

MODEL MURDERERS. AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE GOLDHAGEN METHOD AND HISTORY

CHRIS LORENZ
Amsterdam/Leiden

Chris Lorenz, “Model Murderers. Afterthoughts on the Goldhagen Method and History”, *Historyka*, XXXIII, 2003, s. 23–40

ABSTRACT

The article is a critical analysis of the renowned book by D.J. Goldhagen *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. Using comparative historiography the author of the article reconstructs Goldhagen's narrative model and compares it with the achieved cognitive effects. In doing so, he demonstrates weaknesses both of the model and of the effects.

Whatever else you might say about Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, it certainly is a remarkable book.¹ Although it has been slated by most specialists, Goldhagen's rewritten thesis has sold like hot cakes to the general public. “The book has been discussed and critiqued *ad nauseam*”, Steven Ascheim already observed in 1997, and even that seems an understatement.² “Few works indeed have achieved greater success and have aroused more heated debate in recent memory than Daniel Goldhagen's work”, was noted by Istvan Deak, another informed spectator of the intellectual Holocaust scene.³ Even Ian Kershaw, who usually relativizes the importance of public discussions for historiographical developments, devotes a whole new paragraph to ‘the Goldhagen phenomenon’ in his recent

.....

¹ D.J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, New York 1997 (Vintage Books), further abridged as: HWE.

² S. Ascheim, “Archetypes and the German-Jewish Dialogue: Reflections Occasioned by the Goldhagen Affair”, *German History* 1997, 15, 2, p. 242.

³ I. Deak, “Review article Holocaust Views: The Goldhagen Controversy in Retrospect”, *Central European History* 1997, 30, 2, p. 295.

CHRIS LORENZ

revised edition of *The Nazi-Dictatorship*.⁴ All in all, Ulrich Herbert's comment in case still hits the nail its head. Referring to Eberhard Jäckel's judgement that Goldhagen's best seller was "simply a bad book", Herbert remarked that Jäckel seemed to miss the point: "It is bad, but not simply bad".⁵ Its grave scholarly deficiencies notwithstanding, retrospectively one has to admit that Goldhagen's book is one of the few studies that has exerted a traceable influence on the historical agenda: *HWE* did so by putting both the question about the involvement of the Wehrmacht in the Holocaust on the agenda of the German historians and the question about the motives of the perpetrators of the Holocaust⁶ (while Christopher Browning's far superior *Ordinary Men* in 1992 did not).⁷ By giving a very simplified and 'wrong' answer, Goldhagen's book immediately provoked an unprecedented interest in the 'right' answers. *HWE* has thus, in a paradoxical way, highlighted the serious lack of knowledge about the composition and the motivations of the Holocaust-perpetrators. Given the continuing centrality of the Nazi period for the self-definition of the Berlin Republic this is no small deal.⁸

Now, of course, Goldhagen did not manage this change of the historical agenda all by himself, however hard he tried to create this impression. *HWE* and the debate caused by its publication both firmly fit in the general process of 'coming to terms with the past' (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*)

⁴ I. Kershaw, *The Nazi-dictatorship. Problems & Perspectives of Interpretation*, London 2000 (4th rev. ed.), pp. 251–262. This is all the more telling since Kershaw had removed the chapter on the Historikerstreit. included in 1989 in the 2nd edition, from his 3rd edition in 1993, because of its lack of historiographical impact.

⁵ U. Herbert, "Academic and Public Discourses on the Holocaust", in: *The Dilemmas of Commemoration: German Debates on the Holocaust in the 1990's*, special issue of *German Politics and Society*, vol. 17 (1999), no. 3, p. 47.

⁶ U. Herbert, "Academic and Public Discourses", p. 48: "The question about the motives and forms of participation of Germans in the Holocaust has not been seriously posed by German historians. Not one German historian has investigated or thematized the fact, well-documented by German prosecuting attorneys in the 1960s and 1970s, that a significant number, and probably a majority, of the "direct perpetrators" committed their crimes with enthusiasm". See further: Ch. Gerlach (ed.), *Durchschnittster. Handeln und Motivation*, Berlin 2000; Ch. Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers*, Cambridge 2000.

⁷ Ch. Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, New York 1992.

⁸ See: U. Frevert and A. Assmann, *Geschichtsvergessenheit — Geschichtsversessenheit: vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945*, Stuttgart 1998; M. Hettling, "Die Historisierung der Erinnerung. Westdeutsche Rezeptionen der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit", *Tel Aviv Yearbook for German History* 2000, 29, pp. 357–378.

of a reunited Germany in the 1990's. The famous exhibition of the crimes of the Wehrmacht in Eastcentral Europe did in fact provoke similar questions already in 1995, although it did not provide answers as to motivations. Nevertheless, this exhibition suggested, in its original uncorrected version at least, a similar as to the significant involvement of 'ordinary Germans' in the Holocaust. So both *HWE* and the Wehrmacht-exhibition fundamentally questioned the 'founding myth' of both post-war German states, that is the idea that the massive 'nazi crimes' could be attributed almost exclusively to a minority of clearly identifiable 'nazi's' and to clearly identifiable nazi-organisations, like the SS. This was no great news for the specialists, but for the public at large it surely was. By questioning the traditional borderline between 'the nazi's' and the rest of the Germans — and by questioning it in a 'shocking' way⁹ — both *HWE* and the Wehrmacht-exhibition paved the way for further historical discussions about the involvement of 'ordinary Germans' in the nazi system, including the involvement of the German historians'.¹⁰

This paradoxical success of *HWE* has not gone unnoticed and has called forth quite a few explanations, that went beyond the early appeals to the publishers astute marketing strategy and the young authors charisma. A variety of contextual explanations for the "Goldhagen-phenomenon" have been presented, which clarified the relationships between the simplified argument of the book, the omission's in the existing Holocaust-research and the specific needs of the second post-war-generation, especially in the United States and Germany.¹¹ This ground has been covered extensively and satisfactorily in the meantime and I do not intend to go over trodden paths once more.¹² Instead of analysing the contexts of *HWE*, I will

.....
⁹ The 'shock character' and simplification of 'events' like *HWE* and the Wehrmacht-exhibition are probably the necessary flipside of the public taboos, they are breaking.

¹⁰ For the discussion about the German historians see: P. Schöttler (ed.), *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft 1918–1945*, Frankfurt a.M. 1997 and: R. Hohls and K. Jarausch (eds.), *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart/Munich 2000. For an overview of the historical controversies in Germany with a public character since the 1980's see my article: "Bordercrossings. Some Reflections on Recent Debates in German History", in: *Remembering the Holocaust in Germany 1945–2000: German Strategies and Jewish Responses*, D. Michman (ed.), New York 2001.

¹¹ See: J. Heil and R. Erb (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft und Öffentlichkeit. Der Streit um Daniel J. Goldhagen*, Frankfurt a.M. 1998.

¹² Collections of critiques of Goldhagen are: J. Schoeps (ed.), *Ein Volk von Modern? Die Dokumentation zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse um die Deutschen im Holocaust*, Hamburg 1997; R. ShandIey (ed.), *Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate*, Minneapolis 1998.

CHRIS LORENZ
.....

here take a closer look at the methodological and theoretical anatomy of *HWE*, which has attracted far less attention until now. Only recently two historical sociologists published a methodological analysis of the book, in which they concluded that Goldhagen also failed in terms of his own social scientific research design.¹³ Because of all the intellectual energy that Goldhagen's book has absorbed, it might be worthwhile to stand back for a while in order to take a closer look at its theoretical underpinnings. I will try to do so by clarifying the conceptual structure of the book, because this structure sheds light on the internal logic behind the overwhelming abundance of empirical problems noticed in the critiques. There is more system to *HWE*'s deficiencies than meets the eye.

My main argument will be that the most important empirical problems that have been noted by the critics can basically be explained by Goldhagen's identification of '(German) history' with a 'model'. As such, *HWE* offers a telling illustration of more general problem sometimes observed in social science history, that of 'Model-Platonism' ('Modelplatonismus' in German).¹⁴ In a nutshell, this problem boils down to the identification of a model that is supposed to order reality, with reality itself. In such cases the tool determines the problem instead of the other way around. So what is often presented as an advantage of social scientific history: the explicit ordering and explanation of historical data with the help of a social science model, in this case helps to explain the fundamental flaws and the critical reception of *HWE* among historians. The presupposed methodological advantage, thus, turn out to be a serious disadvantage, and this contributes to the paradoxical character of *HWE*.

In the field of the social sciences, Goldhagen is, in fact, originally a political scientist and with this book he has strayed self-confidently into the territory of — Holocaust — historians. This is important in this case, as he specifically presents himself as a theoretical and methodological innovator, frequently hauling his critics over the coals by appealing to social science methods.¹⁵ It is important, therefore, to analyse what he understands these to mean, all the more so because the author takes his central question

.....

¹³ J. Mahoney and M. Ellsberg, "Goldhagen's Hitler's Willing Executioners: a Clarification and Methodological Critique", *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1999, 12, 4, pp. 422–436.

¹⁴ For an overview of the debate relationship between and the social sciences see my *Die Konstruktion der Vergangenheit. Eine Einführung in die Geschichtstheorie*, Cologne–Weimar–Wien 1997, pp. 323–367.

¹⁵ See especially Goldhagen's "Note on Method", *HWE*, pp. 467–473.

straight from common sense, rather than linking it the academic debate on the Holocaust.¹⁶

The question of whether ‘ordinary’ Germans actually ‘wanted’ the Holocaust, because of their anti-Semitic prejudices, is undoubtedly important, but it can only be a starting point for disciplined research if the exact nature of the question is clarified, that is to say; which comparisons are under discussion.¹⁷ ‘Ordinary’ Germans as opposed to ‘unusual’ Germans? ‘Ordinary’ Germans as opposed to ‘ordinary’ non-Germans? ‘Want’ as opposed to ‘do not want’, ‘want less’, ‘do not really want’, and so on? “German” anti-Semitism as opposed to ‘non-German’ anti-Semitism? It is on exactly this count of precision and clarity of meaning that *HWE* fails the reader completely, despite all the space Goldhagen has devoted to his method and his theoretical framework. All *HWE*’s methodological dress up notwithstanding retrospectively its most striking characteristic turns out to be that it does not even succeed in sensibly framing a clear historical question. I shall argue below that this problem is basically due to *HWE*’s identification of Germany history with a preconceived model: there simply is no research question in *HWE*, because the model applied to history is identified with German history itself and therefore already contains all the answers. The basic function of ‘the facts’ is just to ‘illustrate’ the model instead of ‘testing’ a hypothesis in a comparative way, as Goldhagen himself repeats *ad nauseam*.

GOLDHAGEN’S METHOD

An obvious starting point for an analysis of the method in *HWE* is an investigation of the author’s own claims about it. In that way we will find out how he places the book himself, and which conceptual opposites he uses. According to Goldhagen, his work is not an ordinary, narrative history book about the Holocaust, but a “primarily explanatory and theoretical” study in which he wants to “isolate the influence of anti-Semitism in

.....
¹⁶ For the relationship between the Goldhagen-debate and the other recent public debates on the nazi-past see: *German Politics and Society*, 1999, vol. 17, p. 3.

¹⁷ See for the general problems of comparison and contrast-class in history my “Comparative Historiography: Problems and Perspectives”, *History and Theory* 1999, 38, 1, pp. 25–40.

CHRIS LORENZ

order to test its causal efficacy”.¹⁸ His aim is “explain why the Holocaust occurred, to explain how it could occur”.¹⁹

Goldhagen, in using these contrasts, clearly presents himself as a sophisticated social scientist as opposed to an ordinary historian; the impressionist descriptions and narratives of historians are diametrically opposed to the scientific tests of causal hypotheses derived from theories, which are carried out by social scientists. Goldhagen frequently gives historians a good talking-to about their theoretical, methodological, conceptual and analytical shortcomings. “The conventional explanations’ enormous shortcomings [moreover], are not only empirical. They suffer from common conceptual and theoretical failings”, says Goldhagen, who later specifies these “shortcoming’s profound”.²⁰

Goldhagen’s suspicion and contempt of the status of “historical narrative’ is shared by quite a few other political scientists, who openly doubt the epistemological credentials of narratives. Either based on modernist or on postmodernist premisses, they fundamentally question the ‘narrative mode’ of ‘traditional’ history. Take for instance a typical statement in case of recent date: “Narratives, it was recognised, embody explanations. But they often mobilise mythology and hagiography of their times, mixing literary tropes, notions of morality and causal reasoning in efforts both to justify and to explain. Social scientists therefore found it difficult to extract defensible propositions from these complex mixtures”. No wonder these political scientists go on to cite Robert Fogel in order to advocate “the abandonment of narrative accounts and the exploration, through statistics, of regular and systematically generated events”.²¹

Nevertheless, Goldhagen’s book consists for the most part of descriptive case-studies, in which he reconstructs in detail the ‘contributions’ to

.....
¹⁸ *HWE*, p. 467. See, however, Mahoney’s and Ellsberg’s review for the argument that Goldhagen’s book also fails in terms of its own research design.

¹⁹ *HWE*, p. 5.

²⁰ *HWE*, p. 379, 393.

²¹ R. Bates (eds.), *Analytic Narratives*, Princeton 1998, p. 12. See also symposium on “Analytic Narratives”, *Social Science History* 2000, 24, 4, esp. the contributions of D. Carpenter, “What is the Marginal Value of Analytic Narratives?”, pp. 653–669, and T. Skocpol, “Theory Tackles History”, pp. 669–677. For recent defense of the narrative mode in historical sociology see: J. Bryant, “On Sources and Narratives in Historical Social Science: a Realist Critique of Positivist and Postmodernist Epistemologies”, *British Journal of Sociology* 2000, 51, 2, pp. 489–523. See also my “Culture and Explanation in Historical Inquiry”, *History and Theory* 2000, 39, 3, pp. 348–363.

the Holocaust of the reserve police force, the labour camps and the death marches. These stories, however, remain subservient to explanatory objectives, because the point here should be the comparative testing of different hypotheses.²² He refers to his own central ‘hypothesis’ (i.e.; that the specifically German form of eliminationist anti-Semitism was the motivation for the perpetrators of the Holocaust to murder the Jews *en masse*) in comparison with the hypotheses of other Holocaust historians. Aided by his case studies, he claims to isolate the influence of anti-Semitism in order to be able to determine its causal effect. In this context also, he talks repeatedly about the testing (and even about the ‘stringent’ and ‘tough’ testing) of his ‘hypothesis’.

In the light of the state of the discussion among historians, Goldhagen’s aim was, of course, remarkable, since Holocaust historians stopped trying to reduce the total complexity of the Holocaust to a single motivational factor at least some thirty years ago.²³ Although, directly after 1945, anti-Semitism was initially regarded by many as the explanatory factor, the belief in a single motivational factor for all perpetrators of the Holocaust has long been abandoned. Instead of single factor explanations (which were also often pinned on Hitler), more complex explanations have appeared emphasising combinations of diverse motives and the interaction between motives and variable circumstances of place and time. There has been no room ever since, in the historical debate, for monolithic and single motive explanations of the Holocaust, as Steve Ascheim noted:

We have come full circle. Goldhagen has again inflamed and re-energised the debate by revalidating and recirculating (what was thought to be) the discredited *Sonderspecies* archetype, the notion of ‘ordinary’ Germans as anti-Semitic murderers, impelled to kill exclusively in terms of this historically conditioned, fanatic belief. Scholars have criticised this (correctly, in my view) by arguing that individual genocidal acts can be better explained in terms of a complex cluster of motivational factors. They obviously include anti-Semitism as a central force but also take into account other ideological ingredients. Moreover, they recognise

.....
²² *HWE*, pp. 467–468.

²³ For German historiography see: U. Herbert, *Der Holocaust in der Geschichtsschreibung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, in: *Zweierlei Bewältigung. Vier Beiträge bei dem Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit der beiden deutschen Staaten*, U. Herbert and O. Groehler (eds.), Hamburg 1992, pp. 67–87; N. Frei, *Auschwitz und Holocaust. Begriff und Historiographie*, in: *Die Grenzen des Verstehens. Die Debatte über die Besetzung der Geschichte*, H. Loewy (ed.), Holocaust: Hamburg 1992, pp. 102–110; and: D. Pohl, “Die Holocaust-Forschung und Goldhagen’s Thesen”, *Vierteljahresshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1997, 45, 1, pp. 1–49.

CHRIS LORENZ
.....

the weight of situational factors and take into account generalised psychological mechanisms, evidenced by the equally murderous activities of other national groups (both in the Shoah and elsewhere) that render more intelligible the qualitative leap from conventional every-day prejudice to radical genocidal action.²⁴

This state of discussion was, in fact, completely ignored by Goldhagen. Remarkably, he even openly admitted that he preferred single factor explanations to “some strained patchwork explanation”, without specifying empirical grounds for his preference.²⁵ I believe this is no coincidence, because this explanatory preference can also be reduced to his *a priori* identification of German history with his single motivational factor model. Small wonder, therefore, *HWE* actually is little else than an exercise in single motivational factor explanation, although this ‘explanation’ is made plausible by a ‘refutation’ of competing explanations, as social science ‘hypothesis testing’ prescribes. Therefore, ‘competing’ motivations are ‘checked’ superficially only to be rejected. Let’s have a quick look at his checklist.²⁶

According to Goldhagen, there are others who claim that the perpetrators committed the mass murders because Germans are exceptionally susceptible to authority or to external pressure and so will always follow orders, irrespective of their content. Names of recent historians who uphold this explanation, however, are hard to find.²⁷ Yet other historians seek the explanation in-group pressure, which would account for why individuals with moral inhibitions ‘joined in’ nevertheless. Christopher Browning rendered this partial explanation plausible in his book *Ordinary men*. The motive of self-interest or opportunism has also been proposed as a partial explanation for the perpetrators; they would have been prepared to do anything to ensure that their careers were not harmed. Hans Mommsen and Götz Aly, who investigated the bureaucrats involved in the Holocaust, are mentioned as representatives of this point of view.

Finally, according to Goldhagen, there is the proposed explanation of the bureaucratic division of labour, whereby the bureaucratic perpetrators had no idea of their contribution to the ‘project’ as a whole and therefore felt no responsibility. This ‘banal’ explanation for ‘the banality of evil’

.....
²⁴ S. Ascheim, “Reflections”, pp. 248–249.

²⁵ *HWE*, 594 n. 42.

²⁶ *HWE*, pp. 10–14, 375–416.

²⁷ *HWE*, p. 379.

(Hannah Arendt) is attributed to Raul Hilberg, Zygmunt Bauman and Michael Marrus.

Not surprisingly, none of these ‘competing’ motives withstand the ‘test’ of Goldhagen’s case studies, although he fails to specify how the comparison of the ‘causal impact’ of the different motives is assessed. Remarkably for a social scientist propagating social science methodology, there is no weighting of competing ‘hypotheses’ or of their relative probabilities, given the evidence. Although he constantly refers to the need to explain the Holocaust by way of comparison, the relevant comparisons are glaringly absent. This holds as well for the comparison of Germans with non-Germans as perpetrators of mass murder as for the comparison of Jews with non-Jews as victims of German mass murder: Goldhagen never researches whether the cruelty was only specific for the German perpetrators and for their Jewish victims, although he does frame these questions — characteristically *post festum*, at the very end of *HWE*. Typically, he merely suggests some tantalizing and unsubstantiated answers²⁸ in order to return as fast as possible to his familiar track.²⁹ The answer to this crucial question is simply assumed *a priori* in order to attribute the cruelty to the specific German brand of anti-Semitism and so maintain the fabric of his central ‘argument’. His answer is based on his central assumption that there exists a ‘special’ and ‘negative’ relationship between Jewishness and German-ness. Because of this assumption, there is only a rhetoric of comparison in *HWE*, and not actual comparative research.

Only the outcome of Goldhagen’s uncontrollable ‘comparisons’ is crystal clear: there is just one motive that accounted for the German mass murder of the Jews... and that is the mass will to murder Jews *en masse* that existed (until 1945) among The Germans. Motives other than anti-Semitism might perhaps clarify individual murders, but not the Holocaust as a whole. That was simply “a German national project”, the work of “ordinary Germans”, *alias* “Hitler’s willing executioners”. As far as the motives of the

.....
²⁸ *HWE*, p. 408: “That some non-Germans did act similarly suggests either that we must what they had in common with the German perpetrators or that there might be more than one path to becoming a perpetrator of mass slaughter”.

²⁹ *HWE*, p. 409: “Whatever such studies would yield, the main purpose of comparing German Perpetrators to those of other national groups who aided the Germans remains the illumination of the sources of the Germans’ actions, because, as I maintain in the introduction, the Germans were the prime movers, and the central and only indispensable perpetrators of the Holocaust”. See also p. 414: “This brief comparative treatment suggests that the cognitive explanation of the Holocaust does fulfill the criteria of a powerful explanation”.

CHRIS LORENZ

Holocaust perpetrators are concerned, therefore, a “mono-causal explanation” is sufficient, i.e. the specifically German “racist, eliminationist anti-Semitism”:³⁰ “Germans could say ‘no’ to mass murder. They chose to say ‘yes’”.³¹ Because they did not murder under ‘external pressure’, they must have acted out of their own ‘free will’.

At one point in the text, he typifies this motive as a necessary and sufficient condition for the actions of the Holocaust perpetrators.³² This characterisation implies the strongest possible explanatory claim and leads us to the heart of Goldhagen’s ‘method’. It can therefore, in my opinion, rightly be regarded as the Freudian slip of *HWE*. What the characterisation amounts to, after all, is that the mass murder of the Jews could not have taken place unless the Germans were driven by this motive (because it is necessary), and also that this motive led inevitably to the murderous actions of the Germans against the Jews (because it was in itself sufficient). So in this passage Goldhagen posits an inseparable link between the Germans (until 1945) and the Holocaust, and can thus even maintain that the Holocaust was predictable.³³

Later on in his argument, Goldhagen wisely omits to mention German anti-Semitism as a sufficient condition, only alluding to it as necessary condition of the Holocaust. However, this move does not suffice to back up Goldhagen’s explanatory claim, because this move opens the door for marshalling an indefinite number of ‘necessary causes’ for the Holocaust and thus may lead him straight to the type of “patchwork explanation” he explicitly rejected.³⁴ In order to uphold his special explanatory claim — and the explicit rationale for writing *HWE* — Goldhagen therefore has to stick to anti-Semitism as the sufficient motivational condition.

³⁰ *HWE*, pp. 10–11, 404, 416–418.

³¹ *HWE*, p. 381.

³² *HWE*, pp. 417–418: “Not only was German antisemitism in this historical instance a sufficient cause, but it was also necessary cause for such broad German participation in the persecution and mass slaughter of Jews, and for Germans to have treated in all the Heartless, harsh, and cruel ways that they did”. On p. 416, however, Goldhagen restricts this claim somewhat: “With regard to the motivational cause of the Holocaust, for the vast majority of perpetrators, a monocausal explanation does suffice”. The empirical basis for this restriction is not made explicit. For a general analysis of the idea of necessary and sufficient conditions see my *Konstruktion der Vergangenheit*, pp. 188–207.

³³ *HWE*, p. 89: “During its Nazi period, German antisemitism look predictable turns”.

³⁴ After all, the presence of such trivial things as guns, bullets, spades and gas etc. were also necessary conditions for the Holocaust to occur, because without them it would not have occurred the way it actually did.

The afore-mentioned Freudian ‘slip’ is the key to Goldhagen’s model and method, because the conviction that Goldhagen expresses in it — namely of a necessary and sufficient relationship between the Germans and the Holocaust — turns out not to be the product of his empirical research (as he asserts over and over again) but to be a presupposition that is introduced in advance of empirical research. And although this presupposition is simultaneously referred to as a ‘hypothesis’, it is never submitted to any serious testing: it is in fact, simultaneously both the premise and the conclusion of *HWE*. Just as the Jewishness of the Holocaust-victims can be established *a priori*, so is the German-ness of the Holocaust-perpetrators in *HWE*.

Now, of course, every’ research design contains a certain circular element, because the design specifies which factors will be dealt with and thus — by implication — which are left out. There is, in principle, nothing wrong with this type of ‘circularity’, because selection is the prize we pay for empirical research as such.³⁵ The only *proviso* of scholarly research, however, is that the relationships between the variables within the limits of the research design are established on the basis of research, i.e. by empirical means, and not by definitional means, i.e. *a priori*. This is exactly the point where *HWE* takes a wrong and fateful turn, because Goldhagen’s conclusion, that the (motivational) explanation of the Holocaust is the eliminationist anti-Semitism of the Germans, is already contained in his definitions and by no means the result of his empirical ‘testing’ of various hypotheses.

Goldhagen puts the conceptual relationship between the Germans and the Holocaust straight into the first chapter of his book, where he identifies the Holocaust perpetrators as a single homogeneous collective and national subject, i.e. ‘The Germans’!³⁶ ‘No Germans, no Holocaust’, is how Goldhagen’s argument reads for this radical conceptual step.

The most important consequence of this definition is undoubtedly that, in this way, the national identity of the Germans is exalted to the distinctive and explanatory feature of their being mass murderers of the Jews. Goldhagen makes no bones about his central argument: “The first task in restoring the perpetrators to the centre of our understanding of the Holocaust is to restore to them their identities, grammatically by using not

.....
³⁵ This type circularity was identified in the hermeneutical tradition as the ‘hermeneutic circle’ or ‘spiral’.

³⁶ *HWE*, p. 6.

CHRIS LORENZ

the passive but the active voice in order to ensure that they, the actors, are not absent from their own deeds (as in «five hundred Jews were killed in city X on date Y»), and by eschewing convenient, yet inappropriate and obfuscating labels, like ‘Nazi’s’ and ‘SS men’, and calling them what they were, ‘Germans’.³⁷ Goldhagen, thus, seemed to subscribe to the remarkable theory that the individual identity of the perpetrators can be reduced to one collective identity, i.e. their being German. Whatever the empirical status of this theory, it surely is a great help in order to write Holocaust-history in monolithic categories of ‘German perpetrators versus Jewish victim’s and to obliterate Primo Levi’s morally disquieting ‘grey zone’.

After having defined the identity of the Holocaust perpetrators as the German national identity, Goldhagen goes on to define Nazism and German society: “The Holocaust was the defining aspect of Nazism, but not only of Nazism. It was the defining feature of German society during its Nazi period”.³⁸ Later on, he drops this time limit imperceptibly, when eliminationist anti-Semitism becomes the defining feature of German culture and history as a whole (from the Middle Ages until 1945).³⁹ According to this definition, being an eliminationist anti-Semite is a characteristic of Germans, just as having stripes is a characteristic of zebras. This definition of Germans in terms of ‘eliminationist anti-Semitism’ also explains why Goldhagen remains almost blind to other categories of German victims except Jews, as has been noted by some of his critics.

My interpretation of Goldhagen’s method clarifies some important empirical problems with the book, which have been pointed out in the reviews. First of all, it becomes apparent why there is an absence of systematic empirical comparisons between Germans and non-Germans. This is also the case for German and non-German anti-Semitism; Goldhagen already knows beforehand how German anti-Semitism differs from non-German varieties, as has been pointed out in the critiques of Browning, Pohl, Birn and Finkelstein.⁴⁰ On the grounds of Goldhagen’s assumptions as outlined above, such comparative research is as superfluous as a comparative study of the difference between zebras and horses, when we already

.....
³⁷ *HWE*, p. 6.

³⁸ *HWE*, p. 8.

³⁹ *HWE*, pp. 49–128.

⁴⁰ R. Birn, “Revising the Holocaust”, *Historical Journal* 1997, 40, 1, pp. 195–215; N. Finkelstein, “Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s ‘Crazy Thesis’: a Critique of *Hitlers Willing Executioners*”, *New Left Review* 1997, 224, pp. 39–87; Ch. Browning, “Daniel Goldhagen’s *Willing Executioners*”, *History & Memory* 8, 1, pp. 88–108; D. Pohl, “Goldhagen’s Thesen und Holocaustforschung”.

know that zebras have stripes and horses do not. Whatever is presented as a conceptual trait or by definition (in Goldhagen's case, the Germanness of the Holocaust perpetrators and the specifically genocidal character of modern German anti-Semitism) does not need any more empirical research. Therefore there is a logical need in *HWE* to stick to one and only one explanatory factor, i.e. to mono-causal explanation. Goldhagen's open disdain for competing explanations — that is, for practically the whole of the existing scholarly literature on the Holocaust — is therefore also a consequence of his conceptual strategy and not accidental. When Goldhagen alludes to comparisons (as in the case of the death marches), therefore, it even can not be a 'test' of his 'hypothesis', but only the umpteenth 'illustration' of its accuracy.

Secondly, this conceptual link between the Germans, German society and eliminationist anti-Semitism explains why Goldhagen eventually runs into problems with the relationship between the presumed free will of Germans, their genocidal anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. If Germans were eliminationist anti-Semites purely on account of being German, and if this anti-Semitism led, by necessity, to genocidal actions (as Goldhagen's theory, by his own account, 'suggests'), then Goldhagen's Germans, paradoxically, could do little other than execute 'their' Holocaust. His later attempts (in the preface of the German edition of *HWE*) to free *HWE* from its determinist and collectivist implications, are only 'paid' by the 'price' of total internal inconsistency.⁴¹ I shall deal with both these problems respectively.

THE HOLOCAUST AS A GERMAN NATIONAL PROJECT

Fundamentally important to *HWE* is the definition of the Holocaust as 1. German national and 2. a project. The first characterisation contrasts with the generalising interpretation à la Browning and Bauman, in which the Holocaust is classified as a (particular) example of (general) genocide. That is why Goldhagen (surprisingly, for a practitioner of generalising social science), emphasises *ad nauseam* the unique and specifically German character of the Holocaust. The characterisation of the Holocaust as a 'project' contrasts with 'structuralist' interpretations of the Third Reich, such as those of Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat. The fact that

.....
⁴¹ See Appendix 3 in *HWE*, pp. 477–483.

CHRIS LORENZ

the debate between Holocaust-historians has moved beyond the opposition between intentionalism and structuralism in the past decade seems to have escaped Goldhagen's attention, however.⁴² 'Structuralist' historians explain the Holocaust as the consequence of an unplanned process of 'cumulative radicalisation' that was connected to the bipartite institutional structure of the Nazi state. According to this view, the Nazi state was not a monocratic dictatorship, where everyone immediately carried out Hitler's orders, but a polycracy, in which a chaotic battle of competency reigned between the old state organisations and those of the new Nazi regimes. This power struggle was all about the institutional 'survival of the fittest' and during it, increasingly radical 'solutions' to 'problems' (among which, 'the Jewish problem') were invented and selected. So, according to this interpretation, the way to Auschwitz was not straight, as 'intentionalist' historian's claim, but twisted.⁴³

By defining the Holocaust as a 'project', *HWE* is firmly attached to the intentionalist track and Goldhagen makes no qualms about it. He argues that people — including Germans before 1945 — most certainly have a 'free will', which for Goldhagen basically means that if they did something, then they must have wanted to:⁴⁴ intention and consequence correspond with ease for Goldhagen. Because individuals (Germans) and collectives (Germany, 'ordinary Germans', and 'the German people') are simply identified with each other, there is no difference between what is intended by individuals and what do they bring about collectively.⁴⁵ This super-intentionalism (Götz Aly) is rather surprising in a social scientist, because social science is usually justified vis a vis history by its study of *unintentional* consequences of social actions and their logic. If everything was intentional and always went according to plan, it would result in social scientists

⁴² See I. Kershaw, *Nazi-dictatorship*, pp. 93–134; for an overview of the debate until the present.

⁴³ For Martin Broszats structuralist interpretation and its problems see article "Has the Third Reich Become History? Martin Broszat as Historian and Pedagogue", *Bulletin of the Arnold and Leona Finkler Institute of Holocaust Research* 1998, no. 8. pp. XXVII–XIV. Van Pelt and Dwork recently enforced this interpretation in *Auschwitz from 1270 to the present*, a meticulous history of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. According to their reconstruction, not only the way to 'Auschwitz', but also the ways of Auschwitz were anything but straightforward. See: R.J. van Pelt and D. Dwork, *Auschwitz from 1270 to the Present*, New Heaven 1966.

⁴⁴ *HWE*, pp. 116, 395.

⁴⁵ *HWE*, pp. 46, 48, 77, 79, 82, 87, 102, 123–124, and esp. 399: "A consonance between the macro, the meso, and the micro existed, because the same beliefs moved policy makers, infused and shaped the character of the institutions of killing, and motivated the executors of genocidal policy. Of one mind, confronting their common foe, Germans in face-to-face relations with Jews, reproduced the thinking of those who shaped overall policy".

being out of work. Due to his definition of the Holocaust as a — or rather the — German national project', Goldhagen, however, has no choice but to cling to super-intentionalism. This super-intentionalism of Goldhagen's actor model is again, by necessity, translated into a completely linear model of German history, because German history can be no other than the progressive 'unfolding' of the genocidal anti-Semitic intention, alias the genesis of the Holocaust. The essential *Geist* of German history has always been clothed in a brown uniform with a swastika, according to *HWE*.

No wonder that within *HWE*'s super-intentionalist universe, Germany's way from Luther to Auschwitz is dead straight.⁴⁶ The question by which 'route' German history lead to 'Auschwitz' can even not be meaningfully asked in *HWE*, because being German and being 'eliminationist' are assumed to be identical. On the basis of this assumption Goldhagen is capable, when looking at photos from one Nazi demonstration in Nuremberg, of seeing "the faces of ordinary Germans — that is, the collective face of Nuremberg and Germany", as well as their "ardent support for their government and the eliminationist programme".⁴⁷

Due to the introduction of super-intentionalism another fundamental problem, which torments most other practitioners of empirical social science, also simply disappears in *HWE* (although it is once referred to as problem, only to be put aside abruptly⁴⁸). I refer here to the problem of how conclusions which are based on a very limited number of cases (for example, one, two or three police battalions etc.) can have any bearing on larger collectives (the German police, or all of the 'ordinary' Germans). Goldhagen's fundamental conclusion that 'The murderers of the Jews were ordinary Germans, therefore all ordinary Germans were murderers' (criticised by nearly every reviewer), is not just an incidental blunder, but a necessary consequence of his (conceptual) strategy.⁴⁹ The only intrinsic definition that German-ness receives in *HWE* is the characteristic of eliminationist anti-Semitism: 'The German' (till 1945) is simply the anti-Jew,

.....
⁴⁶ *HWE*, pp. 132, 161–162, 422.

⁴⁷ *HWE*, p. 102.

⁴⁸ *HWE*, p. 468: "(So) even though the case chapters are devoted to only a few police battalions, work camps, and death marches, my conclusions are buttressed by a still more extensive fund of knowledge". Typically, conflicting or ambiguous evidence is not even mentioned as a possibility.

⁴⁹ See *HWE*, p. 402, where he states that "the conclusions drawn about the overall characteristics of the members actions [of the police battalions, ChrL] can, indeed must be, generalized to the German people in general. What these ordinary Germans did also could be expected of other ordinary Germans".

CHRIS LORENZ

and German nationalism is nothing other than eliminationist anti-Semitism. Goldhagen just elevates the ‘negative symbiosis’, that has characterised the Germans and Jews since ‘Auschwitz’, into the hallmark of Germany history as such and has projected its origins back into the Middle Ages.

A second consequence of this identification is that the ‘free will’ of individual Germans disappears into their culture of eliminationist anti-Semitism. If being German necessarily meant being an eliminationist anti-Semite (till 1945), then individual Germans could do little or nothing other pursue their ‘national project’, i.e. the Holocaust. Seen in this light, Hitler’s ‘willing executioners’ were culturally programmed (anti-Semitic) automata. Among Goldhagen’s reviewers, Pesch and Helle in particular have pointed out this paradoxical problem.⁵⁰ The paradox is demonstrated yet again by the fact that Goldhagen was enough of a trend follower to wish to interpret cultures à la Geertz as ‘social conversations’, yet he reconstructed the German culture as a single monologue on eliminationist anti-Semitism, and ascribed to that anti-Semitism a similar status of unconsciousness as the grammar of languages.⁵¹

GOLDHAGEN’S ONE-DIMENSIONAL ACTOR MODEL OF THE GERMAN

The problems which result from Goldhagen identifying Germans with genocidal anti-Semitism, whilst still maintaining their ‘free will’, also crop up in his one-dimensional view of how people transform intentions into actions, i.e. his actor model, and in his one-dimensional view of German history. Both views are analysed respectively below.

Goldhagen’s view of how people act seems to be grafted onto so-called rational choice theory.⁵² This theory strives to explain the actions of in-

⁵⁰ A. Helle, “Kein ganz gewöhnlicher Streit: Zur Zeitgebundenheit der Goldhagendebatte”, *Leviathan. Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft* 1997, 25, 2, pp. 251–271, bes pp. 257–262; V. Pesch, “Die künstlichen Wilden. Zu Daniel Goldhagens Methode und theoretischen Rahmen”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1997, 23, pp. 152–262.

⁵¹ *HWE*, p. 46: “An individual learns the cognitive models of his culture, like grammar, surely and effortlessly”. Although Goldhagen acknowledges “exception to the rule” (47), he at the same time sticks to his thesis that “in Germany during the Nazi period an almost universally held conceptualization of the Jews existed which constituted what can be called an ‘eliminationist’ ideology”.

⁵² See for rational choice theory and its problems the discussion on Analytic narratives in note 20 and: A. van den Berg, “Out of Habit. Notes Towards a General Theory of Deliberate Action”, *Amsterdams Sociologisch Tijdschrift* 1998, 25, 3, pp. 429–463.

dividuals (actors) as the rational choice between alternative actions, based on certain fixed preferences. The free will of the individual is manifested in the choice. In this kind of theory, it is assumed that individuals possess fixed preferences, which are established in the actor model. An example of this is the model of homo economicus in the theory of economics; the economic model actor will always be guided in his choices by his 'economic' preference, i.e. the optimal relationship between price and product. As most real-life individuals do not usually have such fixed and consistent preferences as the theoretically constructed model actors, they differ from each other significantly. For this reason alone, it is not wise to interchange real people and model actors. Most significantly, this is precisely what we see happen in *HWE*.

In his analysis of actions, Goldhagen makes a distinction between ideals, intentions and implementation.⁵³ Ideals are an individual's thoughts as to what is optimally desirable in the world, independent of the limitations of reality. Intentions are the plans of action, which are derived from ideals but take into account the real limiting circumstances. And finally, implementation is the transformation of intentions into actions, taking into account the limiting circumstances and other, rival, intentions. By no means must implementation automatically reflect the intention in question. When circumstances are unfavourable, the relationship between ideal and implementation can even be exceptionally obscure, writes Goldhagen, apparently for a moment forgetful of his earlier super-intentionalism — at least in theory. In his case studies, however, he is able to show with ease the direct relationship between ideal, intention and implementation in the actions of the Germans.

Goldhagen goes on to use this three-stage model of actions to lend plausibility to the permanent presence, in German history, of the ideal of eliminationist anti-Semitism, even though this was often 'obscure' before 1933. What he does in his case studies amounts to the identification of his actor model with the historical actors. This results in Germans from the Nazi period being credited with the characteristics of model actors, who, by definition, make only rational choice because they are equipped solely with rational qualities. Goldhagen, then, simply postulates that Germans 'were actors with a will, who made deliberate choice in accordance with existing and evolving ideas'. This means that Goldhagen interprets all actions (of

.....
⁵³ *HWE*, pp. 134–135.

CHRIS LORENZ

.....

Germans) as the result of a conscious process, in which preferences are rationally weighed against each other.

An illustration of his outlook can be found in his analysis of the death marches towards the end the war. Why, wonders Goldhagen aloud, did the Germans go on putting the Jews to death, even after Himmler himself had given the order to stop? Wouldn't have been more sensible, in view of the fast-approaching defeat, to have obeyed that order? Yes, it certainly would, according to Goldhagen, but the Germans made the deliberate choice still to murder as many Jews as possible, simply because they wanted to. Germans (referred to elsewhere by Goldhagen as the 'new savages', who have so little in common with 'ordinary', modern human beings that they warrant an 'anthropological' approach⁵⁴), are modelled here as the absolutely goal-rational children of the anti-Enlightenment, who always weigh up alternative actions in the light of their fixed preference, i.e. the elimination of Jews. Even in the chaos and madness of the last months of the war, Goldhagen finds a purely means-to-an-end rationality of the model actor in the concrete Germans.

In this identification of historical Germans with rational model actors, a drastic and fatal reduction of historical complexity of action takes place. Firstly, all actions which are non-deliberate, but just carried out mindlessly on a routine basis, are lost from view, as are all actions which spring from indifference, emotion and impulse, etc. During wartime, these kinds of action are, presumably, of some significance. After all, is the opposite of love not hate, but indifference? And has Browning not suggested that even murder can become routine for 'ordinary' people?

Secondly, an unjust reduction of complexity of intentionality takes place by means of this identification. In contrast to the afore-mentioned model actors, real people are often guided by a multitude of intentions, rather than just one, and the relationships between them are not always equally clear and stable. Thus, people who carry out 'ethnic cleansing' are often guided not only by the ideological motive of effecting the 'ethnic purity' of 'their' territory, but also by the motive of being able to plunder, rape and murder without punishment. On these two grounds, the complexity of action and intentionality is much greater in reality than in rational choice theory, and it is certainly impossible to interpret every human action as a manifestation of rationally efficient 'free will'.

.....

⁵⁴ *HWE*, p. 15.

But his is exactly what Goldhagen does, and not by accident either. His disinterest in the empirical complexity of the Germans' actions, as pointed out in the reviews is based on the fact that he already knows a priori the top priority of Germans, i.e. the elimination of the Jews. This results systematically in Goldhagen's one-dimensional treatment of the source material, which has been heavily criticised in the reactions of Birn, Browning, Pohl and Finkelstein.⁵⁵

GOLDHAGEN'S ONE-DIMENSIONAL CONSTRUCT OF GERMAN HISTORY

The model German history, which Goldhagen constructs, perfectly reflects the one- dimensionality that is embodied in his actor model. This also is no accident, as it is derived from a process used in classical sociology and philosophy of history. German history since the Middle Ages is transformed and reduced by Goldhagen to a linear prehistory of the Holocaust alias to the development of the Genocidal Anti-Semite. Whoever recognizes this movement can, unconcernedly, call the 'Kristallnacht' "a pro- to-genocidal assault" and the "psychological equivalent of genocide".⁵⁶ The attention to specific time, place and sequence of events, and to the complex interaction between movement and counter-movement, continuity and discontinuity, which is usual in 'ordinary' history, is nowhere to be found in *HWE*. Just as 'social conversation' in Germany (till 1945) is an anti-Semitic monologue, according to Goldhagen, so is German history (till 1945) linear.

This linear aspect of Goldhagen's viewpoint can also be reduced to a systematic root. Because he already knows the direction and the outcome of German history (till 1945), i.e. the Holocaust, he does not have to concern himself with all kinds of trifling questions of time and place. This way of dealing with history is known as teleological (goal-oriented, as if the whole of German history was moving towards its goal of the Holocaust), deterministic (as if it was predetermined that German history should result in the Holocaust), and anachronistic (against chronology, because history before 1941 is seen from a point of view in time that did not exist for contemporaries). Most professional historians generally try to avoid this method of working, because they endeavour to convey history as it would

.....
⁵⁵ See note 40.

⁵⁶ *HWE*, p. 141.

CHRIS LORENZ
.....

have been experienced by contemporaries, i.e. as an open, undetermined and complex process, in which the outcome is never known beforehand, making conditions of time and place therefore essential.

Goldhagen's outlook on the scholarly approach to history clearly differs from the common one: "Ground-level perspectives are highly instructive — and necessary — but they are only a supplement to, not a substitute for, the aerial overview".⁵⁷ Accordingly, his view on the relationship between empirical research and theory is also the reverse from the usual one found among historians: "[Yet] the theoretical assessment alone is not sufficient. An empirical investigation is also necessary"⁵⁸ (*sic!*). But not as other Holocaust historians go about it, because they think that the Holocaust can be explained by universal motives, such as group pressure, opportunism etc. and are thus, according to Goldhagen, not really engaged in proper historical practice.⁵⁹ Remarkably for a social scientist, Goldhagen apparently views 'German-ness' as a particular characteristic in opposition with all general characteristics and not as a specific combination of general characteristics. This is another necessary consequence of the definitional identification of 'German-ness' with 'genocidal anti-Semitism' and the Holocaust.

To lend empirical plausibility to his theoretically constructed 'tunnel history' of Germany, Goldhagen introduces a remarkable supporting construction, i.e. the difference between manifest and latent anti-Semitism, which calls to mind the Marxist supporting construction of 'false class-consciousness'. His problem is to explain why the development of eliminationist anti-Semitism was not always visible to everybody (including German Jews), and was only exalted to an official 'national project' as from 1933. Goldhagen solves this problem by introducing the assumption that whenever eliminationist anti-Semitism was invisible, it was still omnipresent, but in a latent form. Circumstances dictated whether this anti-Semitism was manifest or latent, and how much chance it stood of being put into practice, but anti-Semitism itself did not change *au fond*. In a developmental process unspecified as to time and place, the idea of eliminating the Jews just went from bad to worse, till it came to fruition with the Nazis. Circumstances could, at best, slow down this process temporarily, but they

.....
⁵⁷ *HWE*, p. 133.⁵⁸ *HWE*, p. 128.⁵⁹ *HWE*, pp. 389, 391, 470.

could not stop it. The essential *Ungeist* of German history inevitably just marched on and on and on... until it was stopped from outside in 1945.

Here too, a comparison of Goldhagen's historical view with that of classical Marxism is enlightening. In both views, history is a single movement, in which a single essence is becoming manifest in various stages. This essence is viewed as an immanent principle of the historical process, as well as a political utopia. When the last (utopian) stage is reached, then 'actual' history comes to a halt. In classical Marxism, the essence of history is the 'socialisation of the means of production', which is crystallised through successive modes of production to eventually assume its definitive form in communism (the renowned 'classless society'). In Goldhagen's view, anti-Semitism is the essence of German history, both as force that really exists and as a (negative) utopia. In any case, he interprets German history as a succession of religious, ethnic and biological manifestations of eliminationist anti-Semitism. Eliminationist anti-Semitism look on its definitive shape under Hitler in the pursuit of a 'Jewless society'. From Goldhagen's standpoint, then, actual German history comes to a halt after Hitler, in 1945, and from a systematic point of view, he can do little other than suddenly declare the post-war Germans cured of their age-old evil convictions about the Jews (see the preface to the German edition⁶⁰). Goldhagen's 'motor' of German history simply runs out of its 'fuel' without 'Genocidal anti-Semitism', just like the Marxist 'motor' of history runs out of its 'fuel' without class struggle.

Goldhagen's later 'explanation' of the sudden disappearance of the genocidal, German brand of anti-Semitism after 1945 as a consequence of Germany's 'reeducation' and democratization was little else than a *deus ex machina*.⁶¹ Besides, it was, of course, a wonderful *political* message for the general public, especially in Germany, although he repeatedly disclaimed any moral or political intentions. And, paradoxically, Goldhagen's message did provoke some reactions in Germany, which belied his central thesis that after 1945 anti-Semitism had evaporated in thin air.⁶² One of *HWE*'s

.....
⁶⁰ *HWE*, Appendix 3, pp. 477–484.

⁶¹ This 'explanation' was furnished in the foreword to the German edition, reprinted in the late English editions: see *HWE*, p. 482.

⁶² See S. Ascheim, "Reflections", 246, where he signals reactions to the book in the form of "thinly veiled threats", reinforcing "the view many problematic, traditional German attitudes may remain in place, albeit under the surface".

CHRIS LORENZ

central theses based on one of its central supporting constructions — was thus ‘refuted’ in more than one way.

EPILOGUE

Goldhagens *HWE* was a deliberate attempt to surpass (and do away with) ‘traditional’ (Holocaust-)history, ‘traditional’ (Holocaust-)historians and ‘traditional’ historical method. This attempt has failed utterly, basically because of the resistance offered on basis of ‘traditional’ historical method. What merits of *HWE* there are, thus must be located elsewhere than the author of *HWE* intended (thereby presenting an unintended ‘refutation’ of ‘intentionalism’ himself). In fact, the paradoxical merit of *HWE* lies mainly in its unintended demonstration that there was something fundamentally wrong with its method: the fact that *HWE*’s ‘modelisation’ of (German) history failed so openly, testifies to the enduring resistance of the historical facts to the ‘imposing’ of constructions, that do not ‘fit’. This observation, of course, does not imply that theories and models play no role in history — they most certainly do⁶³ — but only they should be developed and applied with due historical care. Clearly, however, ‘modelling’ is no substitute for the hard work of the historian, let alone a ‘short cut’ for the (at least double) hard work of the comparative historian.

From this perspective the fatal collection of *HWE* with historical method can be interpreted not only as the failure of social scientific ‘model-propaganda’, but at the same time as the failure of post-modern ‘any thing goes’ ideas. This connection should not come as a great surprise, because postmodernist positions are often the result of an inversion of modernist — scientististic — positions.⁶⁴ The lasting value of *HWE* may therefore consist in its function as a beacon of what students of history better avoid, because Hitler’s willing executioners may have made its author into a millionaire, but at the same time it has wrecked his academic career.⁶⁵

⁶³ See my *Konstruktion der Vergangenheit*, chapter 13. for this argument.

⁶⁴ For an analysis of this type of inversion see my article “Narrativism, Positivism and Metaphorical Turn”, *History and Theory* 1998, 37 (1998), 3, pp. 309–329. See also my “Post-moderne Herausforderungen an die Gesellschaftsgeschichte?”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1998, 24, 4, pp. 617–632.

⁶⁵ This characterisation of Goldhagen’s academic fate I owe to Jeffrey Herf. Manfred Holdings conclusion that the debate on Goldhagen’s book is far more interesting than the book itself points in the same direction. See his review Goldhagen in *Comparativ. Leipziger Beiträge zur Universalgeschichte* 7, 4, pp. 123–128.

Modelowi mordercy.
Refleksje o metodzie i historii według Goldhagena

Autor artykułu wykazuje, że jakkolwiek książka Goldhagena pisana była z pozycji przedstawiciela nauk politycznych, w rzeczywistości wkroczyła na grunt historii, historii Holokaustu w szczególności. Była też próbą świadomego przekroczenia, a nawet odrzucenia tradycyjnej historii Holokaustu. Zdaniem autora artykułu była to próba nieudana. Goldhagen zastosował w niej model wyjaśniania omówiony krytycznie w artykule, który w efekcie okazał się zbyt ubogi zarówno w odniesieniu do wyjaśniania historycznych faktów, jak i ich interpretacji stworzonych przez literaturę Holokaustu. Model Goldhagena zasada się na centralnej hipotezie, według której specyficzna, niemiecka forma antysemityzmu eliminującego była zasadniczą motywacją masowych mordów dokonywanych na Żydach. Ta forma antysemityzmu miała być typowa dla Niemców przed 1945 rokiem. Doprowadziła do powstania i realizacji swoistego narodowego projektu likwidacji Żydów. Realizacja projektu była następstwem chęci eliminacji Żydów. Zdaniem autora artykułu jest to jednostronny model wyjaśnienia historii Niemiec. Pomimo przyjętych pierwotnie założeń prowadzi do prostego, linearnego i teleologicznego wzorca wyjaśnień. W takiej interpretacji Holokaust na swój sposób stałby się czymś z góry przesądzonym w historii Niemiec, a sama historia Niemiec musiałaby się na swój sposób zatrzymać w 1945 roku. Jednym z niezamierzonych, pozytywnych skutków omawianej książki jest zatem ukazanie swoistej oporności faktów historycznych wobec nakładania na nie nieodpowiednich konstrukcji. Negatywna ocena wyników metody zastosowanej przez Goldhagena nie oznacza zdaniem autora artykułu klęski stosowania teorii i modelu w historii. Oznacza jedynie, że samo modelowanie nie zastąpi „twardej pracy historyka”.