

An Interview With Prof. Yehuda Bauer

Director of the International Center for Holocaust Studies of Yad Vashem

January 18, 1998, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem

Interviewer: Amos Goldberg

The Background to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust

Q- Can you point to a reason, or reasons, as to why the Holocaust took place between the Germans and the Jews?

B- The overall answer, I suppose, lies in the history of the Jews within European or, if you like, Christian/Moslem culture. Any kind of a radical rebellion against Western civilization had a good chance of turning against the Jews. In other words, one answer would be traditional antisemitism.

Regarding the Germans, however, it was the result of specific circumstances that took place in Germany, and which developed over time. There is nothing genetically German in the Holocaust; it could have happened elsewhere.

Practically all of Europe was Christian, and Jews in Christian perception had a very central place, because they, after all, were the background against which Christianity arose. This background could not be eradicated; it had to be there all the time. Christianity saw in the Jews the symbol of evil, the symbol of the devil, because they believed – of course, as we know quite wrongly – that the Jews were somehow responsible for the crucifixion of the Christian messiah. And only the devil could have wanted the crucifixion of the Christian messiah.

Now what did the devil want? The devil wanted to rule the world, and so the Jews, possessed by the devil, wanted to rule the world. That, I think, is the origin of the idea that the Nazis adopted, of a Jewish conspiracy to control the world. This developed over time, of course, with its ups and downs. There were also some Christian trends, or streams of thought, that were opposed to

this, that were more pro-Jewish than that, but they were a small minority. Overall, the Jew was the prototypical "other" in Christian self-understanding.

With the modernization and industrialization of society, the Christian element in this became less important. Nowhere in Christian thought or in Christian history was there ever a plan to kill the Jewish people – never. Jews had to be kept underfoot... Jews had to be deprived of equal rights... Jews could not do this, and could not do the other.... But a genocidal program never developed in Christianity, because there was a moral hindrance that Christianity created to any kind of genocidal thought. In other words, to kill a Jew was to kill a person, a human being, and this was against the law of God, and so it was forbidden – in theory. In practice, of course, this was very often overcome by mobs that killed Jews in large numbers, but this was against Christian theology.

The moment that Christianity was abandoned, the moment that there was a rebellion against it (through the secularization that began in the 18th century), you had Christian antisemitism without Christianity. And then antisemitism, clear and undiluted, could turn towards the logical end of an argument that said the Jew was a symbol of the devil. Now he became the devil himself and, of course, the devil had to be destroyed. There is a certain logic in that. This has nothing to do with Germany per se, but rather with Western civilization in general.

However, there was a minority trend of thought developing that led to genocide. It took place in Germany, I think, because it's elite, composed of bureaucracy, aristocracy, church and mainly academia, as well as doctors, lawyers, engineers, and so on. There was a minority trend of radical, racial antisemitism that took hold and became stronger and stronger because of intellectual, economic and political crises in German society. Contrary to other countries, perhaps, these factors (especially just before, and just after, WWI) made it possible for these right-wing intellectuals to direct the whole society towards genocide once they came to power.

Q- You're actually saying two things: On the one hand, you say that it was a logical development; on the other hand, you claim that it was a historical accident of sorts.

B- I think there was a logic in this development, but it did not necessarily have to happen. In other words, it could have happened otherwise. The fact that the Holocaust happened doesn't mean that it had to happen. All kinds of developments point to such a conclusion. For instance, the fact that the Nazis never received a majority by popular vote in Germany. In the last free elections of the Weimar Republic in November 1932, the Nazis lost 34 seats in the German parliament, and 2 million votes, and they were on the way down. It was at this point that they came to power. To the conservative, non-Nazi, but radically conservative elite, the Nazis were no longer a threat, and they were obviously getting weaker. Of course, once they were in power, they turned the whole thing round. But it didn't have to happen.

It didn't have to happen after 1936, because during that year, Germany occupied the Rhineland, against the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler gave an order to the German army that if but one battalion of French troops crossed the Rhine to counter the German entrance into the region, the Germans should withdraw. The French never moved, but they could have. There was in place a democratic government, and some of its members were very much afraid of what Hitler was doing in Germany.

Another crucial point came very late – in early 1939, just before the war broke out. The British and the French negotiated with the Soviets to stop Hitler. As a result of mutual jealousies and a credibility crisis between the two sides, this never came off. If an agreement had been reached, we don't know what would have happened. But, certainly, this overwhelming danger of a world war, in which the Holocaust became possible, could have been avoided. Not because of the Jews, but because of the interests of the three powers: Britain, France and the USSR.

The Holocaust was not a deterministic development; it took place in Germany because of certain developments in German society. These trends were not the norm in German society. Some people argue that, from the Middle Ages, or from the beginning of the 19th century, a norm of very radical antisemitism developed in Germany. No. That was a minority opinion, which ultimately gained ground and came to rule. This minority opinion developed into what Saul Friedlander, I think rightly, has called "redemptive" or "messianic antisemitism," creating a redemptive utopia. If the Jews were done away with, then the world would be beautiful, nice, and wonderful. This type of antisemitism certainly was not the norm in Germany or in any other society, but it was there. It took hold especially of the academia, and this became crucial.

Q- Can one talk of a continuity between traditional antisemitism and Nazi antisemitism, or was there a leap from one to the other?

B- There are clear elements of continuity between Christian antisemitism, nationalistic antisemitism, and racist, radical, exterminatory antisemitism. The Nazis accused Jews of things mostly found in medieval Christian antisemitism, such as the theory of a Jewish world conspiracy and the theory of Jewish blood – the very idea of a racial component in antisemitism. In other words, even if the Jews were to become Christians, their blood would prevent them from becoming different.

This idea was developed very early in the 14th and 15th centuries in Spain, and after the expulsion of the Jews. There was an idea that if people's distant ancestors (five or six generations before), had been Jews, they could not occupy certain central positions in Spanish society. Even though they had undergone baptism generations ago, "Jewish blood" still circulated in their bodies, and therefore you could never trust them. This aspect was not really new, but for it to become an ideology was new.

So you have an element of continuity, and you have a jump. The jump is that before racist antisemitism, Jews were considered to be the symbol of the devil, and with racial antisemitism, they became the devil himself. Before racial antisemitism, there were certain elements in Christianity that prevented the slaughter of human beings in general – at least in theory, not in practice – for moral reasons. This disappeared with the rise of racist antisemitism, which rejected Christianity because it was Jewish. There's an element of truth in that, because Christianity developed from Judaism. And therefore all these people thought that because Judaism contaminated Christianity, ultimately it was no good for this modern age.

The Nazi version of antisemitism did something that the others had never done: It translated theory into practice. In the past, you could find many statements that the Jews should be done away with – but these were statements, only words. The words didn't become flesh (to use a term from Christian theology). But here the words became flesh; in other words, the idea became something real and tangible, and it was translated into reality.

“German-Jewish Symbiosis” Against the Background of the 30s

Q- From a historical perspective, was the so-called "German-Jewish symbiosis" real or an illusion?

B- People talk today about a Jewish-German symbiosis that existed before Hitler. There was a love affair between Jews and Germans, but it was one-sided: Jews loved Germany and Germans; Germans didn't love Jews, even if they didn't hate them. One-sided love affairs usually don't work very well. In this case, the so-called symbiosis between Jews and Germans is a post-factum invention. It never existed. Jews participated in German life, in German cultural life, but to say that they were accepted, even if the product they produced was accepted.... They were not accepted, even if they converted.

A typical and classic case, of course, is Heinrich Heine. But there were many others as well, certainly those who didn't convert. They were taken for

granted, their contribution was utilized, but they were not really accepted; there was no symbiosis, no joining. At the same time, one has to say that in an atmosphere of relative liberalism in Germany – which prevailed both during the Second Empire, until WWI, and in the Weimar Republic – Jews were not rejected. They may not have been loved, but they were not rejected.

And so you had this peculiar situation where Jews were not quite accepted and not quite rejected. But the tremendous creativity that the Jews developed once they were out of the Middle Age ghetto was taken to be part of German culture. Their contributions were not accepted by extreme antisemites, of course, but by the rest of German society. Otherwise, you cannot explain, for instance, why there were tens of thousands of Jews in the Weimar Republic who were born Jewish, but had converted or intermarried. Their spouses and relatives, and the society around them, accepted them. They may not have loved the idea, but they accepted it. In this kind of situation, it was possible for Jews to be active in German culture and society.

Q- Against the background of the fact that Jews were part of the German elite – academic, cultural, and maybe even financial – how can you explain the ease with which they were kicked out of German society during the 30s?

B- There are certain things that we are not quite sure of as yet. Jews were participants in German society – certainly as far as the elite were concerned, and also in the lower ranges of society. They were never fully accepted, especially not by the elite. They were sometimes admired, but to say that they became part of society would be an exaggeration. There was always a reserve there.

After WWI, there was a feeling of crisis developing in Germany, that something was radically wrong with German society. In conjunction with the promise of utopia that the Nazis gave to the Germans – and especially to the German elite – there was a tendency of saying, "Well, if the price for that is to get rid of the Jews, then... let it be that way." Many Germans may not have

loved the idea of treating Jews in a brutal manner, but they were prepared to accept this price for a beautiful, new society and promises of a wonderful future. The promise of utopia is crucial. They created a consensus, not against Jews, but in favor of utopia. Clearly, the Nazi utopia idea could never happen without getting rid of the Jews. This rapid switch on the part of German society, which expressed itself in pro-Nazi demonstrations and activities, drew in rapidly, though not immediately, larger and larger parts of German society.

The German People and the "Final Solution"

Q- Was the "Final Solution" a project of a small group of the German people, or of the German nation as a whole?

B- I think what happened in Germany can be described in terms of a sociological model. A small pseudo-intellectual elite – and there's no doubt that the Nazis were intellectuals, or perhaps pseudo-intellectuals – gained power in a large, modern society, not because of their potentially genocidal ideas, but due to economic, social, and political crises. In addition to making promises, they [the Nazis] gained power with the help of this elite, who were attracted by these utopias. The pseudo-intellectual governing body put genocidal plans into action, not because it originally identified with these plans, but rather with the general ideas of Nazi society. Once you have the intellectuals on your side (or the vast majority of them), you can do anything you want, including mass murder, genocide, total annihilation of human beings, humiliation, and so on. The lower rungs of society will follow the intelligentsia.

This model holds true not only for the Holocaust, but also for what happened in Rwanda, Serbia, Cambodia, and possibly other genocidal projects at different times. In all these cases, you had a small intellectual group in power. Once this intellectual group got the rest of that society on its side, it could do anything it wanted. Ordinary people followed their teachers, professors, and clergy.

I think this model applies to Nazi Germany. After the Nazis came to power, they didn't quite yet know what they were going to do with the Jews. They knew they wanted to get rid of them in some way. First, it was by emigration, and when that didn't work, they resorted to other ways of dealing with the Jews. The German people followed, because in German society there was not enough identification with the Jews, or with social and moral principles that would protect Jews, to prevent such an action. Not that the vast majority of the German population wanted to kill the Jews, but they were not sufficiently interested in preventing the killing.

Q- In this regard, was the "Final Solution" different from the Euthanasia Program?

B- Something quite different happened with the Nazis' Euthanasia Program. This operation had not been prepared properly, although they produced films and organized lectures on the subject. The idea of killing your own people because of illness went against the grain of tradition, and there was a solid body of people who said, "This is too much." In German society, there was a lot of pragmatic opposition to this issue, and the Nazis took that into account. They did not want to go against the views or opinions of the German population.

This was also true in one instance concerning the Jews. In a famous demonstration of non-Jewish German women whose husbands or sweethearts were Jews, the Nazis' planned deportation of the men was prevented by the women's public demonstration in February 1943. When there was such a public demonstration, the Nazis would always retreat.

Was German Jewry Blind to its Fate?

Q- Did the fact that the German Jews were so integrated into German society prevent them from seeing, during the 30s, where things were heading?

B- The fact that the Jews thought of themselves as part of German society hindered them from seeing what was happening around them. The same can be said about East European Jewry at the beginning, because the German army in WWI had protected Jews against the Tsarist armies. After the Germans invaded Poland, in 1939, and later the Soviet Union, in 1941, Jews were shocked by the Germans' behavior. Of course, East European Jews imuch more with their Judaism than did their counterparts in Germany.

One has to be very careful about claiming that it was the so-called assimilation of Jews in German society that prevented them from seeing things. One can point to quite a number of assimilated German-Jewish individuals who warned of what lay ahead even before the Nazis came to power. One example is a representative of the Joint [the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee] in Europe, a German Jew who, in 1930 and again in 1932, predicted that the Nazis were going to come to power. He, an assimilated Jew, believed that one had to prepare for the end of German Jewry. Since we can probably find cases on both sides, we should refrain from making generalizations.

Q- The following question seems to be very troublesome: Why didn't the German Jews realize what was happening and flee immediately?

B- At the beginning, the Nazis didn't know what to do with the Jews, except to deprive them of civil rights, and so on. And if the Nazis didn't know what they were going to do with the Jewish population, how can one expect the German Jews to have known their fate? It was quite natural for them to think that this was a phase and it would pass – like all governments ultimately change. They thought that this would be a very difficult period, which they would have to overcome as German citizens of the Jewish faith, and that time was with them and not with their oppressors.

As the situation became worse, many German Jews said, "Well, all right, we have to prepare to leave this country within the next 10, 20, or 30 years." This

was the time range of which they were thinking. In 1935, there was a centrally important plan developed by German Jews to get the entire community to emigrate within 10-20 years. The idea that this was an immediate, physical danger not only did not occur to the Jews, but it didn't occur to the Nazis either. It occurred to the Nazis only later, although murder was a part of Nazi ideology. It wasn't clear to the Nazis what they, themselves, were going to do at that time.

Q- Shouldn't the potential victim have been more aware that there was such a clear, murderous seed in the ideology of the regime?

B- The danger of the Nazi ideology was hidden from the Jews by a number of factors. One of them, for instance, is that the Nazis, in all their propaganda, never actually said what they planned to do once they were in power. And once they were, they always said that this would be the last stage, and that they would not go any further. When they passed the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, for example, this was their official, open position. In private, the Nazis said different things, but of course the Jews were not privy to those conversations.

In Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and in his public pronouncements, both before and after his accession to power, he did not make physical threats against the Jews. (He made physical threats against the Jews in 1920, right at the beginning of the Nazi party's history. People had forgotten what he'd said in public speeches, which had not been recorded in 1920.) At that time, no German Jew could truly grasp the situation. Today, people say that they should have read *Mein Kampf*. Many Jews did read it, and although it is a terrible book against the Jews, it doesn't say they should be killed. It never says that. There is a brief reference to 10,000-15,000 "Hebrew parasites," or "Hebrew corrupters" during WWI. According to Hitler, had they been held under gas – killed – then the whole war would have been worth it. However, this was just the raving of a radical antisemite and it was not considered to be

a prophecy. I don't know whether Hitler saw himself as a prophet at that point. There was no way the Jews could have known.

Nevertheless, there were many Jews who did want to leave Germany during the 1930s, and, in fact, more who wanted to leave than there were places that would accept them. And the Jews could not have been expected to know what the Nazis had planned for them.

Q- The literature on the reaction of the Jews in Germany in the 1930s is very polarized. There are those who see the enormous Jewish activity as a "Jewish renaissance," while others term it a "fool's paradise." How would you define the Jewish reaction in Germany at that time, taking into consideration the development of Jewish organizations, the return to a more distinct Jewish identity and the strengthening of the Zionist movement?

B- I think the organization of German Jewish life and the development of Jewish culture in the 1930s was an inevitable reaction of a group of people who had been radically attacked, who wanted to keep their traditions alive. In a sense, this was the only type of resistance the German Jews could have developed. Whether this was a fool's paradise or not is immaterial; as I said, they could not have known what would happen. This was a natural, positive reaction of a community that, for the first time in its entire history, had united. German Jews had never had a united organization before Hitler. Now they had one, both on the political side, and in the social, economic and cultural sphere. They did the best they could with their situation.

The rise of the Zionist movement was quite natural, because it promised a solution by emigration over a long period of time. Everybody in Germany was fully aware of the fact that Jewish Palestine of the early 1930s did not have the economic, social, or political basis to absorb large numbers of people. A small number of Jews in Palestine could not have taken in half a million Jews from Germany at that time. However, over a long period of time, this was

indeed a possibility. People thought they had time. Thus, they could identify with the Zionist ideal.

There was also, in one way or another, identification with the very idea of a Jewish separateness. This also took hold of the vast majority – liberal Jews, who perceived of themselves first as Germans. Even though when they thought of themselves as being vitally influenced by German culture, they now realized that they were a separate group within German culture. After 1935, all of the leaders, in stages, realized they couldn't stay in Germany. They thought that another diaspora should be sought, mainly America, where Jews would find what they didn't find in Germany – a separate niche in a general culture.

Q- Do you see this organization, such as the establishment of Jewish schools, in a positive light?

B- The achievements of German-Jewish culture – such as the establishment of Jewish schools, music, drama, the so-called Kulturbund (the Jewish organization for cultural activity), the schools developed for adults by Martin Buber and others, the translation of the Bible into German (which made it accessible to a large number of people) – were certainly tremendously positive developments. People who emigrated, who managed to rescue themselves, then built on these foundations wherever they went (Palestine/Israel, America, England, or wherever), and developed certain elements of their culture in a very positive way.

World Jewry Facing Nazi Persecution in the 30s

Q- Is there any other essential aspect of the 30s which we haven't related to yet?

B- The impact on German Jews of Jewish organizations outside of Germany, which was very important, has not received adequate attention. This is true, especially, of the American Jewish organizations, chiefly, of course, the JDC [the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee], which was the main

organization that supported social-welfare work for Jews in countries outside of the United States. The pressure of the JDC on German Jewry was a vital factor in establishing a united German-Jewish organization.

With the help of the JDC, of the Central British Fund for German Jewry (the British counterpart of the JDC), and of French Jewry, German Jewry was able to organize itself. They literally not only paid for social welfare – which was increasingly important as Jews were more and more impoverished – but also for cultural activities, schooling, and other programs. They managed to work together, despite the fact that the idea of a Jewish nation, or a Jewish people, was rejected by many of these very liberal and non- or anti-Zionist Jewish organizations.

The World Jewish Congress was created specifically in response to the rise of Nazi Germany, and was finally established in 1936. The Zionist leaders who took over the World Jewish Congress were different from the Zionist leaders of the World Zionist Organization. The leaders of the World Jewish Congress wanted to help German Jews emigrate wherever they wanted to, yet they were still Zionists. So it wasn't directed to Palestine, it was directed elsewhere

The World Zionist Organization supported the financial arrangement with Nazi Germany – the Ha'avara Agreement, which enabled Jews to transfer capital from Nazi Germany to Palestine – from a Zionist perspective, in order to help establish a Jewish national home (which could then accept European Jews, including German Jews). But the World Jewish Congress, which was also led by Zionists, opposed this arrangement.

There existed a very typically Jewish disagreement by people who belonged to the same political group. The World Jewish Congress had a very definite impact on German Jewry. It strengthened the opposition to the Nazis. This, of course, could not be expressed openly, but rather expressed itself within the

Zionist section of German Jewry, which was a minority, although it grew over time.

The "Final Solution" – A Bureaucratic Process or An Ideological Genocide?

Q- I'd like to move on to a totally different topic. What led to the "Final Solution?" Was it a self-motivated bureaucratic process, or was it an ideological process that was led by the topmost levels of the Nazi regime?

B- The leading historians who have explained how it happened had to take many things into account: how the bureaucracy operated; how the structure of German society attuned itself to a development that led to the Holocaust; how certain initiatives came from the lower ranks. But it doesn't explain why the bureaucrats did what they did. It doesn't explain why the structures of German society killed the Jews and not, say, all people with green eyes. I think the central motivation – and recent evidence has shown this to be quite clear – was a radical, racist = biological, antisemitic ideology. It is perfectly clear that the decision to mass-murder the Jews came from above, from a central group of ideologically motivated leaders of the Nazi movement. They in stages, decided to kill Jews because of an ideology, and not because they were forced into it by anything else. This central issue has to be borne in mind whenever we speak about the Holocaust.

Q- Can you be more specific?

B- One has to recognize the great contribution of the so-called functionalist school of thought as to why the Holocaust took place: and the development of social and bureaucratic structures, and of conditions that, according to some of these historians, more or less forced German society into a mood that made it possible for the Holocaust to take place. Functionalist historians such as Hans Mommsen or Goetz Aly, or in a way Raul Hilberg, have contributed a

great deal to our knowledge, and there's no doubt that these social structures are of great importance.

The question remains as to whether, without an ideological motivation, the Holocaust would have happened. I think not. We now have convincing proof, in that only recently did we discover the famous Hitler statement about destroying the Jews. On December 12, 1941, Hitler spoke in front of about 50 Party leaders in the Reich's Chancellery in Berlin. He said that now, with Germany's declaration of war against the United States, the time had come for his January 1939 prophecy about the annihilation of the Jews to be fulfilled. A speech by Hitler in front of the top leadership of the Party, on the "Jewish question," in those terms, is a Hitler's wish, interpreted as an order. There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that it was that "wish" – culminating, from the beginning of the war, after various plans to deport Jews to other places. This was after the beginning of the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and it led to the development of the "Final Solution".

On July 31, 1941, Goering gave the famous order to Heydrich to prepare an overall solution, and then a "Final Solution," in all of the areas of German interest in Europe. It seems as though there were hesitations about what to do with the German Jews; after all, they were part of German society, and it was not so easy to murder them. Nevertheless, murder did take place. There were counter-orders and hesitations regarding policy, yet they were all solved when the United States entered WWII. From a Nazi point of view, one could then go ahead and murder the Jews.

I think the intentionalist school of thought – which places a strong emphasis on ideology and murderous antisemitism – has won. One has to weave in the very important findings of the other school, so the old argument between intentionalist and functionalist is passe? by now. I don't know of any serious historian who would disregard the research of Martin Broszat, Hans Mommsen, or Goetz Aly, or any of the other great contributors to this discussion. The idea that local authorities were the reason that the Holocaust

took place – no. Clearly, it was an ideology that was crucial, central, and decisive. The orders came from above.

This can be proved locally as well. As my colleague Christopher Browning recently wrote to us at Yad Vashem, the middle level of German bureaucrats in Poland at the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942 suggested a change in Jewish policy. In late 1941, these bureaucrats recommended that the Jews be given more to eat, because the German armies were thrown back, in front of Moscow. Their argument was that a Jewish working force was needed in their factories for the war effort. In order to utilize the masses of Jews, they had to get something to eat. They suggested increasing their rations, and, in fact, this was done in a number of ghettos. Then came a contradictory order from Berlin to kill them.

Now, according to Hans Mommsen and Goetz Aly, it was the middle level of bureaucrats who were leading toward the "Final Solution." I disagree. At a certain point, because they were pragmatists, they realized that they had a tremendous reserve of manpower. The order to kill the Jews came from Berlin. It was an ideological, anti-pragmatic order, which was contrary to every pragmatic German interest. Despite the importance of structures – and they were there, and cannot be ignored – the decision came from the center. In other words, it was an ideological decision.

Q- You mean Hitler?

B- An order from the center, as I just showed, is in fact a Hitler order. There is another indication of this: On December 17, 1941, he met with Himmler. Himmler noted in his diary just four words [in the German]: "Jewish question," and then there's a slash, and it says, "to exterminate them on the pretext they are partisans." It's quite clear that Hitler was directly involved. If that were true in December 1941, it was so much more so in July 1941 (six months beforehand), when Goering gave an order for a "general solution" and a "Final

Solution." The idea that this could have been done without Hitler's involvement is ridiculous.

Q- Why was Goering's appointment of Heydrich to take charge of Jewish issues so significant?

B- This crucial document of July 31, 1941, was given by the No. 2 in the German Reich, Goering, who had been nominated by Hitler to be responsible for the "Jewish question" after the Kristallnacht pogrom in 1938. Reinhard Heydrich was subordinate to Heinrich Himmler. The idea that Heydrich could have accepted such an order without Himmler being involved is, again, quite impossible. Just as Goering couldn't have moved without Hitler, so Heydrich couldn't have moved without Himmler. This is a clear statement that the so-called "Jewish question" should be handed over to the policeman, to the murderer, to the SS person, and to those who oversee the Einsatzgruppen. Obviously, they were not in charge of preparing summer camps, but rather of the idea of murder. This is a crucial element in the development towards the "Final Solution".

The Development of the Implementation of the "Final Solution"

Q- Why did the method of killing change from shooting to gassing?

B- The murder started in the Soviet Union in 1941 and proceeded gradually. At first, it was mostly men who were murdered by the Germans. However, their collaborators (Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and so on), killed women and children from the beginning. In August 1941 (two months after the invasion of the Soviet Union), the Germans began a massive program of killing everyone. Technically, this operation became very difficult, due to the need to prepare burial grounds for all these murdered people. The psychological burden of murdering women and children became an issue. Since the Nazis had to go from place to place to find Jews, concentrate them, and then kill them, they needed large numbers of people. Overall, this was an inefficient operation.

We used to think that it was the four special-action groups in the Soviet Union that murdered the Jews – the so-called Einsatzgruppen, who together numbered some 3,000 people. But we now know that the murder was executed by large numbers of people. There was a special 18,000-strong SS unit that was involved in this. There were 26 battalions of policemen, who, in various stages, organized to help in the murder. There were also quite a number of army units, so there was a large number of people. The knowledge of their crimes couldn't be contained and it spread.

The idea of murdering the Jews in a more technically efficient, simpler, quiet, and secret way – so that the knowledge of the details should not spread too widely – was raised. The idea of industrialized murder was carried out, first in gas wagons, where people were gassed with carbon monoxide in specially constructed trucks. This operation, using these gas wagons, was then conducted in places such as Chelmno, the first extermination camp, which started to operate on December 8, 1941. Carbon monoxide gas was also used in Eastern Poland, such as in the Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka death camps. In Auschwitz, they used another system of gassing, the so-called Zyklon B, a derivative of prussic acid. There was a sixth extermination camp (of which only now do we have detailed knowledge) in Bielorrussia, near Minsk, which was called Maly Trostinets. A combination of killing Jews in pits and gas wagons, along with other forms of killing, was used there. So there were six extermination camps: Belzec, Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz, and Maly Trostinets.

Majdanek is a separate case, because it was a concentration camp mainly for Poles. The Jews were a minority, although a very important minority. Large numbers of Jews were killed in Majdanek, in a special section of the camp; we still are not quite sure of the numbers. Someone is now writing a Ph.D. on Majdanek, so maybe we'll know more about these aspects in the future.

Q- Were the death camps an outgrowth of the concentration camps of the 1930s?

B- Two of the major extermination camps, Auschwitz and Majdanek, were also concentration camps. These camps clearly reflect a development from pre-war Nazi concentration camps in Germany. The basic camp structure remained, but its purposes changed.

For example, the economic purpose became very central during WWII, but that had started already before WWII, in various concentration camps before 1939. The economic section of the SS became very active and tried to utilize slave labor from the concentration camps for its purposes. During the war, the SS made all kinds of arrangements with private German firms that produced for the war effort, supplying them with both Jewish and non-Jewish slave labor from the concentration camps. This development evolved because the killing process, and the annihilation process by starvation, disease and exhaustion, became more and more central. By 1942, however, it became a central feature of all the camps.

There's a contradiction: On the one hand, the Nazis wanted to utilize slave labor; but on the other, they were killing it. The ideology clashed with the pragmatic issues, and the ideology won in the end. The Jews were useful, but they were killed. At the end of the war, the Jews were deported to certain camps in Germany. Germany, in desperate need of labor, utilized the Jews as slave labor, but they killed them at the same time, which is totally contradictory. The regime created this contradiction: It was not a logical contradiction, but a contradiction in reality. You kill, despite the fact that you want to use these people.

The Motivation of the Bureaucrats of the "Final Solution"

Q- What was the motivation of the bureaucrats of the "Final Solution"?

B- It's very difficult to answer this, because obviously the bureaucrats did not write about their own feelings in their official letters and memoranda. One can only talk about the consensus in German society which, by the outbreak of the

war, had become imbued with this tremendous impact of Nazi propaganda and radical antisemitism. Although people may not have consciously wanted to murder human beings, they were not opposed to it, because this was part of a "medical" problem. German, or European, society had been infected by the Jewish virus, and removing it was a medical issue, so they were part of this procedure.

Due to the modern structure of a bureaucracy, where each person has a limited role in the creation of the general picture, the fact that each bureaucrat contributed just a small part to the general project made it easier for him or her (usually him), to do what he did. At the same time, it appears that a number of bureaucrats (and, in retrospect, more and more), were fully conscious of what they did. Their identification with this murderous task gives us additional insight.

A typical example is not just Eichmann himself, but the group around him that organized the deportation of Jews from different European countries. They were fully aware of what they were doing and they knew that it was contrary to common morality. They did it because of that tremendous promise of a wonderful new society without Jews – historian Saul Friedlander's phrase of "redemptive antisemitism".

The same applies to quite a number of bureaucrats in different places – in Poland, for instance – who were involved in the mass murder. Were they ordinary murderers? Explanations given by Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen seem to me very problematic. The kind of brutality and sadism they've uncovered, especially of a certain police battalion that was engaged in these killings (but also of other units), is in no way different from the actions of Rumanian, Lithuanian, and Latvian collaborators. Those who were recruited by the Germans for these murderous actions behaved in exactly the same way – absolutely no difference.

The Croats, in fact, established a system of concentration camps that were, if anything, worse than what the Germans did in different parts of Europe. In places like Jasenovac in Croatia, and Stara Gradiska and various other places, they certainly behaved no differently from the Germans. Another example is the Hungarians, who also brutally killed and tortured Jews. An example is the Jews who were reported to a copper mine in Northern Serbia, who were treated more humanely by the German army than by the Hungarians.

To say that this was something specific to German ordinary men is difficult to accept. At the same time – contrary to what I just said, but true nevertheless – is the fact that these people came from a German society that was now overwhelmingly, radically antisemitic, and there's no doubt that this eased their entry into these murderous actions. On the level of the policeman, the SS officer, the army soldier, or whoever was directly involved in the killing, German society formed a background that eased the action of murder for them.

There are additional elements, such as peer pressure and the fact that they were given the opportunity to get out of it. However, if everybody had done that, then the task would not have been fulfilled. As Browning has convincingly shown in his analysis, it became easier and easier for this particular police battalion to kill, not only Jews, but also Poles. In other words, the increasing brutality can be added to an analysis of German society as a background that eased the action of murder.

Q- Did German society realize what was going on?

B- According to some researchers, at least, a very large proportion of Germans knew in a general, but not specific, way that Jews were somehow being done away with. In other words, that they wouldn't come back, they would die. I think this was a common perception in Germany, certainly after 1942. There may have been people who were unaware of it, or there may

have been some who thought that it was just propaganda, but I think the vast majority knew what was going on. They didn't know about the places, the methods, and the murderers.

Most of the Germans did not know how quickly, or in what numbers. But when we read some of the diaries of German Jews, especially the diary of Victor Klemperer – a converted Jew who lived in Dresden, not terribly far from Auschwitz – he knew that Jews were being killed in Auschwitz while it was going on. So if a Jew, isolated in a Jewish house, with very little contact with Germans, knew, then it is very difficult to imagine that the vast majority of Germans did not know. They repressed that knowledge, and did not want to know. Sometimes, it was their priests and pastors who told them about it, and who said that they were going to suffer because of what they did to Jews and Poles. (Jews and Poles were always put together in these sermons.) We do know that the Germans knew; their postwar claim that they did not know, is not credible.

The Sonderkommando

Q- I'd like to switch to a different topic and ask about the Sonderkommando – those prisoners who were part of the extermination apparatus in the death camps. How can one understand the reality in which totally normal people – people who, before the war, could not have imagined any situation in which they would act in that way – function as participants in the murder apparatus? What does that teach us about human nature and about the reality of the death camps?

B- The Sonderkommando in Auschwitz-Birkenau was the bottom rung of this whole story. Jews, and at some point some non-Jews as well, were being forced to dispose of bodies, and to calm the victims as they were being marched into the undressing chambers before they entered into the gas chambers. Of course, these people didn't do it of their own free will. Some people refused and others were killed. They knew that if they did not obey,

they would be killed, and they took these threats seriously. They knew, of course, that ultimately they would be killed as well.

However, there was always the hope against hope that they would survive, but indeed, very few of them did. Some managed to get out and hide in the general mass of Auschwitz-Birkenau inmates. A few expressed their resistance by leaving behind diaries, which they buried locally. Today, having found some of these diaries, we assume that there were others, and that we simply didn't find them because they were hidden. It is unlikely that a person wrote a diary, and that his immediate companions, who were with him in the same sleeping place, were not aware of it. Writing diaries was a way of expressing opposition and resistance.

Of course, a rebellion that finally broke out in the Sonderkommando caused most of them to be killed. The Sonderkommando committed a number of revenge acts against the SS, and one of the SS men was thrown alive into the fire of the ovens. There was a feeling of resistance, but the type of terror organization that was used there was overwhelming. From a psychological point of view, this is an extreme example of what people can be forced to do when absolute terror is exercised against them.

In some cases, of course, they were trying to help. The personal story of a man by the name of Filip Mueller, whose memoirs have appeared in English, is very telling. There's one point at which he wants to commit suicide, and the girl with whom he wants to do it, is one of the victims. She tells him that he must survive in order to tell the story, and physically pushes him out of the gas chamber. This was not something that was special to the Sonderkommando; in many other situations in the Holocaust, people were told by their relatives, friends, or inner voices that they must survive in order to tell the story. It was a major element in the desire for survival.

We are not yet fully aware of the psychological constraints on people like those of the Sonderkommando. There were all types amongst them, from

ultra-Orthodox Jews to complete secularists, from convinced Zionists to Communists, to liberals, to anyone. There were people from Eastern and from Western Europe, so it cannot be said that this was a specially selected group of people.

The question arises whether there is a special relationship between experiments that were done in sterile surroundings after the war, like the famous Milgram experiment, and the reality of Auschwitz. Can one persuade or lead people not to participate, not to themselves murder, but to help, or aid in, the murder of others? Apparently, this is possible with practically everyone. The constraints of people can be broken down by a system of terror and humiliation, such as that exercised by the Nazis in a place like Auschwitz-Birkenau. How exactly this is done, is something that psychologists have not yet determined. One can find parallel situations in other genocides, where the participation of the victim in the murder of other victims is a well-known fact. Of course, the Sonderkommando is an extreme case. Nevertheless, it's an extreme case of something that happened in less extreme circumstances elsewhere, and one should be able to analyze that. This is something that has not been done so far.

Patterns of Jewish Response and Resistance

Q- The reaction of the Sonderkommando in the extermination camps represents the most extreme example of the victims' reaction in the most extreme situation of victimization? But can one characterize a general pattern of Jewish response during the time of the Holocaust?

B- Jewish reaction to the Holocaust, to the actual murder, runs the gamut of practically every type of reaction that we know – from utter disorientation, helplessness and desperate obedience to anything the murderers said, to a full realization of what was happening. Knowing that there was no way out, some proudly went to their death in the pits and gas chambers, whereas others chose various forms of resistance. In some instances, Jews did

collaborate with the Nazis; an example is a number of cases of Jewish Gestapo agents or Jewish policemen who tried to "save their skins".

The analysis of these types of reactions is frightfully important. The ways in which the victim (or the potential victim), react to situations of mass murder or genocide or Holocaust, are very important for all future human attempts to oppose such events. It seems that the terror and the lack of any way out sometimes forces people, or moves them, to collaborate with the murderer – although psychologists have, as yet, no answer.

In other cases, people went to the other extreme. Believing that they had no way out, the young ones who had access to arms (however few and ridiculous these arms may have been in comparison to what the Germans had), felt they had a moral obligation to make a statement against oppression and murder. They did this by fighting physically against the Germans, and by any kind of reaction in-between – from maintaining schools and prayer groups, to organizing literary and artistic presentations – because the perception was that the Nazis wanted to destroy the morale of the Jewish population.

Whether this perception was true or not, makes no difference. In opposition to a perceived German threat against the morale of the Jews, the Jewish population reacted by maintaining its cultural, educational and religious dignity. There was the smuggling of food into the ghettos, knowingly done, of course, against the wishes of the Germans. These actions were also conceived of as unarmed resistance.

At the same time, you had people who lost all hope and went wherever one led them. These varied types of reactions have been seen in other genocides as well – from one extreme to the other. I would say that because it was a more extreme situation, the Jewish reaction, in all senses, was more extreme.

One can see how in certain groups, such reactions took certain forms; and in other groups of Jews, there were other responses. This was partly due to

objective circumstances. A person cannot react with arms when he or she has no arms, or flee into the forest when there are no forests. Someone cannot become a partisan without the minimum support of at least some of the local population. Without teachers, a person cannot have classes.

There were also subjective circumstances. What were the traditions of that particular group of Jews? There were many different types of people and traditions – such as religious, Zionist, non-religious, Communist, liberal, anti-Communist, anti-Zionist, or anti-religious – who saw in their suffering a humane way to oppose radical evil. In all these Jewish reactions, it is crucial to note that a certain ideological stand (whether liberal, Zionist or religious), gave individuals the strength to not just accept what was being done, but to react.

Sometimes this ideology is hidden. It's not an ideology, it's a tradition: A woman protects her children. Now that is true for any woman anywhere, but she becomes an active person, she pushes her children to rescue themselves, even when she knows she can't rescue herself. She pushes others, she fights for them. Now again, this is not specific to Jews. But in this extreme circumstance it changes a Jewish tradition, while it continues other traditions. She's responsible now; the husband has disappeared. He's been killed and she is alone, fighting for her children's lives, in order to protect them. She draws strength from certain types of Jewish traditions, and opposes others in order to fight. I think this is the classic reaction for a whole series of situations.

The question of the reaction of Jewish women in the Holocaust is part of the Holocaust. Women were targeted just as were men. But in that general, specific situation, Jewish women reacted in a specific manner, because they occupied certain specific positions in the family and community. In certain places, Jewish women (for the first time for thousands of years in Jewish communities), assumed leadership positions. Politically, Jewish women had always been disenfranchised, but in the Holocaust, there was no room for this

disenfranchisement. They became leaders of political and social groups in France, Holland, Bohemia, and Slovakia, as well as in the underground groups in Eastern Europe.

The question of armed Jewish resistance has to be seen in proportion. It existed on the margins of the Holocaust. The number of people involved was obviously very, very small in comparison with the millions of dead. Before the Holocaust, Jews had no access to arms, no tradition of an independent military force, and no united leadership. It was very difficult to establish a different situation during the Holocaust, especially when there was opposition or indifference from the societies around them, whether it was an opposition to the very fact of Jewish resistance or an insistence that Jews should be part of a general resistance. All these factors limited Jewish resistance considerably.

People have asked about how many Germans did the Jews [the armed Jewish resistance] kill? Very few, but the purpose of this resistance was not to kill as many Germans as possible. The purpose was to make a statement against German murder, and the only way that many people thought such a statement could be made was by armed resistance. So it was a moral imperative to resist; it wasn't just a physical reaction, but a moral imperative. This was, of course, particularly true for youth, and the overall picture of Jewish resistance in Europe is much larger, despite it being marginal, than we originally thought. We estimate today that approximately 30,000 Jews participated in partisan fighting in the forests of Eastern Europe against the Germans. This is rather a large number. Most of them died. It didn't prove to be a major way of rescue, but it made a statement.

In the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania, we know of some 17 ghettos where Jews organized some form of resistance. Only in a few places did it result in actual physical resistance. But in a large number of ghettos, especially in what is now Belarus (which was partly Eastern Poland and, therefore, the former Soviet Union after World War II), we estimate that there were some 65 ghettos where there were armed groups, who then escaped into the forests and joined

the tens of thousands of Jewish people who tried to resist. They didn't always manage to get arms (and therefore fight), but they tried.

There were Jewish rebellions in extermination camps – in Sobibor, Treblinka, and Auschwitz. The only rebellions in any Nazi concentration camps were Jewish ones. This is true also of a few other places, where there was some organization of Jewish resistance, in concentration and labor camps in Poland. No other group in any concentration camp resisted the Nazis by force; only the Jews did.

There were organizations that prepared to resist, but they never acted, for example, the International and the Polish Resistance in Auschwitz, or the International Resistance in Buchenwald, which took over that camp when the Nazis left. This group did not fight against the Nazis, but rather occupied Buchenwald before the Americans came. So you don't have armed resistance in camps, except Jewish armed resistance. There was Jewish armed resistance in France (quite massively, considering the small number of young men who remained), and in Italy and in Bulgaria. Over 7,000 Jewish men and women joined the Tito partisans in Yugoslavia; this is a huge number, considering the number of Jews there. There were 1,600 Jews fighting in the hills of Slovakia in 1944, and there was a Jewish underground resistance group in Germany. In other words, it occurred almost everywhere, and it is significant as a symbol.

It is less important whether German lines of communication were vitally disrupted by mines that the Jews had laid – that is not the issue at all. The important issue is that they laid the mines. Jewish armed resistance was massive, nevertheless marginal, but very important because it became a symbol of Jewish reaction. However, Jewish unarmed active resistance was much more widespread than Jewish armed resistance.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Q- You have said some general things about Jewish resistance. But can you be more specific about the Warsaw Ghetto, which was the site of the most significant Jewish rebellion? Can you comment on the significance of this event, and on why it has become such a symbol?

B- What was unique about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is that it had no pragmatic goal. The military effect of such an uprising was obviously minimal. It was basically a rebellion of people who had been condemned to die, in order to mark their presence in history. It was a matter of revenge, it was a matter of Jewish honor, it was a matter of a simple statement of opposition to the policy of the Nazis, and the only way that the world would understand. If people had not rebelled, then the whole destruction of the Jewish people would have passed by, so to speak, without any kind of reaction; the rebellion made a statement.

The crucial thing about it was that after the suicide of the head of the Judenrat in Warsaw, Adam Czerniakow at the beginning of the deportations on July 23, 1942, there was, in fact, a vacuum in the Jewish internal administration of the ghetto. In time, the groups that prepared the rebellion took over the ghetto, and made the inhabitants of the ghetto partners in the rebellion. This is not what happened in many other places. So when we talk about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, we're not talking about a few hundred people rebelling, but about a whole ghetto that rebelled. Of course, except for a few hundred, they didn't have any weapons.

The second thing that one has to remember is that it began with failures. During the big deportation itself, attempts were made to collect arms (which was extremely difficult), and there was no experience in doing this. And all the preparations, at the beginning of September 1942, were destroyed by the Germans, who managed to arrest leaders of the rebellious groups, and confiscate the very few and pitiful weapons they had.

So, when the big deportation was over (September 12-13, 1942), the rebels had to start from scratch to collect arms and money, and so on and so forth. They were able to do that because of the time gap between the destruction of most of the ghetto of Warsaw, with hundreds of thousands of Jews being transported to their death, and the final destruction (in April 1943) – with January 1943 as a kind of partial attempt by the Germans to remove several thousand people for murder. And it was then, in January, that the rebels first made their mark.

I think it is also extremely important to note that the rebellion did not end with the destruction of the central hiding place, where the commanders of the rebellion were hiding on Mila 18 (the name and the number of the street in the Warsaw Ghetto) in May 1943. Sporadic actions took place after that, as late as September, and so we are dealing with a protracted process of armed rebellion.

What were the aims of the rebellion? As I said, Jewish honor, revenge, making a statement towards history that this had taken place. So the postwar world would know why there had been a rebellion like that in such a central place; it was a statement. The argument of how many Germans were killed, and what exactly was the damage to the German war effort, is a completely mistaken one; that wasn't the purpose of the rebellion. But rather the fact that it was such a tremendously important symbol of Jewish reaction, of Jewish opposition. And that we would not go to our death without making such a statement, which says, in fact, that "you, the German oppressors, are immoral, and we are making the statement in the name of Jewish and universal morality".

“Like Sheep to the Slaughter”?

Q- You have analyzed the metaphor of Jews going "like sheep to the slaughter." You have said that those who use it are identifying, even unconsciously, with the killers, who related to the victims as animals. How would you refer to the very instances in which the victims applied this term,

and others of its ilk, to themselves? And wouldn't you apply the same analysis to their use of this metaphor? Does this mean that they internalized, in a way, the terminology imposed on them by the perpetrators?

B- One has to differentiate very clearly between terms that were used by the victims during the Holocaust itself, and the use of the same terms afterwards. When you refer to the expression "like sheep to the slaughter" (used by Abba Kovner in his famous pamphlet of December 13, 1941/January 1, 1942), it was a means of causing people to rebel. He meant "Let us not be like sheep, let us not go to slaughter." But he didn't see himself or the others as sheep. He said that by using that metaphor, he tried to cause a rebellion against the very use of that term. I think that was the purpose of using such metaphors during the Holocaust. When people used them after the Holocaust, it was something quite different, and very objectionable. Jews were not sheep. Jews were Jews, Jews were human beings; they were led not to slaughter, but to being murdered, which is something quite different. Therefore, I don't think that we, today, should use a term that was used during the Holocaust with quite a different connotation.

In the diaries of Chaim Kaplan or Calel Perechodnik, these authors used animalistic terms to describe themselves. These instances show some kind of despair in a sense of inhumanity, or identifying with the metaphor that the killer put on them. How can we explain this? Doesn't it show that something very central and fundamental broke in their spirits?

The use in some of the Holocaust diaries of metaphors comparing themselves to animals has to be understood from their perspective. Yes, I think it does express a feeling of despair. I think it is a kind of a self-accusation, but it is done because one objects to it. Even when someone doesn't participate in an armed rebellion, or any kind of rebellion, he or she says: "No, I mustn't be like that. I am like that, but I shouldn't be, because I am not an animal. I don't want to accept what the others tell me that I am. I record the fact that they call me that, or that they relate to me like that, but I don't accept it." They used these

terms because they rejected the notion, and this is the sub-text of the expressions like the ones that Chaim Kaplan uses in his diary.

Reactions of the Allies

Q - I want to ask about the bystanders, especially the Allies. How would you explain the lack of action by the Allies to stop the Holocaust?

B- One has to be realistic regarding what happened in the early 1940s. Clearly, the Western Allies decided not to help the Jews. However, between the decision to mass-murder the Jewish people in Europe (which was taken sometime in 1941, in stages probably) and 1944, the Americans and the British could not have done anything militarily, or in any other way, to stop the Germans from killing Jews. The millions of Jews whom the Germans decided to kill were lost, because the Western Allies didn't have the air power or soldiers in Europe. They were fighting for their lives.

In 1941, the Germans seemed to be winning the war in the Atlantic; they were sinking many more Allied ships than the Allies were producing. In 1942, the Japanese conquered the whole of East Asia. There is no doubt that the American Air Force could not bomb Eastern Europe until the repair of the airfields in Foggia, in Italy, in late 1943.

As we know, by late 1943 all the death camps in Poland (except for Auschwitz) had already been closed. Regarding Auschwitz, one knew that some terrible things were going on there. But details were unknown until the escape of two Slovak Jews, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, in early April 1944. The details of the gas chambers and so on were not known until the late spring of 1944. Something could have been done then. But by that time, most of the Jews killed in the Holocaust were already dead.

The Allies received detailed knowledge about the Holocaust (but not about Auschwitz) from the summer of 1942 on. The killing of a whole people was unprecedented in history. It is not really surprising that people had difficulty in

accepting the notion that that was happening in Europe. The Americans didn't particularly hurry in finding out the details, but in early November 1942, they received confirmation of the information received from Jewish sources in August 1942. In early December 1942, the United Nations, or the Allied nations, made the famous declaration acknowledging the fact that the Germans were killing the Jewish people in Europe.

In December 1942, as I said, the Western Allies had no means of stopping the Holocaust. Now they could have helped, but they didn't do it. So the argument against the Allies is not that they didn't rescue the Jews from the Holocaust, but that they didn't help to the small extent that they could have – by providing havens in neutral countries, and by promising the neutral countries that they would pay for any Jewish refugees who would enter countries like Switzerland, Sweden, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, and so on.

The Allies could have dropped leaflets on German cities together with the bombs, informing the German population that they would be held responsible after the war for murdering the Jews. The Poles asked the British to do that for Poles and Jews in 1943, but the British refused. The British said that they were not in the business of dropping leaflets, but of dropping bombs, as though the two were contradictory. They could have smuggled money in, but they refused to do that. Money that could have rescued people, saved people – not millions, but thousands. In other words, there were things that could have been done, that weren't. Although they could not have rescued all the Jews from the Holocaust, they could have rescued some people.

Q- Why wasn't that done?

B- There were a number of reasons. There was an element of antisemitism, especially of course in the foreign offices of the two Western powers. I don't think that this element was really crucial, even though it certainly contributed. What was crucial was the fact that the Allies were afraid that if their struggle was in some way identified with the rescue of Jewish people, they would be

accused by their own home constituency of fighting for the Jews and not for themselves. This may have been true for the United States, where antisemitism increased during the Second World War. But I don't think it was true for Britain, where antisemitism decreased during the war.

This was the perception of the leaders of the Western Allies. The Jews were an unpopular minority who were pestering them to help, and the Allies decided that their purpose was to win the war, and anything that diverted them from that was bad. They completely ignored the fact that there was no contradiction between pursuing the war and helping the few thousands that could have been helped (or the tens of thousands that could have been helped by the steps that I outlined before).

The Western Allies themselves said that they were fighting against the most inhumane regime that had ever disfigured the face of this earth. By not helping the Jews, they ignored their own purposes. So in the end, it is a moral issue. And on the moral front, I think the Western Allies failed as far as the Jews were concerned.

Q- When did the Allies internalize that something very different was happening to the Jews compared to other atrocities that took place in the Second World War?

B- This only happened after the war. I don't think that they internalized this difference while the war was going on. They didn't want to internalize it, because then they would have been faced with moral and political issues that they didn't want to see. It was a repression of something that was increasingly streaming in from late 1942 on. One can see that very clearly in the death marches at the end of the war. The Allies most certainly knew what was happening, and they refrained from bombing the trains that were carrying behind them endless wagons with suffering humanity. They could have done that.

There is one case, when a pilot – and we don't know why, and why that particular pilot and not others – quite obviously saw, when flying very low, that a train was carrying victims, and he bombed the engine, and the train stopped. As a result, some people, at least, managed to escape. So there is proof that they knew, but they didn't react. They knew... they didn't know... they refused to know. It was only when the Western Allies liberated the concentration camps that it suddenly hit them, and then they changed their attitude.

Q- Were there chances of rescuing Jews by negotiations that were missed because of this attitude?

B- The question of negotiating with the Nazis to rescue Jews is an extremely complicated issue. The Jews were caught in a trap. The Allies couldn't accept the German demands, because the Germans wanted a separate peace with the Western Allies, and this was out of the question. The Allies couldn't have supplied the Nazis in 1944 with thousands of trucks to help them fight against the Soviet Allies of the West. In other words, these were impossible situations.

What they could have done was to drag out the negotiations more than they did, to promise the Nazis to talk on condition that the Nazis stopped the murder. They didn't do that; had they done so, they might have had trouble with their Soviet Allies. The Soviets were completely oblivious of any Jewish issue whatsoever, and completely refused to negotiate with the Germans, although they did maintain some kind of contact with the Germans behind the West's back.

This fear was quite strong, especially among the Americans. In such a situation, the only thing that might have helped was what Moshe Shertok (later Sharett), at that time the head of the political department in the Jewish Agency, had suggested to the Western Allies: Talk to them, promise them whatever they want, but don't give it to them; drag it out until the war is over.

That was very wise advice, but they didn't listen. Yes, possibilities may have been missed, but in a situation where the trap was almost completely closed.

Q- Did the Allied governments prevent the media from popularizing the notion of the Holocaust?

B- The media in Palestine was very strictly controlled by British censorship: The British opposed any kind of publication that would have caused an emotional reaction among Jews in Palestine. So quite a lot of what the newspapers knew, and tried to publish, was censored. In fact, there is a book on the material that the Palestine Jewish newspapers tried to publish, and couldn't.

Nevertheless, the main stories were published. Certainly, at the end of 1942, as massive information flowed in, there was no hindrance in terms of censorship in Britain and America on what was happening to the Jews. It was an editorial choice. The editors did not hide the information; it was never hidden. They put it in a place in the newspaper that indicated either that the information was not 100 percent certain, and/or that it was relatively less important than the main news about the war. It is incorrect to say that the media in the West hid the facts of the Holocaust, but it is true to say that it was not given the prominence that, with hindsight, it might have been given.

The Jewish newspapers – and there was a Jewish press – went on a kind of exercise of not knowing what to publish and when. There's a famous case of a very important Jewish weekly in the United States, the Jewish Frontier. In June/July 1942, it published original information, transmitted by the Bund to the West, about 700,000 Jews who had already been killed by the Germans in Poland. After a heated discussion by the editorial board, they decided to publish it – but on the last page of the newspaper, indicating that they were not certain if it was true. At the time, they believed that the story couldn't be true, because nothing like that had ever happened before. But what if it were true? They published it in this stupid way. I think this indicates a problem that

one has with hindsight and with reading it with the eyes of the period itself. With hindsight, it was stupidity, but from their point of view, this was something that was so impossible to believe that one couldn't put it on the front page. It is only we who know that they made a mistake.

Q- Our last question of this section deals with the bombing of Auschwitz, or the railroad story that you mentioned before. We know that Winston Churchill approved it, and that the railroad was purposely never bombed. Why?

B- The final answer to the question of why the Allies didn't bomb Auschwitz, is not quite clear. We know, from David Wyman's research, that in January 1944, the Chief-of-Staff of the Western Allies in Washington made a decision of principle that had nothing to do with Jews. They decided that military means should not be used to satisfy civilian needs. And killing Jews in gas chambers represented "civilian needs."

In addition to this decision not to divert, as they put it, bombers to civilian targets, there were two other considerations. First, the demand to bomb the railways and/or Auschwitz came after D-Day. They had bombed railways in France, which was much nearer, of course, than Poland. It was a massive bombing campaign that didn't really completely succeed. The Germans managed, within 24 to 48 hours, to repair every kind of damage that the Allies managed to inflict on the railway system in Northern France, or in France generally. According to their logic, if they couldn't do it in France, then they certainly 't do it between Hungary and Poland.

Second, the bombing of the gas chambers would have been a very complicated operation. It could have been done with 500-pound bombs, and there were planes that could, at that point, deliver those bombs. Nobody could tell what the losses might have been. Whether they would actually have hit the gas chambers is a moot point, because the chambers were on the bottom floor of buildings built with concrete. It would have required very direct hits;

even then, it is not certain whether the gas chambers themselves would have been hit.

There's no doubt that the surrounding area, which included the women's camp, and "Canada," the place where they sorted the clothes of the victims, would have been hit. Clearly, there would have been many casualties amongst the victims. However, that is what the victims wanted – for the gas chambers to be bombed. And even had they not been destroyed, it would have made a statement that the world cared.

The practical outcome is not the important thing there. The Nazis had other means to continue the destruction of the Jews. Had only three or four of the gas chambers been destroyed, they would have reverted to the old one in Auschwitz I. They could have killed Jews in pits – they had done it before, and could have done it again. Gas chambers were useful for the Nazis, but it wasn't the only way of killing the Jews. They would have gone back, presumably, to what they had been doing all the time. It was the symbolic meaning that is important. The fact that the Allies, although they were asked to, did not bomb the railways, didn't bomb Auschwitz, makes a moral statement that ultimately turned against those who refused to bomb.

The peculiar thing is that the deportations to Auschwitz from Hungary were stopped largely because of a massive raid of American bombers on the railway yards of Budapest on July 2, 1944. The Hungarians interpreted these bombings as American intervention against the deportation of the Jews. This obviously wasn't the case, but that is how the Hungarians perceived it. This raid was one of the main reasons behind the decision of the Hungarian government to stop the deportation of the Jews a week later. So, inadvertently, and without any decision to do so, the railways were bombed, and they did stop the deportation to Auschwitz, which stands in contradiction to what I just said. The contradiction is a reality; it's not a logical contradiction. The Allies didn't believe that the railways could be bombed. They were

probably right that they couldn't have stopped it, and yet they did stop it because they bombed the railways.

The Vatican During the Holocaust

Q- What about the Vatican and the Pope – did they fail morally ?

B- If the Pope had made a public statement against the murder of the Jews, I don't think it would have had the slightest impact on what was happening. Such a statement would have been made over the radio, but who listened to the Vatican radio? A German SS man, a Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian or a German bureaucrat listened to it? Had the bishops announced it in the cathedral, and the priests in the churches, the Gestapo would have stopped them straight away. Something would have gone through, but it would not have been enough to stop anything at all. A statement by the Pope wouldn't have helped to save Jewish lives, but it might possibly have saved the Pope's soul. They didn't do that; it was a moral issue. It was not for the Jews, but for the future and for the eternal salvation, in Catholic terms, of the Catholic Church itself. The statement should have been made, and the fact that it wasn't, is a problem for the Pope, not for the Jews.

In WWII, Catholics didn't necessarily do what the Pope told them to do. There were Catholic priests, and princes of the Church, who acted in completely contradictory ways. An example is Cardinal Sapieha in Krakow, who intentionally ignored the murder of the Jews that took place under his windows. The Archbishop of Zagreb, as well as various German archbishops and cardinals, encouraged German soldiers to obey the law of the land. In other words, by encouraging soldiers to obey the Nazi party and the Nazi leadership, these Church officials did something that the Catholic Church should deeply regret.

But there were Catholic priests who acted differently. Cardinal Van Roey in Antwerp asked his followers to rescue Jews, and Archbishop Saliege of Toulouse did the same thing. And Papal Nuncio Angelo Rotta in Budapest

certainly went beyond the instructions from the Vatican to try and rescue Jews. These were individual choices that all people faced.

The Catholic clergy in Italy was overwhelmingly on the side of rescuing Jews; in other countries, however, the Catholic clergy was overwhelmingly on the side of the devil. So, it's not a question of what the Catholic Church did, because – like everybody else – it did contradictory things. It's a question of individual conscience, and there you have to check each individual case in order to see what was done and why. Those who came to the aid of Jews did so not because of theology (which was the same all over Europe), but because of individual, personal, moral responsibilities – which they either felt, or didn't feel.

Q- The Pope does have a significant place in this hierarchy. What were his motivations to ignore the plight of the Jews altogether?

B- One can only guess about the Pope's considerations at that time. He did intervene once, not as far as the Jews were concerned, but when the Germans invaded Belgium and Holland, in May 1940. He made a public announcement against this invasion by the Nazis, but nobody reacted or paid any attention. He may have thought that any other pronouncement would have achieved the same result. The Pope was more anti-Communist than he was anti-Nazi. He perceived Russian Bolshevism as a great danger. Although he didn't agree with Nazi ideology, and Catholic theology obviously opposed racism, he considered it to be a lesser danger than Soviet Communism. He wouldn't openly turn against the Nazis if he could help it.

He did this once, as I said, as far as Belgium and Holland were concerned. He was pro-German. He had spent much of his time, before he became Pope, in Germany, and he was a great friend of German culture, and so on. Whether he did or did not believe the reports that he received from Catholic sources about what was happening to Jews is a moot point. He received the information – that is certain – but whether he believed it or not is very difficult

to say. After the war (in 1946), he made a statement to an American rabbi, which suggests that he did not internalize the information. It was a private conversation, and there was no reason for him to hide anything. Overall, it seems that he closed himself off to the knowledge that was imparted to him by his own people.

Q- Would you say that the Pope failed religiously and morally?

B- Yes. I think that a pronouncement by the Pope would have made for a better moral standing, not only for the Pope, but also for the Church that he represented and for the people who came after him. He didn't do that. Of course, the Catholic Church, to this day, defends his stance. At least some Catholics defend his stance, whereas others oppose it. It is a problem that the Catholic Church has to face.

Jewish Reactions Outside Europe to the Holocaust

Q- What was the Jewish reaction outside of the sphere of the Nazi Holocaust?

B- Jews outside the Nazi Holocaust kingdom didn't receive information about the Holocaust before or later than anyone else, and they didn't believe in it more or less than anyone else. It is quite untrue to say that the Palestine Jewish newspapers didn't publish whatever they received from Europe. It was all published, but usually not on the front page – that's the problem. You could read it on the third, fourth, fifth and seventh pages, which indicates that they couldn't bring themselves to believe the stories they were writing. People who lived during the Holocaust didn't believe it. Many of those who were sent to Auschwitz didn't believe the rumors – they didn't penetrate. The SS men were not right in saying that nobody would know about this, because if some of them survived, nobody would believe them.

This is also true concerning the information that came out during the Holocaust itself. The reaction of the Zionist leadership in Palestine after information was received in November 1942 was one of despair, of

disorientation, of immediate activity – which turned out to be quite useless. The Zionist leadership, for instance, turned to the major powers and wired requests asking for help on behalf of the Jews being killed in Europe. They received no replies, of course. One mustn't forget that this was the middle of the war, and there was no way of physically reaching the Jewish communities outside of Palestine. One or two people could travel, but that certainly wasn't enough to raise public consciousness as to what was happening in Europe.

In Britain, non-Jewish parliamentarians brought up the issue very strongly, and as we know, on December 17, 1942, there was an Allied declaration stating that the Jews were being killed. There was public activity that attempted to persuade the British government to actually do something to save those who could be rescued. The British Government, with great steadfastness, resisted all attempts to help, because they were completely taken in by this basically anti-Jewish notion that if they did something, antisemitism would rise in Britain. And in any case, what could they do?

The Jewish leadership in Palestine then decided to concentrate on the few visas to Palestine that were still available – 29,000 of them – and asked the British to give those visas to children. The British agreed and then didn't do anything about it. Clearly, the pressure of the half-a-million Jews in Palestine, in the middle of a war (and with huge numbers of British soldiers all around them), didn't change British policy.

The Turkish Government permitted a few Jews a week to pass through its borders on the road to Palestine. The next thing was whether Jewish leaders could help with suggestions that came from the countries of the Holocaust itself, to barter Jewish lives for money. Well, there was no money, and it was extremely difficult to smuggle it to Europe. One has to say that within a year, the Jewish community in Palestine raised money – though much too little – and illegally sent it to Europe. Much of it was lost on the way; there was no way to safely transfer it. It was done by Nazi agents who, for lack of anyone

else, were trusted to deliver the money to people in Slovakia, Rumania, and other places. Of course, some of it was delivered, and some was not.

The same applies to Switzerland, where, from April 1942 to September 1943, during the main period of the Holocaust, the Swiss Government refused to transfer charitable American dollars to be smuggled into Nazi Europe by local Jewish aide representatives. The Swiss refused because of economic considerations of their own. This may have been legitimate in their own eyes, but it effectively prevented dollars, raised amongst American Jews, from reaching Europe.

American Jewish leaders tried (between the arrival of the information, confirmed by the American government in November/December 1942, and an attempt by the Anglo-Americans to deal with the issue in Bermuda in April 1943), to protest, to meet with Roosevelt, and to publicize the news. There was a wall, and when they didn't succeed, they despaired and gave up. This reaction can be understood, but it cannot be justified.

One has to remember that there was no Jewish community in America. There were communities, but no central leadership. They concentrated on what would happen after the war, to guarantee whatever rights would remain to those who survived. But they did help a little, by pressing the American government to help. Due to rising antisemitism and internal Jewish insecurity in the United States during the war, their friends told them not to emphasize the Jewish issue too much, otherwise antisemitism would rise even more.

One shouldn't accuse here, but rather see where this failure came from. We should also try and understand how ginger groups pressed the American government and Jewish leaders to do more. Had these groups (especially a radical right-wing group led by Peter Bergson and Hillel Kook wanted to impress on the American public to do more about rescuing Jews, and succeeded more than they did, I still don't think that American military would have been diverted to help Jews. What might have been done was to help a

little more, and that would have saved lives. So this, I think, is what can be concluded from the situation.

Q- Would you adopt the same non-accusing approach towards the Allies?

B- Yes, I probably would. However, the Allies had power, the Jews didn't. To argue today that the Allies were powerless, is an excuse. We can't ignore the situation of the time: it was the Jews who were powerless. They were considered a pathetic, very unpopular small group in America, who constantly pestered people in power to do something about their people in Europe. The typical Allied response was: "Well, we can't do much about the people in Europe. We can't do anything about the Norwegians, the Poles, and the Czechs either. We can't do anything about the Jews, so why are they after us? We don't like them anyway".

Jewish leaders who acted in these situations were caught in a trap. For instance, those who were most vocal, the Orthodox Jews, organized a demonstration in Washington. But the president was not in the White House and he wouldn't receive them, of course. This demonstration was publicized the next day in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, and that was the end of that. There was absolutely no impact whatsoever. In a situation where America was leading a war to liberate humanity from Nazism and Japanese imperialism, a demonstration against the government was simply unacceptable. After all, these were very respectable people who were very hurt and pained, so nobody prevented them from holding the demonstration. So they said "Let it pass" and it passed without any effect whatsoever on politics or military actions. I'm not saying anything against the demonstration. I identify with it, if you like. But as a means of pressure, it showed how limited "Jewish power" was in America at the time.

The Holocaust and Other Genocides

Q- Is the Holocaust comparable to other genocides?

B- One has to remember that the Holocaust was a form of genocide, and as such, is comparable to other genocides. The United Nations' definition of genocide may not be accurate, but let's accept it for the moment. What happened to the Polish people was genocide. The Nazis didn't want the Polish nation to exist. In addition to mass murder, the Nazis removed all the economic, religious, and educational achievements of the Polish people. The Polish people – what would remain of them – were to be the slaves of the Germans. However, there was never a plan to murder all the Poles, nor was there a plan to murder all the Romas (the Gypsies).

According to new research published in Germany, the Germans killed wandering Gypsies who lived outside of Germany. As far as German Gypsies were concerned, they were to be removed completely, either by mass murder, sterilization, or expulsion. That's genocide. There was mass murder by the Nazis of many millions of people. It is now estimated that some 49 million people, mostly civilians, died as a result of the Nazi regime. The Holocaust, then, is a form of genocide, but it's a unique, unusual, and unprecedented form of genocide.

Q- Why?

B- Because it was to lead to the death of every single individual with three or four Jewish grandparents. In other words, the crime for which people were killed was that they had been born. This was the first time that this had happened in history – and hopefully the last – but certainly the first.

All the other genocides that we know of (before, during, and after the Nazi regime) were localized; there was a certain area in which the genocide took place. In the case of the Holocaust, Germany intended to conquer the whole world and reach every single Jew. It was a universal, global, and murderous ideology.

With all the other genocides, the motivation that was behind it was political, as in the case of the Armenians. The Young Turks sought to remove a political hindrance in the new Turkish empire. In the case of the Gypsies (the Roma), after some internal squabbles, settled Gypsies were to be left alone. Wandering Gypsies, who represented a hindrance to the good order of a German culture that would conquer Europe, were to be killed.

In the cases of the Poles, the Tutsies, and the Cambodians, all this is territorially circumscribed; in that of the Jews, this was global, not territorial. Nazi ideology was not rooted in political, economic, or military pragmatism. It was based on pure fantasy, a so-called Jewish conspiracy to control the world. The 17 million Jews who lived in the world before WWII, who couldn't agree on a single thing – not even on who they were – were suddenly transformed into a world conspiracy. This pure fantasy mirrored Christian antisemitic notions dating from the Middle Ages.

Jews were accused of corrupting societies. Well... they corrupted society in America and Britain to such an extent that America and Britain won the war against Germany. In other words, wherever Jews were permitted to exercise whatever talents they had in a society, these societies survived; wherever they were driven out, they declined. This situation is exactly the opposite of the fantasy that the Nazis believed in, and they believed in it. There is no relationship between Nazi ideology and the real situation that this ideology was supposed to reflect.

At least these three elements made the Holocaust unprecedented as a genocide, compared with all the other genocides. The Nazis invented a fourth element – or rather developed a hell that they received from others – the concentration camp. In the concentration camp, people were not just tortured and killed in masses, but were humiliated to a degree that no group had ever been humiliated before in human history. Now this applied not only to the Jews, because humiliation in the concentration camps was exercised towards everyone. However, Jews were on the lowest rung in the camps. The

humiliation there reached depths that were unknown and never before experienced in human history.

This was unprecedented – not that it cannot be repeated in one form or another. The fact that, 50, 60 years after the event, this unprecedented situation is penetrating into public consciousness in a vague, sort of half-conscious way, is one of the explanations as to why in the Western world (and now increasingly in the rest of the world as well), more and more is thought, written, shown, and talked about the Holocaust than ever before. Within the foreseeable future, I can't see this declining, but only increasing.

Q- You said something paradoxical. On the one hand, you placed a strong emphasis on the Nazi antisemitic ideology, making the Holocaust something between Germans and Jews, especially Jews. On the other hand, why did this uniqueness of humiliation, of globality, and so on, become a universal issue?

B- Because Jews and Germans are humans. What happened in the Holocaust was something that humans did to humans, and it can be repeated. The Holocaust was specific to the Jews by the Germans, but any kind of genocide is specific to a certain group and by a certain group.

If the Holocaust, or situations like the Holocaust, can repeat themselves (and genocides have repeated themselves after WWII), then the Holocaust is the most extreme case of genocide that we know about. It is extreme not in terms of suffering – suffering is the same everywhere – but in terms of the analysis of what happened. Genocide can, and does, happen to others, be they Tutsies, Cambodians, Bosnians, or whoever.

I'm not trying to draw an analogy, because it's not the same thing. The extreme case is the Holocaust, so the Holocaust then becomes a universal concept, a universal problem, the other examples of which are with us. Therefore, it becomes an issue for all of humanity, and not just for Germans and Jews. I think that this realization is gaining ground. When you have a

museum on Auschwitz, in a suburb of Hiroshima in Japan... when you have a department of the local university that deals with the Holocaust, in Shanghai... when you have the information about this event spreading, and the problems around it being discussed, this indicates how this specific case has become a universal concern. I think there's no contradiction between the specificity and the universal character of this crucial event in human history.

Q- In what way would you say that the Holocaust is unique?

B- I claim four elements that make the Holocaust different from other genocides:

Totality – all Jews everywhere, those who had three or four Jewish grandparents, were to be killed for the reason that they had been born.

Globality – all people of Jewish descent everywhere in the world were to be included. Never before had that happened.

Ideology – abstract issues of a Jewish world conspiracy were based on pure fantasy; there were no pragmatic elements involved.

Total humiliation – in concentration camps, where everyone was humiliated, Jews were at the bottom rung of the ladder, and were the ultimate victims of this crime.

Relationship Between Jews and non-Jews After the War

Q- Has there been a change in the relationship of the non-Jewish world towards the Jews after the Holocaust?

B- The question surrounding the post-Holocaust relationship between Jews and non-Jews is of great importance, because the situation has changed. The Jewish position in the non-Jewish world generally, and in the Christian world in particular, has become that of a respected minority. We have to see this in its proper perspective.

In 1965, for example, the Catholic Church decided to change its whole attitude to the Jewish people. Protestant churches did likewise in Germany and in

other places. The Catholic Church in Poland made a very important declaration in January 1991, which also indicates a change in its attitude toward Jews. Jews are a minority that has become a respected and accepted part of general society in the major Western countries.

In addition, consciousness of the Holocaust has penetrated into the non-Jewish population. More and more non-Jews are involved in research, writing, and artistic creations on the Holocaust. The relationship between Jews and non-Jews has changed, in part because of what happened during the Holocaust, and in part not because of it. Yes, there has been a radical change

Jewish Identity After the Holocaust

Q- What about Jewish identity – how was it influenced by the Holocaust?

B- As far as Jewish identity is concerned, this is very complicated. Jews do not agree with each other about what their identity actually is – whether it is religious or ethnic, or ethnic-religious, to what proportions, what religion means to them, and so on. There is a great difference of opinion within the Jewish community, because there is no common interpretation of self.

The Holocaust has had a tremendous impact on this, but the impact varies in different parts of the Jewish community. For some people, it is a call to return to Orthodox religious observance. For others, it is a call to integrate into the non-Jewish world to avoid such things from happening in the future. And for yet others, it is a combination of insisting on particularity and extending a hand outside to the general concern of humanity to oppose mass murder and genocide. For some, it is a political tool to achieve political ends. I think using the Holocaust as a political tool is an abomination, and it must never be done.

For all of them, I think, it is something that concerns their very core as Jews. The Holocaust affects all those who were born either before, or during, the event (and their number, of course, is diminishing), and all the rest who were

born afterwards. The post-Holocaust birth of a Jew, whether he or she is conscious of it or not, is a statement against Nazism. The Nazis wanted to destroy the Jewish people, but Jews exist. Their very existence is a statement of a fight against Nazism, and a victory, if you like, over Nazism. Therefore, all these things impact on how Jews see themselves.

Reclaiming Jewish Possessions

Q- I would like to ask about the campaign for the Jewish possessions taken by the Germans, by the Swiss banks, and by various other institutions. Can you explain first what this is all about?

B- First, before the war, by and large, a number of Jews (and nobody can tell us today how many there were), deposited whatever money they had in Swiss banks, in the hope that, after the war, after managing to get out of Nazi-controlled Europe, they would be able to reclaim their property. We are maybe talking about relatively small amounts of money, although it may add up to millions of dollars in terms of those years. Supposedly, these deposits were somehow lost, or forgotten, or hidden by the Swiss banks and others, without any trace. In the 1990s, an effort was made to recover the documentation on these deposits.

Second, the Nazis smuggled money into Switzerland. This was money that had been stolen not only from Jews, but from others as well. They hid this money in bank accounts of various kinds.

Third, a huge amount of gold was confiscated by the Germans, or robbed, partly from central banks in various parts of Europe, in countries conquered by Germany, and where the gold was physically taken, or where pressure was applied, where the gold was taken for the Germans for use in their war effort. Apart from this, however, there were very large amounts of gold that were confiscated, not from central banks of conquered states – which also contained a certain Jewish element, different in different countries – but were the property of Jewish citizens of Germany in the 1930s, who had to deliver

their gold to the Central German Bank. There was also gold confiscated from Jews all over Germany – wedding rings, personal jewelry, perhaps gold coins that people hid in order to use in an emergency.

More terrible than anything else is the small amounts of gold that were broken away from the gold teeth of victims murdered in the concentration and death camps. Each such gold filling might be a fraction of a gram of gold, but it weighs more than the tons of gold that were confiscated from central banks, I think. And so this is another element in the story.

Another element is life-insurance policies that people took out before the war with respectable insurance companies all over Europe. And, insofar as they survived, they, or their heirs, never got the money back. Again, these things do not only concern Jews, but Jews played a very prominent role in this effort before the war to make life-insurance agreements, so that their heirs and their relatives could inherit whatever was paid in there. Only in part did these life-insurance policies come back to the people who insured themselves. To a large extent, these were never paid out.

There are various explanations for this – for example, that after the war Communist countries in Eastern Europe confiscated such monies, and that the insurance companies lost their property because of this, and so on. But the fact remains that these life-insurance policies were taken out in the belief that they would be paid out when the time came. Another element is slave labor: Non-Jews, and Jews, slaved for German companies – not only German companies, but largely German ones. And what they got back (if anything at all), was a pittance.

And so the argument runs that those people who lost their physical capabilities of survival, or whose health was damaged, and so on, were entitled to compensation beyond the overall monies paid by various states, including Germany, in large sums, for the general problem of suffering during the Holocaust.

In addition, there are art treasures that were confiscated and robbed by the German occupiers – again, not only from the Jews, but also from others, in various countries – mainly in France, in Germany, but also in other places. These were never returned, and are still in various countries, and the argument runs that they should be returned.

This overall problem is supposedly one of property – but it isn't. The problem of property is part of a major, moral problem. The Decalogue says quite clearly: "Thou shalt not steal." Now, are we going to refer only to the main argument, namely, "Thou shalt not murder," or do we also deal with "Thou shalt not steal"? It's part of the story; it's part of the moral obligation of humanity to the victims to return whatever property can be returned, and however much compensation can be made.

I think it is essential to emphasize that this is a moral question, and not a question of dollars and cents (although it expresses itself in dollars and cents). But a robber must not be let off scot-free after the robbery he has committed, especially if it ended in murder. There cannot be restitution for the murder, people cannot be brought back to life, but at least those who survived, and their relatives, can get the material compensation that they're entitled to.

Q- What is the role of the institutions of neutral countries, such as banks, that were involved in those robberies? How would you define this role: Was it criminal, or was there some kind of indifference?

B- An independent commission of experts, nominated by the Swiss Government, and headed by Prof. Henri Bergier - a very well-respected, wonderful Swiss historian – has clearly proved that, from 1941 on, the heads of the Swiss National Bank and of the Swiss Government, knew that the gold transferred by the Germans to Switzerland (in order to pay for imports), was stolen. That is clear. What is not clear is whether they knew that part of that gold was stolen from Jews – although it is clear that it was stolen gold.

The Germans used the gold they had robbed from various sources in order to pay directly for Swiss imports, and indirectly for imports from Spain, Portugal, and other countries. This gold was transferred partly to the private Swiss banks – but that stopped after a while – and then to the Swiss National Bank, and also to a clearing bank based in Basel, and was used as a balance of gold payments between countries before, during, and even after, the war. It is, again, quite clear that the Swiss knew they were dealing in stolen property – I think they recognized this. The Swiss banks arrived at an arrangement with the Jewish organizations that represented Holocaust survivors, and agreed to repay money that both sides agreed should serve as compensation. Some of these things are still outstanding.

And there is, of course, an argument presented by the Swiss Government that they had agreed after the war, with the Western Allies, to repay a certain amount of money, although this was done under what the Bergier Commission quite clearly points out was false pretenses. Nevertheless, this is a valid agreement; and the question is whether valid international agreements that were agreed upon under false pretenses should still be valid or not. This is an ongoing argument.

Other countries, in somewhat similar situations, had different attitudes to this. One must say that the Swiss Government made available all material related to it; it was perfectly open. The situation of Switzerland during the war was not an easy one. It was surrounded by German-occupied territories, it was under tremendous pressure from Germany; the argument is that it acted under pressure. (This is a historical argument that needs checking in greater detail, and the Bergier Commission has promised to do this.)

Sweden is a different case. It decided to make full restitution of whatever money had come to them. Gold had come to them during the war, and it is reasonable to suppose that the Swedish National Bank knew that this was stolen money. And Norway made full restitution of all the properties of all the

Jews who has been taken away, and whose property had been confiscated by the Germans.

So there are different attitudes in different countries. And, because these things are extremely complicated, this matter will still be going on for quite some time. But one has to say that the demand for restitution from different neutrals – and this implies not only to Switzerland and Sweden, but also to Turkey, Spain and Portugal – is, again, a question of morality. Again, this is expressed in money, but it's a question of confiscated property and what to do about it.

Q- But we know that, during wartime, dirty business was taking place all over the world. Would you consider it some kind of cooperation or collaboration, or taking some stand with the Nazi criminalities?

B- Yes. What we discussed about the neutrals is also true of the Allied nations. In Great Britain and in the United States, there were survivor properties that were never returned, so that one has to enlarge the view about all this. One might also say that here, in the State of Israel, there are survivor properties that will also have to be investigated in order to return them. This is a universal issue, and an issue that deals with the criminality of a period central to our self-understanding. So, yes, I think that this is a matter of a belated, but very important, dealing with Nazi criminality.

Q- But were those institutions, banks, and governments involved in this criminality? Would you point to them and say, "You are responsible, in your way, for Nazi criminalities"?

B- I don't think you can argue that they were responsible for Nazi criminalities. From a certain date onwards, they knowingly took stolen property. That is their criminality, but they were not responsible for the Nazi crimes or for normal trading with Germany. Nobody accused either Switzerland or Sweden,

or anyone else, of what is known as normal trading, as long as it was not with stolen money.

Q- Some people are critical of this whole issue, and claim that it heightens antisemitism. You referred to this when you said that it's a moral issue, more than one of economics. But I still want to ask if this is a Jewish campaign alone, or if other victimized people are also participants?

B- There was a demand by the Roma – the so-called Gypsies – to have restitution made to them too. Although, because they are a very poor people, the amount of gold that was confiscated from them was minimal. But again, if you confiscated from a Roma a small gold amulet, it weighed more than tons of gold confiscated from anyone else. All the Jewish organizations, and the State of Israel, have stood behind this demand – I think justifiably so – of the Roma people that was openly presented for restitution. Part of the restitution money is to go to them.

So, yes, definitely, this particular genocide (because what happened to the Roma people was a type of genocide, and by the same people, the same Nazis), should be dealt with also. There is an international collaboration on this; there's an international effort led by the United States. Conferences have been, and continue to be, held in order to clarify these issues, and voluntarily to have restitution made to the victims.

Q- But what about other peoples, such as the Poles and the Ukrainians, who were also robbed in one way or another by the Nazis, even though they were not victims of genocide?

B- Well, you could argue that what happened to the Poles was a genocide. But this is a matter of bilateral negotiations between Poland (which is an independent country), and the Ukraine (also an independent country), and the Federal Republic of Germany. We all know that such negotiations are in fact going on, and some restitution is being made. This is outside of the issue of

the Jewish people, who had no state from whom these things were taken, but from individuals all over Europe. The same applies, of course, in the proper proportion, to the Romas.

The Centrality of the Holocaust in Western Civilization

Q- My final question (which we've asked of several scholars), concerns another issue: Why has the Holocaust gained such prominence, and on so many levels, of Western civilization, Western culture, Western history, and Western discourse?

B- From my perspective, I see two reasons. One is that the Holocaust was a genocide, and therefore comparable to other genocides. It must be compared to other genocides, and so it has become not only a specific Jewish issue, but a universal one. But on the other hand, the Holocaust is a special kind of genocide. It has elements that are not to be found in other genocides:

First, the totality – in other words, the fact that the Nazis were trying to find every single person defined by them as a Jew all over the world (not only in Europe), in order to be registered, deprived of property, concentrated, humiliated, deported and murdered.

Second, the globality – the final Nazi idea was to implement the "Final Solution" everywhere in the world.

Third, the ideology behind this particular genocide was totally non-pragmatic, purely fantastic – a world Jewish conspiracy. If there had been a world Jewish conspiracy, the Holocaust wouldn't have happened. So it was an idea that had no bearing on reality to the extent that the Nazis were murdering their own armaments workers (the Jews), while they were looking for every pair of hands in a situation where they were losing the war – and they were murdering their own workers. This was totally non-pragmatic, purely ideological.

Fourth, is that this happened to a people, to the Jewish people, that was a central element in the self-understanding of European or Euro-American peoples. Because Christian antisemitism, for many, many hundreds of years,

had seen the Jews as the stereotypical "other," although Christianity never planned the genocide of the Jews – never! But it discriminated against them, it saw them as different, it saw them as the enemies of what they understood to be God. In other words, a philosophical enemy, if you like, and that translated itself into practical, economic, political, and social measures against the Jews. Without Christian antisemitism, no Holocaust; with Christian antisemitism, no Holocaust either, because after Christian antisemitism comes the anti-Christian German form of antisemitism, which is based on Christian antisemitism, but is different from it. It is both a continuation and a break.

But the Jews are a central issue in European culture because they did not accept the Christian savior; for Christianity, this is a central issue. And the Nazi rebellion against Western civilization, which was a total rebellion against everything that preceded them – against humanism, against democracy, against conservative liberalism, against liberalism, against socialism – had, in a way, historically to turn against the Jews, who were a symbol, rightly or wrongly, of all these things.

The Jews themselves, of course, are just like everyone else; they are no more moral than others. The great moral teachings that the Jews propagated through the Old and the New Testaments are not necessarily observed by Jews any more than they are by anyone else. But the Jews had become the symbol of all this, and the Nazis attacked the symbol that had become the content of the symbol.

And there you have the specificity of the Holocaust. So you have both the universal aspect and the specific Jewish aspect of it. The two are intertwined; you can't separate them. This explains why the Holocaust has become such a central issue in the late 1990s, and a code for evil, and that, I think, could provide an answer to your question.

Q- Thank you very much.



Source: The Multimedia CD *'Eclipse Of Humanity'*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 2000.