

HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND
PROFESSIONAL HISTORY-WRITING

A Thesis Submitted to the College
of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Holocaust denial and professional historiography. Although much has been written about both subjects, the issue of distinguishing between them seems to have been largely ignored. They are, however, linked because of the way deniers conduct their business: in the attempt to make credible the claim that the Holocaust never happened, deniers mimic the styles and conventions traditionally employed by professional historians. Using footnotes and writing in the third person, deniers hope to get the surface right and make their readers believe their work.

But appearances are deceiving, for deniers do not do history and are not historians. There is a claim that defies morality and any sense of historical reality. Professional historians, while undoubtedly recognizing the moral bankruptcy of deniers and certainly not accepting their work as historical writing, have failed to make evident enough that deniers are not historians. Moreover, those who have attempted to refute deniers – and not often have these been professional historians – have usually done so on the basis of evidence: they have gone back to the data and shown how deniers have falsified or misrepresented it. While there is nothing necessarily wrong with that method, my own tack is different. At the same time as I take for granted the fact that deniers are not historians, what I aim to do is show how that is the case. Thus, this is partly a way beyond factual analysis, and partly the framework for factual refutation should it ever become necessary. Until deniers do history, however, evidence-based

refutation is not necessary, and this very recognition should be implicit *and explicit* in any examination of Holocaust denial.

My hope is to make this clear in three distinct but nevertheless related chapters. The first is about the evolution of Holocaust denial and how deniers have, especially in recent years, attempted to convey the appearance of legitimate scholarship. In the second, I focus on competing narratives as part of my effort to show that the appearance of denial literature is just part of deniers' mode of deception. There is a major difference between competing narratives that are compatible – historical narratives vs. historical narratives – and between competing narratives that are incompatible – historical narratives vs. denial literature. Drawing comparisons between the two should make more evident the genre-specific characteristics of history-writing and Holocaust denial. They are not, and can never be, the same, no matter how much deniers may try to convince us otherwise.

But what to do about this dichotomy? That question is largely the basis for my third chapter. It is my contention that turning to the evidence cannot be the only method by which to distinguish between history and denial. More is required to convince others of the falsity of deniers' claims, and for me this is a larger issue, one that must take into account not just how but also why we write about the past. Lost is the sense that there is an ethical component to history-writing, specifically as this relates to events like the Holocaust, the issues surrounding which seem to require no less than a general notion of right-wrong. Judging between accounts thereby takes on a more meaningful role in the sense that focusing solely on issues of true-false tends to minimize the importance of the Holocaust as lesson. So, too, I think, does this lend itself rather easily to the

disconcerting placement of post-modernism/relativism and Holocaust denial under the same sign. That is, Holocaust denial is untrue, and because post-modernists are often condemned precisely because they question the very notions of truth and objectivity in historical writing, deniers and post-modernists are often linked. However, such a narrow focus risks missing the forest for the trees. Instead of looking solely at how post-modernism threatens “the truth,” history would be better served through the use of post-modern concepts in order to make more evident the ethical component of the discipline of history. In fact, this is what a number of scholars from other disciplines have suggested, for it is in the meaning of the Holocaust – the Holocaust as lesson – that we have the best prevention against denial. Our discipline, after all, is comprised of much more than facts. The more effectively we impart this to students and readers, the better the chance they will understand who historians really are, what they really do, and why it is important. This alone should make clearer the idea that deniers are not historians, and that what they say is wrong on much more than just a factual level.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the product of five years' research as a graduate student. And thought. Deep thought, about the Holocaust, Holocaust denial, and, just as importantly, about the discipline of history. Obviously, such a project requires the help of others, and I received a lot of it along the way. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Christopher Kent, who was more than patient throughout the process, allowing me to chart my own path while providing direction, assistance, and encouragement – always genuine and ever thoughtful. My thanks, as well, to the advisory committee – Professors Fairbairn, Korinek, and Matheson – who asked important questions and made this a better product. I also appreciate the assistance I received from the entire history department at the University of Saskatchewan. Both faculty and staff made grad school bearable and, at times, even fun. My conversations with Professor Jack Coggins were especially enlightening.

My friends, too, offered their assistance in a variety of ways, from reading the thesis, to providing personal support, to giving me the motivation I needed during times of struggle. Rebecca Brain, Erin Millions, Kim Marschall, Rob Scott, Rob Paul, Jay Albrecht, Paul Jenkins, Chris Clarke, Clay Poupart, and Derek Brown were fellow graduate students who always seemed to have the right things to say. While I knew only one of you before I embarked on this venture, you have all become friends I hope to have for a lifetime. So, too, must I thank Bruce MacDonald, Dan Mastrangelo, James Stewart, Gerrit Baan, and Candace Kucher who provided constant encouragement.

I also wish to acknowledge with appreciation Professor Tom Wishart and Heather Lukey, both of the College of Graduate Studies, who provided me with a

number of Graduate Service Fellowships, all of which not only provided funds for research, but also allowed me to broaden my intellectual and administrative horizons. Thanks, as well, to Ruth Epstein from the Extension Division and Linda Dietz, Administrative Assistant of the Department of History. When I needed financial support, you were also there to provide it – and more. I also received the Mary Hallett Travel Award from the history department, and that, too, helped finance my research.

I owe a very special thanks to The Gwenna Moss Teaching & Learning Centre, where I worked for two years of my studies through a Graduate Service Fellowship. Corinne Fasthuber, Joel Deshayé, and Christine Anderson-Obach provided help with a variety of my endeavours, none of which would have gone so smoothly without them. Tereigh Ewert-Bauer and Kim West were more than colleagues; they became close friends who were tireless in their support of my thesis and other projects. I learned more than I can convey in words from Ron Marken and Eileen Herteis, who taught me that graduate school is about much more than just the final product. They, too, always provided me with help and direction.

A quick note of appreciation, as well, to the entire Louis' staff. I spent more than my fair share of time writing this thesis there, and the never-ending cups of coffee blended well with the friendly voices from everyone on staff.

To Professor DeBrou of the Department of History, who, sadly, passed away far too soon, I really owe a heartfelt thank-you. He became a true mentor and friend, and I will always miss him.

And last but certainly not least, thanks to my parents. They made this possible, and never wavered in their support.

For my parents, Richard and Kathleen, without whose support, patience, and wisdom none of this would have been possible. You've done so much for me, and there's no way I'll ever be able to thank you enough.

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INTRODUCTION

It was only after reading the now-familiar refrain of Holocaust deniers, as well as the now equally familiar rhetoric of those historians (and others) for whom “Truth” in historical writing occupies a domain beyond personal morality, that I was confronted with a stark realization: *This just isn't the sort of subject professional historians normally do.* To be sure, some might contest that statement in light of the growing literature about – and of – denial, and about truth and objectivity in historical writing. Rarely, however, do the two subjects overlap in any meaningful way. At best, certain historians cite post-modernism/relativism as a sort of corollary for Holocaust denial. That is, they insist that a relativist approach to historical writing paves the way for the denial of history. According to many of those same historians and anti-post-modern critics, this means that Holocaust deniers and post-modernists share the same concept of history – anything goes – and speak the same language, even if they do not hold exactly the same values or morals. For many scholars, therefore, post-modernism/relativism begets denial, and if truth is the first victim and historiography the second, then the third, and most important, victim is the tragedy that was the Holocaust.

As someone for whom the Holocaust holds definitive and particularly deep and integral meaning, the implications of all this for my own historiographical ethos are numerous. As attracted as I am to the relativist approaches of Hayden White and others, the historian in me still recognizes a certain truth that is in the past. So, too, do I understand the continual yearning for objectivity when historians write about that past.

Thus, if absolute objectivity is a once-cherished myth, historical writing remains an effort at conveying, as much as possible, what actually happened. And surely that is an effort shared by most professional historians. As Alan B. Spitzer suggests, it would be “difficult to imagine anyone willing to push historical scepticism to the point of a nihilism that would put us all out of business,” or anyone who “wishes to relativize out of existence the arsenal of argument against deplorable – racist, sexist, and so forth – histories.”¹ Indeed.

It is precisely because of my own concern about how we narrate the past – about historiography, authority, and truth claims – that I turned on the issue of confronting the denial of the Holocaust. What are historical narratives if not representational claims to the past? How do these narratives invoke the authority of their authors, and even of the discipline of history itself? To what extent have narratives about the Holocaust, in particular, converged to create a “master representation” (read: truth), especially in light of innumerable disagreements and varying interpretations about specific aspects of the tragedy? And what happens when the master representation itself is called into question or disputed entirely? Can we, ought we, engage the deniers of history, the purveyors of a belief that bears no resemblance to reality? If so, then how? Does this not require an epistemological truth – a knowledge grounded in the evidence – and the refutation of denial *and* relativism?

These sorts of questions relate to both history and philosophy of history, and clearly confront the issue of what historians do and how we do it. I think they also bear upon the question of how we do things better – “more historically” – than, in this case,

¹ Alan B. Spitzer, *Historical Truth and Lies about the Past: Reflections on Dewey, Dreyfus, de Man, and Reagan*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 3.

those who would deny the Shoah. Just as important – perhaps even more so – as refuting denial seems to me to be the categorization of Holocaust denial in relation to the writing of history. Historians and their narratives may never be able to claim a perfect representation of the past, but such representations convey an approach that, while it may be formally or stylistically imitable, remains unattainable for Holocaust deniers. They do not do what we do, and only if ever they do that will a confrontation with their work require a way of judging between what are obviously incompatible accounts. More specifically, this means that in what we do and how we do it we already have a metaphorical but nevertheless implicit refutation of denial – we do history, while they do not – and also the framework for a more evidentially-based refutation should deniers ever actually write something that can be even loosely defined as history.

*Why and
How to Respond?*

The questions of whether and why probably lie at the heart of any undertaking such as this. I obviously believe the issue of Holocaust denial warrants a response. However, we still do not know the impact of Holocaust denial, so what is the rationale for responding? This was really the first question I asked myself as I approached the subject, and it is of course not the first time it has been addressed. Anti-denial advocates Deborah Lipstadt and Pierre Vidal-Naquet experienced the same trepidation prior to researching and writing their own books on Holocaust denial.² For them, as for me, the answer to the questions of whether and why must firstly be based upon the danger Holocaust denial poses to the study of history, as well as its assault on the memory of

² Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, (New York: The Free Press, 1993), pp. vii-viii and 1-3; Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of Memory: Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 1-3.

those who survived the Holocaust. There is something inherently wrong and immoral about the denial of such a tragic event, and in that sense the failure to respond seems quite simply inhumane.

Still, how does one respond without providing deniers with a platform for their beliefs and, moreover, without conveying the appearance of a legitimate debate, least of all one with two opposing but equally valid points of view? Vidal-Naquet likewise asks: “But how to respond since discussion is impossible?” and answers: “By proceeding as one might with a sophist, that is, with a man who *seems* like a speaker of truths, and whose arguments must be dismantled piece by piece in order to demonstrate their fallaciousness. And also by attempting to elevate the debate, by showing that the revisionist fraud is not the only one to adorn contemporary culture, and that not merely the ‘how’ but also the ‘why’ of its lie needs to be understood.”³ Demonstrating the “fallaciousness” of deniers’ arguments requires, I think, an empirical approach. That is, to refute specific claims historians must turn to the evidence and find out what exactly happened and how deniers have falsified or manipulated the evidence in support of their claims. For me, this was never really an option, not having access to all of the necessary materials for such an undertaking. As for the “revisionist fraud” not being the only one of its kind, one need only look at the number of conspiracy theories and the like that do “adorn contemporary culture.” Among these, flat-earth theorists come immediately to mind. Bearing in mind the words of Vidal-Naquet, therefore, it is imperative that historians demonstrate what motivates and perpetuates Holocaust denial. Just as importantly, these issues must be made comprehensible even to the casual reader, for

³ Ibid., p. 3.

they present very real problems for history, memory, and society both within and beyond the academic sphere.

And yet it remains the case that in examining Holocaust denial I am engaging in an issue largely dismissed by historical associations – for example, the American Historical Association⁴ – and individual historians alike. Hence Michael Marrus' one-sentence salvo in his otherwise superb book, *The Holocaust in History*: “I have had no difficulty excluding from this book any discussion of the so-called revisionists – malevolent cranks who contend that the Holocaust never happened.”⁵ The point is that few historians see any value in responding to deniers: asking themselves the question of whether, they have chosen instead to do nothing. Those who have responded to deniers' claims – and there are many – have not commonly been the guild historians whose very profession is being attacked.

This relative lack of any disciplinary response is somewhat disconcerting, at least in the sense that while historians are undoubtedly unified in their condemnation of Holocaust denial, rarely have they made sufficiently evident the very obvious: Holocaust deniers are not historians at all.⁶ Of course, this is not to suggest that

⁴ *AHA Statement on Holocaust Denial* (1991): “The American Historical Association Council strongly deplores the publicly reported attempts to deny the fact of the Holocaust. No serious historian questions that the Holocaust took place.” <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/1991/9112/9112RES.CFM> (last checked on July 10, 2005). While I concur wholeheartedly with the statement itself, it does little to make clear to readers why Holocaust denial is wrong, and how it affects the study of history.

⁵ Michael Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*, (Hanover, NH: Published for Brandeis University Press by the University Press of New England, 1987).

⁶ From my research, I can find only two who have or had legitimate academic credentials: Harry Elmer Barnes (now deceased) and Mark Weber (who has a Master's degree from Indiana University). David Irving is often referred to as a historian, and he has published a multitude of books on Hitler, the Nazis, and the Second World War. However, he is not a PhD historian. Moreover, despite his contentions otherwise, his works have not always (or even usually) been held in high standing, least of all by academic historians. In his libel suit against Deborah Lipstadt, Irving had claimed that Lipstadt had damaged his reputation as a historian. As a key member of Lipstadt's defense team, Richard Evans therefore had cause to examine the matter further, and found that while some reviewers initially held Irving's research in high regard, most found his judgments lacking, while some, like Martin Broszat and

professional historians include deniers among their ranks or that denial literature is considered part of legitimate historiography. Rather, they seem unwilling to apply the rules and conventions of historical discourse in order not only to condemn deniers, but also, and more importantly, to preclude their work from sharing the same stature of legitimate historical discourse. For it is one thing to show us what deniers have done wrong and how this affects what deniers hold to be legitimate historical interpretations, but quite another to demonstrate the fact that these are not interpretations at all.⁷

For most professional historians, the seemingly uncontentious phrase “Holocaust deniers are not historians” should therefore carry with it a certain weight and relevance, for it implies that the discipline really means something. In my case, it also establishes the framework for this thesis. It is not my intention solely, or even mainly, to describe denial literature and demonstrate that what its proponents say is untrue, for it seems altogether too obvious that what deniers say or imply is incorrect. Simply put, the Holocaust *did* happen. Despite the fact that professional historians do not always agree about specific aspects of the tragedy, they do share one common belief: between 1941 and 1945, millions of Jews (and Gypsies, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, and others) were murdered by various means – via firing squad, as guinea pigs for so-called medical experiments, in mobile gas chambers, and, of course, en masse in the concentration camps across Germany and German-controlled territories. The evidence attesting to the fact that the Holocaust happened is overwhelming and far beyond reasonable dispute.

Peter Hoffman, were especially critical. See Richard Evans, *Lying About Hitler: Hitler, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), pp. 8-21.

⁷ Until deniers’ works reach attain the level of interpretation, showing readers what factual errors deniers make does not suffice. It is imperative that we also make clear the fact that Holocaust denial is not interpretive at all.

Although their stories, like those of historians, often differ, deniers share instead the belief that the Holocaust *did not* happen. Some of the more common claims are these: the main causes of Jewish deaths between 1941 and 1945 were disease and starvation; the gas chambers were used for delousing; there were shootings and hangings, and perhaps even experimental gassings, but these were conducted by extremist individual Nazis and not ordered by Hitler or the Nazi hierarchy; the number of Jewish deaths during WWII was substantial – perhaps upwards of two million – but nowhere near the six million claimed by those who insist upon the reality of the Holocaust; there was no Nazi policy of extermination, but rather the “Final Solution” to the “Jewish question” was deportation out of the German Reich. Their rationale for these general claims are varied, while more specific arguments (such as those about the use of the crematoria at Auschwitz) continually adapt to hypotheses put forth by other deniers, as well as to refutations by those seeking to combat their claims.⁸

⁸ See Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000; reprinted in 2002); and John Zimmerman, *Holocaust Denial: Demographics, Testimonies, and Ideologies*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000). A case in point is *The Leuchter Report* (1989), by Fred Leuchter, an American death penalty consultant and self-proclaimed engineer without a corresponding degree. Commissioned by denier Ernst Zündel, with the support of fellow denier Robert Faurisson, Leuchter travelled to Poland to examine the Auschwitz facilities, ostensibly to determine the “efficacy” of the “alleged gas chambers...for execution purposes” (p. 182, Zimmerman). This was actually part of a larger project – that of Ernst Zündel’s defense against prosecution in 1988 for spreading false news. Leuchter’s lack of credentials prevented him from actually testifying, but nonetheless, he produced his work, which included his own findings, but was based upon the technical information provided by Faurisson. Leuchter’s conclusion was this: “The author finds no evidence that any of the facilities normally alleged to be execution gas chambers were ever used as such and finds, further, that because of the design and fabrication of these facilities, they could not have been used for execution gas chambers” (Cited in Shermer and Grobman, p. 133). While deniers continue to cite and promote Leuchter’s work, some have distanced themselves from him because it (and indeed Leuchter himself) has been so thoroughly discredited. Moreover, because the *Leuchter Report* states that the crematoria could not have been used as delousing facilities, it also directly contradicts those deniers who claim that the crematoria were in fact used precisely for that purpose. In order to continue to use it, deniers will have to take what they can from the report while ignoring that which does not suit their purposes (Zimmerman, pp. 181-7; Shermer and Grobman, pp. 131-3 and 273-4n.16).

Someone with the necessary access to archives and other materials could show precisely what errors deniers have made: how they have used historical evidence “unreasonably” by making purposeful errors in their use, interpretation, and even translation of that evidence. Many historians who have studied the Holocaust have done so for decades, and have the breadth of knowledge and wealth of materials at their disposal that allows them to do exactly that. Not so in my case, as I am certainly not an expert in the field of Holocaust or genocide studies. Nonetheless, the issue of Holocaust denial remains for me an important one. My work as a historian has taken shape over a number of years, and it is for that reason that I chose to take on this topic. It affects my own research, of course, but more importantly it involves a variety of issues central to the discipline of history. So although my breadth of knowledge in the field of Holocaust history is still developing, what follows will remain personalized, not so much as a reaction to the Holocaust itself – a natural reaction of all those who share an intellectual abhorrence of racism and irrational violence – but because it bears on my beliefs regarding history and historiography.

*History-Writing
and Representation*

Examining the historical canon is useful in its own right. Historians should embrace the self-conscious reflection about what they do, how they do it, and why it is important – not least because it affects how they teach their students. Though they do (and should) evolve over time, certain rules and conventions have always been central to the discipline. Among the most fundamental is the use of evidence, as well as footnotes by which to check that evidence and the interpretations and explanations based upon it. For most professional historians, the use of historical data is what effectively

distinguishes history from fiction. Moreover, historians believe that evidence is what grounds historical writing as being about the past: it situates writing in a discernible time and place and ostensibly conveys what actually happened, or how it actually was.

Evidence is also presumed to act as a check against historical misrepresentations and as a way of preserving the truth. So concerned, in fact, are historians about the notions of truth and objectivity that they write predominantly in the third person, a convention used to distance them from the evidence and give the often misleading impression that they are speaking on behalf of history, or even that history itself is speaking through them.

Using archival and other evidence, citing it with footnotes, and writing in the third person – these are among the historical conventions that have stood the test of time and continue to be vital to the discipline. And only by properly understanding what historians do, as well as how they do it, can we gain a better insight into the tactics of Holocaust deniers. After all, it is clear that deniers have themselves reflected upon historical writing – or more specifically, upon the methods by which historians aspire toward conveying the truth about the past. Deniers claim that their work constitutes legitimate historical study, follows the very same conventions practised by professional historians, and is in fact better than the work of those professionals. They insist that they are *purely* objective, and are simply letting the evidence speak for itself. This reflects a radical change in the texture of denial literature -- though definitely not the substance – which upon its inception was explicitly anti-Semitic and, rather than denying the Holocaust outright, tended much more commonly to justify it.

In chapter one of this thesis, the focus is on that change, and more specifically, the evolution of Holocaust denial as it has tried to make its way into the mainstream of

historiographical discussion. Although my first impulse was to include a brief history of denial as part of this introduction, for a variety of reasons that simply would not suffice. Examining its history as part of a chapter on its evolution is both more meaningful and feasible, in that the work of such early “path-breaking” deniers as Harry Elmer Barnes and Paul Rassinier provided a professional, experiential, and theoretical base for those deniers who have carried the movement into the twenty-first century.⁹ From the late 1970s to the present, replacing overt polemics with a more academic style of prose – a stylistic change initiated by Arthur Butz and Robert Faurisson – has characterized the denial movement.¹⁰ During the intervening thirty or so years, deniers have become more willing to confront their adversaries through the use of such terms as “revisionist” and “exterminationist,” terms they use to describe themselves and professional historians. Their primary motivation was, and continues to be, to create a debate between two schools of thought. In so doing, deniers hope to make others see Holocaust denial as a valid interpretation of past events.¹¹

The first chapter thus provides the framework for discussion of the dangers posed by deniers and the methods by which they try to make credible their claims. It also gives further credence to my belief that despite all of their work on a “master claim,” deniers do not write history. At the same time, the chapter should make clearer that, because of their continued efforts and evolution as a school of thought, deniers are (perhaps) closer than ever to finding a niche in contemporary historiography, especially

⁹ See Lipstadt, pp. 49-83.

¹⁰ Arthur Butz, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century: the Case Against the Presumed Extermination of European Jewry*, (Southam, Warwickshire: Historical Review Press, 1976); and Robert Faurisson, *Mémoire en défense: contre ceux qui m'accuse de falsifier l'histoire; la question des chambres à gaz*, (Paris: La Vieille Taupe, 1980).

¹¹ Carlo Mattogno, “The First Gassing at Auschwitz: Genesis of a Myth,” *Journal of Historical Review* 9:2 (1989), pp. 193-222.

in countries such as Russia and Japan, where legitimate historiography is itself in transition.¹² Again, by responding and adapting to historiographical and societal trends, Holocaust denial may emerge less as a threat to history and the memory of the Holocaust than just one among many other explanations arising from the revision of history generally. While it seems quite plausible to suggest that at this deniers will not succeed – their thesis, the Holocaust never happened, is after all incompatible with the fact that it did – one need only look at the evolution of the denial of the Armenian genocide (1915) to realize that there is a danger in accepting Holocaust denial as being in any way scholarly or historical. In fact, the success of the denial of the Armenian genocide is probably the most vital reason for a detailed chapter on the evolution of Holocaust denial. The negation of the Turkish genocide against the Armenians *is* in many quarters recognized as legitimate historiography, and one of my goals is to contribute to ensuring this never happens to the denial of the Holocaust.¹³

In the second chapter, my objective is to expand upon Holocaust denial's substantive difference from history, and to begin to characterize it as its own genre of writing. Mainly, I want to examine the historiography of the Holocaust in such a way as to situate debates between historians, and between what I term the “master narrative” of the Holocaust and the “master claim” of Holocaust deniers.¹⁴ Such debates are as dissimilar as are the individual discourses of Holocaust denial literature and historiography. That is, there are no common grounds upon which to conduct such a

¹² Stella Rock, “Russian Revisionism: Holocaust Denial and the New Nationalist Historiography,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 35:4 (2001), pp. 64-76; and Rotem Kowner, “Tokyo Recognizes Auschwitz: The Rise and Fall of Holocaust Denial in Japan,” *Journal of Genocide Research* [Great Britain] 3:2 (2001), pp. 257-272.

¹³ Richard Hovannisian, ed., *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999); Roger Smith, Eric Markusen, and Robert J. Lifton, “Professional Ethics and the Denial of the Armenian Genocide,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 9:1 (1995), pp. 1-22.

¹⁴ Compatible-competing narratives can reasonably be debated; incompatible claims cannot.

debate, and this is because denial literature and Holocaust narratives do not share the same foundation. They are incompatible.

By no means am I the first to examine the issue of competing accounts. Among the many philosophers, historians, and others who have done so as part of a reflection upon history and philosophy of history, William Dray and Raymond Martin are the two who most commonly use case studies.¹⁵ This is not to say that the Holocaust has not been used as such by others – on the contrary, it is often regarded as the litmus test for valid history and historical writing. For Dray and Martin, however, the case study is the primary means by which to judge between competing accounts on the basis of explanation and, specifically, interpretation, whereas the Holocaust is more commonly cited as a limit event, the representational boundaries for which preclude for some, but does not for others, certain types of employment. Martin, in particular, abjures the focus on “abstract and highly theoretical issues” in favour of what he calls “*philosophy of history from the bottom up*,” a project he initially undertook in *The Past Within Us* (1989).¹⁶ Accepting, as most historians and philosophers do, that there are always alternative ways to interpret the evidence, Martin concludes that the essential task is to determine which among them is most likely to be true.¹⁷ His method is a departure from the usual theoretical debates, predominantly, these days, between so-called post-modernists and traditional historians. And as I suggest in the second chapter, it does provide historians with one way by which to judge between accounts with the same factual basis, such as specific events or persons.

¹⁵ See Raymond Martin, “Objectivity and Meaning in Historical Studies: Toward a Post-Analytic View,” *History and Theory* 32:1 (February, 1993), pp. 25-50.

¹⁶ “Forum: Raymond Martin, Joan W. Scott, and Cushing Strout on Telling the Truth about History,” *History and Theory* 34:4 (December 1995), p. 321.

¹⁷ Martin, “Objectivity and Meaning,” p. 29.

But just how useful is his method as a way of discriminating between denial literature and Holocaust narratives? Although it can help us to decide between compatible accounts, Martin's approach can only help judge between Holocaust denial and Holocaust narratives if we accept denial literature as a historical interpretation. In one sense, therefore, it is no more helpful than an evidentially-based refutation, one that would require us to go back to the archives and secondary sources used by deniers, examine specific claims they make on the basis of such evidence, and determine whether and how they have falsified, misinterpreted, or mistranslated it. On the other hand, Martin's work does make it all the more clear just how incompatible Holocaust denial and historical writing really are. Moreover, his approach does offer us one means by which to judge between narratives of denial and those of history *should deniers ever offer us something in the way of a distinctly historical interpretation*. Until they do so, however, the best we can do is show how historical debates and debates between deniers and history are different in kind – no less different, in fact, than are the accounts upon which such debates are founded.

If judging between historical accounts and accounts of denial is rendered thus problematic, and if turning to the evidence alone is, as I suggest, an impractical way of refuting deniers outright, how might we, as historians, go about contesting deniers and dismissing their work? This is the question addressed in the third and final chapter. My initial concern is with the linking of post-modernism and Holocaust denial – a connection supposed by Deborah Lipstadt, Richard Evans, and a host of others to show readers that history and post-modern discourses are incompatible. It is also part of an

effort to convey the notion that post-modernism is not “adequate to the magnitude of the epistemological and ethical questions related to the Holocaust.”¹⁸

Truth and ethics. It is somewhat surprising that these issues are connected by Lipstadt *et al.* in their condemnation of post-modern discourses, for there has been a long-held conviction that history-writers should avoid making ethical judgments – or at least that such judgments should not be explicitly stated – in order to more appropriately convey the appearance of disinterested scholarship. Thus, if many historians are unwilling to partake of an ethically-oriented discourse, much less still are they prepared to accept any type of relativism as an acceptable method by which to refute deniers. Examining the work of Patrick Finney¹⁹, I suggest that this is a fundamental misconception. Finney draws on epistemic relativism and shows how it can be used as a way of distinguishing between history and Holocaust denial. Moreover, he conveys the suggestion, echoed by others, that relativism is adequate to that task because its proponents have closely examined history and truth claims and shown us why and how history-writing is not objective. That being so, his arguments suggest that post-modern advocates should likewise be able to make clearer the ideological grounds upon which the discourse of denial is based.

Much of this chapter relates, therefore, to conceptions of truth, ethics, and understanding, and following the work of Michael Dintenfass and James Young²⁰, I suggest an alternative for the study of history, one that would make ethics a more

¹⁸ Wayne Klein, “Truth’s Turning: History and the Holocaust,” in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, ed., *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), p. 54.

¹⁹ Patrick Finney, “Ethics, Historical Relativism, and Holocaust Denial,” *Rethinking History* 2:3 (1998), pp. 359-365.

²⁰ Michael Dintenfass, “Truth’s Other: Ethics, the History of the Holocaust, and Historiographical Theory after the Linguistics Turn,” *History and Theory* 39:1 (February 2000), pp. 1-20; James E. Young, “Toward a Received History of the Holocaust,” *History and Theory* 36:4 (December 1997), pp. 21-43.

prominent part of the discourse about the Holocaust. This involves using survival literature despite (and in fact because of) the various problems associated with it. Moreover, it entails conceiving of history as the discipline of the right and good as much as it is of the true. This is, I think, the only way historians can convey to students and others the meaning of the tragedy and simultaneously preserve the memory of survivors.

In no part of this thesis am I suggesting the evidence be ignored. Like many others, I certainly oppose deliberate misreadings and misrepresentations. That said, I am also sure that there are better ways of writing about the past than concentrating solely on maintaining the appearance of objectivity. Just as clearly are there more appropriate ways of refuting deniers than by a turn to the evidence alone, especially as such refutations relate to history students and others who may or may not be able to distinguish truth from lie, and history from denial. My goal, then, is to examine different methods by which to judge between accounts, as well as new ways of writing history and refuting deniers, not because I want to replace other methods, but rather as corollaries to those that are already in place. Foregrounding the concept of ethics in more subjective, self-reflexive accounts of the past should help students and others understand the meaning of the Holocaust at the same time as their willingness to accept Holocaust denial as just another version of the past should be diminished.

CHAPTER ONE

The History and Evolution of Holocaust Denial

However this war may end, we have won the war against you; none will be left to bear witness, but even if someone were to survive, the world will not believe him. There will perhaps be suspicions, discussions, research by historians, but there will be no certainties, because we will destroy the evidence together with you. And even if some proof should remain and some of you survive, people will say that the events you describe are too monstrous to be believed: they will say that they are the exaggerations of Allied propaganda and will believe us, who will deny everything, and not you. We will be the ones to dictate the history of the Lagers.¹

Citing Simon Wiesenthal's last pages of *The Murderers Are Among Us*, Holocaust survivor Primo Levi's comments make it clear that Holocaust denial really began with the perpetrators themselves. Yet after the war, much more prominent were efforts to minimize the extent of Nazi atrocities and justify Nazi policies against the Jews which, in any case, some argued, were exaggerated, unknown to Hitler himself, and no less extreme than certain military actions of the Allies.² Conspicuously absent at this stage was outright denial of the Holocaust; or at the least, there was nothing resembling a denial movement. But this changed, especially after the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, and my concern here is with Holocaust denial, for while rationalizing of Nazi atrocities still exists even in current denial literature, there is something more sinister about a movement that denies history altogether, disguising immorality, racism, and political objectives as legitimate history. How this denial has evolved from its early years to the present is an important subject because it bears directly upon the study of history, as

¹ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal, (New York: Summit Books, 1988), p. 11f. Cited in Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg, ed., *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 29.

² Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: the Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), pp. 41-47.; see also Lipstadt, "Holocaust Denial: An Overview," *Dimensions* 8:1 (1994), p. 6.

well as the memory of Holocaust survivors, most of whom will soon have passed and no longer be there as living proof of what took place.

Holocaust denial has a history, one that in many ways has been shaped, and one that has also shaped itself. By being shaped, I mean that it has been propagated at different times, with more or less successful results, by different proponents and publishers and through different mediums. By shaping itself, I mean that those proponents have responded to various demands in denial circles, in different countries and venues: right wing movements, sudden waves or resurgences of anti-Semitism, historiographical trends, and new works (both by deniers and professional historians) have all contributed to the writing and dissemination of Holocaust denial literature. Much like histories of all events, these appear to be different, often more polished than their predecessors, and in that sense Holocaust denial has its own historiography. Unlike professional historians, however, deniers have had to shape their works in the effort to gain any validity at all. More specifically, they have tried to gain legitimacy as participants in a historical enterprise. As Charles Maier and Deborah Lipstadt have suggested, “[T]hey’ve worked hard to insinuate themselves into the arena of historical debate and deliberation.”³ In a way, therefore, one might say that deniers have used revisionism as a means of creating a more solid foundation for their enterprise.

In the main, this chapter explores those efforts by focusing on the ever-changing nature of Holocaust denial literature. This will include examining some of the earliest deniers, those whom deniers still look upon as the forefathers of the movement: Harry Elmer Barnes, Paul Rassinier, and Austin App. Their efforts contributed greatly to

³ Deborah Lipstadt, “Deniers, Relativists, and Pseudo-Scholarship,” *Dimensions* 14:1 (2000), p. 45; and Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 64.

today's denial literature and, as will be shown, in many ways helped give it the appearance of genuine scholarship, as well as provide it with credibility. And credibility and acceptance are really what all deniers aspire toward. The writings of Arthur Butz and Robert Faurisson, widely considered among the leaders of the current crop of deniers, are notable for their absence of overt polemics and anti-Semitism. Whilst following the work done by Barnes, Rassinier, and App, the "new deniers" have increasingly recognized the importance of a work's appearance – in other words, getting the surface right. Only by avoiding explicit racial epithets and, perhaps more importantly, writing in the same manner and form as do professional historians, can their writing gain that highly sought-after credibility. Chapter one will, therefore, also look at the different tactics used by deniers to help facilitate the notion and appearance of legitimate historical debate.

It is also worth noting that, early on at least, leading deniers were most prominent in the United States and France. Maurice Bardèche, a French theorist, literary critic, and fascist sympathizer, for example, began writing immediately after the war about the camps. As both Deborah Lipstadt and Gil Seidel suggest, he was the "first to contend that the pictorial and documentary evidence about the murder process in the camps had actually been falsified," and that "the gas chambers were used for disinfection – not annihilation."⁴ Only in the work of Paul Rassinier, however, is Bardèche given explicit credit for his ideas. This is undoubtedly because of his openly fascist and anti-Semitic sentiments – sentiments the current crop of deniers attempts to make less overt.

⁴ Deborah Lipstadt, *Assault*, p. 50; and Gil Seidel, *The Holocaust Denial: Antisemitism, Racism, and the New Right* (Leeds: Beyond the Pale Collective, 1986), pp. 95-6.

Lastly, I want to make clear the fact that while success is not easily measured, Holocaust deniers are following a certain path that may, in time, give credence to their work. The denial of genocide is, after all, not at all new. Perhaps the first deliberate attempt to exterminate an entire people was undertaken by the Turks in 1915: the Armenian genocide. As with the Holocaust, the evidence attesting to its atrocities is overwhelming, yet there is currently a strong movement to deny the Armenian genocide. In the United States, this movement has long been in existence and continues to grow stronger, not least because of two reasons: first, this work of denial has been undertaken both by government (mostly Turkish) personnel and professional historians; and secondly, because the denial has taken an entirely new form. Although exact numbers (of the dead) are still debated, deniers of the Armenian genocide have gone beyond the “facts” and now deny that whatever did happen constituted genocide.⁵ Now, it is unlikely that Holocaust denial will gain the implicit acceptance and assistance of government officials in the Western World; however, the tactic of refusing the very charge of genocide is a dangerous one. In many ways, this should provide even more impetus for historians to confront, instead of tacitly ignore, deniers of the Jewish Holocaust.

Beginning as a series of localized movements (notable for their independence, most early deniers made no effort to create ties amongst one another), deniers initially forged no particular identity outside of the political arena. Rather, they were already

⁵ Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 328; and Richard Hovannisian, “Denial of the Armenian Genocide in Comparison with Holocaust Denial,” in Richard Hovannisian, ed., *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), pp. 201-204.

and easily identifiable for their overt anti-Semitism and radical right-wing views.⁶ In other words, bonds were not created on the basis of Holocaust denial; they were forged in right-wing political organizations, which were by their very nature usually localized and marginal. For the most part, the anti-Semitism of such organizations was easily identifiable because it was so overt in polemical discourse. Denying the Holocaust in a similarly overt way meant that the tie between anti-Semitism and Holocaust deniers was just as easily identified. While that is no longer the case, the branding of Holocaust deniers as anti-Semites continues today, and is part of the reason they are so often dismissed by historians of the Nazi era. It is seen simply as racially-motivated discourse.

Early Deniers: Harry Elmer Barnes, Paul Rassinier, and Austin J. App

Even early on, however, there were exceptions to the notion that deniers were extremists lacking any legitimacy at all. Harry Elmer Barnes, now known as the father of Holocaust denial, was a history professor and one of the leading WWI (with Sydney Fay and Charles Beard) and WWII revisionists. His work was always noticeable for its anti-American government slant, but Barnes was not immediately following the Second World War a Holocaust denier. His focus was always on criticism of the American and Allied governments. And his condemnation of, for example, the bombing of Dresden and, even more notably, American involvement in the war, led him to sympathize with the Germans. Recalling the false allegations of atrocity stories levied against Germany

⁶ Anthony Long, "Forgetting the Führer: the recent history of the Holocaust denial movement in Germany," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 48:1 (2002), p. 73. Long makes clear the fact that only in Germany have Holocaust deniers so commonly associated with one another and made public their associations with far right political movements. In this regard, Long points to Ernst Zündel as having been the "primary motivator."

during the First World War, Barnes believed accusations during World War Two to be at the very least overstated, more probably untrue.⁷

Like Barnes, Paul Rassinier is credited by current Holocaust deniers as having been one of the earliest founders of the movement. In fact, his work had the effect of convincing Barnes himself of the veracity of Holocaust denial.⁸ Rassinier was first a communist, then a socialist, who during the Second World War was a member of the French resistance. Imprisoned by the Germans, Rassinier got out, unscathed, at the end of the war. Upon hearing of and reading stories about camp conditions and genocide, he spoke out, claiming that no such atrocities as were reported had he ever seen. Of course, he was never in a concentration or death camp and was not Jewish, but let us leave that aside. For the point is that Rassinier, left-wing though he remained, began to write about life in the camps during WWII, and in his works he denied the Holocaust.⁹

Yet their being cited now does not imply that there was, in the 1950s or '60s, a developing "school" of denial. In fact, it seems that Barnes and Rassinier were simply the most legitimate of an entirely corrupt collection of fascist sympathizers and anti-Semites. And anti-Semitic though Barnes and Rassinier were – at times less than subtly so – the "new" deniers can nevertheless portray them as icons as a direct result of their past positions and personal experiences. In Barnes, deniers can legitimately claim to have had a well known and fully accredited professional historian on their side.

Moreover, it is from Barnes and his fellow World War One and Two revisionists that

⁷ Lipstadt, *Assault*, pp. 67-83 (see, especially, pages 76-78, whereupon Lipstadt examines Barnes' transition to outright denial). See also Seidel, pp. 66-67; and Ben Austin, *A Brief History of Holocaust Denial*, <http://www.mtsu.edu/~baustin/denhist.htm> (last checked on July 15, 2005).

⁸ Lipstadt, p. 74; and Seidel, p. 67.

⁹ Seidel, pp. 96-98; and Austin, *History*, <http://www.mtsu.edu/~baustin/denhist.htm> (last checked on July 15, 2005).

deniers have really borrowed the term, “revisionist.”¹⁰ They have conferred it upon themselves as a self-serving claim to historical legitimacy. In Rassinier, deniers can claim to have a “survivor” of the prison camps. Denying atrocity stories and “rumours” of mass murder as he did, Rassinier’s dubious testimony is portrayed as the real, verifiable history of Nazi prison camps. Ignoring, even mocking the stories of Holocaust survivors was, it appears, justifiable in light of Rassinier’s experiential claim to authority.

In looking at the works of most early deniers, including Barnes and Rassinier, it is clear just how Holocaust denial began as a process of minimizing. That is, its proponents did not always or even entirely deny the Holocaust. Instead, they tended to blame the Allies for war crimes, thereby equalizing guilt. They claimed that Zyklon-B was used for disinfection, and that any Jewish deaths were the result of wartime deprivations. And they asserted that the solution to the Jewish problem meant resettlement in the East; certainly not the intentional extermination of a distinct group of people. Austin J. App, one-time English professor at the University of Scranton and Lasalle College, is considered Holocaust denial’s main theoretician for his having formulated the eight axioms of denial that are now the pillars of the California-based Institute for Historical Review. Those axioms are:

1. Emigration was the Reich’s plan for solving the Jewish problem. Had Germany wanted to murder every Jew, no inmate would have survived and immigrated to Israel, where they collect “fancy indemnities from West Germany.”
2. “Absolutely no Jews were gassed in any concentration camps in Germany, and evidence is piling up that none were gassed in Auschwitz.” Gassing installations were crematoria, intended for

¹⁰ Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), p. 40. See also Deborah Lipstadt’s discussion of Barnes and the WWI revisionists, as well as the WWII revisionists and post-war isolationists, in *Assault*, pp. 31-35; and 38-47.

- cremating those who had died from disease and other causes, including the “genocidal” Allied bombing campaigns.
3. Jews who disappeared during the war and who remain as yet unaccounted for did so in Soviet, not German, territories.
 4. Those Jews who did die in German hands were acting against the German government, and therefore were subject to unfortunate but internationally legal reprisals.
 5. Had six million Jews been murdered, it stands to reason that “World Jewry” would demand funds to research the topic. Israel has not, however, opened its archives to historians, preferring instead to persecute, in the name of anti-Semitism, anyone publicizing the Holocaust myth. This, above all else, is proof that the figure of six million is a “swindle.”
 6. Jews and the media continue to offer no evidence to prove the figure of six million. Instead, they deliberately misquote leading Nazis in the substantiation of their claim.
 7. The burden of proof is rightfully on the accusers, not the accused, yet the Talmudists and Bolsheviks have done such a good job publicizing the hoax that Germany dares not ask for that proof.
 8. The discrepancies, “ridiculous” as they are, regarding the figures presented by Jewish scholars, are themselves proof that the atrocity stories are false.¹¹

When App presented those axioms in 1973 he was building upon the contentions of others writing in the aftermath of World War Two. He also built upon what he himself had been writing since 1946, when he first dismissed the figure of 6 million dead.

Unlike Barnes, App was immediately convinced of the falsity of the Holocaust. He was also much more explicit than Barnes with regard to his racism and political ideology.¹²

*Bringing the Discourse of Denial into the Mainstream:
Arthur Butz, Robert Faurisson,
and the Institute for Historical Review*

Typically, however, the explicit anti-Semitism of their forerunners has caused the new deniers to either dissociate themselves completely from them or, in some cases, to criticize their efforts. Arthur Butz did exactly that in his seminal work, *The Hoax of*

¹¹ Paraphrased from Austin J. App, *The Six Million Swindle: Blackmailing the German people for hard marks with fabricated corpses*, (Tacoma Park, MD, 1973), pp. 18-19. In the eighth axiom, App seems to assert that survivors’ stories should be uniform, and that the fact that they are not casts doubt on the entire notion of a Holocaust. Lipstadt discusses these axioms in more detail in *Assault*, pp. 99-100.

¹² Lipstadt, *Assault*, pp. 87 and 89-90. Lipstadt also makes clear App’s political connections. For years, he served as president of the Federation of American Citizens of German Descent, a group that successfully lobbied for immigration slots originally intended for Holocaust survivors to be given to Germans and Austrians (pp. 85-86).

the Twentieth Century, published in 1976. He condemned many early deniers' results and, especially, their methods, claiming they were "unscrupulous and unreliable in the employment of resources."¹³ Was this part of a concerted effort to create a school of thought? Butz never says for certain, but as a professor of engineering at Northwestern University he is undoubtedly aware that claims to scholarly legitimacy have certain characteristics both methodological and technical. That is, writing in the same manner and form as historians is not enough. Butz therefore reviewed other deniers' works not with the aim of condemning their belief that the Holocaust did not happen. Rather, imitating a professional historian, Butz examined the works of early deniers and claimed they were lacking in certain areas and fundamentals. Criticizing one's own cannot help but create the image, false as it is, of objectivity and viability. For Butz, it also seems to have been his way of making more legitimate what to him is a perfectly viable thesis.

All of this, of course, helps make clearer the current strategies enlisted by deniers. Only by assuming the appearance of intellectualism and professionalism can deniers gain any respect and their works enter the mainstream, and of this today's deniers are all too aware. Although App is considered Holocaust denial's first theoretician, it was Butz who helped the most by radically changing the texture and substance of denial literature. First, he admitted that the Nazi party was to a certain degree anti-Semitic, its members having on occasion expressed anti-Jewish sentiments. As well, Butz was among the first deniers to accept that the Nazis "committed certain

¹³ Arthur Butz, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century: the Case Against the Presumed Extermination of European Jewry*, (Southam, Warwickshire: Historical Review Press, 1976), pp. 7 and 12, especially.

anti-Semitic actions,”¹⁴ thereby acknowledging the culpability of some individuals. Clearly, however, such concessions do not in any way validate Butz or his work, least of all for professional historians. But is there anything here that might appeal to the student or casual reader of history – someone less than familiar with the evidence or “malleable” to alternative views and histories? The short answer is that in Arthur Butz one is confronted with an academic who surely understands the value of the perception of legitimacy. Upon examining early denial literature, Butz was unimpressed with the way it was presented. Most texts and articles lacked any hint of professionalism; thus, not only was the thesis, “The Holocaust did not happen,” in stark contrast with the claims of academic historians, so too was the methodology. Most historians go to great lengths to objectively view the evidence. The notion of objectivity is carried forth into writing – mostly impersonal but authoritative third-person narrative – and compels readers to believe in the power of the evidence. Now, I have already made clear my own belief that claims of absolute objectivity and disinterestedness are part of a ruse – a ruse helping to create the impression of authority. For professional historians, this remains one of the trademarks of the discipline. For deniers, however, there is more. Third-person narratives and claims of disinterested authority also serve to disguise ideology, or at least minimize its outward appearance and hide/cover up its effects.

For Butz, therefore, the deliberate effort to make *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* less overtly anti-Semitic is revealing. Moreover, he made his work appear academic by making use of evidence and citing it with footnotes. So although his work is almost unreadable, to the casual reader it bears the mark of authenticity. No doubt,

¹⁴ Deborah Lipstadt, “Holocaust Denial and the Compelling Force of Reason,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 26:1-2 (1996), p. 66. See also Arthur Butz, “The International Holocaust Controversy,” *Journal of Historical Review* 1:1 (Spring, 1980), pp. 5-22.

this is what prompted Pierre Vidal-Naquet to call him “the most skillful of all deniers,”¹⁵ and *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* “at times a rather hair-raising success” through which “the reader is persuasively led by the hand and brought little by little to the idea that Auschwitz is a tendentious rumor that skillful propagandists have gradually transformed into a truth.”¹⁶ If Vidal-Naquet is correct to assert that Butz’s arguments can surely be countered on the basis of evidence¹⁷, then he is also correct in stating that when a fictitious account is well-prepared, its refutation “cannot be done on strictly internal grounds.” I think he means that countering Butz’s evidence will not convince Butz of the error of his ways, and, more importantly, that such a task would be tedious, requiring a thorough reading of Butz’ work, as well as of all of the materials Butz used in the preparation of it.¹⁸ Moreover, because Butz makes one claim – the Holocaust did not happen – yet at the same time appears to sympathize with the victims of disease and hunger, it is not easy to convince the casual reader of his anti-Semitism or his historical fallacies.

For a variety of reasons, not the least of which is geography¹⁹, Butz’s work remains important for deniers. Yet Butz has not personally been the key spokesperson for the denial movement (in point of fact, as an engineering professor one might have expected him to join Fred Leuchter in attempting to advance more technically the

¹⁵ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of Memory: Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 51.

¹⁷ Jacques Kornberg attempts to do exactly that in a persuasive article about Butz’s *Hoax of the Twentieth Century*. Jacques Kornberg, “The Paranoid Style: Analysis of a Holocaust Denial Text,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 29:2-3 (1995), pp. 33-44. Kornberg’s work, however, is focused on Butz’s conspiratorial claims and beliefs. So although it points to some of the fallacies in *Hoax*, it surely does not point to all of them; nor need it do so, as not all such fallacies relate to Kornberg’s objective.

¹⁸ Vidal-Naquet, p. 51.

¹⁹ Geography is one of the reasons Butz’s work has remained in circulation. The United States is probably the leading venue for deniers. There, the First Amendment protects free speech, meaning that neither Butz nor the IHR (as publisher of *Hoax*) can be prosecuted for denying the Holocaust.

argument that the gas chambers could not have functioned as historians and others say they did). Robert Faurisson, former professor of French literature at the University of Lyons-III, certainly has become that spokesperson, and again, as we shall see, this is in no small way the result of location, and indeed of French law and national history. It is perhaps in his conclusion that we best obtain a sense of Faurisson's skills:

Nazism is dead, quite dead, and its Führer along with it. What remains today is the truth. Let us dare to proclaim it. The nonexistence of the gas chambers is good news for a beleaguered humanity. Good news that it would be wrong to keep hidden any longer.²⁰

Indeed, far from simply symbolic, it also seems perfectly logical that Faurisson has become Holocaust denial's leading "evangelist." Outwardly, his words do not portray a virulent anti-Semitism of the sort that previously plagued the denial movement. In fact, the message is one of "good tidings" – a blessing to humanity, so to speak.²¹ Claiming, as he did, to be in the sole service of "truth" now resonates in much of the denial literature being produced. So, where Butz left us with an academic and even sympathetic tone, Faurisson's work resonates because of its scholarly and rather uplifting message: humanity simply did not sink to the depths we had previously imagined.

Why, therefore, his subsequent allegation that the alleged genocide was part of a historical lie, the "principal beneficiaries of whom are the State of Israel and international Zionism and whose principal victims are the German people, but not its

²⁰ Robert Faurisson, "The Problem of the Gas Chambers or the Rumor of Auschwitz," (*Le Monde* 29 December, 1978). The entire article is reproduced in Faurisson, *Mémoire en défense: contre ceux qui m'accusent de falsifier l'histoire; la question des chambres à gaz*, (Paris: La Vieille Taupe, 1980), pp.-73-75. Faurisson would write a subsequent letter to *Le Monde* on January 19, 1979, in which he once again attempted to explain his position as the arbiter of the truth. That letter is also reproduced in *Mémoire en défense*, pp. 84-88.

²¹ See Jeffrey Mehlman's foreword to *Assassins of Memory*, specifically pp. xi-xiii.

leaders, and the Palestinian people in its entirety.”²² After all, these words not only made clear an anti-Semitism previously disguised, but also led to his conviction by the first Chamber of the Paris Court of Appeal on April 26, 1983.²³ The answer is really beside the point (though I suspect it had much to do with Faurisson’s wanting to gain sympathy from fringe support groups), for what did happen is that the prosecution created public awareness. Through both the trial and an article published in *Le Monde*, Faurisson made a name for himself. Moreover, a rebuttal of his article by George Wellers (of the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine), which appeared alongside it, created the façade of a legitimate debate over a question with two sides, “either of which,” as Jeffrey Mehlman suggests, “reasonable men might entertain.”²⁴ As noted, this is exactly what anti-denial activists like Deborah Lipstadt and Pierre Vidal-Naquet fear most. Perhaps this sense that any form of attention is advantageous to the cause of Holocaust denial helps to explain just why historians have mostly ignored or dismissed Holocaust denial as a subject unworthy of merit.

At least part of Faurisson’s notoriety stems from his former job as a university professor. Both for Faurisson and Arthur Butz, the position of professor itself confers the immediate mark of credibility. In Faurisson’s case, however, there is more, for it was he, even more than Butz or other deniers, who most effectively appropriated the term revisionist. In France, this term has particular resonance, since it was originally used in reference to the reviewing or reopening of the Dreyfus case, and so also bears the mark of authenticity, moral authority, and intellectual freedom. Like his

²² C. Colombani, “Des universitaires s’affrontent sur le cas Faurisson,” *Le Monde* (June 30, 1981). Cited in Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of Memory*, p. xiii.

²³ For an informative discussion of the trial itself, see Robert Kahn, *Holocaust Denial and the Law: A Comparative Study*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 31-37.

²⁴ *Assassins of Memory*, p. xiii.

skewing/appropriating of specific titles for his works²⁵, Faurisson used the term revisionist in order to project the appearance of a legitimate re-examination of the past.

It is clear, therefore, that Holocaust denial has evolved, especially over the last two decades. Formerly the enterprise of political extremists and other radicals, denial pamphlets and the like not only appeared unscholarly and anti-Semitic, but the media through which they were disseminated had a disreputable air to them. This too was to change with the appearance of the Torrance, California-based Institute for Historical Review. It was set up in 1978 to provide an academic-sounding forum for Holocaust deniers. Just as importantly, it brought deniers together (something that, at least outside of Germany, rarely occurred), and since then the Institute has held approximately annual conventions (although this has changed because of the IHR's current financial difficulties). Perhaps the IHR's most notable achievement was its launching, in 1980, of the quarterly *Journal of Historical Review*.²⁶ Although like-minded efforts have been made elsewhere, none have been as successful as the IHR, no doubt partly because the United States protects freedom of speech, and therefore the purveyors of denial literature are freed from concerns about prosecutions they would face in, for example, France and Germany for denying the Holocaust. Clearly, some members of the IHR are complicit in the ultra-right campaign to rehabilitate fascism, while some are simply anti-Semitic.²⁷ Just as clearly, however, the IHR itself is used as a mask or disguise: deniers

²⁵ Like other deniers, Faurisson appropriates titles to add to the authority of his works. The "Rumor of Auschwitz," for example, reminds one of the "rumor of Orleans," the false story about a white slave trade run by Jews. Throughout this thesis, the reader should be aware of the borrowing of catch-phrases or replicating of titles used by legitimate Holocaust historians.

²⁶ Lipstadt, *Assault*, pp. 137-156; Shermer and Grobman, p. 43; and Seidel, pp. 66-73.

²⁷ A few sources examine the individual deniers connected to the IHR. Among these are the work of Shermer and Grobman (*Denying*, pp. 39-74) and the Nizkor Project, <http://www.nizkor.org/faqs/ihr/ihr-faq-03.html> (last checked on July 28, 2005). In *Assault* (pp. 137-138 and 145-156), Lipstadt more closely

do not want known their political affiliations (and these are actually diverse) or racial beliefs for fear of their work being dismissed on just such grounds. Similarly, the *JHR* attempts to disguise its own writers' anti-Semitism and polemics. It was surely no accident that among its ranks it immediately included Butz, Faurisson, and App, for Butz and Faurisson, in particular, command exactly the academic, scholarly style and approach that the *Journal's* editors desire. That each of them holds a PhD only adds to the façade of legitimacy.

*Geographical Perspectives:
Anti-Semitism, Holocaust Denial,
and Nationalist Historiography in Russia and Japan*

Before the advent of the Internet, it was the IHR that helped the most in spreading the “gospel” of Holocaust denial. In fact, there are now prominent deniers in North America, England, mainland Europe, Russia, Japan, Australia, and the Middle East, and many of them have connections to the IHR. Geographically, however, their success at entering the “mainstream” has continued to depend upon such factors as contemporary thoughts and beliefs, politics, the law, historiographical trends – all peculiar to their particular locations – as well as state histories. Stella Rock and Rotem Kellner, for example, have researched – though not thoroughly confronted or challenged – Holocaust denial movements in Russia and Japan respectively, and note that there are a variety of factors implicit both in the writing and general acceptance of Holocaust denial.²⁸ In Russia, Rock notes that Holocaust denial fits with an overall trend toward

focuses on the history of the IHR, but also examines the political connections, especially of its founder, Willis Carto.

²⁸ Stella Rock, “Russian Revisionism: Holocaust Denial and the New Nationalist Historiography,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 35:4 (2001), pp. 64-76; Rotem Kowner, “Tokyo Recognizes Auschwitz: The Rise and Fall of Holocaust Denial in Japan,” *Journal of Genocide Research* [Great Britain] 3:2 (2001), pp. 257-272. I will be discussing Rock’s and Kowner’s articles on Holocaust denial at length, in order to make clear the variety of ways denial has attracted followers in both Russia and Japan. In the case of

the revision of history and collective memory brought about by the fall of communism, as well as an inherent anti-Semitism in Russia itself. Yet, she says, there is very little “native” denial literature, most having been of western origin (some of which have been translated into Russian).²⁹ Such western deniers as Jürgen Graf and Carlo Mattogno have made inroads and connections there, and Graf’s work, *The Myth of the Holocaust*, has gained a particularly large following, its foreword having been written by Oleg Platonov, since 1997 a member of the Institute for Historical Review’s *Journal of Historical Review* advisory board.³⁰

Because of the virulent public hatred for Nazism, in light of the Russian experience during WWII, Holocaust denial in Russia requires its own peculiar tack. As Rock astutely observes, “The theory that western Holocaust-denial material is in part aimed at rehabilitating Nazism is not one that transfers comfortably to the Russian context.”³¹ In terms of numbers, Russians suffered more casualties in WWII than any other definable populace. Deniers such as Graf therefore focus on relativizing or minimizing the Jewish experience on the basis of numbers, in their own way comparing

Russia, there is not as yet a large “native” nucleus of prominent deniers; however, for reasons Rock alludes to, the concern should be with its potential. In Japan, by contrast, Holocaust denial experienced a 10-year surge, with a subsequent decline. It seems that in Japan, (unlike Russia or the Middle East, for example) the government stepped in to try and ensure that ideological and supernatural beliefs, national history, and national and revisionist historiography could not in the interim sustain Holocaust denial as a serious threat to legitimate historical inquiry. This was, however, also a response to foreign criticism brought about by the *Marco Polo* Affair (discussed in this thesis, starting on p. 34), and as Kowner seems to imply, Holocaust denial has not been permanently disabled. It may again reappear as a viable enterprise precisely because of systemic Japanese beliefs and the denial of its own past, and through the work of Uno Masami and the Institute of Historical Review.

²⁹ Rock, pp. 65-66.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66; see also the Institute of Historical Review’s own website, specifically http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v16/v16n4p36_Weber.html (last checked on May 10, 2005). The article discusses Graf’s work, as well as its translation and foreword by Platonov.

³¹ Rock, p. 67; see also Fabian Virchow, “German revisionism ain’t dead, but living in exile,” in Kate Taylor, ed., *Holocaust Denial: The David Irving Trial and International Revisionism*, (London: Searchlight Educational Trust, 2000). The theory is a common one, expounded by Lipstadt and Gil Seidel, amongst others.

the Jewish and Soviet plights during the war. This simultaneously maintains the distinction of Hitler as arch-enemy. Graf and Platonov also distinguish between Jews and Zionists: the former suffered, while the latter profited by using the Holocaust for personal gain.³² In this way, they seem, like Butz before them, to sympathize for those Jews who suffered and died at the hands of the Nazis. At the same time, of course, they really trivialize the Jewish experience as a whole.

In native Russian denial literature, fascists “are often Jews”; or Hitler was in alliance with Zionists, who sacrificed their own brothers; or Hitler, Himmler, and Eichmann were all Jews themselves. In other words, tying together Nazism and Zionism allows Russian deniers to vilify both. Platonov, on the other hand, ties Judaism with communism, and proclaims a “Jewish conspiracy” to destroy Russia after 1917. In this way, he and others justify the phrase “the Russian Holocaust” and their demands for compensation from Jews to Russians for the Soviet-inflicted genocide.³³ Russian denial literature has not yet created the same academic façade as the work of its western predecessors; rather, it is mostly political and politicized. In fact, the historiography of the Holocaust itself has received little attention in either the old Soviet Union or *glasnost* Russia.³⁴ Hence, there is a limited, albeit now growing, public awareness about the Holocaust in general, and certainly as awareness grows so too will the proliferation of denial literature increase in a country that is legitimately revising its own past, with a population that missed the Soviet-era anti-fascist education, and with a

³² Rock, p. 68.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 70-71

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73; see also Zvi Gitelman, “Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union,” in Zvi Gitelman, ed., *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997). While Gitelman is more positive than others about the Soviet historiography of the Holocaust, he nevertheless makes clear the fact that the net result of at least relative ignorance has been a diminished public knowledge of, and understanding about, the Holocaust.

tradition of anti-Semitism and conspiracy-theory beliefs. Add to that the fact that the work of deniers is now being taught in schools and all of this, as Rock makes clear, suggests that “antisemitism will become an integral part of post-Soviet Russian identity.”³⁵ As has always been the case for western deniers, the key will be creating the façade of legitimacy, and this may be much simpler there as part of, and at the same time as, the Russian revisionism of all historiography.

Where Stella Rock portrays the picture of a “new” Russia, one still coming to terms with its post-Soviet identity, and one whose tradition of anti-Semitism make it fertile ground for Holocaust denial, Rotem Kowner examines the causes (and effects) of the Holocaust denial movement in Japan, asking what prompted Holocaust denial in a country without either a long history or government support of anti-Semitism. Indeed, Japanese-Jewish relations began only in 1854, when Japan was forced to open its ports, and stereotypical negative Jewish images first appeared only during WWII. Public knowledge about the Holocaust, moreover, was negligible at least until the publication of Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl*, while “genuine understanding” did not come until the trial of Adolf Eichmann.³⁶

The Japanese image of Jewry thus seems to have been found in the historical type-casting of Jews, especially in anti-Semitic literature such as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. With Japan’s national (and natural) affinity to “occultism, supernatural phenomena, and a wide range of conspiracies,” Jews were (and are) easily cast into the “role of world manipulators”; they are “othered” and thereby find a popular place in

³⁵ Rock, pp. 75-76.

³⁶ Kellner, pp. 257-260.

Japanese literature. Appropriate, therefore, is Kowner's dubbing Japanese Holocaust denial as an "almost unique example of Jewish-free anti-Semitism."³⁷

Despite the absence of a specifically anti-Semitic tradition, these and other factors have played a major role in Holocaust denial in Japan. So, too, has its own history. Japan has had difficulty facing the reality of its own past: while casting itself in the role of victim as the result of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan has significantly ignored and/or denied its own wartime atrocities (specifically, the Nanjing massacre). Moreover, many Japanese view Nagasaki and Hiroshima as crimes equivalent to Auschwitz, and so have these been compared in historiographical literature in the United States and elsewhere.³⁸ And although that does not in and of itself constitute denial, the analogy has served to awaken national sensibilities in Japan, where at least one writer has portrayed survival of the atom bomb as being far worse than survival of the Holocaust.³⁹

Thus, it should not be altogether surprising that in Japan, the IHR found a receptive audience, and that the growth of Holocaust denial in Japan, beginning in the mid-late 1980s, followed the trend in the West. Uno Masami, the first and still leading Holocaust denier in Japan, has a long-standing connection to the IHR. Like others, Uno claimed that Zionists exploited the Holocaust in order to establish the state of Israel. He also claimed the work of Anne Frank to be a forgery. But Uno was not the only

³⁷ Ibid., p. 259; see also J. Raz, *Aspects of Otherness in Japanese Culture*, (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1992); and W. Davis, *Dojo: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980). Raz discusses, among other topics, Japanese explanations for contemporary problems such as economics, ideology, and uniqueness, while Davis focuses on occultism and other Japanese supernatural beliefs.

³⁸ See, for example, R.J.B. Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima: History Writing and the Second World War*, (New York: Routledge, 1993).

³⁹ Kurihara Sadako, "The Literature of Auschwitz and Hiroshima," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 7 (1993), p. 87.

Japanese writer to establish ties to the IHR. In fact, Keiichiro Kobori, a professor at the University of Tokyo⁴⁰, “praised the work of the [IHR],” and as a result the IHR invited a number of Japanese speakers to its annual convention in 1990 and published the works of Japanese “revisionists.”⁴¹

A January 14, 1995 article by Nishioka Masanori (published in *Marco Polo*, a monthly belonging to the publishing house of Bungei Shunju) denying the Holocaust and claiming, moreover, that Hitler wanted only to resettle Jews in the East, brought the growing Holocaust denial movement national attention. Reaction came primarily from outside of Japan, from both the Anti-Defamation League and the Simon Wiesenthal Center, both of which protested and demanded a published retraction. Bungei Shunju defended the article until forced by external pressure and the withdrawal of corporate support for the magazine to publicly apologize, which the distinguished publishing house did on January 30th. The Japanese government followed suit, and as a consequence the affair received massive coverage in the Japanese press. While some journalists condemned Bungei Shunju for submitting to foreign pressures, the majority opinion was positive, and resulted also in the publication of articles dedicated to informing the Japanese public more fully about the Holocaust.⁴²

⁴⁰ From what I can tell, Keiichiro Kobori was in September 2001 a professor of comparative culture at Meisei University (see http://66.102.7.104/search?q=cache:F_T53VKrKNsJ:ktla.trb.com/news/nationworld/world/la-091301pearl.story+%22keiichiro+kobori%22&hl=en) (Last checked on May 10, 2005). Other searches indicate that, as Kowner states, Keiichiro was before that a professor at Tokyo University, though in what exact department I have not been able to find out. As late as 2003, he was recognized as professor emeritus at Tokyo University. Articles are not speaking of two different people, for all searches indicate Keiichiro’s concern about (and denial of) Japanese atrocities at Nanking.

⁴¹ Kowner, pp. 261-2; see also *IHR Newsletter*, No. 76, November 1990. This is cited in both Kowner, p. 262, and Kenneth Stern, *Holocaust Denial*, (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1993), p. 49.

⁴² Kowner, pp. 262-4.

At the same time, however, anti-Semitism was transformed from “‘intellectual’, text-only,” to violent, after *Aum Shinrikyo*, an occult sect, “attacked Tokyo’s underground and left 12 dead and more than 5000 wounded.” The education of the sect had been based largely upon Uno’s and other deniers’ writing, so they believed the claims that Jews aspired toward world domination and that Hitler was still alive.⁴³ Predictably, the sect acted on the basis of those beliefs, and Japan was condemned once again for not reacting to the *Marco Polo* Affair in a proper way. David Goodman, for example, was especially critical – unlike Deborah Lipstadt, he wanted an open debate after the affair, not simply “solipsistic monologue.”⁴⁴ Conversely, the IHR predicted “a long struggle for historical truth and open inquiry” in Japan, and the prediction became reality.⁴⁵

In Japan, the literature of Holocaust deniers is aimed at white-collar workers concerned about Japan’s past and future. As Kowner suggests, “anti-Semitic literature” thereby “seems to perpetuate itself through the rise of new generations of readers with periodical fluctuations.” It moreover holds appeal in light of traditional Japanese beliefs about its own past. Those sensitivities having re-emerged in the 1990s, the time was then ripe for Holocaust denial, just as it was for denial of the Japanese atrocities in Nanjing in 1937, where between 100,000 and 200,000 Chinese civilians were killed by the Japanese Army. In fact, Japan’s own atrocities have been denied in school textbooks, by politicians and journalists, and are still a source of conflict between Japan and China. In addition, Japanese writers saw in the so-called historians’ debate in

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 264-265

⁴⁴ David Goodman, “Anti-Semitism in Japan: its history and current implications,” in F. Dikotter, ed., *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), pg. 195. Cited in Kowner, p. 265.

⁴⁵ Cited in Kowner, p. 265.

Germany a genuine effort to revise traditional accounts of the past, and piggybacked upon this as a way toward downplaying Japanese wartime excesses.⁴⁶ Obviously, Holocaust denial bears no similarity to genuine historical revisionism of the past; however, its having been portrayed (by, for example, Deborah Lipstadt) as symptomatic of post-modernist writing and its supposed denial of any singular truth of the past is clearly problematic. Seeing the possibility that the Holocaust was a hoax, some Japanese writers believed that the Rape of Nanjing too could have been untrue. At the very least, in portraying Japan as a victim and not an aggressor, Japanese historiography seems almost to invite the denial of the Holocaust, for it fits into that very context. As Kowner states, the implication of all this is that ignoring Holocaust denial, as occurred in Japan until the *Marco Polo* Affair, does not mean the problem will go away. On the contrary, “it stimulates interest and demand for further publications”⁴⁷; historians, therefore, have yet another reason to respond.

No doubt, deniers will continue to play upon the sympathies and traditions of such countries as Japan and Russia, for, in Russia especially, there is less difficulty adapting denial literature to contemporary historiography, which will continue to be revised as time progresses. Likewise in the Middle East, where not only is there a history of anti-Semitism but, moreover, a society that can and does portray itself as a victim of the Jews – Palestine. The IHR, in particular, promises to propagate Holocaust denial material in those countries; as well, it will continue to make contacts in an effort to have “their” history become part of the accepted norm. In other parts of the world, they will continue to face difficult obstacles.

⁴⁶ Kowner, p. 266-8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

*Constructing an Ethos:
Creating the Façade
of Respectability and Legitimacy*

Given that deniers will always face those difficulties in societies that predominantly accept the Holocaust as historical fact and/or determine this by law, how do they continue to portray themselves as credible, and their history as not just an alternate view, but *the* authentic account of certain past events? As stated, neither Butz nor Faurisson is specifically “trained” as a historian; their PhDs are in the fields of engineering and literature. Nor, for that matter, do deniers count amongst their ranks many verifiable professional historians at all.⁴⁸ So how do they maintain any credibility in spite of their theses and, moreover, their holding positions that do not entail the study of history? This is key, because deniers must create their own authority in order to legitimize a thesis – the Holocaust did not happen – which is incompatible with the traditional view – that it did.

It seems to me that the way to do this involves the creation of an ethos, a term I define, as in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, as credibility or authority.⁴⁹ There are four types, two of which I have borrowed from the work of Shane Borrowman, the other two that I have designated myself: academic ethos; techno(logical) ethos; experiential ethos; and historiographical ethos. The academic ethos, according to Borrowman, is both necessary (for it masks overt anti-Semitism) and the one with which readers should be most familiar. It can be defined as the “credibility that comes from being recognized as an expert in a given field of knowledge,” as well as “the traditional print-based ethos

⁴⁸ Mark Weber, currently Director of the Institute for Historical Review, does have a master’s degree in Modern European History from Indiana University. See Shermer and Grobman, p. 46; and the IHR’s author biographies, <http://www.ihr.org/other/authorbios.html> (last checked on July 30, 2005).

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, Trans. George A. Kennedy, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

that is constructed through linear argumentation” through which “a reader is convinced that the writer is a rational, reasonable, intelligent individual who is engaging in an honest dialogue with his or her audience.”⁵⁰ Both Arthur Butz and Robert Faurisson, as stated, use the professional qualification of professor to invoke that ethos by claiming to be engaged in a search for the truth of the past and writing in a professional style. In that way, they hope to cash in on the academic ethos of professional historians as legitimate arbiters of the past.

Building upon that ethos also includes mimicking the scholarly style used by professional historians. Here again, Butz and Faurisson serve as primary examples. Both write in the third person and create that distance from the evidence discussed earlier. They also cite the sources of their information, and although they tend to skew certain meanings, this can create the virtual appearance of an academic having conducted thorough and proper research. Butz, for example, uses a multitude of sources and appendices, further accrediting his work as scholarly and legitimate. Deborah Lipstadt suggests that his “position as a professor at one of the most prestigious universities in the country enhanced the sense of controversy” generated by the publication of his book, and in addition that “[i]t was hard for the public to reconcile Holocaust denial with the pursuit of truth to which universities and their faculty are supposedly dedicated.”⁵¹ Again, Butz has used both his position as professor and the academic style preferred by professional historians to construct his academic ethos. In like manner do all articles published by the *Journal of Historical Review* rely upon

⁵⁰ Shane Borrowman, “Critical Surfing: Holocaust denial and credibility on the Web,” *College Teaching* 47:2 (Spring, 1999), pp. 44-48. I could not find a print version, and refer to an on-line version of the article available at <http://www.cofc.edu/~powell/criticalsurfing.pdf> (last checked on July 15, 2005), p. 2.

⁵¹ Lipstadt, *Assault*, pg. 123, as cited in Borrowman (on-line), p. 3.

footnotes and bibliographical citations to define the subject matter as credible and its authors as historians. The Institute of Historical Review, the proprietor of the *JHR*, even holds official conferences, again, giving it, as well, the appearance of a reputable scholarly organisation with an intellectual pursuit of knowledge; in other words, its own academic ethos.

The techno(logical) ethos is continually being constructed (ironically, both as an ideal and in the sense of technology itself), in this case on the Internet. With differing levels of proficiency, many deniers and denial groups and organizations have seized the opportunity provided by the Internet as a medium for their messages. Arthur Butz and the Institute for Historical Review (IHR), both view the Net as an extension of the textual medium, and have websites that are distinctly “un-technical,” while the websites (and thus techno-ethos) of Ernst Zundel and the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust (CODOH), are much more developed.⁵² Where Butz and the IHR use the Web as a way to further disseminate the information already provided in written form, Zundel and CODOH use the Web to create credibility. That is, not claiming the same academic ethos as Butz or the IHR, Zundel and CODOH must create the façade of legitimacy (and some might say notoriety) through different means entirely. This includes using constantly changing imagery, colour schemes, and the like in order to convey the aura of professionalism. Borrowman sees this as problematic, not least for teachers and professors. Why? Because many students write papers citing “only

⁵² Borrowman (on-line) pg. 4. See also Zündelsite, <http://www.zündelsite.org/>; and Bradley Smith’s Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust website, <http://www.codoh.com/> (both websites last checked on May 12, 2005).

anonymous Internet sources,” to which they are attracted on the basis of their technological proficiency.⁵³

Were these the only two means by which deniers create the façade of credibility, the problem might be immediately solvable. Historians are, after all, free to discredit the academic ethos of specific deniers. However, deniers further legitimize their works on the basis of both historiographical and experiential ethos. By the former, I mean building upon a tradition; by the latter, I mean deniers’ using someone’s experience during the Nazi era to both deconstruct and then mystify the traditional Holocaust narrative. One example is Paul Rassinier; another is Thies Christopherson. Both lived during the Nazi era. Rassinier was even imprisoned by the Nazis – in Buchenwald and then Dora – as the direct result of his work with the French resistance.⁵⁴ Deniers disguise the fact that far from being a prisoner in the sense that Jews were, Rassinier was a political prisoner – and he was not Jewish. Without minimizing Rassinier’s own experiences, he faced none of the same conditions or treatment as did Jews (or Gypsies, Jehovah’s Witnesses, or homosexuals). It is therefore not at all surprising that he would have seen no gas chambers himself, but nevertheless, deniers portray him in a specific light – Rassinier was there and saw no gas chambers, ergo they did not exist. Similarly, Thies Christopherson, who was a *Wehrmacht* officer and guard at Auschwitz-Monowitz. In his 1973 tract, *Die Auschwitz-Lüge*, Christopherson claimed that he had never seen any gas chambers at Auschwitz, and only heard of them after the war.⁵⁵ Again, deniers

⁵³ Borrowman (on-line), pp. 4-5.

⁵⁴ See Austin, *History*, <http://www.mtsu.edu/~baustin/denhist.htm> (last checked on July 15, 2005); and Seidel, p. 96. Seidel expounds on many of the facets of Rassinier’s work from pages 96-98.

⁵⁵ A number of authors and websites state Christopherson’s theses. See, for example, <http://christianactionforisrael.org/antiholo/shoah2.html> (last checked on May 12, 2005); see also <http://www.ihr.org/books/harwood/dsmrd05.html> (last checked on May 12, 2005), for an example of how IHR authors have used Christopherson’s work as a source of legitimization.

cite the fact that Christopherson “was there,” without giving it a second thought. Interestingly, they take his word as the truth, while denying the veracity of stories of other guards and Nazi officials who admitted to the existence of the gas chambers, if not to their partaking in the killing of Jewish and other prisoners. The point is, deniers use the experience of Rassinier, in particular, to convey the appearance of legitimacy, and to claim that theirs is the verifiable version of past events.

As noted earlier, in Harry Elmer Barnes, deniers did, until his death, have a professional historian in their ranks. They make much of this fact through their literature and various dedications to him. And again, in Barnes they can build upon an already-constructed historiographical ethos – not simply a historian, Barnes was (in)famous for his examinations of US involvement in World Wars One and Two, and was certainly a prolific writer who addressed the general public. Moreover, as part of a legitimately revisionist historiographical school, Barnes adds credibility to the very term “revisionist.” At the same time as deniers have eschewed the term “deniers,” in favour of the much more moderate (and scholarly) term, “revisionists,” they have branded believers in the traditional Holocaust narrative “exterminationists,”⁵⁶ thereby suggesting that traditionalists are, in reality, the extremists. Simultaneously, then, deniers have given themselves a name that carries with it an intellectual façade and historiographical respectability, and tried to create, by virtue of the term “exterminationist,” a historiographical debate with two legitimate sides to it.

⁵⁶ See for example, Carlo Mattogno, ““The First Gassing At Auschwitz: Genesis of a Myth,” *Journal of Historical Review* 9:2 (1989); and Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Limor Yagil, *Holocaust Denial in France: Analysis of a Unique Phenomenon*, (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University and the Project for the Study of Anti-Semitism, 1995), p. 57.

The IHR has pushed the historiographical ethos further in its own mission

statement:

Devoted to truth and accuracy in history, the IHR continues the tradition of historical revisionism pioneered by distinguished historians such as Harry Elmer Barnes, A.J.P. Taylor, Charles Tansill, Paul Rassinier, and William H. Chamberlin. The Institute's purpose, in the words of Barnes, is to 'bring history into accord with the facts.'⁵⁷

No doubt, that sentiment would have A.J.P. Taylor, Charles Tansill, and William Chamberlin squirming in their graves. Should Russian scholarship, for example, provide any similar individuals, they too will undoubtedly be credited with this ethos. Thus, one of my main concerns is that historians – not just me, but especially professional historians – wholly and appropriately demolish the historiographical ethos the IHR is continuing to construct.

*The Last Stage: Noam Chomsky,
Denial of the Armenian Genocide,
and the Future of Holocaust Denial*

It should be clear by now that Holocaust denial has a future; that specific efforts have been made to legitimize the discourse of denial; that some nationalist historiography will continue to aid the growth of Holocaust denial; and that it is up to professional historians to stem the tide. That promises to be a difficult endeavour, however, with scholars such as Noam Chomsky continuing to affirm deniers' right to write history and, moreover, associating with Holocaust deniers. Professor Werner Cohn has already done an excellent job of lambasting Chomsky's actions – in particular, his having written the foreword to Robert Faurisson's *Mémoire en Défence (Contre ceux qui m'accusent de falsifier l'Histoire; la question des chambres à gaz)*.⁵⁸ Suffice it to

⁵⁷ IHR webpage, <http://www.ihr.org/books/harwood/dsmrd05.html> (last checked on May 12, 2005).

⁵⁸ See Werner Cohn, "Chomsky and Holocaust Denial," in Peter Collier and David Horowitz, ed., *The Anti-Chomsky Reader*, (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2004), pp. 117-158; Werner Cohn, *Partners in*

say, though, that scholars such as Chomsky aid and abet Holocaust denial by such actions, and offer to its promulgators a respectability and credibility they do not deserve. In short, by lending their names and credibility to Holocaust deniers, Chomsky and others make it that much easier for deniers to try and create the appearance of legitimate academic debate, and thereby facilitate the creation of the academic and historiographical ethos deniers need in order to be recognized as historians in pursuit of the truth of the past.

Chomsky, however, is not the only renowned professor to help the discourse of genocide denial make its way into the mainstream. As noted earlier in the chapter, denial of the Armenian genocide has already made its way into the mainstream of contemporary historiography. Stanford Shaw, Justin McCarthy, and Bernard Lewis are all fully accredited professional historians who deny the reality of the Armenian genocide⁵⁹ and, in so doing, give instant credibility to a claim that could otherwise be easily dismissed. Funded by the Turkish government and assisted by the United States' relations with Turkey, these scholars are given free rein to question survivor accounts, claim the Armenians posed a legitimate security threat to wartime Turkey (an argument similar to one of Butz's), and relativize what happened to Armenians by stating that no less did Turks suffer from the atrocities of war. Their main impetus, though, is to make it seem as though there was no intent. Far from simply reducing the numbers of Armenian victims, deniers of the Armenian genocide proclaim that even if large numbers of Armenians did die – even at the hands of Turks – this was the result of

Hate: Noam Chomsky and the Holocaust Deniers, (Cambridge, MA: Avukah Press, 1995), especially pp. 42-72; and Alfred Kazin, "Americans Right, Left, and Indifferent: Responses to the Holocaust," *Dimensions* 4:1 (1988), p. 12, as cited in Lipstadt, "Compelling," p. 69.

⁵⁹ Hovannisian, pp. 20-21 and 209-211; see also Yves Ternon, "Freedom and Responsibility of the Historian: the Lewis Affair," in *Remembrance and Denial*, pp. 237-248.

individual actions, and not governmental policy. And since the United Nations Genocide Convention (and likewise other accepted definitions of genocide) demand intent in order for any actions to be considered genocide, it is clear that what McCarthy, Shaw, and Lewis hope to do is explain the history of the Armenian experience in such a way as to convey the appearance of atrocious but understandable (in the context of war) victimization.⁶⁰ Eliminating the quotient of intent can thereby throw into question the entire concept of genocide.

Avoiding the numbers game and admitting to individually-committed atrocities promises to be yet another tack followed by Holocaust deniers. In *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, Arthur Butz seemingly foreshadowed the possible use of this tactic by claiming to sympathize with those Jews who did suffer under the Nazi regime. As noted earlier in the chapter, Jürgen Graf's work does much the same thing. Unfortunately, it will be even more difficult to refute deniers' claims should they use such tactics unless professional historians respond in kind.

This chapter should make clear the fact that denial has more than just a history: it continues to undergo its own evolution as an enterprise – one might even say a religion – and as a discourse. Over the past twenty years, deniers have increasingly realized that, if they are to succeed, then they must do so without making explicit their inherently racist and/or political messages, by taking advantage of nationalistic sentiments, history, and historiographical trends, and by making credible their own candidacy as historians. This, they continue to do deliberately, and again, it is up to professional historians to combat and de-legitimize the enterprise of Holocaust denial while it is still in the process of identifying and legitimizing itself.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

Holocaust History, Competing Narratives, and Judging Between Accounts

Despite the fact that professional historians tend no longer to believe that what they do is, strictly speaking, purely objective, their discipline gives them a conviction that what they are writing is true. Yes, true – for historians believe in their end products, these having been the result of extensive examination of both primary and secondary source evidence. Those products are traditionally put in the form of narratives, which, as much as possible, are supposed to convey past social and other realities. More often than not these are also sequential narratives, in that the historian’s job is to find and impose order. Briefly, then, one might say that such narratives are primarily the result of empirical or *a posteriori* – literally, *from what follows* – knowledge, necessarily derived from research. That research is taken as experience, or derived from the senses, and it is the reason historians are so often self-assured in their work. It is also the epistemological foundation of the discipline. Undoubtedly, problems arise when one takes into consideration historians’ personal predispositions, the biases and reliability of evidence, historical interpretation, and *etcetera*. Nevertheless, disciplinary rules exist to limit and regulate these factors.

Through their use of evidence, historians also tend to sanitize their accounts of the past, making them appear neutral and transcendent, even disinterested, but accordingly authoritative and objective in much the same way that Ranke envisioned well over a century ago. But while historians may admit to the necessity of truly

understanding the moral imperatives derived from our explanations of specific events, rarely are these as transcendent as they might appear – certainly not in historical writing itself – and this is true even in the case of the Holocaust, an event the magnitude of which has accorded it the ethical imperative, “Never again.”

In spite of this, it is still somewhat surprising that anyone could deny the reality of the Holocaust in the face of the overwhelming evidence attesting to its reality. And yet, as Robert Eric Frykenberg suggests, “There is a sense in which the vulnerability of historical claims to historical refutation is inherent to the nature of all historical understandings.”¹ This is the point of an essay written in 1819 by Archbishop Richard Whately, in which he hypothetically “deconstructed” the historical story and identity of Napoleon Bonaparte. It was a response to David Hume’s philosophical objections to Christian belief in his *Essay on Miracles*. Fundamentally, I also suspect Whately intended to make clear the fact that even seemingly well-attested historical claims are no more “secure” than those of religion. He did this by questioning the “master” biography of Napoleon and casting doubt on the sources of information about him. More precisely, he accused writers of having relied on second (and third, fourth, and so on) hand information; and showed contempt for witness testimony itself.² Whately’s work may be viewed as an ironical warning for historians: irresponsible claims, or those based upon belief, can always be disputed; so, too, however (whether legitimately or not), can those based upon valid documentation. It is hard to disagree with him, for if one wanted, one could really say anything about anything: “Elvis lives”; “The earth is flat.”

¹ Robert Frykenberg, *History & Belief: the Foundations of Historical Understanding*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), pp. 12-13.

² Richard Whately, *Historical Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*, <http://elvis.rowan.edu/~kilroy/CHRISTIA/library/doubts-napoleon.html> (last checked on June 1, 2005).

Holocaust deniers rely on this notion of the questionability of history and, as I suggested in the previous chapter, they try to convey their approach in just such a way as to make it appear congruent with traditional accounts of the Holocaust. That is, by mimicking the form of historical narratives and citing the same content, they hope that their work comes across as being as credible and self-assured as traditional historical narratives. In so doing, the goal is also to make their work part of legitimate historiographical inquiry.

At first glance, it would therefore appear that professional historians could simply appeal to the evidence as a way of refuting deniers' claims, for it is well-known how they make various, often purposeful, errors in their use of evidence, in many cases going so far as to purposely manipulate, make false statements about and unreasonable edits from, and deliberately mistranslate, historical data. There is something to be said for such an approach, because it bears significantly on the method by which historians arrive at their conclusions and various truth claims. At the same time, however, it need not be the only, or even the primary means by which we discriminate between accounts. Rather, it seems to be the one with which professional historians are most comfortable, and this is likely the result of historical method itself. It is useful to keep this in mind in this chapter that examines historical explanations and interpretations, and what happens when these are not just questioned but entirely disputed.

In light of all this, it is with trepidation that I address the question of how it is that historians explain the Holocaust "differently" than Holocaust deniers; how, in fact, the lack of historical explanation is at least part of what makes denial literature less than historical and different *in kind* from truly historical narratives, and its proponents

therefore less than true historians. The foundation for my trepidation is the very difficulty faced by Holocaust historians: how to properly explain the unimaginable. Even more pressing here is the matter of how exactly to confront the basic claim of denial – the Holocaust did not happen – in light of the fact that professional historians have so much trouble understanding the tragedy themselves. Almost sixty years ago, Hannah Arendt had already observed the difficulty of understanding and explaining³ when she said that any effort to write a history of the Jewish tragedy must inevitably end in failure.⁴ More recently, Arthur Cohen expressed similar concerns with regard to the incommensurability of thought and the Nazi death camps:

There is something no less in the reality of the death camps that denies the attentions of thought. Thinking and the death camps are incommensurable. The procedures of thought and the ways of knowing are confounded. It is to think the unthinkable – an enterprise that is not alone contradictory but hopeless – for thought entails as much moral hope (that it may be triumphant, mastering its object, dissolving the difficulties, containing and elucidating the conundrum) as it is the investment of skill and dispassion in a methodic procedure.

In short, he concludes, “The death camps are a reality which, by their very nature, obliterate thought and the humane program of thinking.”⁵ Thus, the conundrum, for me, is two-fold, for if understanding the Holocaust itself is wrought with difficulty, just as

³ Indeed, this is an issue unto itself, for there are a number of historians who contend that the Holocaust cannot be explained *or* properly understood by anyone who was not there. In the famous words of Elie Wiesel, “[T]he truth of Auschwitz remains hidden in its ashes. Only those who lived it in their flesh and in their minds can possibly transform their experience into knowledge. Others, despite their best intentions, can never do so.” Thus, for Wiesel, the only conveyance of the real story is the testimony of survivors, because “no one who has not experienced the event will ever be able to understand it,” let alone, one would assume from this, actually be able to explain it. The discourse of memory (as a mode of explanation), in that sense, seems for Wiesel and other survivors to be more appropriate than historical discourse as a method by which to impart understanding. See Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 166, 187. Inga Clendinnen provides an excellent analysis of memory, witnessing, and understanding in *Reading the Holocaust*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1999). See pages 6-54, especially.

⁴ Hannah Arendt, “The Image of Hell,” in *Hannah Arendt, Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954*, Jerome Kohn, ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), pp. 198-199.

⁵ Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust*, (New York: Crossroads, 1981), pp. 1-2.

troubling is it to refute deniers in the face of our own infinitely incomplete comprehension of the Shoah.

My response to this conundrum lies in the subtle difference between explanation and understanding; between, that is, knowledge about the Holocaust – which is vast – and the very magnitude of the tragedy – which may never be wholly comprehensible. But while we may never fully grasp its enormity, the Holocaust *as event* has nevertheless been imparted into our collective consciousness on the basis of the explanatory efforts of Holocaust researchers. In their narratives, the history of the Holocaust has been shaped, various aspects of the event explained, and it is on the basis of historical explanation that we have at least a framework upon which to build future refutations of Holocaust denial that do not necessitate one-on-one debates with its proponents.⁶

Nevertheless, empirical, or *a posteriori*, refutation is rendered problematic primarily because deniers do not, in fact, do history at all. I ground this statement by introducing the historiography of the Holocaust and the resulting “master” representation of reality and contrasting that with those claims the most noted deniers have offered us. Rather than simplifying the means by which we can discriminate between the accounts of deniers and those of historians writing about the Holocaust, the fact that professional historians and Holocaust deniers proffer two entirely different *types* of explanation in many ways complicates the process of judging between them.

⁶ To be sure, this “shaping” of a picture of the Holocaust is not, nor has it been, limited to the medium of the historical narrative. Films (*Schindler’s List*, *Shoah*), poetry (in the work, for example, of Paul Celan), novels (such as those by Aharon Appelfeld), and other types of discourse continue to be used as well. However, the historical narrative is certainly the one most commonly used, especially by professional historians. I cite it throughout this chapter, therefore, as the “master mode” of representing the Holocaust, but certainly not the only one.

Normally, when historians try to discriminate between “better” and “worse” accounts they are dealing with works about the past that share at least some conception of the reality of an event or events. This not being the case with Holocaust denial, we are left with a fuzzy picture – not of the past, as it were, but with the issue of discriminating between incompatible accounts. My belief is that empirical philosophy can offer us one way (but by no means the only one) to refute Holocaust denial in the future, should its proponents ever offer us something in the way of history. On the other hand, it also makes clear that empiricism is presently an impractical way by which to discriminate between history and denial. Hopefully, my discussion will also lead us directly into the next chapter, which proposes a more credible alternative for the present. My specific concern in this chapter is to make clearer the genre-specific dichotomy between history and denial.

*Creating the
“Master Representation”*

A former colleague and fellow graduate student, Tracey Tremaine, has portrayed the “master representation” of the Holocaust rather succinctly in the introduction to her essay, *Judging Among Competing Historical Accounts* (1999):

Today probably most people picture the Holocaust in the following way, albeit in less detail. During the Second World War, the German state, governed by the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (Nazi Party), carried out the systematic murder of nearly six million Jews. This number constituted about two thirds of Europe’s Jews. The killing of so many people was achieved partly by imposing a regime of deliberate starvation, hard labor, beatings, torture, lethal injections, and hanging, but mainly by deploying mobile killing squads called *Einstazgruppen*, using mobile gas vans, and using stationary gas chambers located in concentration camps – particularly in the Birkenau facility of the complex of camps, collectively called Auschwitz, which was built near the Polish town of Oswiecim. Disease, too, took a toll. The killing was the direct result of a deliberate plan to exterminate European Jews. The label that was attached to that plan was the Final Solution.

Implementation of the Final Solution destroyed the rich communal life and culture of Eastern European Jewry.⁷

What Tremaine implied was not that this is the entire story told about the Holocaust, but rather that this is the one “affirmed in contemporary accounts” and, as the “master representation,” the one that “commands...widespread adherence.”⁸ Historians, survivors, and other Holocaust researchers have, especially in the last twenty-five years, constructed that representation through interdisciplinary collaboration (both direct and indirect). Especially for students, but for professional scholars as well, it is from within that broad picture that specific claims and arguments are now made, and upon that picture that they are based.

Contemporary written accounts and other forms of representation continue to affirm that picture on the basis of further research. Thus, if such institutions as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum were primarily intended to preserve the memory of the Holocaust, so too have they succeeded in at least indirectly endorsing this master representation. Probably even more successful and direct⁹ in this regard, however, have been the collective efforts of historians. We see, for example, Raul Hilberg, Lucy Dawidowicz, Martin Gilbert, and Rita Botwinick, among others, establishing the Jewish death toll at between 5.1 million and just over 6 million, those figures having been adjusted on the basis of new documentary evidence.¹⁰ More geographically specific texts include Susan

⁷ Tracey Tremaine, *Judging Among Competing Historical Accounts: What is the State of the Art?* Unpublished essay, 1999, p.1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹ More direct, in the sense that historians’ written interpretations are usually self-evident and have contributed to the “master representation” recognized by students and others.

¹⁰ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Revised Edition, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), pp. 1201-1220; Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1975), p. 403; Martin Gilbert, *Macmillan Atlas of the Holocaust*, (New York:

Zuccotti's works on France and Italy, as well as *Vichy France and the Jews*, by Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton¹¹, these also attesting to the far-reaching effects of Nazism and that regime's attempt at annihilating Europe's Jews, and implicating, where necessary, non-Nazi collaborators. Drawing upon these sources reveals not only the extent to which the Holocaust has been studied, but also how historical narratives, and indeed the master representation itself, have been the result of the collective efforts of these scholars.

Compatible-Competing Narratives

Like the histories of all past events, a number of issues related to the Holocaust have given rise to disagreement, even controversy, in the form of historiographical problems and perspectives. In her book, *A History of the Holocaust: From Ideology to Annihilation*, historian Rita Botwinick sees ten such dilemmas:

1. Was the Holocaust the inevitable final step of centuries of anti-Semitism, a pogrom of unprecedented magnitude, or was Hitler's persecution a distinctly different assault?
2. The Intentionalists and the Functionalists debate whether the destruction of the Jews had been Hitler's plan from the inception of his ideology or whether the death camps evolved from events originally not foreseen by the Nazis.
3. Did the victims go to their deaths like the proverbial sheep to the slaughter, or was there significant Jewish resistance to the implementation of the Final Solution?
4. Under the Nazi regime, was Germany a goose-stepping, Hitler-heiling monolith of obedience or was support for the dictatorship less widespread than originally believed?
5. What were the reasons for Hitler's assault against the Jews? Was he motivated by the desire for their alleged wealth? Fear of their supposed power? Or were the reasons for his hatred psychological rather than political or economic in nature?
6. What and when did the world learn of the Holocaust? What actions resulted from such knowledge? Could earlier intervention have lessened the magnitude of the disaster?

Macmillan, 1982), p. 244; Rita Steinhart Botwinick, *A History of the Holocaust: From Prejudice to Annihilation*, 2nd edition, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), p.3.

¹¹ Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Susan Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993) and *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, and Survival*, (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

7. How should the operation of the Judenraete (councils of Jewish elders in the ghettos) be evaluated? Did their work as administrators of the day-by-day administration of the ghettos help or hinder the SS in the administration of their assignments?
8. How was it possible for some individuals, usually designated as the Righteous Gentiles, to remain true to their ethical standards? Though small in numbers, their courage and integrity testify that even in the midst of evil, there was goodness. What inner forces compelled them to risk their own lives to save others?
9. Can we, should we, forgive the men and women who perpetrated the genocide? What of those who stood by and did nothing? Are they guilty?
10. If we accept the premise that ordinary men committed extraordinary evil and extraordinary people risked their lives to save them, then who are you? Who am I?¹²

Daniel Niewyk's, *The Holocaust: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, an edited collection of excerpts from books written by leading Holocaust researchers, elaborates more fully on these issues by pitting various perspectives against one another.¹³ Such problems have even gravitated toward more historico-political issues, in the form, for example, of the so-called German Historians' Debate (1986)¹⁴, as well as philosophical concerns, in Saul Friedlander's *Probing the Limits of Representation*, which examines whether (and how) there should be limitations as to how the Holocaust should be properly and morally represented in historical literature and film.¹⁵

¹² Botwinick, pp. 3-4.

¹³ Daniel Niewyk, *The Holocaust: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 2nd edition, Problems in European Civilization Series, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997). This is, I think, the best example of such a collection, in that the excerpts are taken from not only leading scholars in the field, but that these are probably the best representative explanations of the problems that continue to both plague and enliven the historiography of the Holocaust.

¹⁴ This "debate" represented a confrontation with Germany's past (in relation to its present), and was sparked especially by the writings of Hans Mommsen and Ernst Nolte. Insofar as it had certain public (and political) prominence, its historiographical significance has been questioned. See, for example, Michael Bentley, ed., *Companion to Historiography*, paperback edition, (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 570-572.

¹⁵ Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution,"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press). Friedlander cites in his introduction the primary incentive for the conference that led to the publication of the book as a 1989 debate between Hayden White and Carlo Ginzburg "on the nature of historical truth," (p. 2) and the "central dilemma" as a confrontation with "the issues raised by historical relativism and aesthetic experimentation in the face of two possibly contrary constraints: a need for "truth," and the problems raised by the opaqueness of the events and the opaqueness of language as such" (p. 4). This is an issue I will explore further in chapter 3, especially in

Arguably the best, and most well known, example of such a historiographical issue is the so-called Intentionalist vs. Functionalist debate.¹⁶ Take, for example, Lucy Dawidowicz's *The War Against the Jews*. In it, she asks how a modern state could have carried out such a systematic murder, and reaches the conclusion that Hitler's anti-Semitism directly resulted in the Final Solution. For Dawidowicz, therefore, the tragedy that manifested itself especially from 1941-1945 was directly linked to Hitler's program of thought: the Nazi party was established largely on the basis of anti-Semitism; Hitler promised the annihilation of European Jewry in *Mein Kampf*; and upon accession to power he promoted a number of officially anti-Semitic policies, all of which led to the adoption of the program of extermination.¹⁷

Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat (among others) have rebuked Dawidowicz's explicitly "Intentionalist" theory, contending that the policy of annihilation evolved. Thus, rather than having been the basis of a formal blueprint, the Final Solution was decided upon and carried out only after Germany conquered Poland and initiated war against Russia, whereupon vast numbers of Jews became first prisoners of Germany, then victims.¹⁸ Although the dispute has never been fully resolved, Christopher Browning has provided an alternative, widely regarded as the most acceptable one. He advocates a moderate-functionalist theory, in that while he sees no direct evidence of an

regard to how postmodern/relativist thinking (particularly in the work of Heidegger) has been linked to Nazism, and is commonly seen as at least a "friend" of Holocaust denial.

¹⁶ See, for example, Tim Mason, "Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism," in Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker, ed., *Der Führerstaat: Mythos und Realität*, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), pp. 21-40; and Christopher Browning, *Fateful Months: Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution*, (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), pp. 8-38.

¹⁷ Dawidowicz, *War Against the Jews*.

¹⁸ Martin Broszat, "Hitler and the Genesis of the Final Solution," *Yad Vashem Studies* 13 (1979); Hans Mommsen, "The Realization of the Unthinkable," in Gerhard Hirschfeld, ed., *The Policies of Genocide: Jews and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany*, (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1986). Reprinted in Niewyk, pp. 27-38.

earlier-conceived “blueprint,” he nonetheless perceives an indirect message from Hitler to his Nazi officials in the summer of 1941 to plan for the Final Solution.¹⁹

Not always, however, do historiographical dilemmas or conflicting interpretations meet with such a “net result” as Browning’s alternative. For example, Browning wrote *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, in an effort “to explain why ordinary men – shaped by a culture that had its own particularities but was nonetheless in the mainstream of Western, Christian, and Enlightenment tradition – willingly carried out the most extreme genocide in human history.” The title is appropriate, as Browning looks at the measures whereby ordinary men were transformed into killers through the manipulation of the Nazi regime.²⁰ In a different vein did Daniel Jonah Goldhagen write *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, which sees Goldhagen seeking to find out “what was the structure of beliefs and values that made a genocidal onslaught against the Jews intelligible and sensible to the ordinary Germans who became perpetrators?” He concluded that Germany had a “dominant cultural thread of eliminationist anti-Semitism.”²¹ That is a very different conclusion than that reached by Browning, who believes that indoctrination, peer pressure, Nazi propaganda, and even the nature of the Second World War were necessary elements of the transformation of ordinary men into

¹⁹ Christopher Browning, “A Reply to Martin Broszat Regarding the Origins of the Final Solution,” *Simon Wiesenthal Center Multimedia Learning Center Online*, <http://motlc.wiesenthal.com/resurces/books/annual1/chap06.html> (last checked on June 1, 2005); see also Christopher Browning and Jurgen Matthaus, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Christopher Browning, “A Product of Euphoria in Victory,” http://mars.acnet.wnec.edu/~grempe/courses/hitler/lectures/holocaust_origins.html (From *Fateful Months*; reproduced with permission of the publisher) (last checked on June 1, 2005).

²⁰ Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 162.

²¹ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, (London: Abacus, 1997), p. 24; 47.

killers. This is perhaps the most precise example of a dispute amongst legitimate Holocaust historians. The works of Browning and Goldhagen are, in every essence, competing narratives; they reach different conclusions despite using mostly the same records and archives. Yet never did either one reach the conclusion that the Holocaust did not happen. Nor for that matter could they have been expected to, as the records are a clear indication of *what* took place. The dispute is one of interpretation, about *how* and *why* otherwise ordinary men became mass-killers.

Thus, the number of issues examined by historians and other Holocaust researchers is multitudinous. Whatever perspective one accepts as most closely approximating reality, however, there is no disputing the fact that “[c]omparing historical interpretations sheds light on the process by which we come closer to the truth through inquiry and debate.”²² Explanation helps breed knowledge and at least some sort of understanding. In the case of the Holocaust, it has also helped shaped the very conception of the event – that is, the convergence of otherwise competing narratives has provided a base of knowledge about, and indeed an identity for, the Shoah.

While some Holocaust narratives may therefore seem completely at odds, in the sense that historians do not always agree about certain aspects of the tragedy²³, these are nevertheless still “relatable” because they affirm and adhere to the master representation: millions of Jews were killed by the Nazi regime upon implementation of the Final Solution. Jews were selected for extermination for no other reason than that they were Jews; or as Tremaine suggests, “...on the basis not of how they behaved but

²² Niewyk, p. 7.

²³ In that these are matters of interpretation, disagreements seem most often to be related to questions of causality.

of who they were.”²⁴ Thus, we are talking about compatible narratives, in that while specific claims and arguments are made about persons, places, events, and even numbers, about Holocaust uniqueness, and about whether the Final Solution was a plan derived immediately upon the Nazi accession to power or one necessitated because of the war and the resulting inability to deal otherwise with the vast numbers of Jewish prisoners, these narratives nevertheless accept the fact that the Holocaust happened. And we are also talking about competing narratives, in that the authors of such narratives are in perpetual competition – not so much in a personal way, but rather in their efforts to illuminate the present about the past. Narratives about people and events are the primary means of that illumination, insofar as their authors purport to write something that as closely as possible approximates past reality(ies). The more they are believed (to approximate that past), the more the community of professional historians accepts them. The result of believability and acceptedness is that a given work becomes, for a time, the dominant account of an event (or part of it) or person’s life – the standard against which other accounts on the same subject are measured.

Raymond Martin engages the issue of deciding between such accounts in *The Past Within Us*, primarily because he sees it as the least focused-upon aspect of philosophy of history. As he suggests, while the publication of Carl Hempel’s “The Function of General Laws in History” launched a distinct period of discussion about explanation, that period explored “the merits of the positivist theory of explanation” more than explanations in their own right.²⁵ In Holocaust denial, we have a subject that

²⁴ Tremaine, p. 3.

²⁵ Raymond Martin, *The Past Within Us: An Empirical Approach to Philosophy of History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 16. Hempel, a philosopher of science, did this to cast doubt upon the distinctiveness of history as an intellectual endeavour. It does seem somewhat surprising,

allows us to do exactly that – to focus on explanation and how it remains absolutely fundamental to any conception of history as identifiable subject and discourse. I hope it will also show how denial literature – which begins and ends with a claim – is simply insufficiently historical to warrant consideration as history, per se.

Martin attempts to clarify how exactly historians defend their explanations of past reality(ies), whether or not their defenses are enough, and how these might be improved upon. Although I do not quite understand his assertion that historians rarely defend their arguments with “affirmative strategies”²⁶, he is certainly correct in stating that “controversial explanations in the best historical work available are almost invariably defended by means of arguments designed to show that the favored explanation is better than the best competing explanation.” He is also right to suggest that balancing arguments against someone else’s explanation with arguments in favour of one’s own explanation is the preferred method of defense. Simultaneously, Martin recommends this as the starting point for choosing between competing narratives.²⁷ In

therefore, that Martin would call upon some of Hempel’s main assertions and, in fact, eventually defend the positivist way of explanation when, in a separate article, he contends that “through case studies [philosophers of history explain] ...the really central and apparently intractable ways in which historical studies are *more* subjective, *as a matter of fact*, than the sciences.” Raymond Martin, “Objectivity and Meaning in Historical Studies: Toward a Post-Analytic View,” *History and Theory* 32:1 (Feb., 1993), p. 38.

²⁶ I take this to mean that historians do not often defend their selections of specific evidence – “I used this source because...”

²⁷ I suspect Martin had something a little different than Holocaust denial in mind when he used that term. Citing, as he does, the various theories regarding the collapse, in the 9th century A.D., of the Classic Period Lowland Maya civilization, none of these was a rejection of that collapse (although he admits that archaeologists disagree about what constitutes the collapse). Rather, he says that “[t]raditional accounts of the collapse tend to stress a single explanatory fact: natural catastrophe, ecological failure, internal revolt, external invasion, and so on,” while “[m]ore recent explanations invariably combine elements of several of the traditional explanations” (p. 32). The analogy to Holocaust historiography would be the Intentionalist-Functionalist debate: Intentionalism→Functionalist→Moderate Functionalist. Where I see disanalogous components of the argument, however, these would involve “denying explanations.” For example, one of the explanations of the collapse is natural disaster (earthquakes). This explanation has been criticized on the basis of the lack of evidence that there were any earthquakes in the lowlands. Thus, the collapse is not denied, but the proposition that there were earthquakes is. I see no such analogy

other words, how historians do what they do and defend what they claim has a direct bearing on the believability and “reality” of their narratives. I would suggest that it also has a direct bearing on how their work is distinctly “historical.”

“All else being equal,” he says, “an explanation that is better justified but less nearly sufficient is neither better nor worse than one that is less well justified but more nearly sufficient.”²⁸ Put more simply, this means that “[t]he stronger one’s grounds for believing that an explanatory claim is true, the more nearly justified one is in believing the claim,” while “the more completely one’s explanation identifies the array of causes suggested by the evidence, the more nearly sufficient is the explanation.”²⁹ Thus, justification appears to relate to the question: Is it true? Sufficiency asks: Is it enough? So, to cite Martin’s example, *that* there were severe earthquakes in the Peten in late classic times explains the fact *that* the Lowland Maya population collapsed in late Classic times. To be considered true, it would seem that we would first have to prove that there were in fact severe earthquakes during the time in question (justification); secondly, that severe earthquakes could in fact have produced such catastrophic conditions as to necessitate a collapse (sufficiency); and thirdly, that the effects of earthquakes caused similar collapses elsewhere (sufficiency again). Whether or not I as a reader would be justified in believing the account to be credible would be determined by these factors.

in the case of the Holocaust, even in the case of arguments about intentionalism/functionality. That there was no written “Hitler Order,” for example, is granted by both sides of the argument.

²⁸ Richard Angove, a mathematics expert, suggested that a better way of putting the claim would be that an explanation that is better justified but less nearly sufficient is either better than or equal to one that is less well justified but more nearly sufficient.

²⁹ Tremaine, p. 14; Martin, p. 47.

Martin applies equal weight to justification and sufficiency, I think, because the one bears upon the other – without the proof of earthquakes, the entire argument would fall apart. Let us then follow the work of Tracey Tremaine, and put Martin’s claims symbolically, using the letter “e” to indicate explanation, “J” to mean justification, “S” to mean sufficiency, “*” to mean “more strongly” or “more nearly,” “>” to mean “is better than,” and “=” to mean “is neither better nor worse.” Roughly equally believable explanations would be thus symbolized:

$$eJ^* + eS = eJ + eS^*$$

One could not determine the more believable argument because while one explanation is more nearly justified, the other is more nearly sufficient. A second claim would see:

$$eJ^* + eS > eJ + eS$$

Here, we would be more likely to believe the first explanation because it is more nearly justified and equally as sufficient as the second. And a third would see:

$$eJ + eS^* > eJ + eS$$

So, given that the first explanation is more nearly sufficient, it would be the better explanation.³⁰

By means of this hypothesis, it should be clear that the importance of justification lies in the evidence itself: the stronger it is, the more justified is the claim *and* belief in that claim. Thus, as well, do I think this is the basis for Martin’s contention that historians do not use affirmative strategies for “justifying” the justification of their arguments. *All* historians use evidence to support their claims. Evaluating degrees of sufficiency is a more problematic part of any historical

³⁰ Tremaine, pp. 14-15. By way of symbolizing, she makes somewhat clearer Raymond Martin’s assertions.

explanation, in that it is difficult to understand where exactly sufficiency about historical claims comes from. Here, Martin is not at all specific. We do not, in any case, have covering generalizations of the kind that are common in natural science claims, so sufficiency in historical writing must, we can infer, be based upon historians' agreement about an explanation, or upon a particular historian's trustworthiness – he or she has put forth prior arguments that have been repeatedly verified in the past.³¹

As I see it, Martin's theoretical approach lends itself rather well to deciding between historical accounts. Citing once more the competing narratives of Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen, one could argue that Browning's is the better account. This is so because Browning identifies an array of reasons why ordinary Germans became killers. And this does not in any way completely preclude Goldhagen's claim that eliminationist anti-Semitism caused ordinary men to become killers. Rather, Browning's suggestion is that there were more factors at play than simply that form of anti-Semitism. His narrative is thus more sufficient than Goldhagen's because he takes into account the variety of other factors inherent in killers' decision-making processes.

The same determination could be made for a number of other competing narratives. Take, for example, the claim that the Treaty of Versailles after WWI contributed to Hitler's rise to power in Germany. Any narrative that focused solely on Versailles would be less sufficient than one that also took into account the Great Depression and the immediate economic hardships resulting from it, this having made the desire for political change a factor in the minds of many Germans. A variety of other rationales could also be put forth, but the point is that, using Martin's criteria, we

³¹ Martin, pp. 45-47. See also his appendix, which examines historical counterexamples, especially pp. 128-132 and 134-137; and Tremaine, pp. 14-15.

have one way of deciding between accounts on the basis of their explanations. But what of those accounts that are not at all compatible, in this case, Holocaust denial literature? After all, the basis for historical claims and the narratives that justify and explain them (however different these may be) is always something commonly accepted as having happened.³² For the belief in a real past is simply essential for any historian, however much he or she may believe we can actually know about that past. Put more simply, professional historians (and indeed most reasonable persons) accept that the Holocaust happened; so too the War of 1812, slavery, the landing on the moon, and 9/11. These are the realities on which are based our various claims. So can Martin's criteria and formula be used to decide between Holocaust narratives such as Browning's, Goldhagen's, or any others, and those that deny the very fact of the Holocaust? I think they can, but not in an epistemological sense. Rather, Martin's work makes clear the fact that historians must use both explanation and interpretation in any and all of their works. There just is something historical in those works that differentiates them from the works of denial, and this is why his method is as yet inapplicable in any confrontation with deniers.

*Incompatible-Competing
Narratives*

Let us begin by trying to enter the minds of Holocaust deniers and, more importantly, the readers of their works. In this way, I think it might become clearer why empiricism is as yet an inappropriate method by which to refute the claims of deniers. Here, I ask the reader to imagine another event as important for some as the Holocaust is for others: the traditional Christian Story – the very story upon which Christian belief is

³² The convergences of accepted facts (or "facets" of said event) form the master representation.

predicated. The Christian Story is a narrative that originated, with the Christian religion itself, in the first century (Acts 11:19 and 11:26 in the *New Testament* saw Jesus' followers called Christians by non-Christians in the city of Antioch). This master representation is really based on the *Gospels* of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and while these are not identical accounts, central to the story are the claims that Jesus was born between 7-4 BC in a stable in Bethlehem, the Son of God, miraculously conceived by Mary, the wife of Joseph. Jesus was a preacher, teacher, and healer who, with His disciples (Twelve Apostles) taught the word of God throughout Palestine while simultaneously healing the sick and performing miracles. Eventually condemned as blasphemous and for being an apostate, he was executed between 29-33AD, after being betrayed by Judas Iscariot, by Roman authorities. He was Resurrected three days after His death, and His Resurrection is now considered proof of His divinity. His Crucifixion is now celebrated as Good Friday; the date of the Resurrection as Easter. Christmas is also celebrated as commemoration of His birth, and Sundays (the Christian Sabbath) have become weekly memorials of His Resurrection on which practicing Christians attend church services.

Now imagine someone denying this entire story. My guess is some readers of this thesis will find such a denial plausible, even rational, while others may not. Keep this in mind as you read the following summaries of certain of the most well-known Holocaust deniers, because I want to come back to this and explain why I think it gets at the heart of the issues of historical explanation and interpretation, judging between accounts, and the problems associated with evidentially-based refutations of Holocaust deniers.

What makes Holocaust denial unique is that it rejects past reality. Especially recently, the foregoing master representation of the Holocaust has been called into question by Arthur Butz, Robert Faurisson, the Institute for Historical Review, and a host of others who deny that there was any genocidal plan for the Jews, much less that any genocide ever occurred. Although deniers are prone to specific disagreements amongst themselves, they nevertheless adhere to one specific thesis: the Holocaust as we know it simply did not happen. This thesis is rather more appropriately called a claim, in the sense that Holocaust deniers cannot purport to be discussing an event they say never happened. It is this claim which as a result runs counter to any and all stories about the Holocaust, and which I have termed an incompatible-competing narrative – incompatible, in that denial literature shares seemingly no common grounds with the multitude of narratives about the Holocaust; competing, in that such narratives run directly counter especially to the master representation of the Holocaust.

What exactly are their main arguments? I have elaborated on some of these in the first chapter, but it is nevertheless useful to expand on the ways in which deniers use the guise of historical narratives to put forth their views. As noted earlier, Arthur Butz is perhaps the best known denier, and among the most respected by his peers. His challenge to the traditional Holocaust narrative, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*³³, was, as already stated, upon its original publication the most in-depth and sophisticated of the various works of denial then in existence. In it, he argues that there was no genocide, and bases his claim on many of the same sources of information used by historians: statements made at Nuremburg, photographs, survivor testimony,

³³ Arthur Butz, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century: the Case Against the Presumed Extermination of European Jewry*, (Southam, Warwickshire: Historical Review Press, 1976). All subsequent references to this source will be included in the text.

contemporary documents, and the like. Far from confirming the master representation of the Holocaust, Butz calls into question historians' use of these various resources. He claims, for example, that any statements made by Nazi leaders in reference to killing were hyperbole (pp. 69-73; and chapter 5); that torture was used to extricate confessions from Nazi officials at the Nuremberg trials (pp. 8, 22-25, 189-190); that those innocent Nazis who confessed did so because they hoped to strike advantageous deals with the victors (pp. 158-160); that German documents attesting to the killing process were forged (pp. 7-8, 130, 158, 173, 198); and that Jewish eyewitnesses lied. Further to the camps and the death toll, Butz sees the numbers of victims as highly exaggerated, and contends that those Jews who died were victims of typhus outbreaks in the camps or suffered from the chaotic conditions resulting from German withdrawal from formerly occupied territories, casualties having been because of "a total loss of control, not a deliberate policy..." (p. 30). Moreover, he says, any Jewish prisoner concentrations were in transit camps and ghettos, not concentration camps proper (p. 37). Lastly, Auschwitz itself was an industrial labour camp, and aptly called a death camp only in the sense that it was where the dead, dying, and sick were sent, and where some labourers inevitably fell sick and died as well (p. 49). As to what happened to Jews under German control, Butz is less clear, but at the time he hypothesized that many ended up in the Soviet Union, and that the reason for his being less than certain lies in the absence of documents showing the resettlement of Jews – these, he professes, were destroyed by the Allies (p. 200, 219). His conclusion? The Holocaust is "a Zionist hoax," and because the inventors of that 'hoax' "had to assess the gullibility of a possibly skeptical gentile audience," they chose Auschwitz as the centerpiece and used

the War Refugee Board (WRB) to “perpetrate the deception.” (pp. 7-8, 67, 87, 247) In fact, Butz singles out the WRB’s report, *German Extermination Camps: Auschwitz and Birkenau* as “the formal birth of the ‘official’ thesis of exterminations via the gas chambers at Auschwitz.”³⁴

In a similar vein does Wilhelm Stäglich challenge “the charge that millions of Jews fell victim to a systematic, racially motivated program of genocide”³⁵ (p. 13). Stäglich, who formerly served with an anti-aircraft battery unit near Auschwitz, and who by the time of his writing was a West German judge with a PhD, displays his legal training in his analysis of contemporary documents in *Auschwitz Myth*, published in 1979. His aim was “to survey, examine, and assess as objectively as possible the evidence that has thus far been presented for the claim that Auschwitz was a ‘death factory’” (p. 2). Although his work is perhaps better argued than Butz’s, Stäglich nevertheless conforms to the same basic premise, and contends, like Butz, that trial testimony and affidavits are unreliable, given that they were generated under no small amount of duress. Like other deniers, Stäglich also ignored the other camps: for him, “the extermination thesis stands or falls with the allegation that Auschwitz was a ‘death factory’”³⁶ (p. 2f).

In her essay about competing accounts, Tremaine examines Stäglich’s treatment of contemporary documents such as the Goering memorandum, in which he contends

³⁴ See Jacques Kornberg, “The Paranoid Style: Analysis of a Holocaust-denial Text,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 29-2 (1995), p.34.

³⁵ Wilhelm Stäglich, *Auschwitz Myth: A Judge Looks at the Evidence*, (Torrance, CA: Institute for Historical Review, 1986). Originally published in 1979 as *Der Auschwitz-Mythos: Legende Oder Wirklichkeit*, (Tubingen: Grabert Verlag, 1979), references hereafter are to the first English edition, unless otherwise noted. Also note that Stäglich’s PhD in law was revoked after the publication of *Auschwitz-Mythos*, ironically enough, by authority of a law originally promulgated by Adolf Hitler.

³⁶ Cited in Robert Jan Van Pelt, *The Science of Holocaust Research and the Art of Holocaust Denial*, (Waterloo: Department of Geography, University of Waterloo, 1999), p. 37.

the meaning of the phrase “final solution” has been improperly read as physical annihilation. Rather, Stäglich insists, the memorandum itself “deals with removing the Jews from the German sphere of influence in Europe through emigration,” a policy Stäglich insists was already in effect in Germany proper.³⁷ Thus, the phrase itself is misleading, and should instead be read to mean evacuation, colonization, and isolation in another definable territory (pp. 26-29). To support his claim, Stäglich cites two prominent Nazis: Dr. Johann von Leers, who in 1933 stated that “[f]or all its radicalism, our struggle against Jewry has never aimed at the Jewish people...”; and Reinhard Heydrich, who in 1940 looked toward finding what he called a “territorial final solution” for the Jews by then under German control (pp. 28-29).

With regard to the gassing facilities, Stäglich argues that there is only one “known document from the Auschwitz camp files in which the word ‘Vergasung’ is used in connection with the crematoria...” with the result that “there is no documentary evidence for the allegation that chambers for killing people by means of lethal gas were part of the crematoria” (p. 47). Building upon Butz’s interpretation of the *Vergasungskeller* as a carburetion room, Stäglich suggested that it had been a gas-tight air-raid shelter (p. 53).³⁸

Finally, Stäglich concerns himself, as the title of his book suggests, with questioning witness testimony. For example, Madame Vaillant-Couturier was a member of France’s Constituent Assembly at the time of her testifying about her experiences at

³⁷ See also Tremaine, pp. 10-11.

³⁸ For more clarity on Stäglich’s “scientific” argument, see Van Pelt, pp. 38-40. Interestingly, another denier, Carlo Mattogno, has soundly discredited Stäglich and Butz. See Carlo Mattogno, *Auschwitz: the End of a Legend: A Critique of J.C. Pressac*, (Torrance, CA: Institute for Historical Review, p. 64); and “Morgue Cellars of Birkenau: Gas Shelters or Disinfecting Chambers?” <http://www.vho.org/GB/c/CM/leichen.html> (last checked on June 1, 2005). Samuel Cromwell has since replied to Mattogno with the claim that the morgues were both disinfestation chambers and air raid shelters, <http://www.codoh.com/granata.html> (last checked on June 1, 2005).

Auschwitz. Of particular concern to Stäglich was her testimony about the selections of prisoners, the use of a red brick building for gassing operations, and the use of burning pits. According to Stäglich, as a journalist Vaillant-Couturier was naturally and professionally dishonest, for “[f]antasy, exaggeration, and mendacity are more prevalent in this profession than any other...” (p. 126). As John Zimmerman points out, however, although Vaillant-Couturier did make a mistake in saying she saw eight crematories at Auschwitz, the rest of her testimony was so compelling that Stäglich deemed it necessary to try and discredit her.³⁹

Over the past twenty or so years, deniers’ arguments have become even more sophisticated than those cited above. In 1989, for example, we see Carlo Mattogno examining “The First Gassing at Auschwitz.”⁴⁰ Again, supporting his claims by using some of the same sources as historians (the *Polish Fortnightly Review*, the post-war accounts of Joseph Vacek, Zenon Rozanski, and Wojciech Barczand, and the testimony of Rudolf Höss, all of which were used as references for the *Kalendarium of Auschwitz*), Mattogno argues that the story of the first gassing is simply a “myth.” How do we know that to be the case? Because upon critical analysis of the sources, there are too many discrepancies regarding: the date of the gassing (occurring either in June 1941, or August 15th, or September 5th or 6th, or on September 15th, or October 24th, or at the end of November – pp. 205-6); the location of the gassing (in a building, or in an underground shelter, or in the coal cellars of Block 11 – p. 206); the duration of the gassing (“immediately, or during the night, or two days later” – p. 207); and the victims

³⁹ John Zimmerman, *Holocaust Denial: Demographics, Testimonies, and Ideologies*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), pp. 74-5.

⁴⁰ Carlo Mattogno, “The First Gassing At Auschwitz: Genesis of a Myth,” *Journal of Historical Review* 9:2 (1989). All page references will hereafter be included in the text.

(850 Russian officers, or 700 Russian POWs and 300 Poles, or 500 Russian POWs and 196 sick inmates, or 1473 Russian POWs and 190 sick inmates; or 600 Russian POWs and 250 sick inmates – pp. 207-8). Mattogno also points to discrepancies about the selection of sick inmates, the evacuation of the gassed cadavers, and the gassing procedure, but by now the point is clear for him: the event itself did not happen, and this therefore calls into question accounts about any such incidents.

Since the publication of “The First Gassing at Auschwitz,” Mattogno has become recognized as the “guru of body disposal issues,” and John Zimmerman treats his work extensively in *Holocaust Denial: Demographics, Testimonies, and Ideologies*.⁴¹ Mattogno’s main premises, however, have remained the same: special treatment meant sanitary measures against typhus; documents have been forged and/or improperly read; the Soviets suppressed records related to Auschwitz; the “gas chambers” were never used as such; and there remain conflicts regarding dates and places. Thus for him, these are evidence enough, if not for a conspiracy, then certainly that the genocide of Jews never happened, and that Jewish deaths were never the result of a deliberate policy (for which, as he sees it, we actually have no relevant evidence).⁴²

In fact, most denial literature rests on the foundation of a Jewish conspiracy theory, however much deniers attempt to disguise their beliefs about one so as not to convey racial or political motivations. Curious, therefore, was Walter Sanning’s publication of *The Dissolution of European Jewry* in 1983, ostensibly an examination of

⁴¹ Zimmerman, p. 205. His refutations of Mattogno’s various claims are included especially from pages 205-258, and 367-377.

⁴² See Mattogno, *End of a Legend*; and *Concentration Camp Majdanek: A Historical and Technical Study*, (Theses and Dissertations Press, 2003); see also Zimmerman, p. 368. There, Zimmerman discusses Mattogno’s ever-changing thesis regarding the gas chambers and crematoria, as well as Mattogno’s adapting his claims about disinfection (“disinfestation”) and cremation in response to being contracted by Zimmerman.

Jewish population losses during WWII. Notably absent are overt conspiratorial claims, the belief in document forgery and coercion of perpetrator testimony, and even the questioning of Jewish survivor testimony. Altogether unique, moreover, is that there is no mention of the camps at all. The only notion we do see of conspiracy theory relates to the *American Jewish Yearbook*, which Sanning somehow relies upon but simultaneously contests because of its figures regarding Jewish population figures outside of the Soviet Union. Instead, Sanning contends that Jews were never under German control and existed somewhere else. Thus, he insists, the Jews could never have been murdered precisely because they were not under the control of Hitler and his minions.⁴³ Zimmerman cites Sanning's work as "probably the most important to date because it indirectly attempts to validate all other deniers' works."⁴⁴ My own view is that it is the closest any denier has come to offering an alternative "history." Yet he still does not tell us what happened during the years 1941-1945, and instead draws conclusions about the years prior to the implementation of the Final Solution in order to make more plausible the claim that the Holocaust *could not* have happened. In one of the few professional reviews of any work by a denier, John Conway suggests this about the Sanning's efforts:

This book is in fact no more than a perverse attempt to concoct a contrived analysis of the Jewish 'population changes' during the Second World War, which not only mendaciously exonerates the Nazis, but hypocritically seeks to create a distorted account of the Jewish experience which does without the Holocaust, without Hitler, without history at all.⁴⁵

⁴³ Walter Sanning, *The Dissolution of European Jewry*, (Torrance, CA: Institute for Historical Review, 1983).

⁴⁴ Zimmerman, p. 12.

⁴⁵ John Conway, "The Dissolution of European Jewry (Book Review)," *International History Review* 7:3 (August, 1985), p. 451. This is, of course, the point. Sanning's work marks the first effort at creating a past that does not include the Holocaust. So while I think he is wrong about what happened, no less problematic is Conway's analysis. Zimmerman treats Sanning's work much more appropriately in *Holocaust Denial*, especially from pages 3-10 and 27-31.

Whether or not this assessment is correct is less important for our purposes than the fact that Sanning, like others before (and after) him, disputes the master representation of the Holocaust. For him, as well, the genocide did not happen.

The point should therefore be quite clear: while we have such scholars as Lucy Dawidowicz, Susan Zucchotti, Raul Hilberg, Rita Botwinick, Christopher Browning, and Martin Gilbert discussing what happened, in terms of numbers and specific events, and in relation to perpetrators, victims, and bystanders, we see a stark refusal to admit to the Final Solution in the works of Holocaust deniers. Thus, as well, do we have our grounds for conflict: historians and deniers seem to focus on the same types of sources, such as contemporary documents and photographs, perpetrator and survivor testimony, and even material evidence. How these sources are used and interpreted, however, has resulted in incompatible-competing interpretations, claims, and conclusions. Proponents of the master representation of the Holocaust use the evidence to construct narratives that increase our knowledge (and hopefully, too, our understanding) about the Jewish tragedy, while deniers use the same evidence to support the claim that the genocide never happened.⁴⁶

*Judging Between
Narrative Accounts*

So, we have in this case a “master” claim that is inherently different from and incompatible with the master representation of the Holocaust – inherently, because its incompatibility with the master representation precludes commensurability with any

⁴⁶ Now, at this point it might be useful to convey to readers the fact that in no sense do I believe these to be *equal* interpretations. That deniers have manipulated such sources in order to support sub-claims that are insensitive and untrue should already be evident, at least to professional historians. I am also aware that Holocaust historians with access to all of the necessary materials could undertake the task of refuting deniers by “testing” the evidence. Although such an undertaking is not possible here, discriminating between denial literature and Holocaust narratives is fundamental, I think, to our understanding of valid versus invalid claims, and between historical and pseudo-historical narratives.

Holocaust narrative. How, then, to judge between them? As stated, on the surface it would appear that reasonableness itself should help us discern true from false. In addition, many people would argue that in the evidence we have the built-in, ready means by which to refute deniers' claims. Two, among many, examples from the trial of David Irving versus Deborah Lipstadt should make this type of response more clear. The first example displays the importance of evidence, and relates to Irving's insistence that Hitler wanted to protect the Jews from expulsion (and eventual murder). After studying Heinrich Himmler's phone log, Irving argued, in his 1991 edition of *Hitler's War*, that on December 1, 1941, on orders from Hitler, Himmler telephoned an SS General to tell him that Jews were to "stay where they are"⁴⁷ (that is, out of harm's way). Irving based his claim on this entry:

Verwaltungsführer der SS haben zu bleiben (Administrative leaders of the SS have to stay)⁴⁸

Irving, however, translated the sentence as: 'Administrative leaders of the SS. Jews have to stay.' Not only did he mistake '*haben*' for '*Juden*'; he also ignored the lack of a full stop after '*SS*'. As Richard Evans, key witness for the defense team, stated, other manuscript words in the same document should have alerted Irving to the fact that the word Himmler wrote was '*haben*'. According to Evans, this was "deliberately a perverse misreading by Irving borne of his overwhelming desire to portray Hitler as a friend of the Jews",⁴⁹ and it does seem an incomprehensible mistake for someone who considers himself keen on factual detail.

⁴⁷ David Irving, *Hitler's War*, (New York: Avon Books, 1991), p. 851

⁴⁸ *The Irving Judgment: Mr. David Irving V. Penguin Books and Professor Deborah Lipstadt*, (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 60.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Irving also made curious use of some of his sources, specifically as regards his portrayal of Hitler, and his claim that Hitler did not know what was happening to the Jews in the camps. In a footnote on page 851 of the 1977 edition of *Hitler's War*, Irving quoted a passage from Joachim von Ribbentrop (Reich Foreign Minister from 1938-1945), who was, when he made his statement, incarcerated in a prison at Nuremberg:

...that [Hitler] ordered [the destruction of the Jews] I refuse to believe, because such an act would be wholly incompatible with the picture I always had of him.⁵⁰

As Lipstadt's defense team stated, they had no problem with the quotation itself, but criticized Irving's omission of the immediately following passage:

On the other hand, judging from [Hitler's] Last Will, one must suppose that he at least knew about it, if, in his fanaticism against the Jews, he didn't also order [it].⁵¹

So, in addition to Irving's not "questioning Ribbentrop's reliability as a source" (based on his almost complete loyalty to Hitler, and his own demonstrably false claim that he did not know the fate of Jews upon deportation), the Defendants stated that the editing of Ribbentrop's notes was "indefensible".⁵² Now, immediately obvious is the impossibility of historians citing completely every source. Nevertheless, upon examining the evidence one can see that Irving did not follow the conventions set by the discipline. That is, a 'reasonable historian' does not make unreasonable edits from direct quotations.

Thus, this sort of endeavour involves examining the evidence and considering which specific statements, and which narrative as a whole, more appropriately relate what the evidence tells us. In theory, this is what is done in any legal setting, in

⁵⁰ David Irving, *Hitler's War* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 851; *Judgment*, p. 106.

⁵¹ *Judgment*, p. 106.

⁵² *Ibid.* They could also have cited the fact that early in *Hitler's War* (1977), Irving quotes Ribbentrop as saying he never really knew Hitler well at all.

deciding between innocence and guilt. It is, in short, a time-tested method, and one with which most people are familiar. But just how appropriate is it for our purposes?

In fact, it is problematic for a number of important reasons. First of all, such a method would appear to play into the hands of deniers, for their methodology relies upon casting doubt upon the very sources upon which all historians rely. Secondly, someone examining a work of denial and the sort of foregoing evidential refutation by a historian would still be left to decide which account he or she believed and, moreover, might also be convinced that the need for such a refutation would imply two sides to the story. For most of us, in any case, sources are not readily available, and so for any reader examining denial literature and an evidential refutation of it, he or she could not check the evidence for him/herself.

What is more, some historians and philosophers of history have for years questioned even the theoretical applicability of such an approach. For positivist thinkers, the only way to verify (note: this does not necessarily imply judging between) accounts of the past were by way of proto-scientificity. Historians were to use quantitative methods and then defend their explanations on the basis of general laws. Post-modernists and other like-minded skeptical observers have questioned not only what historians *should* do but also *what* they do. Because, they say, historical events are entities that historians construct and not given to us by past social reality or evidence, and because historians link these events together in their histories, so we cannot with any degree of certainty say that such explanations are true (of past reality). Again, therefore, the question remains: Is there any way at all to judge between accounts of denial and representations of the Holocaust?

I asked earlier that you think about the Christian Story and denying it, and said that I would relate this issue to the problem of empirical refutations of Holocaust deniers. Now I can. My assumption, once more, is that some readers will have found such a denial plausible while others will not. Why? Most answers, I think, will relate to issues of morality and evidence: Is Holocaust denial immoral or perfectly rational? Upon what is it based? As regards the Christian Story, you may also ask one further question, one that is likely unconscious, in the sense that you have also probably already and implicitly answered it in your considering the story: Is there a “what else,” or, more specifically, “What instead?”

In considering what you might think of contrasting views about the Christian Story, these, I imagine, would be among the key questions: What is the other side? Is it reasonable? Is it morally correct? Why do “I” think it is wrong? This last question is important primarily because the tendency for all of us is automatically toward refutation.⁵³ For professional historians considering claims of Holocaust deniers, the impulse is usually to think of the evidence and refute denial on just such grounds. Jewish historians may also (and properly) here think of the implications for memory. But morality, I think, would be the least regarded issue, or at least one taken for granted.

For Holocaust survivors, memory (and thus experience) might well be the primary issue. There would in all likelihood be no question of deniers’ immorality. And written evidence would also be a less-regarded factor than memory. For the rest of us, “everyman,” most would think first in terms of plausibility, and secondly, in terms of evidence, in this case, however, as it relates to the “other side.” Issues of morality

⁵³ As Raymond Martin suggests, historians attempt to show how their claims are more sufficient than competing claims by making clear what they believe to be insufficient about those competing claims.

would, as for professional historians, be the least regarded of all factors relating to Holocaust denial. Moreover, in terms of plausibility and evidence, deniers focus on what is wrong with the evidence and (I think deliberately) not on “what instead?” Similarly, “everyman” is likely less concerned with the use of evidence than with the fact that “there is some.” Shane Borrowman made this factor clear in *Critical Surfing: Holocaust Denial and Credibility on the Web*. Discussing Arthur Butz’s work with a student, that student stated, simply, that “[i]t’s hard to believe that someone’s ideas could all be lies when they’re that long and well documented.” Borrowman also comments on a note written in the library copy of *Hoax of the Twentieth Century* at her school: “This guy is really smart.” This is a reflection of the fact that evidence, while it matters for historians, matters in a different, almost quantifiable way for students; and for “everyman.”⁵⁴

Do not think that I am suggesting we disregard empiricism altogether, for that is not at all the case. Rather, the present challenge is as much one of genre differentiation as it is of interpretative reasonability. It is imperative that historians (and others) show that what deniers are doing is not history; that their works are in fact not in the least about the past. In terms of empirical thinking/theory, this involves two judgments: firstly, that historical narratives, by virtue of explanation, are more complete and more

⁵⁴ Borrowman, p. 3. In thinking about initial responses to Holocaust denial literature, I am offering a hypothetical, and what I think would be among the primary responses. I am also most concerned about the responses of students and “everyman,” and believe that Borrowman’s work shows just how much students believe in the power of the footnote but how little they look at the quality of such references. From this work, and from reading the multitude of reader reviews of Holocaust denial literature on Amazon.com, it seems that a number of people (most of whom surely fit into the category of “everyman”) see denial as an “other side” to the story. In her work, Deborah Lipstadt appears to draw the same conclusions; so too, apparently, the producers at C-Span, who wanted to contrast a lecture by Deborah Lipstadt with one by David Irving. See, for example, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A35346-2005Mar14.html> (last checked on June 1, 2005). The point is that many people are seemingly unaware that in order to properly compete with history, deniers must provide a *history* of their own. This, they have been unable to do.

plausible than the narratives of denial; and second, that historical narratives have a distinctiveness that makes them distinguishable from narratives of denial.

*Substantive Denial
vs. Holocaust Denial*

There is one more issue to be examined here because it also relates to empirical thought and the use of evidence. What happens if an event is legitimately denied? In other words, is that possible, and if so, then what? Even without deniers telling us, we know that history is and will remain a subject of doubt and uncertainty. Data cannot be tested via a lab experiment – here, now, and in front of you – and while types of events may repeat themselves, singular events can never be subjected to same-time observation and analysis. Yet there remains something homogeneous about historical narratives that separates them from what are simply claims; something, that is, which makes them truly “historical” (if not “truly” historical). For centuries, the acceptance of the Christian Story presupposed God’s reality. But upon what was that presupposition based? At its core, in fact, its acceptance has always relied (and still relies) largely upon belief (and thus Christianity is really predicated upon a “system” of such beliefs) and/or *a priori* knowledge. Although clearly undermined by evolutionary theory, belief nevertheless perpetuates the Story as an article of faith. I have cited it because, in a way, it acts here as a “foil.” That is, it offers, through its acceptance over the course of hundreds of years, a comparison to the master representation of the Holocaust. It was also simultaneously the very foundation for almost all historical claims in the Christian world for well over a thousand years. On the other hand, the Christian Story offers a significant parallel with Holocaust denial, first, by virtue of its having been denied

(particularly over the last 100-150 years), and secondly, because the basis for Holocaust denial is also belief.

Still, historical narratives are predicated upon explainability, and this, for me, is what begins to distinguish them from other narrative types.⁵⁵ For instance, we now know the Christian Story to be a theological narrative, placing, as it does, significance upon the belief in miracles and eternal life itself (and thus making empirical observation/testability doubly impossible). So although, as Robert Frykenberg tells us, “[o]ne condition that a historical belief possesses, in order to hold validity, is the claim that certain events have occurred and that certain persons have existed,” a historical narrative requires more. In other words, the Christian Story can no longer be considered a distinctly historical narrative because “claims of historical validity...cannot be generated solely out of truth claims which are seen as necessary [valid in all possible worlds] claims.”⁵⁶ They must be comprehensible in a way that stories predicated solely on belief are not.

If necessary truth claims can thereby render something “unexplainable” by offering only a belief as the foundation for a narrative, however, neither is the simple assertion that “something happened” enough.⁵⁷ Though historical narratives begin with “the past,” these require explainability and end (though always tentatively) with

⁵⁵ In fact, the Story is important in its demarcating a distinct “break” in historical narratives in the Christian world. These seem to have been primarily dependent upon Christian belief; otherwise they were not considered “historical.” Historical professionalization roughly coincided with Darwinian Theory and the soon-to-follow acceptance of rejecting Christian belief itself. This means that historical narratives, once largely “founded” *and* explained on the basis of Christian belief, began much more heavily to be based on “explainable” and “understandable” evidence. The analogy to Holocaust denial, in that sense, is that deniers harken back to a time when belief was the principal basis for a historical claim.

⁵⁶ Frykenberg, pp. 12-13; see also his analysis of historical meaning and analogy, pp. 14-18.

⁵⁷ Here, I am trying to say that facts, not themselves enough to be considered history, must nevertheless be “explainable.” I think I have made clear the idea that one bears upon the other (e.g. Resurrection → “Un”explainable → Not history; Dieppe → Explainable → History).

explanation itself.⁵⁸ All three facets are necessary in order for a narrative to be truly “historical.”

Of great importance, therefore, are those factors bearing directly upon the nature of historical claims. Although, as Tremaine suggests, Raymond Martin’s work is “a contribution to the development of an approach to judging competing explanations,” nevertheless “the art of judging needs a further study with a view to explicating any such criteria [as are applied by historians when judging or choosing between particular explanations].”⁵⁹ Surely explanation itself is part of the equation. Implicit in any historical narrative is the explanation (“e”) of something that happened and the interpretation (“i”) about how it came about or how it happened. The common factor in all of the prior symbolic claims was “e”. So, symbolically again, if we designate historical narrative with “hn”, and “must have” or “requires” with “~”, then,

$$hn \sim e + i$$

If that seems too simple, let us go back again to the question of sufficiency. Holocaust deniers have thus far provided only negative arguments of the kind that would directly contradict the master representation of the Holocaust. These are made on the basis of their “master” claim, and nothing more. Of course, all Holocaust narratives are also based upon a claim, but these use the evidence to tell a story. So while Martin may be correct in claiming that historians rarely make affirmative arguments about the evidence, this is so only because that affirmative argument is implicit in the claim itself.

Holocaust deniers make no affirmative arguments; they justify their claim(s) on the basis of evidence but only in their denial of it. That tells us nothing about the past at all,

⁵⁸ Ironically enough, explanations must themselves also and simultaneously be “explainable.” In fact, this is probably of more pertinence than the explainability of an event.

⁵⁹ Tremaine, p. 16.

so it is *not* enough and thereby insufficient as an explanation of the past. Simply put, if the Holocaust did not happen, then what did?

As previously stated, Martin's work is important, for it does offer us one way of deciding between accounts on the basis, primarily, of how evidence is used and how sufficient are historians' explanations and interpretations. Yet only in the work of Walter Sanning is there any sense of a denier trying to convey what did happen. In reality, however, what Sanning wanted to do was subtract from the Polish population of Jews prior to 1939 in order to make the Holocaust a non-event. John Zimmerman makes clear in twelve pages how unjustified and insufficient were Sanning's assertions.⁶⁰ Raymond Martin's hypothesis, therefore, is validated. But even Sanning's work does not offer us much of a glimpse into the years 1941-1945, and so there is still little reason to expend any effort refuting him on the basis of evidence. Again, Holocaust denial has not offered us any thought into what *did* happen during the years in which historians mark the beginnings and implementation of the Final Solution. Until they do, historians should make this fact clear to students, and show them just what is needed in any historical account. Most importantly, this includes explanation and interpretation.

⁶⁰ Zimmerman, pp. 3-10; 27-31.

CHAPTER 3
Holocaust Denial, Historical Relativism,
and the Ethics of Studying the Past:
Toward New Models of Dismissal and Understanding

In chapter two, I made clear that historical narratives are based upon evidence, explanation, and interpretation, and that focusing solely on the evidence as a way of dismissing deniers' claims is therefore not entirely effective. For one thing, we know that even if we show deniers how and why what they are doing is wrong, we are unlikely to change their minds. Rather, it is imperative that our focus be primarily on "everyman," including, most importantly, the students we teach. And it is not just that we want them to be able to distinguish between accounts on the basis of truth or falsity. We want them to know exactly why the Holocaust *as lesson* is so fundamental to the world before us. In other words, they need to develop an ethics of understanding, one that, in the main, should also help them to dismiss Holocaust deniers out of hand, not just as factually incorrect but also morally inept. The best way to do this, I think, is with a relativistic approach – not "anything goes" in the judgmental sense of the phrase, but rather an ethically charged objective to the way we write about the Holocaust even prior to refuting deniers and which, I think, can also help us in countering deniers' claims.

In three separate articles, Michael Dintenfass, James E. Young, and Patrick Finney look towards new ways of conceptualizing the Holocaust in historical discourse. For Dintenfass, this means "an ethical turn in historiographical thinking" and

“reconfiguring history as a discipline of the good as well as the true.”¹ This reconfiguring is necessitated by (and is indeed part of) the linguistic, post-modern turn in “new” historical literature, as well as being a response to the theoretical, anti-post-modernist narratives challenging that turn and its ostensible flight from fact. Young proposes as a way of working between “relativist” and “positivist” history what he calls a “received history,” one that “tells a survivor-historian’s story and [his] own relationship to it.” Following the efforts of Saul Friedlander, he suggests that mediating between these two positions could provide the basis for an “anti-redemptory narrative that works through, yet never actually bridges the gap between a survivor’s ‘deep memory’ and historical narrative.”² Finally, Patrick Finney examines historical relativism not just as a way of understanding the Holocaust, but also as a source of refutation against the claims of Holocaust deniers. At the same time, he provides an example and partial explanation of relativist discourse at work.³

In these articles, there are a variety of issues in play. The authors are aware of post-modern concepts and their implications for the study of history. They are also conscious of the responses of anti-post-modern advocates, including their sometimes linking relativist discourse and Holocaust denial. But most of all, they perceive the need for new ways of telling the past and, in the case of the Holocaust, also defending it. Their notion seems to be that foregrounding ethics and more effectively appropriating the “deep memory” of survivors offer us the most effective ways of presenting the

¹ Michael Dintenfass, “Truth’s Other: Ethics, the History of the Holocaust, and Historiographical Theory after the Linguistics Turn,” *History and Theory* 39:1 (Feb., 2000), p. 1.

² James E. Young, “Toward a Received History of the Holocaust,” *History and Theory* 36:4 (Dec., 1997), pp. 21; 23.

³ Patrick Finney, “Ethics, Historical Relativism, and Holocaust Denial,” *Rethinking History* 2:3 (1998), p. 360.

Holocaust. Like preventative medicine, memory, ethics, and epistemic relativism would provide – or at least supplement – a better defense against Holocaust denial than a turn to the written evidence alone, a hypothetical that directly contradicts those who place relativism and denial under the same sign.

*Ethics and the
Discipline of History*

Working through the suggestions of Dintenfass, Young, and Finney will necessarily involve the recognition of historical claims to authority and confront the issues of explanation and interpretation already alluded to in the second chapter. As stated there, much of the history of the Holocaust is knowable and has been explained rationally – to the point that there is now what can be termed a “master representation” of the Event – and yet remains in some ways beyond understanding. Although the historical canon has provided criteria for a base of knowledge, sanitized versions of the past are not always preferable to a history-telling that would make clearer an ethics of remembering. Moreover, because Holocaust denial attempts to make the same claim to historical authority by presenting itself as an “other side” to the story, focusing on the good in addition to the true should help us face denial and show just how it is incommensurable with historical discourse and an affront to history, survivors, and morality.⁴ In that sense, the Holocaust as event becomes also the Holocaust as lesson in a more meaningful way and provides a distinctly non-neutral, evaluative defense against those who assert that it did not happen.

This, however, confronts one of the very foundational beliefs of the discipline. Among those who many years ago had already repudiated the idea of the historian as

⁴ Dintenfass, p. 20.

moralist included Edward Hallett Carr, David Knowles, and Henry Charles Lea, all three eminent historians in their own right.⁵ In his recent defense against post-modernism, Richard Evans likewise argues that historians do make moral judgments, but that these are “still best articulated historically,” such that “the element of moral judgment, insofar as it is exercised at all, is in the end extraneous to the research, rather than being embedded in the theory or methodology of it.” And this view, as he remarks, has been used not only to combat post-modernism, but also historical positivism of the sort practiced by Arnold Toynbee. The point, of course, is to defend history’s uniqueness – its being more than science and not simply art.⁶ It should hardly be surprising, therefore, to see professional historians use this line of argumentation so also to defend history’s objectivity. Not passing moral judgment in historical texts is part of creating distance from the past, as well as being a seemingly empirically-based ethics of re-telling.

*Relativism, History,
and Holocaust Denial*

This argument has been cited particularly by those who do not wish to concede history to the post-modern challenge, a challenge, they insist, which threatens to obscure the past and result in the sort of “anything goes” that would collapse the distinction between the true and the false. To be sure, no one wants that, but I do not believe that

⁵ Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?*, (New York: Knopf, 1961), pp. 77-79; David Knowles, *The Historian and Character*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 19; Henry Charles Lea, “Ethical Values in History,” *American Historical Review* 9 (1903-1904), pp. 233-246. Lea took particular issue with Lord Acton’s claim that historians needed to pass moral judgments and not gloss over the atrocities of the past. For him, ethical/moral judgments were best left to the reader. See also William Dray, “History and Value Judgments,” in Paul Edwards, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (New York: Macmillan, 1967); and Gordon Wright’s 1975 presidential address for the American Historical Association, “History as a Moral Science,” http://www.historians.org/info/AHA_History/gwright.htm (last checked July 1, 2005).

⁶ Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History*, (London, Granta Books, 1997), pp. 52; 54-57.

either relativism or a linguistics of the type I am suggesting would result in anything of that nature at all. Deborah Lipstadt disagrees. In her important treatise about Holocaust denial, she states that “[Holocaust] deniers do not work in a vacuum. Part of their success can be traced to an intellectual climate that has made its mark in the scholarly world during the past two decades. The deniers are plying their trade when much of history seems to be up for grabs and attacks on the Western rationalist tradition have become commonplace.”⁷ Citing the philosopher, Hilary Putnam, she claims that relativism has offered a way toward a world in which “every conceptual system was ‘just as good as the other.’”⁸ So while she recognizes the fact that relativists were and are neither deniers “nor sympathetic to the deniers’ attitudes,” she insists that “because deconstructionism argued that experience was relative and nothing fixed, it created an atmosphere of permissiveness toward questioning the meaning of historical events and made it hard for proponents to assert that there was anything ‘off limits’ for this skeptical approach.” Thus, for Lipstadt, this type of thinking is particularly dangerous, specifically for those students who might otherwise be able to dismiss Holocaust denial as a movement with no intellectual value, and as bigotry masquerading as truth. “These attacks on history and knowledge,” she says (while once again blurring the distinction between relativism and denial), “have the potential to alter dramatically the way established truth is transmitted from generation to generation. Ultimately, the climate they create is of no less importance than the truth they attack...No fact, no event, and no aspect of history has any fixed meaning or content. Any truth can be retold. Any fact

⁷ Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, (New York: The Free Press, 1993), p. 17. See also Michiko Kakutani, “When History is a Casualty,” *The New York Times* (April 30, 1993), p. C31.

⁸ Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 54. Cited in Lipstadt, *Assault*, p. 18.

can be recast. There is no ultimate historical reality.” Holocaust denial, she insists, is “part of this phenomenon.”⁹

No less forceful is Omer Bartov’s linking of relativism and Holocaust denial. For him, calling into question historical reconstruction puts truth in jeopardy. If the reality of the gas chambers “can be doubted, or if it is a relative issue open to multiple emplotments,” he says, then we are faced with “the peril of losing control over truth, of not being able to distinguish between what is false and what is true, of plunging into a dangerous abyss of openended relativity, where there is no objective reality, but a multitude of subjective views, all legitimate.”¹⁰

Nor are Lipstadt and Bartov alone in connecting Holocaust denial and historical relativism, or in their stances against the post-modern and all its accompanying “isms.” The Marxist intellectual, Alex Callinocos, likewise dismisses any relativistic approach to writing history. Paraphrasing Carlo Ginzburg, he suggests that “contemporary skeptics” have taken the evidence as a wall, one that precludes access to reality. “If the historian’s evidence is a wall,” he contends, “then what’s on the other side of the wall ceases to be an issue; it becomes beside the point to ask what referents her own discourse has, when she uses this evidence to reconstruct the past. Once the referents have been occluded, the boundary separating it from fiction is inevitably blurred – a process reinforced by the stress [Hayden] White lays on that aspect of historiography, the employment of rhetorical tropes and narrative genres, which it shares with fiction.”¹¹ But this, he proposes, leaves open a dilemma for those skeptics who do not want to join

⁹ Lipstadt, *Assault*, pp. 17-20.

¹⁰ Omer Bartov, *Murder in our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 130-134.

¹¹ Alex Callinocos, *Theories and Narratives: Reflections on the Philosophy of History*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 65-66.

the ranks of the Holocaust deniers, “[f]or surely there are events which it would be simply outrageous to treat as constructs of the historical imaginary.” Here, Callinocos seems to be connecting the theories of Hayden White and others with the notion of a history built solely upon imagination, one that would in fact be as open to deniers as anyone else.¹²

Added to the arguments of Lipstadt, Bartov, and Callinocos have been those advanced by Gertrude Himmelfarb¹³, Richard Evans¹⁴, and the team of Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob¹⁵, each of them railing against post-modernism and the sort of relativism that, they say, leaves us no objective criteria by which to reject those who would falsify the past. Appleby *et al.* seem even to suggest that relativism made its mark on the Holocaust as event, and posit that as the breaking point for historical relativism: “The killing of the Jews,” they contend, “seemed to show that cultural relativism had reached its limits in the death camps.”¹⁶

What exactly is this phenomenon they are so hostile toward? Unfortunately, because it operates on so many levels, is so interdisciplinary, and encompasses so many viewpoints and philosophies, post-modernism is hard to accurately define. And this is probably the point: certain only in and about its own uncertainty, it remains evaluative but disobligingly difficult to evaluate precisely because its proponents want it that way.

¹² Ibid., pp. 66-68.

¹³ Gertrude Himmelfarb, “Telling It As You Like It: Postmodernist History and the Flight from Fact,” in Keith Jenkins, ed., *The Postmodern History Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 158-174

¹⁴ Evans, pp. 224-253, especially. Evans does admit to at least one possible “good” to come of postmodernism. “More generally,” he says, “if postmodernism makes us more aware of the possible models available to us within the history of historical writing and research, this too can only enrich our own practice as historians in the present” (p. 156).

¹⁵ Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History*, (New York: Norton, 1994).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7. As Robert Eaglestone suggests, however, the assertion by Appleby *et al.* is a problematic one. By drawing an (ideological?) parallel between post-modernists and the Nazis, they seem to forget that no group has been less culturally relativist than the Nazis. Robert Eaglestone, *Postmodernism and Holocaust Denial*, (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2001), p. 6.

Even loosely defined, one can say only with relative assuredness that post-modernists are predominantly left- rather than right-wing; that they criticize modernity – its politics, history, priorities, and indeed all that it has engendered; that they embrace self-consciousness; and that they have contributed greatly to the rise of theory and (whether they approve of this or not) a multiplication of theoretical models, especially as these relate to the social sciences and humanities. Post-modernists have also been categorized as skeptical or affirmative, the former embracing radical, mistrustful, even pessimistic views of humanity and an apparently totalizing rejection of truth and the naïve search for it, while the latter are often characterized as more optimistic about the post-modern age and willing to make normative, ethical value choices. There is no absolute when it comes to describing or categorizing post-modernists, and for Richard Evans and others this uncertainty is equally prevalent in their work.¹⁷

Small wonder it is, therefore, that the Holocaust has been taken as the primary defense against perceptions about post-modern rejections of truth, meaning, and knowing – indeed, against all that seen as relating to, and as under the influence of, post-modernism. This includes historical relativism, which is seemingly always taken as being of the judgmental kind, carrying with it the notion that all statements are equally valid. Epistemic relativism, on the other hand, does not carry with it the same baggage that judgmental relativism does, and instead simply makes clear the fact that “all statements are socially-grounded and thus all knowledge historically contingent,” and

¹⁷ See, for example, Pauline Roseneau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), especially pp. 3-24. For a brief, yet evaluative description of post-modernism, see Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Another informative synopsis can be found in Michael Bentley, “Introduction: Approaches to Modernity: Western Historiography Since the Enlightenment,” in Michael Bentley, ed., *Companion to Historiography*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), specifically pp. 487-495.

far from leaving us with no alternative for discriminating (or accepting or rejecting) between accounts, offers us instead a wider variety of criteria for doing this than its critics would have us believe.¹⁸

In practical terms, most critics disagree with the above statement, asking instead whether “deconstruction [is] adequate to the magnitude of the epistemological and ethical questions related to the Holocaust.” This question is posed in light of two significant issues: the first is that history plays a vital role in our coming to terms with the Shoah; the second relates more directly to the post-modern questioning of the basic claims of historical inquiry, which for critics positions post-modernism and the study of the Holocaust as “antithetical.”¹⁹ To the first issue, perhaps it need only be said that the Holocaust has come to be the central event of modern history. And this is not solely because of the horror of the event, but because it forces us to examine human actions that defy our sensibilities: how could something that tragic have happened in a society supposedly governed by rational thought, respect for others, and morality? Indeed, if the Holocaust is exceptional, it is precisely because it happened. The second issue, however, and as a corollary of the first, is at once more problematic because it addresses the methods by which we arrive at our histories of the past. It also relates to post-modernism’s ostensible complicity with Nazism and, by extension, Holocaust denial.

Was the Holocaust a revolt against modernity; an aberration in the progress and development of the West? Or was it, rather, an “outgrowth” of Western development, and therefore an intersection, of sorts, with the very project of modernity? These questions have been addressed elsewhere, such that the gas chambers are not always

¹⁸ Finney, p. 36.

¹⁹ Wayne Klein, “Truth’s Turning: History and the Holocaust,” in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, ed., *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), p. 54.

seen as an (post-modern?) aberration of the sort suggested by Jürgen Habermas.²⁰

Nevertheless, there remains the conception of post-modernism as a nihilistic, anti-foundational view of the world, one that in the “real world” disarms us from combating threats to democracy and that within the discipline of history similarly prevents us from refuting Holocaust deniers, forcing us instead to accept their claims as just another version of the past. Deborah Lipstadt takes this view not by way of directly refuting deniers, but rather in the effort to expose their methods and ideological motivations.²¹ Likewise does Pierre Vidal-Naquet reject the acknowledgement of Holocaust denial as legitimate history.²² He also points to the difference between entering a discussion with the deniers and entering one “*concerning*” them:

It should be understood once and for all that I am not entering into a dialogue with them. A dialogue between two parties, even if they are adversaries, presupposes a common ground, a common respect – in this case for truth. But with the “revisionists,” such a ground does not exist. Could one conceive of an astrophysicist entering into a dialogue with a “researcher” claiming that the moon is made of Roquefort cheese? Such is the level at which the parties would have to be situated...Until now, the contribution of the “revisionists” to our knowledge may be compared to the correction, in a long text, of a few typographical errors. That does not justify a dialogue, since they have above all amplified beyond measure the register of falsehood.²³

The point, of course, is that both Lipstadt and Vidal-Naquet refuse to bow to the premise of deniers: the creation of two historical schools of thought, “revisionist” and “exterminationist,” one equally as valid as the other. As Wayne Klein tells us in his provocative article, “Truth’s Turning: History and the Holocaust,” the position shared by Lipstadt and Vidal-Naquet is a justifiable, even honourable one: they refuse denial

²⁰ Milchman and Rosenberg, pp. 1-19.

²¹ Lipstadt, p. 1.

²² Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of Memory: Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

the same credentials as professional history.²⁴ However, when Lipstadt argues that denial is linked with a post-modern school of thought (which Vidal-Naquet does not do), the grounds upon which her position is based seem at the very least misplaced. Tarring judgmental and epistemic relativism with the same brush, she reads both to mean the acceptance of all statements as equally valid. In fact, further connecting denial with her definition of deconstruction/relativism, she claims that deniers “have distorted and deconstructed the definition of the Holocaust.”²⁵ Notwithstanding her seemingly contradictory claims (in the same book) that deniers do not have the analytical skills by which to accomplish such a task, how (and more importantly, why) does she feel so compelled to create such a connection?

For her, this necessarily relates to a purely empirical conception of history, one that begins with an event or occurrence as the basic subject of historical discourse. Taken at face value, the assertion of a presupposed past is not at all controversial and, as I have stated earlier, it is a concept most historians must, and surely do, accept. Lipstadt, however, contends that the documented past exists independently of the historian:

Reasoned dialogue, particularly as it applies to the understanding of history, is rooted in the notion that there exists a historical reality that – though it may be subjected by the historian to a multiplicity of interpretations – is ultimately found and not made. The historian does not create, the historian uncovers. The validity of a historical interpretation is determined by how well it accounts for the facts.²⁶

Thus, for her there is a clear distinction between subject and interpretation: reality exists entirely apart from language. Moreover, her phrase of choice – historical reality “is ultimately found and not made” – can hardly have been a disinterested one. The person

²⁴ Klein, p. 55.

²⁵ Lipstadt, p. 21.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

most often associated with relativism and with whose work Lipstadt is certainly familiar is Hayden White, whose argument that historical narratives can never be absolutely true because they are as much invented as found, contrasts directly with Lipstadt's claim.²⁷ But whatever Lipstadt's contentions, we can never be sure that our evidence is not itself freighted with ideological baggage. Or at least we cannot be sure that the facts exist independently of interpretation; that experience is necessarily independent of language. As Klein says, few philosophers would subscribe to, let alone defend such a view. Even "Ludwig Wittgenstein, more easily identified with the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle than with deconstruction, suggests that our view of the world, our experience, is determined by a linguistic foundation which is by definition malleable and open to interpretation."²⁸ This is not to say that there is nothing but language – the word "fire" does not by itself elicit pain, but holding my hand above a lighted candle for a time certainly will – but rather that experience is not given to us. It simply follows that experience, in this case the experience of pain, can only be described and communicated by means of a shared language.

Yet this is much deeper than Lipstadt, or indeed most other historians, would have us go in order to prove a point. Even those who would not abide by Lipstadt's overly simplistic, positivistic conception of extra-linguistic reality would in all likelihood defend the task of the historian as the interpreter of facts – "events and occurrences which can be independently observed and described."²⁹ That is, even accepting that history is present-centered, constructed, and far from objective, history is

²⁷ Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 82.

²⁸ Klein, pp. 57-58.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

still about the past, and it must remain that way if it is to retain its position as a distinctive discourse.

*Patrick Finney, Epistemic Relativism,
and the Refutation of Holocaust Denial*

Patrick Finney also retains the conception of historical study as distinct from fiction. Recognizing as disconcerting the placement of relativism and denial under the same sign, as well as the accusation that relativism is somehow unethical, Finney undertakes to combat denial at the same time as he wrestles with charges against the sort of relativism with which he identifies. This is, he tells us, an epistemic relativism that understands – indeed, which takes for granted – the fact that there is a bedrock foundation on which histories are constructed³⁰ and, moreover, that facts and evidence are important, even vital, for any representation of a previously real past. “In order to do straightforward historical work,” he contends, “we resile from metahistorical criticism – the notions that all facts are constructs, that no trace can absolutely prove anything other than its own existence – and take the communal acceptance of the existence of particular facts as a starting point.” So while this cannot be proven absolutely from within the discourse, and while facts are, like the histories constructed on the basis of them, interpretive, discursive constructs, we nonetheless “retain the notion that our discourse is in some ways influenced by a real past.”³¹ What relativists point to is the idea that events of the past, once written about, necessarily overlap with the fictional; that the facts as discursive constructs can never prove the truth of a statement. In direct contrast with “empiricist interpretive absolutism,” this type of

³⁰ Finney, p. 361.

³¹ Ibid., p. 364; 363.

relativism rejects “anti-utopian closure” and leaves open the way toward a future that we desire by unlocking the “infinite possibilities of the past.”³²

Does this not, however, point to the irreconcilability of relativism and the refutation of Holocaust denial? Finney does not think so, and neither do I. For one thing, disproving the denial of history by means of epistemic relativism does not necessitate ignoring the evidence altogether. For another – and this is perhaps where the concept of a language of familiarity best fits – as historians we abide by more or less certain rules and conventions.³³ While deniers claim to be following them too, in practice this is not really the case. That they employ many of the same stylistic conventions as professional historians does not mean that we need to accept theirs as just another interpretation of the past.³⁴ On the contrary, deniers do not follow the same rules for interpreting evidence as the community of professional historians, so on the basis of rules and conventions covering interpretive discourse, all historians are right to – and should – continue to “bar [deniers] from mainstream historiographical discussions.”³⁵

³² Ibid., p. 360.

³³ Of course, these do – and should – evolve over time.

³⁴ Finney initially argues that we need to assess Holocaust denial literature as academic interpretations because that is how deniers portray them: as an “other side” of the history of the Holocaust (p. 360). In the name of free speech issues, deniers continue to posit denial as being part of legitimate historical inquiry. While I do not agree that denial need be assessed as such – it is not interpretation, it is denial – for Finney this poses no real problem, for relativism, as he sees it, does not imply the “uncritical acceptance of all interpretations” (p. 361). Neither, for that matter, would Richard Rorty or others characterized as “post-modernists” (or at least sensitive to post-modern conventions) accept the notion that relativism necessarily entails the equal legitimacy of two incompatible points of view. See Richard Rorty, “Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism,” in Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism: essays, 1972-1980*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 166.

In fact, what Finney does show is that even if accepted as interpretation, denial can nevertheless be refuted by means of relativism. Part of the reason he undertakes this argument, therefore, is to make this point all the more clear to critics of historical relativism. Moreover, it is also his way of conveying what I would call a “refutation from within”: that is, just as there are ways of combating denial outside the realm of the academy, so too are there ways of combating it from within.

³⁵ Finney, p. 364.

The problem, of course, is that deniers do not ply their trade within the discipline; they target an audience beyond the academy. Any refutation of their views must therefore take this into account, and recognize deniers' political and ideological motivations: their different epistemic frameworks are veritable proof of interested knowledge. In the main, this includes anti-Semitism and the hoped-for rehabilitation of fascism, and the belief in a conspiracy theory that is upheld by those ideological motivations. For Finney, this suggests an alternative approach: one that involves "political engagement" with denial. In a certain sense, this approach has much in common with Lipstadt's: it prescribes ruling their claims out of court by focusing on the ideological roots of denial and exposing their connections with fascist and like-minded groups.³⁶ Where the two approaches diverge, however, is with Lipstadt's assertion – adumbrated earlier – that her position is one of disinterested scholarship. Anyone who reads *Denying the Holocaust* cannot help but recognize its political tone. It is what gives it such an edge, and is the reason it so quickly resonates, even with those who disagree with its premise and the subject she chose to examine. More importantly, it attempts to preserve the "importance of the Holocaust by asserting an absolutist stance"³⁷ – not just towards the event or interpretations of it, but also towards her conception of proper history and universal truth. In short, it upholds the virtues of absolute objectivity at a time when notions about disinterested truth-claims no longer hold much promise. In Finney's mind, neither do they hold particular value:

After all, who wants to be objective about the Holocaust? We think the Holocaust is important not because of some detached, scholarly inquiry but because of an

³⁶ Ibid., p. 366. Finney, as well, recognizes that his aims and Lipstadt's converge on the issue of ethics, if not on the issue of truth.

³⁷ Lipstadt, especially pp. 1-29 and 209-222; Finney, p. 367.

emotional and intellectual abhorrence of racism, violence and genocide and because we passionately believe in the ethical imperative “never again.”³⁸

Surely we do not require an unambiguous ontology of experience, historical reality, or truth to tell us that. Our lacking indisputable epistemological answers does not mean we should dismiss the rules governing the discourse. As Jean-François Lyotard stated in *Le Différend*, “These rules determine the universes of cognitive phrases.” For him, this also meant that “the proof for the reality of the gas chambers cannot be adduced if the rules adducing the proof are not respected.”³⁹

Thus, far from suggesting that we turn a blind eye to Holocaust deniers, Finney suggests instead that we look at what motivates denial at the same time as we recognize the reason we study the Holocaust. Neither is motivated solely, or even mainly, by epistemology. The motivation of deniers is anti-Semitism – itself clear evidence of ethical bankruptcy – while for historians the study of the Holocaust is grounded in the very ethics deniers lack. We must continue to recognize both and promote our ethics of understanding as a way of conveying the tragedy that was the Holocaust at the same time as we understand Holocaust denial and combat it on the basis of what it is: “not bad history, not history at all, but anti-Semitic race-hate thinly camouflaged.”⁴⁰ Only then can we also hope to dismiss deniers both *within* and *outside* of the academy.

*Toward a New Linguistics:
Michael Dintenfass, James Young,
and the Ethics of Studying the Past*

It is precisely the accepting of certain accounts – those that would bridge the gap between empiricism and relativism – with which Dintenfass and Young are most

³⁸ Finney, p. 367.

³⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 16; see also pp. 56-8.

⁴⁰ Eaglestone, p. 66.

concerned, and whose arguments I pursue in the following pages. “The most telling sign of the seriousness of the challenge of the linguistic turn to working historians’ notions of historical knowledge,” Dintenfass tells us, “has been the animated affirmations of history as a project of faithful reconstruction that it has elicited from some of our more accomplished students of the past.”⁴¹ In *Telling the Truth about History*, Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob state that a “curiosity about what actually happened in the past” is the primary motivation for historical inquiry and writing.⁴² With no less conviction do Evans, Himmelfarb, and Omer Bartov associate historical writing with the attempt to reconstruct past reality, a notion they juxtapose against the theories of Hayden White and others they associate with historical relativism. In fact, according to both Dintenfass and Young, the person most often connected with (and blamed for) the linguistic turn is Hayden White. In *Metahistory* (1973), White had already pointed to the inescapable constructedness of historical writing.⁴³ While White sought to assert his theory through the reading of nineteenth-century historians and philosophers of history, such debates as his work seems to have sparked are now “located largely on the terrain of the Holocaust.”⁴⁴ Thus, the reactions of Evans and others against post-modernism/relativism are in large part reactions against White. Yet instead of telling us why and how the Holocaust is the litmus test of historical theory, they function rather as “an incantation with which the adherents of history as faithful reconstruction attempt to ward off the demons of the linguistic turn.”⁴⁵

⁴¹ Dintenfass, p. 1.

⁴² Appleby *et al.*, p. 259.

⁴³ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1973). See, especially, his introduction, which provides the framework for his work and defines his tropological system.

⁴⁴ Dintenfass, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Dintenfass arrives at his position by reading the works of Dominick LaCapra, Raul Hilberg, and Saul Friedlander. As he says, the sorts of theoretical and historiographical questions the answers for which Evans and others are so self-assured about have also occupied the minds of LaCapra, Hilberg, and Friedlander, all of whom have written and thought deeply about the Holocaust. It is for that reason that he seeks to “juxtapose the anti-postmodernist narratives that invoke Auschwitz as the fixed point of reference for the testing of post-linguistic-turn historiographical propositions with the reflections of some historians whose experience of writing Holocaust history induced them to interrogate the writing of history itself.”⁴⁶ Rather than judging the debate, however, he looks toward a theory of cognitive representation to which can be added the moral dimension of historical inquiry. It is a thoughtful approach, for the semantics about the representation of the Holocaust as truth do little to emphasize the moral imperative. There also seems to be a terribly suggestive depiction of relativism as unethical. Dintenfass’ othering of true/false in the face of right/wrong is thus a far more appropriate departure from the traditional dispute.

In LaCapra, Dintenfass finds someone who promotes history-writing with a purpose, but at the same time does not reduce or disqualify the commitment to standard historiographical conventions: among these, careful research and the belief in the separation of values and norms from empirical reality. Yet there can be no doubt that this does not imply the dry, matter-of-fact analysis that would cement objectivity as an achievable or desirable objective in and of itself. Historians, LaCapra contends, are

⁴⁶ Ibid.

“always implicated in the things we analyze and try to understand”;⁴⁷ thus objectivity is not at all desirable in a total(izing) state. Rather, as an objective in some measure, objectivity requires self-interrogation and theoretical questioning, for theory is what “disciplines the historian’s account of the past” and allows us a way beyond the simple appeal to the evidence.⁴⁸

In the case of the Holocaust, this means working through the past: “not only remembering what happened in the past but actively recognizing the fundamental injustice done to the victims as a premise of legitimate action in the present and future.” As Dintenfass (and I) read him, LaCapra insists that the moral responsibility of the historian writing about the Holocaust should be inextricably linked to his or her work, and may thereby require an appeal to ritual as a way of determining the very appropriateness of a historical account. This really undermines the concept of faithful, unattached reconstruction of the sort desired by Evans, Appleby, and others, for if the Holocaust is to be used as a litmus test for historical inquiry, it does so not only to combat error or misrepresentation. It additionally verifies any representation’s “accommodation of claims of ethics, present-day social and political contexts, and ritual” and determines “whether the provision a theory of historical inquiry makes for the critical theoretical gaze is sufficient to check both the historian’s implication in the past he or she aims to reconstruct and his or her projections onto his or her reconstruction of that past.”⁴⁹ (p. 12)

⁴⁷ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 68; see also Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), especially pp. 1-34 and 195-248. See also Dintenfass, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁸ Dintenfass, p. 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12. On the ritual component of historical writing (or rather, working through the historical writing of trauma, in this case of Auschwitz), see LaCapra, *History and Memory* and also *History in Transit*, especially pp. 106-143.

As author of *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961; 1985),⁵⁰ Raul Hilberg has been variously lauded for his work.⁵¹ In fact, it seems equally celebrated for and validated by volume of evidence alone: Hilberg's mastery of the empirical record is regarded simply as unparalleled, and it is he who has best helped increase our factual knowledge of the Holocaust. But Dintenfass sees another side to Hilberg: "an artist who works in documents just as a sculptor who works in marble, a painter works in oils, and a musician works in tones."⁵² Nor is Dintenfass alone in his portrayal, for Hilberg himself has conveyed as much in *The Politics of Memory: the Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (1996). Hilberg regards himself as artist, and his acclaimed account as a work of art, the documents for which were simply his medium.⁵³ Of course, he is aware that his depiction of history writing as analogous to artistic forms such as music and painting seems only to further juxtapose "footnote writers" against those who produce imaginative literature; however, like LaCapra, in no way does Hilberg diminish the conventions of the historical discipline in favour of a license to say what one will. On the contrary, he stresses fidelity to the documents and rails against trivialization and falsification of the past. Minimizing one's voice is integral so as not to add to the past with invented plot and adventure.⁵⁴

Still, this does not mean that the historian should consider objectivity as the safeguard for academic integrity. Documents have to be interpreted and explained as

⁵⁰ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961; revised edition, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985).

⁵¹ See, for example, Christopher Browning, "German Memory, Judicial Interrogation, and Historical Reconstruction: Writing Perpetrator History from Postwar Testimony," in Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 26.

⁵² Dintenfass, p. 17.

⁵³ Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996).

⁵⁴ Dintenfass, p. 14.

they are synthesized into meaningful accounts, and this necessarily alters what was once reality and brings the historian into the picture. Remarkably, Hilberg's concept of historical representation does not accommodate understanding, which for him is not possible. Instead, it promotes remembrance, in as accurate a way as possible, realities that we can touch but never fully grasp, and for which the text is simply our best substitute. Like the work of LaCapra, Hilberg's seems also to problematize the positing of the death camps as the barrier against historiography's linguistic turn, for it denies understanding and comprehensive knowledge, as well as the scientific premises of reconstruction as conceived by Evans and the like.

Both Young and Dintenfass focus on the work of Saul Friedlander, who, for both of them, seems to come closest to offering a way beyond a discourse solely of the true into one that accommodates the right. And there can be no doubt that Friedlander has thought deeply about the Holocaust. He was a child survivor of the Nazi era who lived in hiding until the end of the war, has been for decades a professional historian, was a commentator on the German *Historikerstreit* (1986), and in addition to authoring a variety of his own texts on Holocaust history, also convened the conference the presentations for which he compiled in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, examining the historical representation of the Holocaust.

In his own work on the Holocaust, as well as his ruminations about the work of others, it is clear that for Friedlander, interpretation is "the crux of historical inquiry in his eyes."⁵⁵ Although he makes clear the imperative of fidelity to the truth and notes that the reconstruction of the Holocaust seems, in his judgment, to "have been progressing apace" to the point that there now is a far greater base of knowledge than

⁵⁵ Dintenfass, p. 6.

ever before, Friedlander nevertheless does not believe that this has translated into a “general framework of meaning in public consciousness.”⁵⁶ As Dintenfass suggests, Friedlander sees, rather, a “time-proven incapacity to yield meaning or understanding,” and this is what provokes his aesthetic turn away from straightforward documentary realism and toward “allusive or distanced realism.”⁵⁷ This implies envisioning reality through the filter of memory and the intrusion of the historian’s voice into the structure of his text, whether through the insertion of the historian’s authorial commentary or by imposing commentative discourses (such as survival literature) upon them. Like the work of LaCapra and Hilberg, Friedlander’s does little to accommodate the Holocaust litmus test for historiography, for it requires narrative disruption, which, as Dintenfass tells us, “fractures discourse” in order to “keep watch over the absent meaning” of the Holocaust.⁵⁸

After working through LaCapra, Hilberg, and Friedlander, Dintenfass comes to the conclusion that the three are very different historians. One could hardly disagree, for their experiences with regard to the Holocaust and Holocaust writing have been uniquely shaped and taken dissimilar routes. LaCapra, for example, is more literary theorist than historian, and arrives at his position by way of psychoanalysis, whereas Friedlander is a survivor-turned historian, and Hilberg a historian whose language is more akin to the creative arts than scientific historiography. Neither, as Dintenfass makes clear, can they be considered as constituting a school of Holocaust

⁵⁶ Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 103; and 130. Cited in Dintenfass, p. 7-8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7. A number of scholars – Wayne Klein, Saul Friedlander, James Young, and Dominick LaCapra among them – have pointed to the sort of allusive realism to which Dintefass refers (and which phrase Friedlander coined). Most appear to view it as a positive. For Klein, Claude Lanzman’s film, *Shoah*, actually offers a way of conveying the usefulness of a deconstructive approach for our understanding the Holocaust, and there is little doubt about its effect.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

historiography, and in that sense he does not even try to synthesize their accounts or “theoretical reflections into a single coherent account of the study of the past.”⁵⁹ Rather, he focuses on them because what each has done is to cast doubt upon the idea of the Holocaust as the appropriate proving ground for historiography. More specifically, what he contends is that it is not a proper epistemological limit case. As a point of reference for historiographical theory, the Holocaust is better served as a moral one. How does he arrive at this conclusion? In their various refutations of post-modern discourse, Evans, Lipstadt, and others, were they so inclined, could have appealed to any of a number of events, the factual knowledge for which is equivalent to the Holocaust. The Holocaust, however, is invoked because of its enormous moral weight: more than just another historical event, its moral authority is unquestionable. As I read it, this can only mean that when Evans and others discuss truth and objectivity and examine the purposes of historical study, they are really looking at moral standards. Citing the Holocaust as test case for historical inquiry, they actually conflate “the cognitive with the ethical.”⁶⁰

For Dintenfass, this is not a problematic conflation at all. Rather, it points toward the recognition of right and wrong as an integral part of historical inquiry and writing: a consideration of “the study of the past as a project of the should and the ought as well as the did and the was.”⁶¹ This would not, of course, offer us a point of departure from the linguistic turn, but a way of using epistemic relativism and foregrounding the “right” and the “wrong” in our accounts of the past. Unwittingly, says Dintenfass, it is in their various objections to post-modern discourse that anti-

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 19. This is in fact the same sort of case made by Klein (p. 68) and Finney (p. 368).

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 20.

relativists have effected what he calls a “post-linguistic turn.” While the historian would not be free to invent the past or construct his own epistemological imaginative, his moral imagination would nevertheless be free to impart ethical authority within and upon his or her narrative accounts. Such a history would also enable a “more robust condemnation” of Holocaust deniers. Instead of telling them only what deniers have done wrong, we would be free to tell them why what they say is factually *and*, more importantly, against all ethical standards of historical discourse, and why their demands for eyewitness testimony are meaningless in an “avowedly moral discipline.”⁶²

In “Toward a Received History of the Holocaust,” James E. Young likewise “examine[s] both the problem of so-called post-modern history as it relates to the Holocaust and suggest[s] the ways that Saul Friedlander’s recent work successfully mediates between the somewhat overly polemicized positions of ‘relativist’ and ‘positivist’ history.”⁶³ His position is that “it may be the very idea of ‘deep memory’ and its incompatibility with narrative that constitutes one of the central challenges to Holocaust historiography.” Defining “deep memory” as that of survivors, Young means that historians have not often used this sort of memory because it has always been thought unrepresentable, and that the unique position of Friedlander as survivor-historian might offer us a way toward a “received history” of the Holocaust that “tells a survivor-historian’s story and my own relationship to it.”⁶⁴

There is certainly something to this, for one of the problems I have always perceived about histories of the Holocaust is that they are “either-or”; that is *either* historians’ accounts based mainly on primary source evidence *or* survivors’ accounts,

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Young, p. 22.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

which provide the essential meaning historians have difficulty imparting into narratives, ostensibly neutral and evaluative as they are or claim to be. However contingent may be the truths of survivors' memories, therefore, it seems altogether imperative that these become part of a process whereby the generation of meaning would be derived through the exchange of narrative and counter-narrative.⁶⁵ The "master representation" of the Holocaust cited in the last chapter may thus be accorded significance in its relation to the evidential record, but it does little to convey meaning beyond the facts themselves. And this is why such an evidentially-based refutation of denial, though it may properly belong in the courtroom (Lipstadt did not have any Holocaust survivors on her defense team), is an inadequate, or at least only a partial, response to the various manifestations of Holocaust denial.

As a result, I want to use the reading of James Young in two ways: first, to suggest that the Holocaust narrative as "received history" does, like the work of Michael Dintenfass, in fact offer us one way of more effectively communicating the moral and ethical imperatives necessarily derived from the Holocaust; and secondly, to make clear that just such a history, one that imparts the collective consciousness of survivors into our narratives, also preserves the deep memory of survivors, making this an integral part of the narrative as "received history." Deep memory would add the moral dimension to historical inquiry, promoting further a sense of right-wrong as much as true-false without necessitating a flight from fact, while at the same time providing the rationale for a history that makes clear the emotional and epistemological difficulties writing about the Holocaust. In so doing, this should work in lock-step with a sort of moral relativism and offer us another effective way of refuting deniers' claims.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 38-9.

Certainly not lost on Young is the significance of the primary impetus for Friedlander's work: the continuing search for "a stable truth of events in a decidedly unstable medium."⁶⁶ Indeed, if the rationale for the 1990 conference on "Nazism and the Final Solution: Probing the Limits of Representation" was the dispute between Hayden White and Carlo Ginzburg⁶⁷, the corollary, for Friedlander, was to mediate between relativist and anti-relativist points of view in order to help historians arrive at that stable truth. Like Friedlander, Young finds the deep memory of survivors in this sense problematic. "What is at issue here," he says while quoting Patrick Hutton, "is not how history can recover memory, but, rather, what memory will bequeath to history."⁶⁸ At once difficult, yet imperative, is finding a place for witness testimony, "as subjective and skewed as it may be," in historical narratives and, more specifically, our understanding of the Holocaust, and by extension, historical writing.⁶⁹

The exploration in Young's work of Hayden White's ironic mode and middle-voicedness is no less important than the way Friedlander mediates between the two. He first approaches White through Carlo Ginzburg, who echoes the concern shared by Evans *et al.* that White's premise can but lead to absolute relativism of the sort that would fail to distinguish between "true interpretations and lies."⁷⁰ Ginzburg contends, in what he perceives as a direct contrast to White's argument, "that even the voice of one single witness allows us to get nearer to some historical truth."⁷¹ Of course, as

⁶⁶ Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, p. 22.

⁶⁷ The divergent points of view of White and Ginzburg are explained in two separate articles in *Probing the Limits of Representation*: Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth," pp. 37-53; and Carlo Ginzburg, "Just One Witness," pp. 82-107.

⁶⁸ Patrick Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), p. 72. Cited in Young, p. 23.

⁶⁹ Young, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Friedlander, p. 9.

⁷¹ *Ibid*; Ginzburg, p. 96.

Young points out, historians have all but disregarded witness testimony as an appropriate supplement to the narratives they write and which purport to convey the truth to which Ginzburg refers.⁷² Moreover, Ginzburg also refuses to accept White's rejoinder that by focusing on the function of language in the historical text, he is not trying to blur the distinction between reality and fiction:

I wish to grant at the outset that *historical events* differ from fictional events in the ways that it has been conventional to characterize their differences since Aristotle. Historians are concerned with events that can be assigned to specific time-space locations, events which are (or were) in principle observable or perceivable, whereas imaginative writers – poets, novelists, playwrights – are concerned with both these kinds of events and imagined, hypothetical, or invented ones.⁷³

What White says – what he has always said – is that historical accounts can be judged by the factual record, of course, but that accounts consist of more than facts, such that the poetics of historical discourse necessarily overlap with the fictional. In a way, this is not altogether different than the way Raul Hilberg conceives of history: there is the past, *and then* there is what we write about the past.

In his presentation-turned-article for *Probing the Limits of Representation*, White takes his theory further, and insists that “the facts of the matter set limits on the *kinds* of stories that can be *properly* (in the sense of both veraciously and appropriately) told about them only if we believe that the events themselves possess a ‘story’ kind of form and a ‘plot’ kind of meaning.” If we do not believe that to be the case, however, then accounts succeed or fail on the basis of the historical conclusions “generated in these modes.”⁷⁴ Examining Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* and Andreas Hillgruber's *Zweirlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* (Two Kinds of Ruin: the shattering of the Third

⁷² Young, pp. 23-4.

⁷³ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, p. 121. Cited in Young, p. 25.

⁷⁴ White, “Historical Emplotment,” p. 39.

Reich and the End of European Jewry), White finds the former successful because it self-consciously depicts the difficulties of writing about even a small part of the Holocaust: it becomes a part of the story as much as are the facts of the events experienced by Spiegelman's father. As a self-reflexive narrative, we should not find White's approval of *Maus* very surprising. Moreover, White finds that even as an unconventional history, *Maus* succeeds also as a "representation of past real events or at least events that are represented as having actually occurred" and as a "masterpiece of stylization, figuration, and allegorization."⁷⁵ Hillgruber's work, conversely, does not meet with the same approval, and this is because of the way he emplots it. Writing a "tragic" history of the Wehrmacht's fate on the Eastern Front, Hillgruber wants his story "to have a hero, to be heroic, and thereby to redeem at least a remnant of the Nazi epoch in the history of Germany." As White further contends, dividing the past so as to tell of two kinds of ruin "set [*sic*] up an oppositional structure constitutive of a semantic field in which the naming of the plot type of one story determines the semantic domain within which the name of the plot type of the other is to be found." In other words, in Hillgruber's work is an implied opposition between possible plot types. Although Hillgruber does not tell us what plot type should or does provide the meaning for the Jewish experience, White finds that this must be something other than tragedy.⁷⁶ Leaving unnamed this plot type also means, for White, that Hillgruber finds the Holocaust unrepresentable in language, a position taken by a variety of other scholars as well.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 41-2; Young, pp. 25-6.

⁷⁶ White, "Historical Emplotment," pp. 42-3; Young, p. 26.

⁷⁷ As Young points out, White and Ginzburg seem to agree about the merits of Hillgruber's history; however, even after similarly distinguishing between the facts of history and the interpretation and

For White, however, there is more to all of this, for he sees in *Maus* a self-consciousness close to what he has elsewhere described as the ironic mode of writing. “Irony,” for White, “represents a stage of consciousness in which the problematical nature of language has been recognized.”⁷⁸ Referring to Alexis de Tocqueville, White tells us that his history of the French Revolution is almost secondary to the recognition that a definitive, objective account of the event as a whole – and the facts that comprise it – is difficult to attain. For critics, such an approach subverts the entire purpose of narrative historiography (which most assume to be the offering of a complete story), but for Young it offers the possibility for a strain of narrative in which the ironic mode is an added mode, not one that displaces others.⁷⁹

transmission of those facts, Ginzburg “cannot abide” by White’s assertion that we should not write off even histories associated with fascist ideologies and, moreover, that the historical record does not provide the grounds for our “preferring one way of construing its meaning over another.” Young, p. 27; Hayden White, “The Politics of Historical Interpretation,” in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 92. Inadvertently, White may himself have provided the rationale for Ginzburg’s objections. While claiming to maintain a distinction between historical lies and errors, rejecting fascist policies (of the Nazi party, especially), and finding Robert Faurisson’s claim that the Holocaust did not happen as “morally offensive as it is bewildering,” White nonetheless seems to suggest portraying a lie as a “subset” of interpretation. Referring to the Holocaust, he states that “[t]he Israeli interpretation leaves the ‘reality’ of the events intact, whereas the revisionist [sic] interpretation de-realizes it by redescribing it in such a way as to make it something other than what the victims know the Holocaust to have been” (White, “The Politics of Interpretation,” pp. 77-8; as cited in Young, p. 28). White also says the truth of the traditional Zionist historical interpretation of the Holocaust “consists precisely of its effectiveness,” an effectiveness which has been used to justify a wide range of political policies (White, “The Politics of Interpretation,” p. 80; as cited in Ginzburg, p. 93). Ginzburg’s claim, in his reply that “if Faurisson’s narrative were to ever prove effective it would be regarded by White as true as well” (p. 93) neglects the fact that White does not say effectiveness alone is what makes an interpretation true. As Young suggests, what it means is that the truth of any interpretation lies in its actual agency, or rather the consequences it holds for that agency. The problem, Young insists, is that White should have stated the obvious: Holocaust denial is not at all interpretation, but rather a negation of the facts. And the result of this is that although White, in examining effectiveness as a truth measure, is referring to historical interpretation and not Faurisson’s lies, muddled the ontological distinction, thereby leaving open Ginzburg’s (and others’) grounds for dispute (Young, pp. 28-9).

⁷⁸ White, *Metahistory*, p. 38.

⁷⁹ Young, p. 30. As Young contends, his is a theory that contrasts sharply even with more “sympathetic critics,” such as Alex Callinocos. Callinocos, for his part, states that the “Ironic historian, in refusing to offer a complete story, is not trying to give a better representation than the practitioners of narrative historiography, but is trying to subvert the whole practice of historical representation. In cultivating a reflexive awareness of the rhetorical devices through which an imaginary totalization of reality is sought,

The problem, simply put, is finding a way toward an “authoritative” narrative that nevertheless points toward “its own provisionality.”⁸⁰ Young finds it, at least in part, in White’s depiction of middle-voicedness, through which “the understanding of historical reality” would be revealed at the same time as the historical story is told.⁸¹ This, he says, would allow us to look at, appreciate, and use survival literature in historical narratives. Instead of independently using effectiveness as a truth measure for Holocaust history (as White has somewhat confusingly suggested) or middle-voicedness as a historical style, Young would have us “use both together as a two-sided guide” so that we can understand the narratives of survivors and victims, as well as the way “they grasped and responded to their experiences” during the time of the Holocaust.⁸² Undoubtedly, this mode of writing would disrupt our ostensibly objective and transcendent versions of the past. But Young insists that this would in no way forsake historical truths and interpretations. What it would do is force us to abandon the claims to objectivity and disinterested authority and look at the authority of historical narratives in terms of their logic and reason, thereby acknowledging the role of the historian in the process of describing a history.

For Saul Friedlander, this may be the only way we truly arrive at understanding: the voices of historians and victims must ultimately be heard. Although he says that historiography and public memory are distinct, their opposition need not be fixed:

[T]he representation of a recent and relevant past has to be imagined as a continuum: the constructs of public-collective memory find their place at one pole, and the “dispassionate” historical inquiries at the opposite pole. The closer one moves to the middle ground, that is, to an attempt at general interpretations of the group’s past, the

she merges with the metahistorian describing the process through which this awareness emerged. Both seek to demonstrate the limits of historical representation” (Callinocos, p. 52).

⁸⁰ Young, p. 31.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., p. 32.

more the two areas – distinct in their extreme forms – become intertwined and interrelated.⁸³

Rather than separating the historian-survivor from historians who did not experience the Holocaust, he recognizes the need to preserve memory as part of historical consciousness, and suggests that all historians need to take part in this endeavour.⁸⁴ So while, in Friedlander's own words, post-modernism's "fundamental relativism...confronts any discourse about Nazism and the Shoah with considerable difficulties" and may even add to the difficulties of history-writing, the acknowledgement of "an aesthetics that remarks of its own limitations" and "its inability to provide stable answers and stable meaning" may nevertheless be a good thing, for these would point to the moral aspect (and imperative) of writing about the Holocaust and prevent moral closure even as surviving witnesses pass on.⁸⁵

As he and Young see it, this is only possible by finding some way to accommodate the deep memory of survivors in our works. Both of them find that deep and common memory are different, the former remaining "essentially inarticulable and unrepresentable," while the latter tends to provide the coherence, closure, and even redemption for which historians seemingly always strive.⁸⁶ As long as survivors – or in the case of *Maus*, survivors' offspring – are here to tell their story, deep memory is not beyond recall. When those voices are gone, however, what becomes of the memory of survivors will become even more the responsibility of the historian. Yet as long as the distinction between history and memory remains "iron-clad," an "integrated approach to

⁸³ Friedlander, *Memory*, p. vii.

⁸⁴ Young, pp. 35-6.

⁸⁵ Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, p. 20; Young, p. 36. See also Friedlander, *Memory*, p. 55.

⁸⁶ Young, pp. 36-7.

both” is not possible.⁸⁷ Somewhat counter-intuitively, this can but mean closure – which for historians seems part of their task, but which in the case of the Holocaust would imply the sort of redemption that made the Holocaust possible in the first place.

In the case of the Holocaust, however, this seems to suggest a confrontation between the two: that is, between deep memory and the promise of coherence in historical representation. Leaving deep memory unstated has thus far been symptomatic of historians’ collective efforts at representation. This is not to imply that historians are not aware of the trauma faced by victim-survivors, but rather that they have not worked through this trauma in their own works. In *Postmodernism and Holocaust Denial*, Robert Eaglestone takes this to mean that the effort at rational explanation can sometimes “*eclipse*” the nature of the subject. After reading a passage in the work of Christopher Browning referring to members of Police Battalion 101 being “saturated in their own blood,” Eaglestone pauses, and reflects. “[*T*]hink,” he says, “*about getting blood on your clothes from a nosebleed: think how much, much more blood – the blood of victims – would ‘saturate with blood’ a thick military uniform. On one day. And the killings, of all sorts, lasted years.*”⁸⁸ Although the reference is not to survivors, just this

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

⁸⁸ Eaglestone, pp. 28-9. Of the authors who have written in a similar vein (though not about the Holocaust), Dea Birkett and Robert Rosenstone come immediately to mind. At first glance, *Spinsters Abroad* portrays itself as the story of various female travel writers: Marianne North, Isabella Bird, Mary Gaunt, Mary Kingsley, and others. Yet the preparation for her book came in the form of Birkett’s own travels to places visited and resided in by her subjects. What this implies is a self-reflection of the sort that I believe to be an important and interesting element in historical writing. She is primarily concerned about self-awareness of the travellers she writes about, and that in sense, Birkett’s self-reflection mirrors the reflexivity inherent in her subjects. Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers*, (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1989). In *Mirror in the Shrine*, Rosenstone examines three Americans who lived in Japan during the Meiji era, and looks not at how his three characters changed Japan, but at how Japan changed them, at how their lives were “altered greatly...in ways they did not fully understand” (p. ix). But the title is also telling, in that it reflects – through his reading of the lives and works of William Elliot Griffis, Edward S. Morse, and Lafcadio Hearn – Rosenstone’s effort at understanding his own past and the ways living in Japan affected him. In order to convey a self-reflexive imaginative (this is not to say he imagined his history, for neither he nor Birkett ignore the evidence or

type of self-conscious pause is what it would mean for historians of the Holocaust to convey the meaning of the event they are writing about.

Rational historiography seeks to explain. The disruption of survivors' voices/memories and self-reflexive commentary – that which would admit, like Eaglestone, to the difficulty of working through and understanding, especially in the face of deep memory – must necessarily affect the traditional, linear mode of history-telling. For Young, as for Friedlander, far from being a negative aspect of historiography, this would preserve memory without fictionalizing.⁸⁹ In short, readers would understand the meaning of the Holocaust as the event is explained to them. They would recognize how victims and survivors faced the circumstances before them, just as they would better comprehend the emotional and epistemological difficulties and choices faced by the historian as he or she tries to write about the Shoah. For the problem with historical explanation as it relates to the Holocaust has hitherto always been the fact that logic has blunted the impact of reality. And this lies at the heart of Friedlander's (and, by extension, Young's) "search for the middle voice of one who is in history and who tells it simultaneously, one who lives *in* history as well as *through* its telling."⁹⁰

I take all of this to mean the search for the personal. While deep memory is at once unreliable, Young's search for a "received" history means embracing this

completely dissociate it from their writing), Rosenstone often interjects himself into his work – as the biographer explaining the problems associated with creating the narrative; and as "you," the author addressing the reader and/or the characters. All of this is done to collapse the distinction between the author and reader, and between the past and the present. So while the subject does not occupy the same ethical domain as the Holocaust, Rosenstone's work (and so too Birkett's) is nevertheless suggestive of the importance of keeping memory "alive." Robert Rosenstone, *Mirror in the Shrine: American Encounters with Meiji Japan*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁸⁹ Young, p. 41.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

unreliability; or rather, embracing the misunderstandings of survivors as much as what, or how, they understood. In his own words, he wants to make “historical inquiry the study of both *what happened* and *how it is passed down to us.*” It also means examining survivor-historians and how their experiences and history- and memory-tellings have affected Young’s life (and work), in order to arrive at Young’s “vicarious past.”⁹¹ This is all part of Young’s effort at finding a way toward a self-consciously subjective history and away from disinterestedness. As someone for whom the Holocaust and history writing have meaning beyond the distanced telling of events, I can say that Young’s efforts have indelibly affected my own introspection, an introspection which would displace “history for its own sake” with one that *also* tells why history is worth writing, and why events such as the Holocaust are worth remembering *now*. Young’s conception of a received history and Saul Friedlander’s efforts at redeeming historical narratives by introducing the deep memory of survivors have, not surprisingly, been rebuked by scholars such as Peter Hayes, who contend that “commonplace problems of technique are mistaken for profound matters of substance.”⁹² Hayes concludes that the historians who write of the events and the students who learn about them displace the participants, and that the knowledge of events thereby becomes less important than the journey toward arriving at such a knowledge. But as Young suggests, neither his nor Friedlander’s reflections desire – less still do they demand – the replacement of factual knowledge, but rather they add to it. In point of fact, their reflections should actually make even clearer the moral imperative that knowledge is not forgotten, and that the denial of history is *ethically* wrong.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 41-2.

⁹² Ibid., p. 43.

If this chapter has shown anything, it is, I hope, that the Holocaust provides much for the historian to consider: such factors as truth, disciplinary conventions, and historical representation have all been addressed, and with increasing frequency, in relation to the Holocaust. For critics of post-modernism, the Shoah has been promoted as a litmus test in the effort to combat a school of thought they conceive as being theoretically, if not also ethically, correlated to it in the past and in the present. Patrick Finney's article on "Ethics, Historical Relativism and Holocaust Denial" performs a rather valuable function within this context. Having given me the initial incentive for thinking more deeply about the ostensible connection between Holocaust denial and historical relativism, it also made me turn on that issue and consider relativism and "post-linguistic" discourse—contrary to what Deborah Lipstadt, for one, has insisted— as a better means by which to refute the claim that the Holocaust did not happen. In other words, it allowed me to consider "post-modern" concepts as part of the search for a history writing that is both "true" and right (along the very same lines espoused by Dintenfuss and Young)— a discourse that would expand, rather than collapse, the grounds on which to combat deniers. Thus, for me the larger issues of historical explanation, interpretation, and understanding simultaneously provide the basis for refutation beyond (and even prior to) empiricism proper. Far from displacing the documentary evidence on which we traditionally ground our work, to that evidence would be added what evidence has hitherto remained inadequately used—the "deep memory" of the survivor—as well as the voice of the historian. All of this, of course, is not to suggest that the Holocaust is a product of our imagination, but rather that

engaging the Holocaust imaginatively requires finding a way to accommodate ethics and memory in order to arrive at a better understanding.

CONCLUSION

What has been shown so far? At the least, I hope that I have conveyed the merit (and appropriateness) of Holocaust denial as a subject of study for historians. It is, after all, a threat to historical study, both as historians write it and as others understand it. Holocaust denial literature has evolved, especially over the last thirty years, since the early writings of Arthur Butz and Robert Faurisson, and with the inception of the Institute for Historical Review. Deliberately “shaping” them so as to appear, in form, the same as the discourses of professional historians, deniers have been attempting to make their works appear scholarly and continue to posit them as the other side of a historical debate. Invoking various ethos – academic, techno(logical), experiential, and historiographical – as they have, deniers rarely fail to take advantage of whichever accords their endeavours additional legitimacy. Moreover, they have done this as part of a school of thought, whereas in the past, efforts were individualistic and for the most part invitiated by overt polemics and bigotry. There is no doubt that the Internet (as an information playground) has helped create this sense of “togetherness” amongst proponents of denial. Further, the Net has helped deniers spread their message(s) and find audiences across the globe. One would hope that scholars such as Noam Chomsky will in the future be more careful about adding more fuel to the fire by defending deniers. They have a right to write, but there is no sense providing them with added grounds for situating theirs as a subject of historical inquiry.

I have suggested that one of the means by which historians might make clearer the true motivations of denial is showing readers the different facets of historical inquiry. Among these are explanation and interpretations about the past. It is this part of history-writing that seems to escape deniers, for they cannot offer an explanation of past events, and for that reason their works do not constitute historical interpretations, but rather belong to another genre of discourse altogether: they are different *in kind* than the accounts written by professional historians. In that sense, we need not judge them according to the various standards ascribed to truly “historical” writing any more than we ought to portray evidentially-based refutations as the only ones that discount denial. This is not, of course, to say that the evidence does not matter, for it certainly does. However, in focusing solely on the truth quotient of history, we risk entering exactly that type of debate so desired by deniers – one that would see theirs as the other version of events. But it is not that at all, so rather than conveying the impression that denial literature is bad history or its proponents bad historians, we need to show others that denial simply is not history.

Part of the reason, I think, that denial is sometimes seen as bad history results from the linking of post-modernism/relativism and denial. While I do not subscribe to all of the beliefs typically associated with post-modernism, I do, nevertheless, see some aspects of post-modern discourse as pertinent to this discussion. Patrick Finney and Robert Eaglestone, for example, see relativism as a source of refutation against the claims of deniers, not least because they understand the different ways that ideology affects any discourse. For their part, Michael Dintenfass and James Young foresee a better way of telling the past, one that would foreground the ethical component of

historical inquiry and one which, they insist, underlies the reason the Holocaust is cited as the litmus test for historiography. That is, far from being posited as a truth-test, in reality the Holocaust is so often cited because of the ethical and moral dimensions, past and present, of the event. Making more explicit these dimensions should help us convey to our students a better understanding of the Holocaust and, as a consequence, should also help them to understand Holocaust denial for what it is and allow them to dismiss it as much because it is “wrong” as for reasons of truth or objectivity.

And yet, if it was easy to ground my thesis in the idea that Holocaust deniers are not historians, the same idea makes this conclusion altogether more complex. For if the “meat and potatoes” of my work relates to issues of historiography, the fundamental motivation for my work was a happening years ago. As a teaching assistant for a first-year class on European history, I received from one of my students an essay about the Holocaust based largely on the writings of David Irving, now a legally certified denier. From Irving’s work, the student drew the conclusion that the Holocaust, if it happened at all, was not known to Hitler. Stopping just short of denying the Holocaust, he suggested (again after Irving) that Hitler may have been the Jews’ greatest ally throughout the war. My premise – Holocaust deniers are not historians – thus began with a conceptual framework and objective in mind: to stop this from happening again.

Given my work at The Gwenna Moss Teaching & Learning Centre, it ought not to be surprising that concerns about teaching should underlie this project. Issues of pedagogy have never been very far from my mind while doing my research. That is why I put forward the notion of the Holocaust *as lesson*. Moreover, it is why the example of the student using Irving’s work as the basis for his essay was, at the least,

disturbing. Of course, what someone can or should take from this account is a different issue altogether than how it can or should be applied. Nonetheless, I have embarked on a sub-project that, I hope, will help prevent just this sort of occurrence by applying the foundations of my thesis. Working with Dr. Lam of Library and Information Studies, I have been attempting to re-catalogue works of deniers under the heading “Holocaust Denial Literature.” Formerly, accounts of denial were included with legitimate works about the Holocaust, and students were, presumably, expected to be able to distinguish between the two. But how? Citing my own education, for example, I can say with all honesty that I did not know about the Holocaust until late in my first year of university studies. Even then, such knowledge was certainly minimal, and it was really only in my fourth year that I became more familiar with some of the primary historical accounts of the Holocaust – those written by Raul Hilberg and Martin Gilbert, among others. To expect of young students the ability to discern between denial literature and history proper – or at least the ability to decide which is the more legitimate claim – is to suggest that they have been appropriately educated about the Holocaust and, moreover, that they have the analytical skills to understand denial for what it is in spite of deniers’ ability to mimic the style of professional historians. Only then could they be expected to reject Holocaust denial out of hand.

The issue of denial literature and libraries has not been the subject of a great deal of research¹, and it is certainly beyond the scope of my work here. I am not trying to encourage censorship or restricted access: I certainly see no need to ban denial literature

¹ See, for example, Benita Hartwell, “Libraries and Holocaust Denial Literature: The Presence of Holocaust Denial Literature in Libraries,” <http://www.slis.ualberta.ca/cap04/benita/hdllibhdl.htm>; and Keith A. Morgan, “Public Librarians and Revisionist Historians.” Non-thesis research project, Faculty of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta, 1990, <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/staff/kamorgan/epl/>.

outright. What I am hoping is that “Holocaust deniers are not historians” can be much more than just a catch-phrase for this thesis. It can and should be used as the basis for a re-cataloguing of denial literature as something other than history – specifically Holocaust history. It is neither of those, and if anything, I hope my thesis has built upon the works of others in order to make that fact altogether more explicit.

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