

The Meaning of Working Through the Past

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The question “What does working through the past mean?” requires explication. It follows from a formulation, a modish slogan that has become highly suspect during the last years. In this usage “working through the past” does not mean seriously working upon the past, that is, through a lucid consciousness breaking its power to fascinate. On the contrary, its intention is to close the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory. The attitude that everything should be forgotten and forgiven, which would be proper for those who suffered injustice, is practiced by those party supporters who committed the injustice. I wrote once in a scholarly dispute: in the house of the hangman one should not speak of the noose, otherwise one might seem to harbor resentment. However, the tendency toward the unconscious and not so unconscious defensiveness against guilt is so absurdly associated with the thought of working through the past that there is sufficient reason to reflect upon a domain from which even now there emanates such a horror that one hesitates to call it by name.

One wants to break free of the past: rightly, because nothing at all can live in its shadow, and because there will be no end to the terror as long as guilt and violence are repaid with guilt and violence; wrongly, because the past that one would like to evade is still very much alive. National Socialism lives on, and even today we still do not know whether it is merely the ghost of what was so monstrous that it lingers on after its own death, or whether it has not yet died at all, whether the willingness to commit the unspeakable survives in people as well as in the conditions that enclose them.

I do not wish to go into the question of neo-Nazi organizations. I consider the survival of National Socialism *within* democracy to be potentially more menacing than the survival of fascist tendencies *against* democracy. Infiltration indicates something objective; ambiguous figures make their *comeback** and occupy positions of power for the sole reason that conditions favor them.

Nobody disputes the fact that in Germany it is not merely among the so-called incorrigibles, if that term must be used, that the past has not yet been mastered. Again and again one hears of the so-called guilt complex, often with the association that it was actually first created by the construction of a German collective guilt. Undoubtedly there is much that is neurotic in the relation to the past: defensive postures where one is not attacked, intense affects where they are hardly warranted by the situation, an absence of affect in the face of the gravest matters, not seldom simply a repression of what is known or half-known. Thus we often found in group experiments in the Institute for Social Research that mitigating expressions and euphemistic circumlocutions were chosen in the reminiscences of deportation and mass murder, or that a hollow space formed in the discourse; the universally adopted, almost good-natured expression *Kristallnacht*, designating the pogrom of November 1938, attests to this inclination. A very great number claim not to have known of the events at that time, although Jews disappeared everywhere and although it is hardly believable that those who experienced what happened in the East constantly kept silent about what must have been for them an unbearable burden; surely one may assume that there is a relation between the attitude of “not having known

anything about it” and an impassive and apprehensive indifference. In any case the determined enemies of National Socialism knew quite early exactly what was going on.

We all are also familiar with the readiness today to deny or minimize what happened—no matter how difficult it is to comprehend that people feel no shame in arguing that it was at most only five and not six million Jews who were gassed. Furthermore, the quite common move of drawing up a balance sheet of guilt is irrational, as though Dresden compensated for Auschwitz. Drawing up such calculations, the haste to produce counter-arguments in order to exempt oneself from self-reflection, already contain something inhuman, and military actions in the war, the examples of which, moreover, are called “Coventry” and “Rotterdam,” are scarcely comparable to the administrative murder of millions of innocent people. Even their innocence, which cannot be more simple and 90 interventions: nine critical models plausible, is contested. The enormity of what was perpetrated works to justify this: a lax consciousness consoles itself with the thought that such a thing surely could not have happened unless the victims had in some way or another furnished some kind of instigation, and this “some kind of” may then be multiplied at will. The blindness disregards the flagrant disproportion between an extremely fictitious guilt and an extremely real punishment. At times the victors are made responsible for what the vanquished did when they themselves were still beyond reach, and responsibility for the atrocities of Hitler is shifted onto those who tolerated his seizure of power and not to the ones who cheered him on. The idiocy of all this is truly a sign of something that psychologically has not been mastered, a wound, although the idea of wounds would be rather more appropriate for the victims.

Despite all this, however, talk of a guilt complex has something untruthful to it. Psychiatry, from which the concept is borrowed with all its attendant associations, maintains that the feeling of guilt is pathological, unsuited to reality, psychogenic, as the analysts call it. The word “complex” is used to give the impression that the guilt, which so many ward off, abreact, and distort through the silliest of rationalizations, is actually no guilt at all but rather exists in them, in their psychological disposition: the terribly real past is trivialized into merely a figment of the imagination of those who are affected by it. Or is guilt itself perhaps merely a complex, and bearing the burden of the past pathological, whereas the healthy and realistic person is fully absorbed in the present and its practical goals? Such a view would draw the moral from the saying: “And it’s as good as if it never happened,” which comes from Goethe but, at a crucial passage in *Faust*, is uttered by the devil in order to reveal his innermost principle, the destruction of memory. The murdered are to be cheated out of the single remaining thing that our powerlessness can offer them: remembrance. The obstinate conviction of those who do not want to hear anything of it does indeed coincide with a powerful historical tendency. Hermann Heimpel on several occasions has spoken of how the consciousness of historical continuity is atrophying in Germany, a symptom of that societal weakening of the ego Horkheimer and I had already attempted to derive in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Empirical findings, for example, that the younger generation often does not know who Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm I were, have confirmed this suspicion of the loss of history.

Thus the forgetting of National Socialism surely should be understood far more in terms of the general situation of society than in terms of psychopathology. Even the psychological mechanisms used to defend against painful and unpleasant memories serve highly realistic ends. These ends are revealed by the very people maintaining the defense, for instance when in a practical frame of mind they point out that an all too vivid and persistent recollection of what happened can harm the German image abroad. Such zeal does not accord well with the declaration of Richard Wagner, who was nationalistic enough, to the effect that being German means doing something for its own sake—provided that it is not defined a priori as business. The effacement of memory is more the achievement of an all too alert consciousness than its weakness when confronted with the superior strength of

unconscious processes. In the forgetting of what has scarcely transpired there resonates the fury of one who must first talk himself out of what everyone knows, before he can then talk others out of it as well.

Surely the impulses and modes of behavior involved here are not immediately rational in so far as they distort the facts they refer to. However, they are rational in the sense that they rely on societal tendencies and that anyone who so reacts knows he is in accord with the spirit of the times. Such a reaction immediately fits in well with the desire to get on with things. Whoever doesn't entertain any idle thoughts doesn't throw any wrenches into the machinery. It is advisable to speak along the lines of what Franz Böhm so aptly called "non-public opinion." Those who conform to a general mood, which to be sure is kept in check by official taboos but which for that reason possesses all the more virulence, simultaneously qualify both as party to it and as independent agents. The German resistance movement after all remained without a popular base, and it's not as if such a base was magically conjured up out of Germany's defeat just like that. One can surely surmise that democracy is more deeply rooted now than it was after the First World War: in a certain sense National Socialism—anti-feudal and thoroughly bourgeois—by politicizing the masses even prepared, against its will, the ground for democratization. The Junker caste as well as the worker's movement have disappeared. For the first time something like a relatively homogeneous bourgeois milieu has developed. But the belated arrival of democracy in Germany, which did not coincide with the peak of economic liberalism and which was introduced by the Allied victors, cannot but have had an effect on the relationship of Germans to democracy. That relationship is only rarely expressed directly, because for the time being things are going so well under democracy and also because it would go against the community of interests institutionalized by political alliances with the West, especially with America. However, the resentment against *reeducation** is sufficiently explicit. What can be said is that the system of political democracy certainly is accepted in Germany in the form of what in America is called *a working proposition**, something that has functioned well up until now and has permitted and even promoted prosperity. But democracy has not become naturalized to the point where people truly experience it as their own and see themselves as subjects of the political process. Democracy is perceived as one system among others, as though one could choose from a menu between communism, democracy, fascism, and monarchy: but democracy is not identified with the people themselves as the expression of their political maturity. It is appraised according to its success or setbacks, whereby special interests also play a role, rather than as a union of the individual and the collective interests, and the parliamentary representation of the popular will in modern mass democracies already makes that difficult enough. In Germany one often hears Germans among themselves making the peculiar remark that they are not yet mature enough for democracy. They make an ideology out of their own immaturity, not unlike those adolescents who, when caught committing some violent act, talk their way out of it with the excuse that they are just teenagers. The grotesque character of this mode of argumentation reveals a flagrant contradiction within consciousness. The people who play up their own naiveté and political immaturity in such a disingenuous manner on the one hand already feel themselves to be political subjects who should set about determining their own destiny and establishing a free society. On the other hand, they come up against the limits strictly imposed upon them by the existing circumstances. Because they are incapable of penetrating these limits with their own thought, they attribute this impossibility, which in truth is inflicted upon them, either to themselves, to the great figures of the world, or to others. It is as though they divide themselves yet once more into subject and object. Moreover, the dominant ideology today dictates that the more individuals are delivered over to objective constellations, over which they have, or believe they have, no power, the more they subjectivize this powerlessness. Starting from the phrase that everything depends on the person, they attribute to people everything that in fact is due to the external conditions, so that in turn the conditions remain undisturbed. Using the language of

philosophy, one indeed could say that the people's alienation from democracy reflects the self-alienation of society.

Among these objective constellations, the development of international politics is perhaps the most salient. It appears to justify retrospectively Hitler's attack against the Soviet Union. Since the Western world essentially defines itself as a unity in its defense against the Russian threat, it looks as though the victors in 1945 had foolishly destroyed the tried and tested bulwark against Bolshevism, only to rebuild it a few years later. It is a quick jump from the obvious statement "Hitler always said so" to the extrapolation that he was also right about other things. Only edifying armchair orators could quickly ease themselves over the historical fatality that in a certain sense the same conception that once motivated the Chamberlains and their followers to tolerate Hitler as a watchdog against the East has survived Hitler's downfall. Truly a fatality. For the threat that the East will engulf the foothills of Western Europe is obvious, and whoever fails to resist it is literally guilty of repeating Chamberlain's *appeasement**. What is forgotten is merely—merely!—the fact that precisely this threat was first produced by Hitler's campaign, who brought upon Europe exactly what his expansionist war was meant to prevent, or so thought the *appeasers**. Even more than the destiny of single individuals, it is the destiny of political entanglements that constitutes the nexus of guilt. The resistance to the East contains its own dynamic that reawakens the German past. Not merely in terms of ideology, because the slogans of struggle against Bolshevism have always served to mask those who harbor no better intentions toward freedom than do the Bolsheviks themselves. But also in terms of reality. According to an observation that had already been made during the era of Hitler, the organizational power of totalitarian systems imposes some of its own nature upon its adversaries. As long as the economic disparity persists between East and West, the fascist variety has better chances of success with the masses than the East's propaganda has, whereas admittedly, on the other hand, one is not yet pushed to the fascist ultima ratio. However, the same character types are susceptible to both forms of totalitarianism. Authoritarian personalities are altogether misunderstood when they are construed from the vantage point of a particular political-economic ideology; the well-known oscillations of millions of voters before 1933 between the National Socialist and Communist parties is no accident from the social-psychological perspective either. American studies have shown that this personality structure does not correlate so easily with political-economic criteria. It must be defined in terms of character traits such as a thinking oriented along the dimensions of power and powerlessness, a rigidity and an inability to react, conventionality, the lack of self-reflection, and ultimately an overall inability to experience. Authoritarian personalities identify themselves with real-existing power per se, prior to any particular contents. Basically, they possess weak egos and therefore require the compensation of identifying themselves with, and finding security in, great collectives. The fact that one meets figures everywhere who resemble those in the film *Wir Wunderkinder* is neither due to the depravity of the world as such nor to the supposedly peculiar traits of the German national character. It is due rather to the identity of those conformists—who before the fact already have a connection to the levers of the whole apparatus of political power—as potential followers of totalitarianism. Furthermore, it is an illusion to believe that the National Socialist regime meant nothing but fear and suffering although it certainly was that even for many of its own supporters. For countless people life was not at all bad under fascism. Terror's sharp edge was aimed only at a few and relatively well defined groups. After the crises of the era preceding Hitler the predominant feeling was that "everything is being taken care of," and that did not just mean an ideology of *KdF* trips and flower boxes in the factories. Compared with the *laissez-faire* of the past, to a certain degree Hitler's world actually protected its own people from the natural catastrophes of society to which they had been abandoned. A barbaric experiment in state control of industrial society, it violently anticipated the crisis-management policies of today. The often cited "integration," the organizational tightening of the weave in the societal net that encompassed everything, also afforded protection

from the universal fear of falling through the mesh and disappearing. For countless people it seemed that the coldness of social alienation had been done away with thanks to the warmth of togetherness, no matter how manipulated and contrived; the *völkisch* community of the unfree and the unequal was a lie and at the same time also the fulfillment of an old, indeed long familiar, evil bourgeois dream. The system that offered such gratification certainly concealed within itself the potential for its own downfall. The economic efflorescence of the Third Reich in large measure was due to its rearmament for the war that brought about the catastrophe. But the weakened memory I mentioned earlier resists accepting these arguments. It tenaciously persists in glorifying the National Socialist era, which fulfilled the collective fantasies of power harbored by those people who, individually, had no power and who indeed could feel any self-worth at all only by virtue of such collective power. No analysis, however illuminating, can afterward remove the reality of this fulfillment or the instinctual energies invested in it. Even Hitler's *va banque* gamble was not as irrational as it seemed to average liberal thought at the time or as its failure seems to historical hindsight today. Hitler's calculation, to exploit the temporary advantage gained over the other nations thanks to a massively accelerated armaments program, was by no means foolish in consideration of what he wanted to achieve. Whoever delves into the history of the Third Reich and especially of the war will feel again and again that the particular moments in which Hitler suffered defeat seem to be accidental and that only the course of the whole appears necessary, the ultimate victory of the superior technical-economic potential of the rest of the world that did not want to be swallowed up: so to speak a statistical necessity, but by no means a discernible step-by-step logic. The surviving sympathy for National Socialism has no need for laborious sophistry in order to convince itself and others that things could just as well have gone differently, that in fact only some mistakes were made, and that Hitler's downfall was a world-historical accident the world spirit may perhaps yet rectify.

On the subjective side, in the psyche of people, National Socialism increased beyond measure the collective narcissism, simply put: national vanity. The individual's narcissistic instinctual drives, which are promised less and less satisfaction by a callous world and which nonetheless persist undiminished as long as civilization denies them so much, find substitute satisfaction in the identification with the whole.[a] This collective narcissism was severely damaged by the collapse of Hitler's regime, but the damage occurred at the level of mere factuality, without individuals making themselves conscious of it and thereby coping with it. This is the social-psychological relevance of talk about an unmastered past. Also absent is the panic that, according to Freud's theory in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, sets in whenever collective identifications break apart. If the lessons of the great psychologist are not to be cast to the wind, then there remains only one conclusion: that secretly, smoldering unconsciously and therefore all the more powerfully, these identifications and the collective narcissism were not destroyed at all, but continue to exist. Inwardly the defeat has been as little ratified as after 1918. Even in the face of the obvious catastrophe the collective Hitler integrated has held together and clung to chimerical hopes like those secret weapons that in truth the other side possessed. Furthermore, social-psychology adds the expectation that the damaged collective narcissism lies in wait of being repaired and seizes upon anything that brings the past into agreement with the narcissistic desires, first in consciousness, but that it also, whenever possible, construes reality itself as though the damage never occurred. To a certain degree this has been achieved by the economic boom, the feeling of "how industrious we are." But I doubt whether the so-called economic miracle—in which, to be sure, everyone participates even while speaking of it with some disdain—social-psychologically really reaches as deeply as one might suppose in times of relative stability. Precisely because famine continues to reign across entire continents when technically it could be eliminated, no one can really be so delighted at his prosperity. Just as individually, for instance in films, there is resentful laughter when a character sits down to a very good meal and tucks the napkin under his chin, so too humanity begrudges itself the comfort it all too well

knows is still paid for by want and hardship; resentment strikes every happiness, even one's own. Satiety has become an insult a priori, whereas the sole point of reproach about it would be that there are people who have nothing to eat; the alleged idealism that especially in today's Germany so pharisaically sinks its teeth into an alleged materialism frequently owes its self-proclaimed profundity merely to repressed instincts. Hatred of comfort engenders in Germany discomfort at prosperity, and it transfigures the past into a tragedy. However, this malaise does not at all issue solely from dark and troubled waters but rather once again from far more rational ones. The prosperity is due to an economic upswing, and no one trusts its unlimited duration. If one seeks consolation in the view that events like the Black Friday of 1929 and the resultant economic crisis could hardly repeat themselves, then this already implicitly contains the reliance on a strong state power that, one then expects, will offer protection if economic and political freedom no longer work. Even in the midst of prosperity, even during the temporary labor shortage, the majority of people probably feel secretly that they are potentially unemployed, recipients of charity, and hence really objects, not subjects, of society: this is the fully legitimate and reasonable cause of their discomfort. It is obvious that at any given moment this discomfort can be dammed up, channeled toward the past, and manipulated in order to provoke a renewal of the disaster.

Today the fascist wish-image unquestionably blends with the nationalism of the so-called underdeveloped countries, which now, however, are instead called "developing countries." Already during the war the *slogans** about Western plutocracies and proletarian nations expressed sympathy with those who felt shortchanged in the imperialist competition and also wanted a place at the table. It is difficult to discern whether and to what extent this tendency has already joined the anti-civilization, anti-Western undercurrent of the German tradition and whether in Germany itself there exists a convergence of fascist and communist nationalism. Nationalism today is at once both obsolete and up-to-date. Obsolete, because in the face of the compulsory coalition of nations into great blocs under the supremacy of the most powerful country, which is already dictated by the development in weapons technology alone, the individual sovereign nations, at least in advanced continental Europe, have forfeited their historical substance. The idea of the nation, in which the common economic interests of free and independent citizens once united against the territorial barriers of feudalism, has itself become a barrier to the obvious potential of society as a totality. But nationalism is up-to-date in so far as the traditional and psychologically supremely invested idea of nation, which still expresses the community of interests within the international economy, alone has sufficient force to mobilize hundreds of millions of people for goals they cannot immediately identify as their own. Nationalism does not completely believe in itself anymore, and yet it is a political necessity because it is the most effective means of motivating people to insist on conditions that are, viewed objectively, obsolete. This is why, as something ill at ease with itself, intentionally self-deluded, it has taken on grotesque features nowadays. Admittedly nationalism, the heritage of barbarically primitive tribal attitudes, never lacked such traits altogether, but they were reined in as long as liberalism guaranteed the right of the individual—also concretely as the condition of collective prosperity. Only in an age in which it was already toppling has nationalism become completely sadistic and destructive. The rage of Hitler's world against everything that was different—nationalism as a paranoid delusional system—was already of this caliber. The appeal of precisely these features is hardly any less today. Paranoia, the persecution mania that persecutes those upon whom it projects what it itself desires, is contagious. Collective delusions, like anti-Semitism, confirm the pathology of the individual, who shows that psychologically he is no longer a match for the world and is thrown back upon an illusory inner realm. According to the thesis of the psychoanalyst Ernst Simmel, they may well spare a half-mad person from becoming completely so. To the extent that the delusional mania of nationalism openly manifests itself in the reasonable fear of renewed catastrophes so, too, does it promote its own diffusion. Delusional mania is the substitute for the dream that humanity would organize

the world humanely, a dream the actual world of humanity is resolutely eradicating. Everything that took place between 1933 and 1945 goes together with pathological nationalism.

That fascism lives on, that the oft-invoked working through of the past has to this day been unsuccessful and has degenerated into its own caricature, an empty and cold forgetting, is due to the fact that the objective conditions of society that engendered fascism continue to exist. Fascism essentially cannot be derived from subjective dispositions. The economic order, and to a great extent also the economic organization modeled upon it, now as then renders the majority of people dependent upon conditions beyond their control and thus maintains them in a state of political immaturity. If they want to live, then no other avenue remains but to adapt, submit themselves to the given conditions; they must negate precisely that autonomous subjectivity to which the idea of democracy appeals; they can preserve themselves only if they renounce their self. To see through the nexus of deception, they would need to make precisely that painful intellectual effort that the organization of everyday life, and not least of all a culture industry inflated to the point of totality, prevents. The necessity of such adaptation, of identification with the given, the status quo, with power as such, creates the potential for totalitarianism. This potential is reinforced by the dissatisfaction and the rage that very constraint to adapt produces and reproduces. Because reality does not deliver the autonomy or, ultimately, the potential happiness that the concept of democracy actually promises, people remain indifferent to democracy, if they do not in fact secretly detest it. This form of political organization is experienced as inadequate to the societal and economic reality; just as one must adapt, so would one like the forms of collective life also to adapt, all the more so since one expects from such adaptation the *streamlining** of the state as a gigantic business enterprise within a certainly less than friendly competition of all against all. Those whose real powerlessness shows no sign of ceasing cannot tolerate even the semblance of what would be better; they would prefer to get rid of the obligation of autonomy, which they suspect cannot be a model for their lives, and prefer to throw themselves into the melting pot of the collective ego.

I have exaggerated the somber side, following the maxim that only exaggeration per se today can be the medium of truth. Do not mistake my fragmentary and often rhapsodic remarks for Spenglerism; Spenglerism itself makes common cause with the catastrophe. My intention was to delineate a tendency concealed behind the smooth façade of everyday life before it overflows the institutional dams that, for the time being, are erected against it. The danger is objective, not primarily located in human beings. As I said, there is much that indicates that democracy with all it implies has a more profound hold on people than it did during the Weimar period. By failing to emphasize what is so obvious, I have neglected what circumspect consideration must not ignore: that within the German democracy from 1945 to today the material life of society has reproduced itself more richly than during any other time in living memory, and this is also relevant from a social-psychological perspective. It certainly would not be all too optimistic to affirm that the German democracy is not doing badly these days and that therefore the real reappraisal of the past is also doing fine, provided that it is given enough time and much else besides. Except that the concept of having enough time contains something naive and at the same time contemplative in the bad sense. We are neither simply spectators of world history, free to frolic more or less at will within its grand chambers, nor does world history, whose rhythm increasingly approaches that of the catastrophe, appear to allow its subjects the time in which everything would improve on its own. This bears directly on democratic pedagogy. Above all enlightenment about what has happened must work against a forgetfulness that all too easily turns up together with the justification of what has been forgotten—for instance, parents who must endure embarrassing questions from children about Hitler and in response, indeed to whitewash their own guilt, speak of the good aspects and say that in fact it was not so awful. In Germany it is fashionable to complain

about civic education, and certainly it could be better, but sociology already has data indicating that civic education, when it is practiced earnestly and not as a burdensome duty, does more good than is generally believed. However, if one takes the objective potential for the survival of National Socialism as seriously as I believe it must be taken, then this sets limits even for a pedagogy that promotes enlightenment. Whether it be sociological or psychological, such a pedagogy in practice will probably reach in general only those people who are open to it anyway and who therefore are hardly susceptible to fascism. On the other hand, it is certainly not at all superfluous to fortify this group with enlightened instruction against the non-public opinion. On the contrary, one could easily imagine that from this group something like cadres could develop, whose influence in the most diverse contexts would then finally reach the whole of society, and the chances for this are all the more favorable, the more conscious the cadres become. Obviously, the work of enlightenment will not be limited to these groups. Here I will refrain from a question that is very difficult and laden with the greatest responsibility: namely, of how far it is advisable to go into the past when attempting to raise public awareness, and whether precisely the insistence on it does not provoke a defiant resistance and produce the opposite of what it intends. It seems to me rather that what is conscious could never prove so fateful as what remains unconscious, half-conscious, or preconscious. Essentially it is a matter of the way in which the past is made present; whether one remains at the level of reproach or whether one withstands the horror by having the strength to comprehend even the incomprehensible. For this, however, it would be necessary to educate the educators themselves. But such education is gravely impaired by the fact that what in America are called the *behavioral sciences** are either not represented at all or woefully underrepresented in Germany at present. It is absolutely imperative that universities strengthen a sociology that would work together with the historical research about our own era. Instead of holding forth with secondhand profundities about the Being of man, pedagogy should set itself the task *re-education** is so vehemently accused of having superficially handled. Criminology in Germany is not yet up to modern standards at all. But above all one should think of psychoanalysis, which is still being repressed today as much as ever. Either it is altogether absent, or it is replaced by tendencies that while boasting of overcoming the much-maligned nineteenth century, in truth fall back behind Freudian theory, even turning it into its very opposite. A precise and undiluted knowledge of Freudian theory is more necessary and relevant today than ever. The hatred of it is directly of a piece with anti-Semitism, by no means simply because Freud was a Jew but rather because psychoanalysis consists precisely of that critical self-reflection that makes anti-Semites livid with rage. Although it is so difficult to carry out something like a mass analysis because of the time factor alone, nonetheless if rigorous psychoanalysis found its institutional place, its influence upon the intellectual climate in Germany would be a salutary one, even if that meant nothing more than taking it for granted that one should not lash outward but should reflect about oneself and one's relation to whatever obdurate consciousness habitually rages against. In any case, however, attempts to work subjectively against the objective potential for disaster should not content themselves with corrections that would hardly approach the severity of what must be confronted. Likewise, attention to the great achievements of Jews in the past, however true they may be, are hardly of use and smack of propaganda. And propaganda, the rational manipulation of what is irrational, is the prerogative of the totalitarians. Those who resist totalitarians should not imitate them in a way that would only do themselves a disservice. Panegyrics to the Jews that isolate them as a group already give anti-Semitism a running start. Anti-Semitism is so difficult to refute because the psychic economy of innumerable people needed it and, in an attenuated form, presumably still needs it today. Whatever happens by way of propaganda remains ambiguous. I was told the story of a woman who, upset after seeing a dramatization of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, said: "Yes, but *that* girl at least should have been allowed to live." To be sure even that was good as a first step toward understanding. But the individual case, which should stand for, and raise awareness about, the terrifying totality, by its very individuation became an alibi for the totality the woman

forgot. The perplexing thing about such observations remains that even on their account one cannot advise against productions of the Anne Frank play and the like, because their effect nonetheless feeds into the potential for improvement, however repugnant they also are and however much they seem to be a profanation of the dignity of the dead. I also do not believe that too much will be accomplished by community meetings, encounters between young Germans and young Israelis, and other organized promotions of friendship. All too often the presupposition is that anti-Semitism in some essential way involves the Jews and could be countered through concrete experiences with Jews, whereas the genuine anti-Semite is defined far more by his incapacity for any experience whatsoever, by his unresponsiveness. If anti-Semitism primarily has its foundation in objective society, and only derivatively in anti-Semites, then—as the National Socialist joke has it—if the Jews had not already existed, the anti-Semites would have had to invent them. As far as wanting to combat anti-Semitism in individual subjects is concerned, one should not expect too much from the recourse to facts, which anti-Semites most often will either not admit or will neutralize by treating them as exceptions. Instead one should apply the argumentation directly to the subjects whom one is addressing. They should be made aware of the mechanisms that cause racial prejudice within them. A working through of the past understood as enlightenment is essentially such a turn toward the subject, the reinforcement of a person's self-consciousness and hence also of his self. This should be combined with the knowledge of the few durable propaganda tricks that are attuned exactly to those psychological dispositions we must assume are present in human beings. Since these tricks are fixed and limited in number, there is no overwhelming difficulty in isolating them, making them known, and using them as a kind of vaccine. The problem of how to carry out practically such a subjective enlightenment probably could only be resolved by the collective effort of teachers and psychologists, who would not use the pretext of scholarly objectivity to shy away from the most urgent task confronting their disciplines today. Yet in view of the objective power behind the continuing potential of anti-Semitism, subjective enlightenment will not suffice, even if it is undertaken with a radically different energy and in radically deeper psychological dimensions than it has been up to now. If one wishes to oppose the objective danger objectively, then no mere idea will do, not even the idea of freedom and humanitarianism, which indeed—as we have learned in the meantime—in its abstract form does not mean very much to people. If the fascist potential links up with their interests, however limited those interests may be, then the most effective antidote is still a persuasive, because true, demonstration of their own interests and, moreover, their most immediate ones. One would really be guilty of speculative psychologizing in these matters if one disregarded the fact that the war and the suffering it brought upon the German population, although indeed being insufficient to remove the fascist potential, nonetheless offers some counterweight against it. If people are reminded of the simplest things: that open or disguised fascist revivals will cause war, suffering, and privation under a coercive system, and in the end probably the Russian domination of Europe, in short, that they lead to a politics of catastrophe, then this will impress people more deeply than invoking ideals or even the suffering of others, which is always relatively easy to get over, as La Rochefoucauld already knew. Compared with this prospect, the present *malaise** signifies little more than the luxury of a certain mood. Despite all the psychological repression, Stalingrad and the night bombings are not so forgotten that everyone cannot be made to understand the connection between the revival of a politics that led to them and the prospect of a third Punic war. Even if this succeeds, the danger will still exist. The past will have been worked through only when the causes of what happened then have been eliminated. Only because the causes continue to exist does the captivating spell of the past remain to this day unbroken.

*English in original.