lustful, rapacious, greedy, perfidious bandits." He preached that "it is the duty of Christians to hate the Jews" and concluded that the Jews are "fit for slaughter." Saint Thomas Aquinas, the most influential theologian in the history of the Catholic Church, argued that it was morally justifiable for Jews to serve Christians as slaves because, as the slayers of God, they were bound to "perpetual servitude." 


One day in April 1933 when Catholic bishops protested to Hitler that his government was mistreating Jews, Hitler replied that he was "only putting into effect what Christianity had preached and practiced for 2000 years." He had a point.

The historian Uriel Tal is therefore probably justified in concluding that the Christian church bears heavy responsibility for the virulent anti-Semitism of the Third Reich. German Christians agree. In January 1980, the Synod of the German Evangelical Church of the Rhineland, the most populous of the twenty-seven regional units of the EKD, passed overwhelmingly the official declaration, Zur Erneuerung des Verhältnisses von Christen und Juden (For the Renewal of Relations between Christians and Jews). The first sentence of this historic declaration reads: "Stricken, we confess the co-responsibility and guilt of German Christendom for the Holocaust."

Religious anti-Semitism, it bears repeating, had shown great continuity in Germany. But it was only in the Second Reich—Imperial Germany after 1871—that religious persecution gave way to a racial anti-Semitism which explicitly anticipated the Third Reich.

When Adolf Hitler was still a babe in his doting mother's arms, Germany's most influential thinkers were inciting racial anti-Semitism with slogans which Hitler would later take over as his own. In the 1890s, for example, the prodigious scholar Paul de Lagarde (whom
Thomas Mann hailed as "one of the giants of our people")\textsuperscript{8} coined portentous metaphors: "Jews are decayed parasites . . . usurious vermin" and warned that "with bacilli one does not negotiate: one exterminates them as quickly as possible."\textsuperscript{9} The long list of racial anti-Semites includes Germany's most popular historian, Heinrich von Treitschke, a best-selling novelist, Gustav Freytag, and probably the most influential Jew-baiter of them all, Richard Wagner.\textsuperscript{10}

Hitler exploited this legacy of hatred. But while showing continuity with the past, Nazi anti-Semitism was different from its predecessors. Here was not merely prejudice, persecution, and invective. Here, for the first time, was a calculated program of mass murder set forth by the legal government of Germany—a government unique in all history.

This was no mere "authoritarian state" of which we have so many and varied examples in world history. This was a government conceived in oppression and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created unequal. This was social and moral cannibalism. This was the very "negation of God erected into a system of government."

This government promised that Jews would be traduced, persecuted, vilified, destroyed. Such was the promise and such was the practice. The horror of Hitler was this: he was no hypocrite; he meant what he said; he practiced what he preached; he kept his promises. Indeed, as Elie Wiesel has noted with bitter irony, "Hitler is the only one who kept his promises to the Jewish people."\textsuperscript{11}

Hitler's policy of genocide was not designed to remove subversives who were a threat to the German state. Quite to the contrary, German Jews through the centuries had proven their devotion to the Fatherland by supporting its government and fighting gallantly in its wars. Their loyalty was shown even after Hitler came to power in 1933. One example: the Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten (National Association of Jewish War Veterans) hailed the advent of Hitler in 1933 and publicly promised support of his government.\textsuperscript{12} (They soon changed their minds.)

Nor were the Nazi executions designed to punish criminals and malefactors. The Jews were killed not because they had \textit{done} anything but merely because they existed—because they had been born. Jews were criminals \textit{by definition}. In occupied Russia, for example, the Nazi conquerors decreed death for the following crimes: (1) sabotage, theft, espionage, and (2) also for "Judenverdacht"—those suspected of \textit{being Jewish}.\textsuperscript{13}

The Nazi Holocaust was also different in the extent of the cooperation it received from the German social infrastructure. The Holocaust enjoyed the support or the benevolent neutrality of Christian churches, the civil service, the judiciary, educators, and thousands of the railroad officials who handled the complex logistics of transporting millions of people to their death. Army generals—the evidence is now incontro-
Thus this genocide succeeded because its perpetrators could count on the cooperation or acquiescence of German state officials, of religious, civic, and military leaders, and of the German public at large. Recent studies have shown that the German people really did know about the genocide and reacted with "a mixture of private sympathy and public passivity." A German historian of public attitudes toward Jews during the Third Reich has concluded that there was "scarcely another country whose population accepted the carrying away of its Jewish fellow citizens with so little opposition."

There is another reason why the Holocaust could take place: the victims cooperated with their executioners; they collaborated in their own destruction. I find this to be one of the most disturbing and least understood problems of the Holocaust. But here we must sound a clear note of warning about the use of the words "cooperative" and "collaboration." If they suggest a voluntary desire to be helpful, the words are badly misused. As Lucy Dawidowicz has emphasized in her valuable studies, there was no voluntary Jewish cooperation; there were no Jewish collaborators in the sense of the word made infamous by Quisling and Laval. Not one Jew wanted to cooperate with the Nazis. No Jew wanted Hitler's "New Order" in Europe. The Judenräte (the Jewish Councils approved by the Nazis and elected by the Jews themselves) cooperated with the SS by selecting Jews for transport to their deaths, but they did so only under the most extreme duress. When the Nazis threatened more drastic enlargement of the death quotas they were obliged to fill, the councils had little choice but to obey. Constantly they confronted soul-destroying decisions: choose for extinction either the young or the old. The Judenräte—it must be repeated—had virtually no choice. They tried desperately to do the very best they could under impossible circumstances. They were coerced into compliance. That much needs to be said and remembered. And yet the hard conclusion reached by eminent Jewish authorities on the Holocaust must be squarely faced and carefully pondered: however compelling the reasons, however extreme the duress, the fact is that Jews actually did become tragic accomplices in their own extinction. Raul Hilberg, Hannah Arendt, and Isaiah Trunk have demonstrated beyond dispute that leaders of the Jewish communities in Berlin, as in Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Warsaw, cooperated with the Nazis and smoothed the way to deportation and death. It is true that there were notable exceptions among the Jewish Councils, but the predominant pattern is clear. Most of the Judenräte implemented SS directives, published benign Nazi cover stories, denied warnings given by the Jewish underground, selected those who were to die, arranged their transportation, and collected money to pay their transportation to the death camps—thereby helping the Nazis achieve their goal of making the Final Solution "self-financing." The Councils gen-
eraly opposed sabotage and active resistance and ordered compliance with Nazi directives. Most Jews followed the orders of their leaders, and many displayed what Hilberg has called "anticipatory compliance": in pathetically futile efforts to pacify the Nazis, they sedulously collected and turned in their jewels and gold and arrived well ahead of time at the designated staging areas, having paid their railway fare in advance. "They attempted to tame the Germans," Hilberg writes, "as one would attempt to tame a wild beast. They avoided 'provocation' and complied instantly with decrees and orders."19

The Nazis were surprised and pleased by the passivity and cooperation they received from their victims. It made their job much easier. Adolf Eichmann, the SS official chiefly in charge of the mass murders, testified during his trial in Jerusalem that the Jewish Councils were so effective in implementing SS orders that German personnel could be released for other service.20 Hannah Arendt concludes bitterly that without Jewish help, the murder of millions of Jews would not have been possible: "To a Jew, this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is . . . the darkest chapter of the whole dark story."21

An even darker role was played by the Jewish Police of the ghettos, an agency which the Nazis created with Satanic cunning to implement their orders and to shatter and demoralize the Jewish community by setting it against itself. After the war, Jewish "Courts of Honor" established that the Jewish Police actively participated in the destruction of their fellow Jews. They ferreted them out of their hiding places, arrested them in the middle of the night, beat them up in the streets, and filled their own pockets with bribes from their victims. A Jew who was to pay with his life for their vicious treachery angrily recorded in his diary: "Every Warsaw Jew, every woman and child, can cite thousands of cases of the inhuman cruelty and violence of the Jewish Police. Those cases will never be forgotten by the survivors, and they must and shall be paid for."22

Later we must consider some of the explanations which Jewish writers have given for the extent of Jewish cooperation with their executioners. But first something else must be said. For it is true, as Reuben Ainsztein has shown in his massive book on Jewish resistance to the Nazis, that many, many heroic Jews fought back at hopeless odds. Their gallant resistance was most tragically demonstrated in the uprisings against their oppressors in the Warsaw ghetto during the spring of 1943 —was it not the only urban uprising against the Nazis in Europe?—and in the death camp of Sobibor in October 1943.23

And yet it must be recorded that the overwhelming majority of the Jews of Europe, by the hundreds and hundreds of thousands, did indeed go, as furious Jewish activists charged at the time, "like sheep to the slaughter." Shortly before he and his family were killed, one of the
heroes of the Warsaw ghetto noted "the passivity of the Jewish masses" and asked some anguished questions: "Why are they all so quiet? Why does the father die, and the mother, and each of the children without a single protest? ... Why did everything come so easy to the enemy? ... This will be an eternal mystery—this passivity of the Jewish populace even toward their own police."24

These questions of Emmanuel Ringelblum and the mystery he could not solve will continue to haunt historians of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust differed from other genocides in other ways as well. For the first time in history, a cultivated and articulate people, confronted by unimaginable suffering and death, left records of immense value to survivors who seek to understand what happened. Philip Friedman has called the details of these harrowing experiences "test tubes . . . in a vast psycho-sociological laboratory such as had never been set up before."25 These records do indeed provide insight into the ways in which the human psyche reacts to stress. They also cast new light into the human soul, probing not only the depth of wickedness and evil, but also—in the memoirs of Anna Frank, Emmanuel Ringelblum, Viktor Frankl, Chaim Kaplan,26 and thousands of others—the light that human courage, faith, and goodness can shed in the darkest pits of hell.

In short, these precious records display the human capacity both for evil and for good. There is a political as well as a moral and a psychological lesson here, for the duality of human wickedness and human goodness proclaims the dangers of dictatorship and the saving promise of democracy. The political lesson of this human duality was best stated in Reinhold Niebuhr's memorable aphorism:

Man's capacity for good makes democracy possible;
Man's inclination to evil makes democracy essential.

The Nazi genocide was also unique in its senselessness. Yehuda Bauer has well asked, where else in history has a government of a civilized nation set out to kill everyone whose grandfather was of a particular religion or ethnic group? "For the first time in history a sentence of death had been pronounced on anyone guilty of having been born."27 And where have mass murders been so injurious to the perpetrator's own self-interest? In 1943, 1944, 1945, beleaguered Germany desperately needed railway transport and skilled labor supply. Yet Hitler allocated billions of work hours and massive amounts of transportation to one purpose: the killing of a nonexistent "menace." For the Jews were not then and had never been a threat to the German Reich. The whole thing was quite literally senseless.

But was this genocide really unique? Was there no historical precedent or parallel? Historians will recall other mass murders, other
slaughters of the innocent. One thinks of Herod and Genghis Khan, or of Stalin's murder of some 15 million kulaks, minority groups, and Russian prisoners of war. We recall the massacres perpetrated by Idi Amin Dada of Uganda and the calculated starvation in Cambodia, where over 50 percent of the entire population was killed between 1975 and 1980.

Two parallels to the Holocaust of the Jews seem particularly close. In 1915 Turkish authorities ordered the annihilation of the entire Armenian people. The proportion of Armenians killed was about the same as that destroyed in Hitler's Holocaust of the Jews: two out of every three people died. The Nazi genocide of the Gypsies also shows close parallels to the murder of the Jews. Gypsies too were killed for no other reason than the alleged threat of "racial pollution" of German blood. As with the Jews (and unlike the Poles) all Gypsies were to be executed. They too (unlike other Nazi victims) were gassed at Auschwitz.

So what can be concluded on this issue of continuity versus change? Many eminent Jewish authorities insist that this Holocaust was unique—it alone deserves a capital letter. Alvin Rosenfeld has called it an event without analogy, "something new in the world, without likeness or kind." Yehuda Bauer has said that any comparison with other genocides is misleading and inaccurate.

An American sociologist, John Murray Cuddihy, has noticed something revealing about the very intensity of Jewish insistence that it is only their genocide which is worthy of the name "Holocaust." He finds that this affirmation of uniqueness and denial of universality is a modern reworking of the ancient "Chosen People" concept: "Chosenness is found . . . even in such horrible context as the Holocaust in the attempt to define victimization in such a way as to exclude all other groups besides Jews."

Elie Wiesel illustrates Cuddihy's point. When historians refer to other holocausts, such as the massacre of the Armenians or the Gypsies, Wiesel is disturbed because such parallels question the special status of the Jewish victims. He is sorely afraid, he says, that "they are stealing the Holocaust from us . . . [which] we need to regain our sense of sacredness."

There are obviously differences of opinion on this question, but I would say that despite close parallels, the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust is striking. It was unique in Hitler's avowed purpose of killing all members of a religious, cultural, ethnic community—a calculated effort to annihilate one of the most creative people on earth. This genocide was unique in the endorsement of leading social institutions and agencies; unique in the senselessness of the whole program; unique in the help the victims gave to their murderers; unique in the consequence it has had on both Jewish and Christian thought.
Let us turn to a second group of questions that highlight the problem. How adequate are the explanations and theories that attempt to account for the Holocaust? What approaches seem most fruitful? What new approaches are needed?

First, how adequate are the explanations? The answer to this is simple: there is no adequate explanation of the Holocaust. This event will continue to stagger the mind and trouble the soul of anyone who investigates it.

Yet several approaches are particularly helpful in leading us to a deeper understanding—though we shall never know the full and final truth about it, just as we shall never know the final truth about any historical problem that is worth its intellectual salt.

In our search for understanding, insights can be gained from socio-logical and psychological studies. Helen Fein,38 for example, following closely the monumental work of Raul Hilberg, has examined the social setting for the Holocaust and found answers to such questions as: What made the social environment congenial to genocide? She provides care-ful comparative statistics from different countries to show that the extent of cooperation with the SS depended upon a number of factors, but the most important of these was the amount of anti-Semitism that existed historically in each country (thus the importance of the first question about continuity). Fein shows, for example, that there is a direct rela-tionship, a positive correlation, between the amount of anti-Semitism —and the support it received from church, army, and the civil service—and the number of Jews killed. Where anti-Semitism was extensive, as in Germany, Rumania, Hungary, and Poland, genocide was extensive. Where anti-Semitism was not strong historically, and where popular sentiment and civic and religious leadership did not support it, as in Denmark and Bulgaria, killing was minimal. Bulgarians and Danes re-fused to carry out SS orders and helped thousands of Jews to escape death.

Thus the congeniality of the social environment helped determine the extent of the Holocaust. So too did the degree of effective political power. Where political power is overwhelming—as in Stalin's Russia, Amin's Uganda, or Hitler's Germany—where opposition is silenced and bureaucracy is obedient, mass murder can become routine.

Fein's comparative approach, which encompasses sociological and quantitative analysis, is a valuable aid to a fuller understanding. So too are the contributions made by psychologists and psychoanalysts.39 We particularly need their help because the very irrationality of the Holocaust makes traditional political and historical explanations distressingly inadequate.
Psychologists can tell us a great deal about the personalities of the perpetrators. What kinds of people, yes, what kinds of human beings, were the Nazis? For it is important, though admittedly distasteful, to remember that the Nazis were human. To dismiss them as "monsters" or "freaks" or "demons" is too easy and far too dangerous. We shall learn little about this historic event until we recognize that the Holocaust was a deeply human phenomenon.

In all people there is a propensity for murderous aggression. Even the unspeakable events of the Holocaust are not "bestial" in the literal sense of the word. To call the Nazis beasts is to defame beasts. Animals in the jungle do not kill except for food or self-defense. Such events as the Holocaust, Heinz Kohut has written, are "decidedly human, an intricate part of the human condition." That is a disturbing and unpalatable thought, but it is a basic fact of psychological life. Hannah Arendt reached the same conclusion. In her brilliant study of Eichmann in Jerusalem she observed that Eichmann was no monster—if he had been, the entire case against him would have collapsed immediately. "The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were and still are terribly and terrifyingly normal. . . . This normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together." Elie Wiesel found the same things to be true about Franz Stangl, commandant of the Sobibor and Treblinka death camps: "It is not the murderer in Stangl that terrifies us—it is the human being." We need to know more about the mechanisms which permit normal people to commit such awful crimes, and psychologists can help provide some answers.

Psychologists have also helped by demonstrating what the "anti-Semitic personality" is like. Germany has no monopoly on such twisted human beings. Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, Eichmann, and the rest were very much like American anti-Semites: they too reveal infantile personalities incapable of development; they too swing radically between swaggering confidence and abject despair. Like American anti-Semites, the Nazis exalted the strong and despised the weak. They too projected their personal problems onto others, namely, the Jews. They too tended to be sado-masochists with inclinations to perversion.

Psychologists can help us understand the anti-Semitic person. So too can philosophers. Jean-Paul Sartre, quite without realizing it, has painted a discerning picture of Adolf Hitler and his vicious but frighteningly human colleagues:

We are now in a position to understand the anti-Semite. He is a man who is afraid. Not of the Jews, to be sure, but of himself. . . . He is a coward who does not want to admit his cowardice to himself; a murderer who represses and censures his tendency to murder without being able to hold it

"
Biographers, aided by psychology, can reach a deeper understanding of the individual perpetrators of the Holocaust. One recalls Peter Loewenberg's penetrating study of Himmler,45 Richard Hunt's pioneering work on Joseph Goebbels,46 Gidda Sereny's sensitive insights into Franz Stangl,47 as well as Hannah Arendt's study of Eichmann.

Certainly we need to know a great deal more about the personality of the one person who was finally responsible for the Holocaust: Adolf Hitler.48 We need to understand the psychodynamics of the process by which his personal hatred of the Jews was rationalized and projected into public policy. We need to see how the personal prejudice of one demented person was transmuted into a horrendous historic force.

Psychologists have also widened our horizons and deepened our knowledge of how it is possible for average people to follow orders which debase and destroy their fellow human beings. Here, two studies by two American social psychologists offer insights—only partial insights, it is true, but nevertheless revealing glimpses of an answer—to that simple but terribly complex question: How could decent people commit such evil crimes? How could they possibly do it? Stanley Milgram at Yale and his colleagues in several other American universities have reached deeply disturbing conclusions about the propensity of ordinary people—in this case hundreds of American citizens—to follow brutal orders commanding them to turn on electric currents which appeared to inflict suffering on fellow citizens. Professor Milgram concludes:

Subjects will obey the experimenter no matter how vehement the pleading of the person being shocked, no matter how painful the shocks seem to be and no matter how much the victim pleads to be let out. This was seen time and again in studies and has been observed in several universities where the experiment was repeated. It is the extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority that constitutes the chief finding of the study and the fact most urgently demanding explanation.

This is perhaps the most fundamental lesson of our study: ordinary people simply doing their jobs and without any particular hostility on their part can become agents in a terrible destructive process.49

If this is true of average American citizens, how much more it is true of German Nazis whose attitude and inclinations were powerfully reinforced by an environment which not only permitted the destruction of their fellow men, but demanded it.

Philip Zimbardo of Stanford University has demonstrated that college students carefully selected for their normality can become perverted by the pathology of power. These students illustrate Stendhal's assertion
that "power is the greatest of all pleasures." In his experiment, Zimbardo simulated a prison situation and had students act out the roles of prison guard and prisoner. The experiment showed how much American students delighted in that greatest of all pleasures and used it to humiliate and hurt their fellow students. It also showed that the victims of this power—also normal college students—became depressed and disoriented, and meekly followed the commands of their persecutors.

Zimbardo's experiment, which was planned to last two weeks, was aborted after six days because in those few days Professor Zimbardo was alarmed by a frightening metamorphosis he witnessed in the students. Those who were serving as guards grew increasingly abusive and sadistically cruel to the "prisoners"; the students who were prisoners became so depressed that they were on the verge of psychological disintegration and suicide. Zimbardo concluded that

in the contest between forces of good men and evil situation, the situation triumphed. Individuals carefully selected for their normality, sanity, and homogeneous personality traits were, in a matter of days, acting in ways that out of this context would be judged abnormal, insane, neurotic, psychopathic and sadistic.50

If that can happen to average American college students in six days, it is small wonder that Germans who had been carefully conditioned to Nazi ideology could become brutal instruments of Hitler's "wicked will," or that humiliated, frightened, starving, and disoriented Jews who felt the utter futility of resistance should yield to brute force and passively obey commands.

Psychoanalysts such as Bruno Bettelheim have further increased our understanding of the difficult question—and to Jews a very sensitive question—of why the Jewish people cooperated in their own destruction. Bettelheim believes that the aggressive-destructive drive so obvious in the SS was also present in their Jewish victims. Feeling helpless and abandoned, they were unable to direct aggressive impulses outward against their hated oppressors. They therefore made both an excuse and a virtue out of futility and used it as a psychological defense against self-accusations of cowardice. Thus they continually exaggerated their own utter helplessness and the total omnipotence of the enemy, and then turned aggressive-destructive drives inward against themselves, thereby cooperating in their own destruction. Bettelheim concludes that Jews were already suicidal before they walked toward the death chambers.51

Such analysis, not surprisingly, has brought a storm of protest and denial from Jewish writers. But it is ironic that these writers who denounce the conclusions reached by Bettelheim, Arendt, and Hilberg, and who vehemently deny that the Jews died with meek resignation,
nevertheless in their own books offer explanations of why the Jewish people were compelled to do just that. They give a number of reasons, all of which have considerable merit.

First, they argue that Jewish tradition did not encourage active resistance to persecution. They point out that for centuries Jews had been conditioned to obey, to suffer, and to survive. As Lucy Dawidowicz has written, "[their] religious tradition elevated powerlessness into a positive Jewish value. It fostered submissiveness." Jews believed that their vaunted capacity to submit and yet to endure would carry them through even this persecution, as it had so often in their past. They made a catastrophic mistake. As Richard Rubenstein has noted, "The Jewish reaction to the Nazis was one of the most disastrous misreadings of the character of an opponent by any community in all of human history." Jews did not understand that Hitler did not plan merely to humiliate them; he planned to kill them. This sensible, legally minded, and cultivated people simply could not believe that the German government really meant to murder them all. That just did not make sense. In this the Jews were quite correct. It did not make sense. But it happened.

Second, Jewish writers argue that to this tradition of "suffer and survive" was added the psychological defense of denying. Jews denied that they were to be transported to death camps. Such horror stories could not be true. Gladly they accepted the Nazi fiction that they were merely being "resettled" in the East. Their psychological need to believe that fantasy led them to cooperate and obey SS orders because to do so was a way of denying what they dreaded might be true. Notice how psychological denial is reflected in their euphemisms. Jews did not talk of killing centers, of gas ovens or death camps; they referred to them as "bakeries"; a person who had given up all hope was a "Moslem"; a depot holding the belongings of recently gassed victims was called "Canada."

Third, as Helen Fein has noted, there was a general belief—particularly among Western Jews—that the Nazis were "punishing" only Eastern Jews, not the rest. Many German Jews, for example, said that Polish Jews must have done something terribly wrong to merit their fate.

Fourth, Yisrael Gutman believes that thousands of devout Jews went quietly to their death with prayer shawls gathered about them in the faith that they were participating in a Kiddush Hashem—a sanctification rite in which they bore witness to their devotion to God. They agreed with a revered rabbi who said, "The quintessence of martyrdom is dying for one's Jewishness." And psychologically it was easier to believe that they were dying as martyrs to their faith in God than it was to entertain the awful thought that their God had forsaken them.

Fifth, to many Jews, death in Hitler's gas chambers was atonement for individual or collective sin. Devout Jews found it more bearable to
believe that it must be they themselves—and not the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob—who had broken the sacred covenant which Jehovah had made with his Chosen People.

Sixth, historically, Jews tended to trust their spiritual leaders. As we have noted, official Judenräte urged Jews to obey orders for shipment to the East and not to resist. As Dawidowicz has written, they feared—with ample justification—that any act of resistance would only increase the wrath of the SS.57

Finally, and this is the point that needs most emphasis, we must recognize that European Jews, like the kulaks of Russia or Idi Amin's victims in Uganda, yielded to a force majeure. The Jews, isolated, intimidated, and confronted by the institutionalized terror of a modern police state, had no other effective choice. They were overwhelmed by sheer power.

It seems to me that all these explanations—including Bettelheim's—deserve an examination that is as careful, as courageous, and as dispassionate as this emotion-laden issue will allow.

The Holocaust clearly required perpetrators; and we need to understand the psychodynamics which drove them. Here, by and large, were frighteningly normal people who were given great power and trained to exploit universal human frailties for horrendous purposes. The Holocaust also required victims, and they too can teach us much about the human condition—how even under the most brutal tyranny, people can retain their humanity and refuse to be broken. But the Holocaust also shows how the cowed and frightened and disoriented can succumb to brutal power and cooperate in their own psychic and physical destruction. The Holocaust is indeed a terrifying but profoundly revealing laboratory of human behavior.

Which is to say that the Holocaust was a human event—an event of shattering and unspeakable inhumanity, but one perpetrated by humans upon humans. It was an event unique in history and yet within the human experience.

III

Historians, as well as psychologists and sociologists, can also contribute to our understanding of the Holocaust because of their long experience with a third issue: the role of the commanding personality.

We see in the Holocaust yet another example of the ancient historical interplay of man and circumstance. But it is doubtful if ever in the past there has been so close a relationship, so fateful an interconnection, as there was between this peculiarly compelling man and these peculiarly receptive circumstances.
First consider the man, Adolf Hitler, the originator and mover of the Holocaust, the one person without whom this event could not have been possible.\textsuperscript{58} He was both a consummately cunning political opportunist and a pathological fanatic. And both aspects determined his program for the Jews. As an astute political operator he recognized the appeal of anti-Semitism to Germans of the 1920s and 1930s. This "Terrible Simplifier" offered a simple explanation for all difficulties: Jews were responsible for the defeat and humiliation of 1918, for the economic disasters of 1923 and 1930-1933, for all the political and moral problems of the time. It was not "our" fault: the Jew was to blame. There have been other racists, other political anti-Semites before Hitler. Three things made Hitler special: the depth and intensity of his hatred for the Jews; the extent of his effective political power; the opportunity given to him by a compliant and cooperative society.

Hatred of the Jews and the desire to murder them was a lifelong obsession of Hitler, the organizing principle of his life. One can feel the venom of his hatred in an early conversation, now recorded in the archives of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich.

As soon as I have power [he said in 1922] I shall have gallows erected, for example in Munich in the Marienplatz. Jews will be hanged one after another and they will stay hanging until they stink... then the next group will follow... until the last Jew in Munich is exterminated. Exactly the same procedure will be followed in other cities until Germany is cleansed of the last Jew.\textsuperscript{59}

This personal obsession became his political program. His promise was kept. Both his last and his first political statements confirmed his obsession with a nonexistent "Jewish Menace." His last political statement, delivered on April 30, 1945, was dictated just before taking a lethal dose of cyanide: "Above all I enjoin the leaders of the Reich to scrupulous observance of the Racial Laws defending against the universal poisoner of mankind, international Jewry." In his first public speech, of which we have one faded shorthand report dated August 7 or 8, 1920, Salzburg, Hitler had sounded the same ominous note:

Don't be misled into thinking that you can fight diseases without killing the carrier!... Don't think you can fight racial tuberculosis without ridding the nation of the carrier of racial tuberculosis! This Jewish contamination will not subside, this poisoning of the nation will not end until the carrier himself, the Jew, has been banished from our midst.\textsuperscript{60}

That promise was also kept.

The extent of Hitler's anti-Jewish phobia is manifest. The psychological reasons for it are complex and cannot concern us here.\textsuperscript{61} Let us simply reiterate that the Holocaust was not possible without Hitler. It
was also not possible without a supportive society. For, once again in history, man and circumstances worked together to produce the event.

German society exhibited attitudes and values recognizable in any country. What made German circumstances peculiar was the intensification and distortion of those attitudes and values through the force of unusual historic pressures and the manipulative skills of the man, Adolf Hitler. We should consider some of these attitudes and notice the way Hitler used them to his advantage. His program required anti-Semitic racism, and German history, as noted, obliged him with a particularly virulent variety. He manipulated it with diabolical cunning. Anti-Semitism not only provided a simple explanation for all Germany's recent disasters, it allowed Hitler to fulfill his contradictory claims that he was, at the same time, a conservative and a revolutionary; that he would preserve traditional society and transform it through a New Order; that he was the champion of both capitalism and socialism. "The Jew" enabled him to have it both ways and to win both capitalist and proletariat to his banner. He convinced capitalists that he was the enemy only of "Jewish finance capitalism"; he persuaded socialists that his program of National Socialism fought only "Jewish Marxist Socialism." He also applied anti-Semitism in another way. His success as mass leader was due in part to his psychological insight that man is both evil and good, beset by two conflicting tendencies: an impulse for aggression, destruction, hatred; and a capacity for creation, cooperation, sacrifice, and service. Hitler appealed to both impulses. His regime institutionalized brutality and aggression, channeling them against the Jews. But we do not understand his appeal, particularly to the youth of Germany, unless we understand that he also inspired them with faith and hope—a shining hope for the future, faith in him as their Messiah. Through the magic of his charisma and the cunning of his propaganda he convinced millions that barbarism was heroic, brutality was strength, and nihilism was an exalted ideology. And the lofty goals of Germany strong and triumphant could be achieved only when the country was cleansed and purified by removing the Jews who defiled the Fatherland.

Hitler manipulated German anti-Semitism to his own advantage. He also gained mightily from another national tradition: obedience to the state. Surely the German people have no monopoly on obedience and capacity to obey inhuman orders, as Milgram's chilling experiments have shown. Yet in Germany, since Luther and the Prussian kings and the Imperial Army, obedience to Obrigkeit (authority) was raised to the highest virtue of citizenship. At Nuremberg, as at a score of Nazi trials since, the phrase Befehl ist Befehl! (an order is an order) was recited as a litany.

Hitler's Holocaust was helped along by yet another circumstance: general indifference to the suffering, humiliation, and murder of the Jews. Here again a common human phenomenon was intensified in
Germany. People in most societies are indifferent to the existence of social evil in their midst. Edmund Burke's justifiably famous warning about evil prospering because of the indifferent silence of good men and women is, unfortunately, true of most good people. Certainly the silence of many good and influential people—people like Pope Pius XII, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Felix Frankfurter, and Rabbi Stephen Wise—helped Hitler carry out the Holocaust. Silence was international. But the indifference of the elite of German society was particularly pronounced and peculiarly helpful to Hitler, as Rainer Baum and Dieter Hartmann have graphically shown.

Hitler was also aided by the psychological phenomenon of defensive denial. People have a remarkable capacity to deny what they prefer not to believe. Turks deny that an Armenian massacre took place in 1915; Englishmen denied the existence of concentration camps in the Transvaal; Americans denied the Christmas bombing of Hanoi; Israelis denied all responsibility for massacres of Palestinians. But denial was pandemic during the Holocaust. And Jews joined the chorus of those who insisted that the genocide was not actually taking place. Since they could not believe they were being transported East to their deaths, they denied it, and their denial expedited their extinction. To a large degree, as was noted, Jews accepted their own victimization. But attitudes of resignation and cooperation with one's oppressor are emphatically not an exclusively Jewish trait. As Barrington Moore has demonstrated, human beings in vastly different social, religious, and political settings all display a remarkable tendency to accept maltreatment and make a virtue out of humiliation. Such is true of Christian ascetics and saints, the Untouchables of India, Chinese coolies, and German steel workers in the Ruhr in the 1890s. Acceptance is a social norm, Moore has observed; resistance is an acquired taste. But here again, during the Third Reich there were specific psychological, social, and political reasons why the Jews put up so little resistance and helped Hitler to direct a human condition to inhuman purposes.

We seek to understand the Holocaust, to explain it, and to establish the truth about what happened. We shall never explain it adequately, never find the final truth. But there is no cause for despair. We can find comfort in the words of a wise old rabbi:

Who says the Truth was meant to be revealed?
It has to be sought, that's all.

I have suggested that we begin our search by considering the interplay of a peculiar man with peculiarly fortuitous circumstances; that we seek enlightenment from such disciplines as sociology, psychology, and
history; and that we recognize this event both as a part of a historical
continuum and as a phenomenon with distinctive features of its own.

NOTES

This chapter draws upon papers originally presented to the International
Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust held at Indiana University, November
3-5, 1980, and at Tel Aviv, Israel, June 20-24, 1982. The present version
revises those remarks and incorporates comments made at the conferences.
2. Larry E. Axel, "Christian Theology and the Murder of Jews,"
   Encounter 40, no. 2 (Spring 1979), pp. 135-36, and Rosemary Radford
   Ruether, Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism
   (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 179-80. See also Edward H. Flannery,
   The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-three Centuries of Anti-Semitism
3. Thomas Aquinas, De Regimine Principum (Westport, Conn.:Hyperion
4. Ibid., p. 135.
5. Hitler's Tischgespräche as quoted by Ruether, Faith and Fratricide,
   p. 224.
6. Uriel Tal, Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics, and
7. As quoted in A. Roy Eckardt, "Preparatory Paper: Indiana
9. Paul de Lagarde, Deutsche Schriften, 5th ed. (Göttingen: Dieterich,
10. For a brief discussion of Wagner's influence on Hitler, see Robert
    G.L. Waite, The Psychopathic God: Adolf Hitler (New York: Basic Books,
    1977), pp. 99-113. It is, of course, true that many German intellectuals
    opposed anti-Semitism, championed Jewish emancipation, and paid tribute
    to Jewish thought and culture. This list includes Gotthold Lessing, Johann
    Herder, Johann Schiller, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich W.
    Nietzsche. But other Germans were vocal and influential anti-Semites. The
    great Prussian liberal reformer Baron vom Stein wanted to ship all the Jews
    out of Germany. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, professor of philosophy at the
    University of Berlin, spoke—jokingly, he later said—of "cutting off all
    Jewish heads." Kant asserted that Jewish thought was devoid of spirituality;
    Hegel said it amounted to a "dunghill." For a general survey of the problem


"polemics" over the Judenräte were due to a confusion between the objective function of the Councils and the intentions of the Council leaders. He noted that Hilberg and Trunk stress the former while Bauer emphasizes the good intentions of the Councils and implies that their function was benign—it was actually not to abet the Nazis but to safeguard their communities. Friedländer concludes with a question: "Could we not say... that objectively the Judenrat was probably an instrument in the destruction of European Jewry, but that subjectively some of them—or even most of them—tried to do their best... in order to stave off destruction?" I would agree with that point and accept the conclusion reached by Hilberg: "That the Council was pained we are convinced. That in desperation Council members committed suicide is a matter of record. But that notwithstanding, ... they went on doing what they were asked—that is a matter of record too." (Discussion reprinted in Bauer, Holocaust as Historical Experience, pp. 236-37, 254-55. Emphasis in original.)


28. The numbers killed during Stalin's reign of terror have been variously estimated. Nicholas Riasanovsky sets the figure at about 5 million


34. Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, p. 36.


45. See note 42.


47. See note 42.


proves Hitler's direct responsibility for the Holocaust and puts finally to rest the spurious claims of the so-called revisionists that Hitler was ignorant and innocent of the mass murders. For a different approach to the same problem, but one that reaches the same conclusion, see my chapter, "The Perpetrator: Hitler and the Holocaust," in Michael D. Ryan, ed., Human Responses to the Holocaust: Perpetrators and Victims, Bystanders and Resisters: Papers of the Scholars' Conference on the Church Struggle and the Holocaust (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1981).

59. Quoted in Waite, p. 16.
60. Ibid.