

this distinction. Is it perhaps really not about an intermediate zone of moral jurisdiction at all but instead about something quite different?

M. Broszat asked for a new moral accessibility by means of a differentiating historical insight. (Insight is, as is well known, not merely knowledge and rationality.) And Broszat imagines a “turn to authenticity and concreteness of the moral in history as well.” The temptation to superficially moralize history would then run counter to a long-term historicizing of morality. Morality and history, morality and politics, have always been a rather painful conjunction. Traditional morality originates in the confines of family, of neighborhood, of friendship; its space extends as far as a legally regulated national community or a community of nations in times of peace. The *factum brutum* of war was and remains traditional morality’s frontier, at which it had to stand by and mourn powerlessly. In our history we arrived at the outer reaches of our traditional morality. The educating forces of civil society in the twentieth century suffered once again a terrible setback. These forces are not by any means already “over the hump.” But there is in the meantime a broad basis, perhaps a viable majority basis for a civil ethos. This new civil ethos might not have to be defeated at the outset by the ethos of the archaic-modern warrior society.

This lively and practical new ethos, and not some abstract metahistorical moral principle for the judgment of past histories, would provide us with the framework for renouncing the violence of a past that in fact is not really past, but present.

At this point one must agree with Habermas that those Germans have come further along the road to a civil society who have achieved a broken, depotentialized relation to their inherited national identity, to their “German-ness.” I take it though for a quite unusual paraphrase when Habermas says that here the national pride and collective feeling of self-worth are forced “through a filter of a universalist orientation of values.” Is this modest gain in world citizenship thereby correctly classified historically if one sees in it (with Habermas) a sign that “we” therefore “have not gambled away the opportunity that the moral catastrophe could also mean for us”? Only after—and through—Auschwitz, according to Habermas, could one forge in the cultural nation of the Germans a connection to “universalist constitutional principles anchored in conviction.” The moral catastrophe as moral catharsis? Nonetheless, it would be proper to doubt that Auschwitz could have made it possible for postwar Germans to become more honorable than the wartime Germans were. It could be the case that the incessant moral shock will no longer be sufficient for continued progress if it is not overtaken by an *historical understanding* of what has happened in our century, particularly through an understanding of the ubiquitous driving social forces that have been in effect through the Nazi period up to our present.

Source: *Nürnberger Zeitung*, September 20, 1986

JÜRGEN KOCKA

Hitler Should Not Be Repressed by Stalin and Pol Pot: On the Attempts of German Historians to Relativize the Enormity of the Nazi Crimes

Today, in contrast to the 1960s and 1970s, the relevance of history does not have to be demonstrated; today there is no lack of interest in history. Historical exhibitions enjoy great popularity. Governments have money for historical museums. “Historical Libraries” flourish as well-known paperback series. Cultural history is good business. The demand for sociology has declined. Alternative movements attempt to solidify their critical identity by associating themselves with history—as they understand it. Prominent historians write lead articles in high-circulation newspapers. Controversies about historical topics stand at the center of fundamental intellectual discourses by social scientists (like Habermas), journalists (like Fest), and historians (like Nolte). It would be wrong to complain that history has sunk into oblivion.

The reasons for this contemporary interest in history have shifted. The public discussion and preoccupation with history is motivated not so much by a desire for enlightenment, for a critique of unquestioned assumptions and for contributions to emancipation. Instead it is a search for aids to establishing national identity; it is a search for contributions to the endowment of a higher meaning for the past. “A consensual past” is sought. In this view history is seen as tradition and employed for the purpose of strengthening a collective identity and building a consensus. The search for a consensual past and the cultivation of an identity-promoting memory are taking very different public forms. Three of these will be briefly discussed.

THE PLACE OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

We must consider the attempt not to actually deny the enormity of the National-Socialist crimes but to relativize and to define anew their place in history. Indeed it is hardly astonishing and not in itself worthy of criticism that we direct different questions to the darkest period of our history now, out of the temporal separation of half a century, than we did immediately

after the war because we can now survey the short- and long-term consequences (one of which is also the stability of the Federal Republic) in better and different ways than was possible immediately following the catastrophe.

Hermann Lübke praises the psychological repression of that past and the avoidance after 1945 of fundamental discussion about the responsibility for the catastrophe. He sees the repression and avoidances as the preconditions for a reconciliation the Federal Republic needed for its survival and stability. One should not, however, deny the true core of this thesis, namely the assertion that the strategy of psychological repression simultaneously had deep-seated political and moral costs. Along with the new credibility arising from the repression of the past, moral deficits were established. Without understanding these deficits we cannot understand the acuteness of the protest movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. And these deficits still burden the commonwealth today. One should—in contrast to Lübke—be able to combine a sober insight into the partially healing consequences of this repression with an outrage about the injustice that the avoidance of reckoning with the crimes meant to their victims—and not only on moral grounds, which do not have to be missing entirely from the historicizing discourse of a philosopher, but also in the interest of a view of history that in the short run may well be less “easy to agree upon” but ultimately more viable.

Ernst Nolte took the relativizing of the National-Socialist period a giant step further in his controversial essay “Die Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will” [The Past That Will Not Pass] (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of June 6, 1986). One should keep distinct two strands of argumentation in his essay:

1. First Nolte wants to disrobe of its seeming singularity the “so-called annihilation of the Jews in the Third Reich”: other genocides both preceded it (the Turkish persecution of Armenians, Stalinist mass terror) and followed it (Pol Pot, for example). Now no objections can be made to historical comparison, quite to the contrary. Such objections are also not new. With the concept of totalitarianism undeniable similarities between National Socialism and Stalinism have been worked out, specifically their common enmity for the liberal democratic constitutional state, their similar forms of repression, and even their mass annihilations.

To recognize these similarities does not mean trivializing the “German catastrophe,” nor does it mean discrediting the concept of fascism, which allows for the likewise undeniably deep differences between National Socialism and Stalinism: important differences of ideology and of respective projections of the future, of social causes and consequences, of their place and value in the historical process of development.

The pan-European dimension of the National-Socialist annihilation of the Jews, in contrast to the internal Soviet dimension of the Stalinist annihilation of the kulaks, has also been discussed. And there remains a

qualitative difference between the bureaucratized, passionless, perfected system of mass murder in the industrialized, fairly highly organized Reich of Hitler and the brutal mix of excesses of civil war, mass “liquidations,” slave labor, and forced starvation in the backward Reich of Stalin. As mentioned previously, historians will always be in favor of comparisons that must always ask about similarities and differences, however much the feeling, the tact, the respect for the millions of dead may run counter to balancing one atrocity against another. But at the same time it is natural to make the comparison with the societies of the Western world with which we otherwise gladly compare ourselves, societies that are more closely related and similar to us in stage of development, in societal structure, and in political ambitions. These are societies that did not pervert themselves through fascism and totalitarianism. The singularity of the German development arising from this frame of comparison should not be repressed by the comparison with Stalin and Pol Pot. The singularity of the German developments remains important, threatening, and shaming.

Why do Nolte and Joachim Fest, who radically defends Nolte against Habermas (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 29, 1986), say so little about this? What are the intentions and the functions of this selection? Doubtless, in the search for the cause, character, and consequences of German National Socialism, it is more productive, more appropriate, and more just to compare Weimar Germany and Hitler Germany with contemporary France or England than with Pol Pot’s Cambodia or Idi Amin’s Uganda. That has nothing to do with “pride” and “master race mentality,” as Fest insinuates; rather it has to do with historical knowledge about the connection between economic development and the possibilities of sociopolitical organization, and also with taking seriously the European tradition, in consideration of which the Enlightenment, human rights, and the constitutional state cannot simply be ignored. How could one justify not categorizing the National-Socialist politics of annihilation against this background of once achieved, then more deeply wounded ambitions? In the basic decisions of historical argumentation, scholarship, morality, and politics are always bound together. This accounts for the intensity of many controversies and warns at the same time of their intensification.

2. Secondly Nolte suggests that the National-Socialist “Asiatic” policy of annihilation can be understood as a not altogether incomprehensible reaction to the prior threat of annihilation, as whose potential or real victims Hitler and the National Socialists allegedly were justified in seeing themselves. “Was the Gulag Archipelago not primary to Auschwitz? Was the Bolshevik murder of an entire class not the logical and factual prius of the ‘racial murder’ of National Socialism?” And in another place he refers to the earlier “declaration of war” made against Germany by the Jewish World Congress in 1939.¹ Now these comments by Nolte, which Fest defends, have nothing at all to do with sober historical analysis of motivations

and causes. The real causes of anti-Semitism in Germany are to be found neither in Russia nor at the Jewish World Congress. And how can one, in light of the facts, interpret the National-Socialist annihilation of the Jews as a somewhat logical, if premature, means of defense against the threats of annihilation coming from the Soviet Union, with which Germany had made a pact in 1941 and which it then subsequently attacked? Here the sober scholarly historical inquiry into real historical connections, into causes and consequences, and about real motives and their conditions would suffice to protect the writer and the reader from abstruse speculative interpretations. Nolte fails to ask such questions. If a past "that is capable of being agreed on" can be gained by intellectual gymnastics of this sort, then we should renounce it.

HISTORIES INSTEAD OF HISTORY

Our "historians of everyday life" in the "history workshops" have little to do as a rule with such revisions of our national image of history, no matter how various the currents in the "new history movement" (to use the language of the media). Politically, morally, and intellectually the work of these less professional local historians, who are hardly protected institutionally, must be understood differently. This work is more likely to be critical of the national historical tradition, more likely to be politically on the Left in many respects.

Nevertheless, these historians also often write history for the purposes of identification. Dig where you are (why?—in order to find your own roots). They are also interested in reconstructing the shocking experiences and the ways of life of the little people in their own area, in order to "locate oneself again" in history. This is microhistory relating to everyday life as a means of founding and assuring identity in the small, surveyable space of a neighborhood, of the movement which it supports, perhaps also of the landscape.

This should not be fundamentally attacked here since this is not at all the place to weigh comprehensively the unarguable advantages and accomplishments of the history of everyday life and the history workshops against their incalculable deficits, illusions, and one-sidedness. Here reference will be made to only one price that normally has to be paid for this form of microhistory: failing to recognize the connections, ignoring the "big questions" about the formation of states and classes, about religion and churches, about industrialization and capitalism, about nation and revolutions, about the fundamental causes and consequences of National Socialism, about the German particularities in international comparison.

Such questions cannot be properly settled by personal and oral history. To answer them one needs complicated concepts and broad reading, theories, and a very long breath—precisely the things that the professional discipline of history is most likely to offer. The discipline has at its disposal to that end the

free spaces and means of the universities; it can reach back to its tedious process of education and take advantage of the division of labor. There is unfortunately no direct, quick, unprofessional way to understand the long-term connections of economy, society, culture, and politics.

But in the perspective of the historians of everyday life, it must likewise be a pressing need not to ignore the knowledge of connections that cannot be gained with one's own methods. The changing structures and experiences even in the smallest space are to a great extent the result of those greater connections and processes, and therefore cannot be understood without recourse to them. Also, a great part of our politics and our political agenda-setting, which affect individuals and small groups, plays itself out necessarily in a supralocal, supraregional space. Avoiding the "big questions" of history can mean the loss of the ability to be politically active (this in accord with Richard Löwenthal).

Finally, there is no objection to the existence of several mutually incompatible images of history. But in the interest of their validity or truth and in the interest of the consensus that always has to be worked out anew in important questions, the consensus that in fact is part of the democratic-liberal political culture, these images should not mutually ignore each other. By shutting out the big questions, historians of everyday life make things easier. They work the puzzle in front of them. They value questioning other images of history for this reason just as little as they let themselves be put in question by these other images. A partialization of the understanding of history must be recognized. They create identity in small spaces by blocking off connections—this is intellectually not satisfying and, in the end, politically problematic.

THE MIDDLE OF EUROPE²

Finally, a third—national—attempt to answer the problem of identity should be discussed. It is politically ambivalent, intellectually stimulating, but in the last analysis unsatisfying. I refer to the modified resumption of the old thesis of the German *Sonderweg* in the middle of Europe.

"The measure of freedom that can reasonably take place in a nation is inversely proportional to the military-political pressure which is exerted on its borders." This conviction of the Englishman J. R. Seeley was shared by many German historians up to 1918. They supported and justified this argument with the fact that Germany could hardly achieve parliamentary government given its vulnerable geopolitical situation in the middle of Europe—and that its specific traditions could not tolerate a parliamentary system but instead would remain an authoritarian state characterized by the military and bureaucracy. To this extent (in comparison to the rest of Europe) Germany would have to go a "separate way."

Clever historians like Otto Hintze gave up this view after 1918; after the Second World War it found hardly a single defender. Not until the end of

the 1970s were critical variants taken up again, and by the American D. P. Calleo, who—quite unconvincingly—attempted to explain the historical difficulties and, in his view, the still extant, incalculable factors based on the Germans' situation in the middle of Europe. Then Michael Stürmer and Hagen Schulze made use of the new geo-historical hypothesis in their weighty books that appeared with Siedler Verlag, *Das ruhelose Reich: Deutschland 1866–1918* [The Restless Reich: Germany 1866–1918], and *Weimar*. Since then this view has had a definite career, continuing into the early speeches of the current Federal president, von Weizsäcker. The view fits quite well with the desire for equidistance between East and West (a desire that Stürmer, Schulze, and von Weizsäcker do not espouse but in fact reject). This view would lend itself well to the establishment of new German separate ways, in who-knows-which areas. Therein lies its explosive power.

“The great constant of German history is its situation in the middle of Europe; Germany's destiny is its geography” (H. Schulze). This assertion conceals the conviction that the European balance of power has assumed a weak middle; thus the particularist organization of the Holy Roman Empire and the German Federation would in principle be a more appropriate solution. The founding in 1871 of the German Reich in the heart of Europe had by this account meant a fundamental disruption of the balance. This was then only temporarily made acceptable to the European powers by the measured foreign policy of Bismarck, which could however only succeed as long as it was combined with an authoritarian policy of repression regarding the constitution, thus holding the internal dynamic of the Kaiserreich in limits. “Germany will only be tolerated by its neighbors for as long as the lid sits securely on its seething internal stew. For this reason the world war will sooner or later become unavoidable, as Bismarck's successors reject his policy of strict limitations . . . and the power of the old Prussian gentry . . . increasingly is subverted. The arrival of organized union interests, nationalistic and imperialistic mass organizations, the gradual rise of a parliamentary process and the creeping loss of power by the Prussian Ministry of State . . . All that combines to destroy unavoidably the boundaries that the European system sets for the existence of the German national state. The conflict is under these circumstances just as predictable as the German defeat, and probably the dissolution of the German Reich as well.”

It is clear that this way of seeing things goes against the long-dominant liberal interpretation of the Kaiserreich as it is espoused, among others, by Hans Rosenberg, Ernst Fraenkel, Fritz Fischer, Gerhard A. Ritter, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Hans-Jürgen Puhle, Heinrich August Winkler, Wolfgang Mommsen, Gordon Craig, and earlier also by Karl-Dietrich Bracher—in differing variants. According to the liberal view, the authoritarian, preparliamentary structure of the Kaiserreich was understood as a burden that

made conflicts more acute and as a long-term obstacle of democratization in Germany, the preparliamentary authoritarian character of the Reich seems in Stürmer and Schulze to be a justified consequence of the geographic situation and a guarantor of freedom, a guarantor that in the long run unfortunately did not measure up to the forces of the Nazi movement.

The retarded rise of a parliament and the continuing dominance of traditional elites of nobility, military, and bureaucracy were seen at most as a structural deficit of the Kaiserreich, but according to Stürmer and Schulze, an earlier rise of a parliament and more fundamental democratization would have only made the Reich more immoderate. According to their view, the Reich suffered from a surfeit of democratization, mobilization, and dynamic and less from its authoritarian rigidity. The Reich did not represent a special danger because it was more expansive and aggressive than its western neighbors but because the “normal” expansiveness of the Reich was incompatible with its geographical situation.

But this view is not convincing. With it one cannot explain why and with what necessity this “Reich in the Middle” developed its internal dynamic and ultimately turned to the outside. And this explanation overlooks that it was precisely the authoritarian preparliamentary immobility of the Reich's constitution that forced aside the social and political forces pressing for participation and thus helped to bring forth the irrational, destructive currents that then had a destabilizing effect, internally and externally.

More fundamentally, geography as such explains little. Switzerland and Poland also are “in the middle” and have nevertheless a completely different history. Completely different constitutional structures and constellations of alliances have coexisted with the geographic situation of Germany in the course of this century. The definition of “middle” is itself a historical phenomenon and changes with time. At the Congress of Vienna, for example, France, which had been defeated and was seen as dangerous, was the state in the middle between England, on the one hand, and the beginnings of the German Federation and the empire of the czars, on the other. Geography is not destiny, nor does it explain much. In this way, then, the question of German identity cannot be answered, even if it is useful to mutter momentarily about the situation in the heart of Europe and the heritage of destiny bound up with it.

CRITICISM AS IDENTITY

Neither by relativizing and leveling the National-Socialist period and other dark points of our past, nor by affectionately painting miniatures of the history of everyday life, nor through short-circuited geographism should historians react to the challenge to endow identity. Their task is to describe, explain, and present past reality with scholarly means within the context of the changing and never unitary future-oriented problems of the present. In doing that they help set the present in as enlightened a

relationship as possible to the past—and that means an appropriate, comprehensive, common, and critical relationship; they fulfill important societal needs and contribute in a fundamental and indirect sense to finding identity, provided one employs a concept of identity that includes self-distancing and reflection, as well as constant change and always renewed criticism.

Source: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, September 23, 1986

Author's Note: The title and subtitle were added by the editors of *Frankfurter Rundschau*. A long version of the article appeared with the title "Criticism and Identity: National Socialism, Everyday Life and Geography," in *Die Neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefte*, October, 1986, pp. 890–897.

NOTES

1. This formulation has been justifiably criticized as inexact. The reference is to Nolte, "Between Myth and Revisionism? The Third Reich in the Perspective of the 1980s," in H. W. Koch, ed., *Aspects of the Third Reich*, London 1985, pp. 17–38, 27ff. (Compare with the first article in this volume.) Nolte mentions "Chaim Weizmann's statement in the first days of September 1939, that in this war the Jews of all the world would fight on England's side." Nolte cites this in the imprecise reprint in the *Archiv der Gegenwart*, 1939. The actual wording of this letter from Weizmann of August 29, 1939, to the British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, can be found in *Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann. Series A. Letters*, vol. 19, January 1935–June 1940, Jerusalem 1977, p. 145. Weizmann offered in the letter the participation of Jews in military efforts under British leadership on behalf of the Jewish Agency (at that time a recognized public entity and part of the World Zionist Organization for Palestine, which among other things advised the British Mandate Government in Palestine). "In this hour of supreme crisis . . . the Jews 'stand by Great Britain and will fight on the side of the democracies.'" Nolte interprets Weizmann's position as "something like a declaration of war" and concludes indefensibly: "It might justify the consequential thesis that Hitler was allowed to treat German Jews as prisoners of war and by this means to intern them." Weizmann was in 1929–1931 and again in 1935–1946 the president of the World Zionist Organization (WZO), which regularly held Zionist world congresses. The letter may have been written in the context of the Twenty-first Zionist World Congress 1939 in Geneva. There were close ties between the WZO and the Jewish Agency. The letter is to be seen in the context of the connections between the British Mandate Government in Palestine and the Jewish Agency. That is clear in the wording of the letter.
2. The section under the heading "Middle of Europe" can be found, in part word for word, in part just the sense, in my review of the books *Das ruhelose Reich: Deutschland 1866–1918*, by Michael Stürmer and *Weimar* by H. Schulze in *Geschichtsdidaktik* 9 (1984) pp. 79–83.

HAGEN SCHULZE

Questions We Have to Face: No Historical Stance without National Identity

Enlightenment has to do with clarity, and what Jürgen Habermas communicates in his *Zeit* article of July 11, 1986, about recent tendencies in German history writing seems to be clear. The problems are easy to survey: On the one side is the community of enlightened liberals who have learned from the errors of German history and pay homage to a "pluralism of modes of understanding." On the other side is a small clique of questionable historians benevolently supported by ruling conservative circles. These historians, rooted in unsavory older traditions of nationalist and affirmative German historiography, are, in the interest of shoring up the stability of the federal government and the NATO alliance, in the process of designing a statist image of history with the intention of endowing a sense of national identity. To do this they make use of a trick by which they deny the singularity of the decisive point of reference of our constitutional order, National Socialism. They also compare Nazism with other totalitarian systems such as those of Stalin or Pol Pot, and in this way "sanitize" German history.

That is nice and lucid; the moral is obvious, and the *ecrase l'infame* is visible between all the lines. Once again, Habermas demonstrates himself to be a virtuoso simplifier, which in some cases can be useful in explaining complex matters. But this clarity is blurred on closer inspection. The argumentation changes in an irritating way. Habermas is in essence interested in politics, even in morality. His attack takes aim at the theoretical and practical positions of the discipline. But a question on one of these levels can be represented as being on another. For this discipline has to do with the world of being, of morality, of politics—and with the world of ethical obligation. One cannot support moral statements with scholarship, nor can one support scholarly statements with political ones. But that is just what Habermas constantly does.

Anyone who believes he will gain clarity about new historical problems and their difficulties will be disappointed reading Habermas, because the problems at hand are not at all compatible with Habermas's approach. The