Prologue

"The Nazi conscience" is not an oxymoron. Although it may be repugnant to conceive of mass murderers acting in accordance with an ethos that they believed vindicated their crimes, the historical record of the Third Reich suggests that indeed this was often the case. The popularizers of antisemitism and the planners of genocide followed a coherent set of severe ethical maxims derived from broad philosophical concepts. As modern secularists, they denied the existence of either a divinely inspired moral law or an innate ethical imperative. Because they believed that concepts of virtue and vice had evolved according to the needs of particular ethnic communities, they denied the existence of universal moral values and instead promoted moral maxims they saw as appropriate to their Aryan community. Unlike the early twentieth-century moral philosophers who saw cultural relativism as an argument for tolerance, Nazi theorists drew the opposite conclusion. Assuming that cultural diversity breeds antagonism, they asserted the superiority of their own communitarian values above all others.

Conscience, as we usually think of it, is an inner voice that admonishes "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not." Across cultures, an ethic of reciprocity commands that we treat others as we wish to be treated. Besides instructing us in virtue, the conscience fulfills a second, and often overlooked, function. It tells us to whom we shall and shall not do what. It structures our identity by separating those who deserve our concern from alien "others" beyond the pale of our community. Our moral identity prompts us to ask, "Am I the kind of person who would do that to this person?"[1] The texts of Western moral philosophy and theology are littered with less-than-fully-human "others." In the Hebrew Bible, outsiders are treated harshly. With barely a thought, classical Greek philosophy excludes barbarians, slaves, and women from fully human status. Christian charity extends primarily to Christians. Many of the major treatises of the European Enlightenment treat Africans, American Indians, and women as creatures without reason, bereft of fully human status. In 1933 Carl Schmitt, a distinguished political theorist and avid Hitler supporter, paraphrased a slogan used often in Nazi circles when he denounced the idea of

universal human rights, saying: Not every being with a human face is human.[2]

This belief expressed the bedrock of Nazi morality. Although it might seem that a human catastrophe on the scale of the Holocaust was caused by an evil that defies our understanding, what is frightening about the racist public culture within which the Final Solution was conceived is not its extremism but its ordinariness—not its savage hatreds but its lofty ideals. The men, and a few women, who popularized Nazi racism expounded at great length about what they called "the idea" (die Idee) of National Socialism. What outsiders saw as ideology, Nazis experienced as truth. Seen from a Judeo-Christian vantage point, the amalgam of biological theories and racist passions that characterized the Nazi belief system does not qualify as a moral, or even coherent, ideology. Compared with, for example, Adam Smith's liberalism or Karl Marx's communism, die Idee of Nazism lacks formal elegance and a humane social vision. Nonetheless, Nazism fulfilled the functions we associate with ideology. It supplied answers to life's imponderables, provided meaning in the face of contingency, and explained the way the world works. It also defined good and evil, condemning self-interest as immoral and enshrining altruism as virtuous. Binding ethnic comrades (Volksgenossen) to their ancestors and descendents, Nazi ideals embedded the individual within the collective well-being of the nation.

Hitler, always an astute reader of his audiences' desires, heard Germans' hunger for a government they could trust and a national purpose they could believe in. From his earliest days as a political orator, he addressed that longing. In phrases his opponents ridiculed as empty and followers heard as inspirational, Hitler promised to rescue old-fashioned values of honor and dignity from the materialism, degeneracy, and cosmopolitanism of modern life. His supporters' lists of grievances were long, and their anxieties ran deep. Bolsheviks threatened revolution; emancipated women abandoned their family responsibilities; capitalists amassed immense fortunes; and foreign states robbed Germany of its rightful status as a European power. Hitler transformed his followers' anger at cultural and political disorder into moral outrage. In place of the Weimar Republic, which he ridiculed as weak and feminine, Hitler promised the dawn of a resolute masculine order. Where once religion had provided a steady moral purpose, Nazi culture offered an absolutist secular faith.

Unlike liberal regimes, in which the moral calculus turns on the concept of universal human rights, the Third Reich extolled the well-being of

the ethnic German community as the benchmark for moral reasoning. Nazi morality explicitly promoted racist and sexist assumptions at a time when ideals of equality had begun to make themselves felt throughout the Western world. German racial theorists, eager to be seen as modern and progressive, dignified age-old prejudices with the claims of science. They appealed not so much to malevolence as to ideas of health, hygiene, and progress in their campaign to elicit compliance with policies that might otherwise have been seen as cruel and violent. Mobilizing citizens in a modern and enlightened nation, Nazi rule relied not only on repression but also on an appeal to communal ideals of civic improvement. In a vibrant public culture founded on self-denial and collective revival, ethnic Germans were exhorted to expunge citizens deemed alien and to ally themselves only with people sanctioned as racially valuable. The road to Auschwitz was paved with righteousness.

The emerging solidarity did not so much render victims' sufferings invisible as make them marginal to the larger purpose of an ethnic renaissance. That the collaborators in mass murder acted according to an internal logic does not, of course, suggest that their moral principles were any more praiseworthy than their actions. Nor does it imply that their pretensions to morality constrained their criminality. Indeed, ethnic righteousness may well have facilitated the clear consciences of those who robbed, tormented, and murdered their helpless victims. In this book, I examine the incursion of a secular, ethnic faith into an area of human life traditionally assigned to religion: the formation of conscience. Although we often take for granted the existence of a universal ethic based on the sanctity of all human life, the history of Nazi Germany reveals how pretensions to ethnic virtue created the conditions within which evil metasticized.
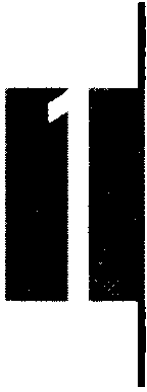
An Ethnic Conscience

I view myself as the most independent of men . . . obligated to no one, subordinate to no one, indebted to no one—instead answerable only to my own conscience. And this conscience has but one single com- mander—our *Volk!*

—Adolf Hitler, October 8, 1935

"Conscience" is a capacious term, encompassing elements of identity, awareness, and idealism as well as an ethical standard. It evolved from the Latin *con* (with) and *scientia* (knowledge). In medieval vernaculars, "con- sciousness" (in German, *Bewußtsein*) was used interchangeably with "con- science" *(Gewissen)*. With the emergence of modern German and English in the sixteenth century, "conscience" began to part company with "con- sciousness." When Martin Luther defied papal authority in 1517, he fa- mously declared, "Here I stand. I cannot and will not recant." Against ac- cusations of heresy, he explained, "I have rescued my conscience because I could declare that I have acted as I saw fit."[1] From the late Renaissance, "conscience" *(Gewissen)* was seen as an irrefutable guide to virtuous be- havior. While Christians understood conscience as the voice of God, secu- larists looked to reason as its source.[2]

Over the centuries, the conscience came to be understood as private and constant. For the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant, it was one of two poles that held his life in order. "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe . . . the starry heavens above and the moral law within."[3] In 1962 the text of Vatican II declared, "Their conscience is people's most secret core, and their sanctuary. There they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths."[4] Modern human rights doctrine assumes the existence of a universal moral code. Article one of the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights states explicitly, "All hu- man beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are en- dowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Across many cultures, the declaration implies, people who issue or obey orders to torture, loot, or murder violate the dic- tates of conscience.[5] Thus, "conscience" refers to an ethically attuned part

of the human character that heeds the Hippocratic command: "First, do no harm."

But, although every major culture honors the injunction to treat others as you hope they will treat you, the ideal often collapses in practice because the meaning of "others" is not always clear. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929), Sigmund Freud expressed his doubts about the Golden Rule. Because a feeling of moral obligation increases with our affection for an individual, loving one's neighbor presupposes a bond, a shared sense of belonging. "If," he wrote, the Golden Rule, "commanded 'Love thy neighbor as thy neighbor loves thee,' I should not take exception to it." But loving a stranger, Freud suspected, ran counter to human experience. "If he is a stranger to me . . . it will be hard for me to love him."[6] The universe of moral obligation, far from being universal, is bounded by community.

Like the vague German word *Weltanschauung* (attitude or worldview), "conscience" guides individual choice by providing structures of meaning within which identity is formed.[7] Like "reason" (and "science"), "conscience" is fluid, formed not only by timeless mandates but also by particular cultural milieus. Knowledge about the identity of those "to whom we do what" provides the mental architecture within which moral thinking occurs. In traditional societies, religious leaders tell the faithful who deserves moral consideration. But in modern societies experts create assumptions about which people belong within the community of shared moral obligation.[8] Similarly, in Nazi Germany, experts provided the knowledge, the *scientia*, about which humans deserved moral consideration—according to conscience *(con scientia)*.

The recollections of a former Hitler Youth member, Alfons Heck, illustrate how such knowledge formed moral thinking. In 1940, when Alfons watched the Gestapo take away his best friend, Heinz, and all Jews in his village, he did not say to himself, "How terrible they are arresting Jews." Having absorbed knowledge about the "Jewish menace," he said, "What a misfortune Heinz is Jewish." As an adult he recalled, "I accepted deportation as just."[9] In wartime Berlin, Hitler's chief architect and director of armaments production, Albert Speer, would pass large groups of forlorn people standing at the local railway station. He chose not to think about the terrible fate that awaited them. Years later, he recalled, "I had a sense of somber goings-on. But I was rooted in the principles of the regime to an extent that I find hard to understand today."[10] Although Jews

had been fellow citizens before 1933, by the time Germany invaded Poland in 1939 they no longer belonged to Germans' universe of moral obligation. This transformation did not just happen. The expulsion of Jews from Germans' universe of moral obligation was carefully engineered. In this book, I explore the process that made Jews strangers in their own country.

The term "Nazi conscience" describes a secular ethos that extended reciprocity only to members of the Aryan community, as defined by what racial scientists believed to be the most advanced biological knowledge of the day. Guided by that knowledge as well as the virulent racism expressed in *Mein Kampf,* the Nazi state removed entire categories of people from most Germans' moral map. But this expulsion, so radical in retrospect, was not as unprecedented as it might seem today. Of the assumptions that defined the Nazi conscience, three had counterparts elsewhere. Only the fourth was without close historical precedent at the time.

The first assumption of the Nazi conscience was that the life of a *Volk* is like that of an organism, marked by stages of birth, growth, expansion, decline, and death. Although earlier writers, like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, had expressed similar philosophical views, the organic metaphor became widespread in social science and political rhetoric later in the nineteenth century. Writing at roughly the same time as Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer described the evolution of "barbarous tribes" into advanced civilizations as the triumph of a superior sociological organism.[11] Early in the twentieth century, pessimists predicted that the West, like a "mature" organism, had to struggle for its very existence against degeneration and ultimate extinction.[12] This struggle required individual sacrifice and collective effort. In the early 1930s, with unemployment rates hovering above 30 percent, politicians in Europe and North America reactivated the rhetoric of the Great War by inveighing against class conflict, materialism, and profiteering while beseeching citizens to give their all for collective survival. Inspired by the 1931 papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno,* Catholic leaders called for burden-sharing between rich and poor. In his first inaugural address, Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Americans to be prepared to sacrifice for economic recovery as if the nation were engaged in a foreign war. In the Third Reich, a Nazi mantra exhorted ethnic Germans to "put collective need ahead of individual greed." The alternative was death of the community.

The second assumption in the Nazi conscience was that every community develops the values appropriate to its nature and to the environment

within which it evolved. Values are relative, contingent upon time and place. But whereas some social scientists of the day, like the anthropologist Franz Boas, placed cultural relativism in the service of tolerance, Nazi theorists invoked relativism to vindicate their own superiority. In interwar Europe, Hitler was not alone in celebrating ethnic identity and excoriating the universalism of the "alien" Enlightenment.[13] The European political landscape was populated with antisemites like General Julius Gömbös, prime minister of Hungary in the mid-1930s; the French fascist Charles Maurras; Leon Degrelle, chief of the Belgian Rexist movement; and Jósef Pilsudski, president of Poland. Like Benito Mussolini, these populist leaders saw ethnic revival—not tolerance—as the prerequisite for national health. Joseph Goebbels captured the mood in his booklet *The Little ABC's of National Socialism,* a catechism for Nazi speakers published in the early 1930s. In response to the question: "What is the first Commandment of every National Socialist?" loyal Nazis answered, "Love Germany above all else and your ethnic comrade *[Volksgenosse]* as your self!"[14]

The third element of the Nazi conscience justified outright aggression against "undesirable" populations living in conquered lands whenever it served the victors' long-term advantage. Western expansion, from the Crusades through colonialism, has been described by its proponents as not only materially profitable but also morally beneficial. Because of Europeans' putative superiority (exhibited by, among other attributes, their white skin, manly courage, self-discipline, and idealism), it could be morally acceptable—especially in wartime—to extinguish "lower" civilizations that stood in the way of "progress." This understanding informed the logic of L. Frank Baum, a journalist in South Dakota, speaking of Native Americans:

> The nobility of the Redskin is extinguished, and what few are left are a pack of whining curs who lick the hand that smites them . . . The Whites, by law of conquest, by justice of civilization, are masters of the American continent and the best safety of the frontier settlements will be secured by the total annihilation of the few remaining Indians. Why not annihilation? Their glory has fled, their spirit broken, their manhood effaced; better that they should die than live like the miserable wretches that they are.[15]

Generations of readers have revered the author of this editorial for his Wizard of Oz books. Baum was not seen as a moral monster but as a man of good will who expressed an understanding of race shared by millions of

white Europeans and North Americans faced with the alleged problem of nonwhite populations who inconveniently occupied white men's desired *Lebensraum* (living space).

The fourth assumption underlying the Nazi conscience upheld the right of a government to annul the legal protections of assimilated citizens on the basis of what the government defined as their ethnicity. Although state-sponsored ethnic cleansing directed at assimilated minorities gathered force at the close of the twentieth century, there were few precedents in 1933. Following many political revolutions or religious wars of the past, members of defeated factions or sects had suffered banishment because of their suspected allegiance to heretical beliefs or defeated factions; but Jews in Nazi Germany had participated in no uprisings. Pogroms in Europe and the Turkish extermination of the Armenians had been directed against culturally separate communities, but not, as in Germany, against citizens assimilated into the dominant culture. When an economy is depressed, nativism mobilizes prejudice against the foreign-born, and in times of war it had sometimes happened that people were seized by panic about "enemy aliens" living in their midst. But in the 1930s, a time of economic recovery, Germany was at peace. The "unwanted outsiders" resided not in a distant "heart of darkness" or in enemy trenches but within mainstream society. Where Social Darwinists had metaphorically depicted nation-states as organisms struggling against one another, Nazi theorists used the language of parasitology to describe a danger *within* the ethnic organism.

When responding to critics, Nazi racial experts muted the distinctiveness of their aims by noting analogues elsewhere.[16] The extrusion of resident aliens and citizens with Jewish ancestry from Germany resembled, they said, the 1922–23 population exchange that followed war between Turkey and Greece.[17] The second and much more commonly mentioned parallel was with the United States. While rabid antisemites praised the lynch mobs that kept African Americans "in their place," more sober but equally determined racial policymakers expressed the hope that one day Nazi racial codes would be as widely accepted as U.S. immigration quotas, antimiscegenation laws, involuntary sterilization programs in twenty-eight states, and segregation in the Jim Crow South.[18]

What set Nazi policy apart from other ethnic exclusions, however, was its victimization of fellow citizens who bore no physical or cultural markers of their difference. Germans who were alleged to have Jewish ancestors, as well as Aryan citizens alleged to have damaged genes or homo-

sexual inclinations, shared a heritage, language, and culture with their tormentors. But while the prospect of readmission to mainstream society was held out to so-called defective Aryans who reformed their ways, Jews (and later gypsies) were banished from the moral community. Coded as dangerous beings to whom no obligation applied, they became "problems" to be solved with ruthless efficiency.

Transforming ordinary citizens who happened to have Jewish ancestors into alien beings was no small task. In the nineteenth century, despite the protests of antisemites, Jewish Germans had been admitted to universities without quotas and had participated in cultural life, elite social circles, the professions, business, politics, and the sciences (although some venues, such as the upper officer corps and the diplomatic service, remained virtually closed). During World War I Jewish Germans fought and died for their fatherland in the same proportions as Christian Germans. Of 38 German Nobel Laureates named between 1905 and 1937, 14 had Jewish ancestors. More Jewish young people married Christians than married Jews, and until 1933 the term "mixed marriage" referred to Protestant-Catholic and African- or Asian-German unions, not to Jewish-Christian couples.[19]

A comparison of antisemitic acts and attitudes toward Jews in the popular press of Germany and four European nations (France, Great Britain, Italy, and Romania) from 1899 through 1939 demonstrates that Germans, before 1933, were among the least antisemitic people.[20] Perhaps the best evidence of the relative openness of German society to Jews was the fact that no census had gathered data on ethnicity.[21] Until Nazi rule, only the 500,000 Germans who registered as members of a Jewish religious community could be statistically identified. The remaining 200,000 or 300,000 citizens with Jewish ancestors who did not affiliate with a congregation were statistically invisible in a population of about 65 million.

In January 1933 all Germans belonged to the same nation. Over the next six years, the Nazi state expelled citizens it defined as Jews from the *Volk*. In the context of Nazi Germany, *Volk* is almost always translated as "race" because of the clear intent behind Nazi policy and Hitler's own obsession with racial purity and pollution.[22] But to understand how support for Hitler's racial aims was created, it is essential to distinguish between *Rasse* and *Volk*, which were not interchangeable in Nazi language. Although the adjective *völkish* translates accurately as "ethnic," the English cognate "folk" connotes merely "traditional," "rural," or "quaint." An alternative translation, "people," has lost its once-powerful appeal to ethnic solidarity.

The popularizers of Nazi doctrine used the immense appeal of ethnic revival to generate compliance with racial persecution. The expansive term *Volk* held out an egalitarian and ecumenical promise to members of a so-called community of fate, whereas "race" rested on empirical foundations so dubious that not even Nazi zealots could define it. When Nazi writers demeaned Jews, they called them "racial comrades" *(Rassengenossen)*, and when they celebrated Aryans they wrote of "ethnic comrades" *(Volksgenossen)*. Hitler could (and often did) rhapsodize for hours about the ethnic body politic *(Volkskörper)*, the ethnic community *(Volksgemeinschaft)*, the ethnic soul *(Volksseele)*, or simply *das Volk*. But neither Hitler nor his deputies spoke of a racial state *(Rassenstaat)*. When they used the word "race," as in racial pride *(Rasssenstoltz)*, racial politics *(Rasssenpolitik)*, or racial protection *(Rasssenschutz)*, a despised "other" lurked in the shadows. The Nazi state was founded on ethnicity and race—on self-love and other-hate.

From 1928 to mid-1932, when electoral support for Nazi candidates leapt from 2.6 percent to 37.4 percent, antisemitism played little role in attracting voters to Nazism. Masses of Germans, disillusioned with a foundering democracy and terrified of communism in a time of economic catastrophe, were drawn to the Nazis' promise of a radically new order under Hitler's control. Archival research as well as memoirs and oral histories make it abundantly clear that Germans' attitudes toward "the Jewish question" began to depart from Western European and North American norms only after the Nazi takeover. Germans did not become Nazis because they were antisemites; they became antisemites because they were Nazis.[23]

Beginning in 1933, sophisticated persuasive techniques prepared German civilians and soldiers, in large ways and small, to collaborate with a regime that in wartime engineered the extermination of Jews, Gypsies, POWs, homosexuals, and all categories of people deemed "unwanted." As the historian Raul Hilberg emphasized, the Final Solution depended not on the extremism of Hitler and a few top leaders but on the creation of a loose consensus, a "latent structure" that was "not so much a product of laws and commands as it was a matter of spirit, of shared comprehension, of consonance and synchronization."[24] Because perpetrators grasped the ultimate aims of racial extermination, they improvised and often exceeded their orders. Describing the millions of ordinary soldiers who arrived at the front primed to murder racial enemies, the historian Omer Bartov commented, "The creation of this consensus among the troops

was probably the single most significant achievement of the Nazi regime's educational efforts."[25]

Historians during the 1990s sought the origin of this consensus in two very different contexts. Some, like Daniel J. Goldhagen, identified in German culture a hatred of Jews so profound and ancient that genocide scarcely required explanation. Others, like Christopher R. Browning, acknowledged that the creation of a gulf between Christians and Jews constituted "a major accomplishment for the regime" but looked to the force of peer bonding and battlefield conditions as the most important factors in explaining men's readiness to commit face-to-face mass murder.[26] For different reasons, both approaches virtually ignore the period I explore, 1933–1939, a time many Germans later recalled as "the normal years" of the Third Reich. Seen against the enormity of Nazi savagery, it is easy to imagine that German collaborators in persecution shared the seething paranoia of Adolf Hitler and his closest comrades. Extreme outcomes, it would seem, must result from extreme beliefs. But careful investigations of public opinion in Nazi Germany reveal that, while most Germans shared the "polite" or "cultured" antisemitism common in Western Europe and North America, they disapproved of diehard Nazis' coarse racist diatribes and pogrom-style tactics.

Self-interest explained the behavior of rapacious Nazi bosses. Grudges motivated many people to make denunciations to the Gestapo. Fanatical racism, fueled by a lust for violence, incited pogrom-style attacks on Jews and their property. What surprised Jewish Germans during this period was not the cruelty of kleptocrats, fanatics, and malcontents, but the behavior of friends, neighbors, and colleagues who were not gripped by devotion to Nazism. Most Germans fell into this category. Jews sadly noted their mundane lapses: the silence of a store clerk who refused to answer an inquiry, the politely worded requests to drop their memberships in leisure and civic associations, or the embarrassed silence that greeted them as they walked into a favorite cafe.[27] When well-meaning non-Jews tried to console their Jewish friends by suggesting they would be happier in Palestine, their Jewish friends despaired.[28] Professionals were incredulous when they overheard talk about "the Jew," perhaps spiked with adjectives like industrial, wily, mobile, or uncreative. Jewish academics were disillusioned when esteemed colleagues exalted simple-minded and primitive concepts of the *Volk* as the "elemental" ideals of the "authentic" Germanic soul.[29] At every level, ties between Jews and their surroundings loosened and ultimately broke. "The end was isolation."[30] What was it

that transformed ordinary Germans, who had not, before 1933, been more prejudiced than their counterparts elsewhere, into indifferent bystanders to—and collaborators with—persecution?

Germans who, in 1933, were ordinary Western Europeans had become, in 1939, anything but. Ascertaining motive, whether in a courtroom or history book, can never be more than a speculative venture. Historians can, however, describe the public culture within which individuals weighed options and made choices. Nazi society has often been described in terms of two attributes. As Hannah Arendt put it in the 1950s, an "iron band of terror" held Germans in its grip, and propaganda indoctrinated them so totally that "plurality disappears into One Man of gigantic proportions."[31] Archival research in the 1990s cast doubt on the omnipotence of terror and propaganda. Because the dreaded Gestapo had actually been understaffed and inefficient, ordinary citizens without Jewish ancestors or close ties with Marxism had considerable leeway to circumvent Nazi measures of which they disapproved.[32] Memoirs by Jews who emigrated from Nazi Germany bear out this conclusion in their descriptions of the few loyal friends who offered comfort and aid—usually without suffering harsh reprisals. Even soldiers at the front could avoid obeying orders that disturbed them. Not mindless obedience but selective compliance characterized Germans' collaboration with evil.

If terror in Nazi Germany was less draconian than previously assumed, then the next likely suspect, as Arendt suggested, was the ideology drummed into Germans' minds by Joseph Goebbels's legendary Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. Although Goebbels was notorious for his racism, before 1939 his ministry devoted relatively little attention to popularizing racial hate. Propaganda denounced the Versailles Treaty, the Stalinist menace, and critics of Nazism, but warnings about racial danger barely figured in prewar mass-market productions. For example, only two comedies and one historical drama among approximately 2,000 films approved by Goebbels and his staff from 1933 through 1939 featured overt antisemitism. Newsreels ignored both race and Jews. Although Hitler made disparaging remarks about Jews, he did not invest his immense political capital in popularizing the measures that would achieve the racial cleansing at the heart of his program. His reticence may have resulted not only from concern about foreign criticism but from his attentiveness to mainstream opinion in Germany.[33] Even passionate antisemites in the party realized that rage against Jews (Judenkoller) could be counterproductive and understood that moderates had to be convinced by other means. Comparing subtle persuasion to a gas, Goebbels wrote,

"The best propaganda is that which, as it were, works invisibly, penetrates the whole of life without the public having any knowledge of the propagandistic initiative."[34] To be credible, racial reeducation had to emanate from apparently objective sources. Not propaganda but knowledge had the power to change attitudes.

While passionate antisemitism created solidarity among hardcore Nazis, a more sober form of racial thinking held the potential for mobilizing broad segments of the population. I use the term "ethnic fundamentalism" to describe the deeply anti-liberal collectivism that was the hallmark of public culture in the Third Reich. The term bears an affinity with both religious fundamentalism and ethnic nationalism.[35] Like the former, ethnic fundamentalism claims to defend an ancient spiritual heritage against the corrosive values of industrialized, urban society. Like the latter, ethnic fundamentalism summons its followers to seek vengeance for past wrongs and to forge a glorious future cleansed of ethnic aliens. Its leaders, often endowed with a charismatic aura, mobilize followers to participate in a moral universe that is accessible only to those who share a language, religion, culture, or homeland. The double standard inherent in such arrogance spawned a degree of hypocrisy that astonished outsiders. For insiders, arrogance (called ethnic pride) formed the matrix for disseminating the central elements of Nazi ideology—the cult of the Führer and his *Volk*, phobic racism, and the conquest of *Lebensraum*.

Much has been written about Nazi propaganda as the myth that masked a harsh reality. I am less interested in exposing the myth/reality gap than in exploring the process by which racial beliefs came to shape the outlook of the ordinary Germans on whose cooperation Nazi policies depended. Although the Third Reich had characteristics of totalitarian regimes, it also bore the marks of a collapsed democracy. Germans were accustomed to participating in a lively public culture. Nazi takeover did not mean the destruction of that culture so much as its re-formation. A deadly uniformity did not descend on Germany when Hitler became chancellor. To be sure, critics were silenced, but for the vast majority of Germans who approved of Hitler's rule, a panoply of outlets for a revived civic spirit opened up. Within three contexts, I analyze the popularization of a concept of ethnic virtue that, in its many variations, inexorably expelled Germans stigmatized as alien from their fellow citizens' universe of moral obligation.

The first context, explored in Chapters 2, 4, and 10, centers on Hitler's role as a preacher of communitarian morality among members of the *Volk*. Hitler presented himself as the embodiment of virtue in a dual narra-

tive that he reiterated throughout his political career. In this parable, he paired his own autobiography with the melodrama of the *Volk* itself, retelling the tale of humble but proud origins; courage in the face of assaults by the cruel, the craven, and the powerful; and, teetering on the cliff of catastrophe, rebirth. A veritable Goliath in David's clothing, Hitler depicted himself as a paragon of virtue and heralded his rule as the restorer of a stern moral order.[36] Hitler's success in presenting himself as the very model of piety who said barely a word about race, however, carried the risk that hardcore followers would fear he had betrayed the radical racist core of their Nazi faith. Relying on the general public to support the popular aims he mouthed so often, Hitler perfected the technique of communicating his ultimate aims in coded messages that primed insiders to await the day when they could act on their hatred. He alone decided when that day had arrived.

With Hitler and Goebbels keeping a discrete distance from racial policy, it fell to midlevel party men to imbue public culture with not only ethnic pride but racial contempt. Despite Hitler's notorious scorn for "eggheads," the campaign to popularize racial thinking depended on highly educated specialists to dignify antisemitism with the aura of objectivity. In Chapters 3, 5, and 6, I examine the public relations campaigns of youthful party functionaries, ideologues, and physicians, and new converts to Nazism from an older generation. In the language of marketing, they "rebranded" Jews as pariahs—Jews who, before 1933, had been friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Distinguished Germans with no prior record of support for Nazism, among them the philosopher Martin Heidegger, the theologian Gerhard Kittel, and the political theorist Carl Schmitt, made a crucial contribution to a version of antisemitism that was both respectable and ruthless. After Hitler seized power in 1933, the Nazi Party Office of Racial Politics, directed by a 29-year-old physician, Walter Gross, infused public culture with a vision of ethnic pride subtly laced with racial fears. The skill of Nazi proselytizers in adjusting their message to suit the tastes of particular audiences was illustrated by the Nazi conquest of the teaching profession.

At the third site in the production of Nazi morality, discussed in Chapters 7, 8, and 9, I examine the creation of a working consensus about racial aims and strategies within the inner circles of the men charged with formulating and administering racial policies. Before seizing power, Hitler and his comrades had apparently not done much programmatic thinking about "the Jewish question." Back in 1919 Hitler had written a letter in

which he contrasted what he called emotional (violent) and rational (bureaucratic) tactics. In the 1930s, the men who conceived and administered terror against Jews formed inter-agency networks and created a milieu within which differences could be worked out. Accompanying harsh administrative persecution, a series of government-sponsored think tanks disseminated the latest racist research that represented Jews not as a biological danger but as a moral contagion. In the face of such "knowledge" of Jewish malfeasance, the Golden Rule became, in effect, "Do unto others as you imagine they have done unto you." Whether because of Hitler's chronic indecision or his political genius, two sharply contrasting approaches to solving the Jewish problem developed among "emotional" Stormtroopers (*Sturmabteilung*, SA) and "rational" SS (*Schutzstaffel*) men. In the contest between these two forces, a powerful—yet flexible—consensus allowed considerable latitude for individuals to radicalize its content according to the opportunities available.

The Final Solution took shape not on the distant eastern front nor as a series of fiats issued after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Rather, powerful cadres within the government, party, and SS formed a genocidal consensus within Germany during six years of administrative networking, theoretical disputes, and factional infighting prior to Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939. No single agency or theory guided its implementation. Racial experts disagreed about racial science; Hitler procrastinated; Interior and Justice Ministry functionaries vacillated. Stormtrooper thugs clashed with SS racial detectives. Cognitive dissonance dogged supposedly objective terms like German blood, *Volk* and *Rasse*, Nordic race, and Aryan and non-Aryan. And yet the direction of policy was never in doubt. The emergent consensus was so powerful that anomalies only solidified it. At a time when no foreign danger threatened and the national economy was robust, the political advertisers of racial fear and ethnic pride created what contemporaries called a "gulf" or "pit" between a righteous ethnic majority and the less than 1 percent of their fellow citizens decreed as unwanted. The etiology of this consensus evolved not as a clear evil but rather as the shadow side of virtue.

The mobilization of a cadre of citizens prepared by ethical ideals to persecute fellow citizens who had done no wrong reveals the potential for a dedicated minority to win what Nazis called the "battle for public opinion." It cannot be emphasized too often that, during the years before World War II, as racial culture spread throughout the Third Reich and hardcore Nazis demanded the "destruction of Jewry," no concrete plans

for physical extermination existed. Committed Nazis, however, used the prewar period to popularize a shared vision of a *Volk* so righteous and an enemy so vile that only the timing and techniques of an ultimate war to the death remained in doubt.

In a short story by Jorge Luis Borges, a former concentration camp commandant and convicted Nazi war criminal reflects on his life just before he is to be hanged. Although he fully accepts the justice of his sentence, he does not regret his crimes because, in his words, "Essentially, Nazism is an act of morality, a purging of corrupted humanity, to dress him anew."[37] Scholars have analyzed the broad outlines and subtle nuances of Nazi ideology without taking Hitler's promise of a new moral order seriously. In this book, I examine the comprehensive ethical revolution that formed the backdrop and paradigm for the Nazi race war and prepared Germans to tolerate racial crime well before the advent of genocidal murder battalions and extermination camps.