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**The American Impact on Western Europe:
Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective**

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The Question of Guilt, 1945-47:
German and American Answers

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The concept of German westernization implies a process of change in German society from a non-Western condition to one that can be characterized in part as an ideological kinship with the United States. Westernization as the rise of a growing cultural, philosophical as well as practical awareness and realization of Western values among Germans can be analyzed by comparisons of the two value systems.

The discussion during the years 1945-47 of German guilt for the devastation of World War II offers one opportunity to observe the point of departure of this process. A defeated and still non-Western Germany no longer functioned as the enemy but was not yet considered a kindred spirit, friend or even a useful, if dubious, ally. It was the time when Germans began to rebuild the country and needed to readjust their self-conception as a culture and society.

For the majority, the switch to a wholly different ideological matrix was less important than bare survival. Yet beyond the question of day to day survival and the fears of an uncertain future one of the issues that dominated German public opinion was the beginning of a still ongoing project to analyze the recent past. The central issue, partly forced on the German public by the occupying powers' deliberate educational, administrative, and punitive measures, was the question of German guilt. This discussion in the newly emerging media and among the general public was probably the first open public discourse after 12 years of Nazi suppression of free speech.¹

On a fundamental level the debate centered around issues that are fundamental to Western thinking. The question of guilt deals with individual and collective responsibilities, with the individual and his or her relationship to others and to society. The relatively uniform German discourse on guilt reveals elements of the value system from which Germans started the process of westernization.

To assess how close or how far German thinking was from Western thinking I will use American attitudes towards the same issue as a point of reference. As in Germany, a discourse developed that showed considerable agreement in the assessment of the German condition and its roots, if not in how the Germans should be treated. American concepts of responsibility and guilt and Americans' views of the Germans' attitudes show Western conceptions were markedly different from German. Before the Cold War caused an ideological and political paradigm shift in regard to Germany the different answers to the question of guilt give a clear indication on the deep ideological gulf dividing German and American thinking in the early postwar years.²

The central role of guilt in human experience and as a philosophical concept makes it difficult to find a working definition for the purposes of this article. A useful approximation can be found in Karl Jaspers *Die Schuldfrage*,³ published in 1946. Though written as part of the contemporary debate, his systematic exploration of the different elements of guilt and responsibility, collectively and individually, can still be used as points of reference in the discussion.

Jaspers distinguished between four different concepts of guilt: criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical.⁴ Criminal guilt was defined by the law and established through courts of law. It concerned a complex of criminal conduct that was not at issue in the discussion. More important is the definition of political guilt. According to Jaspers, it encompassed the actions of governments as well as of the governed. Citizens bear the consequences of the actions of their governments. They were subject to the state's power and dependent on the order that the state creates. However, Jaspers insisted that everybody had a responsibility for how he or she was governed. To that extent political guilt was shared among governments and the governed. It was determined by the victor whose power and will to judge was only restrained by his sense of justice, political foresight, and respect for natural and international law.

In addition to this collective measure of responsibility Jaspers established the concept of individual moral guilt. Here he posited as an absolute condition that everyone was morally responsible for his or her actions, regardless of the circumstances. He explicitly argued that following orders did not exculpate any individual. Moral guilt was established through one's conscience and through "open and loving" discourse with friends and neighbors, those of one's fellow men interested in one's soul.

Finally, the solidarity between fellow humans created the possibility of metaphysical guilt. The belief in one human race, transcending nations, races, and conditions, made everyone share in the responsibility for injustice in this world, in particular for crimes that happened in our presence or with our knowledge. If we failed to do everything in our power to stop these crimes from happening, we would share in the guilt. One's own survival through the war, against the background of the Holocaust, produced a sense of guilt that could not be dealt with through the law, political consciousness, or moral responsibility. It sprung from humans' condition as social beings responsible for all mankind but unable to help others except those few in our immediate surroundings. In the choice between doing everything to save others and being destroyed in the process or giving up in the face of insurmountable obstacles, the morally innocuous choice for one's own life still produced a sense of failure and guilt.

While Jaspers made these fine distinctions between different forms of guilt, he repeatedly insisted that in the actual exploration of one's personal guilt they were intertwined into one complex. These distinctions would be false if their interconnectedness were ignored. He explicitly attacked those who wanted to focus the public discussion on just one of these different aspects. He objected equally to the concept of collective guilt as an invalid generalization that lacked clarity and precluded individual exploration.

Ultimately, the enormity of the crimes committed was beyond any human reckoning or understanding. "[T]here remains the shame of that which is always present, impossible to discover, merely to be explored."⁵ But however unfathomable, it did not excuse anyone from

the attempt to deal seriously with one's individual guilt. For Jaspers, the moral renewal of Germany had to be achieved by individual introspection and selfexamination.

Jaspers' essay developed from his observation that there was a need among his students in Heidelberg for a clarification of the widely discussed question of guilt. However, he later came to realize that his lofty goal was hopelessly idealistic insofar as it assumed a general willingness among Germans to confront whatever doubts and pangs of conscience they experienced.⁶ Most Germans vehemently denied any guilt, collective or otherwise.⁷ The discussion of German guilt that started with the liberation of German concentration camps ended with the spring and summer of 1947, when the announcements of the Truman doctrine and the Marshall Plan changed Germany's role in the international system.⁸

The fate of the first deliberate public admission of German guilt, the Stuttgarter Schulderklärung of the German Protestant churches (organized in the Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands, EKD) of October 18 and 19, 1945, showed how unwilling Germans were to accept any responsibility for Nazism and the war. This declaration of guilt grew out of a meeting of the EKD's council with representatives of the World Ecumenical Council. Both sides deemed it necessary that the EKD, in an act of contrition, admit the guilt of German Protestants in the crimes of years past, since only through an act of repentance could salvation and God's forgiveness be gained.⁹ The declaration spoke of the German community of suffering, but also of a solidarity of guilt. "It pains us to say that through us immeasurable suffering has been brought over many peoples and countries." Pointing out the role Protestants had played in the resistance to the Nazi regime, the German church leaders nevertheless blamed themselves for not having "borne witness more bravely, prayed more faithfully, believed more joyfully, and loved more fervidly."¹⁰

For Reverend Martin Niemöller, the initiator of the declaration, and his coauthors the declaration also had a pastoral purpose as a means to get Germans to repent for the sins

committed during the Nazi regime. They wanted to start the process of self-examination in the churches and according to their Christian faith.¹¹

From a German perspective, Niemöller was well-suited to serve as the spokesperson for a better Germany. He could hardly be blamed for the German crimes since he had been one of the most outspoken anti-Nazi church leaders and a prisoner in the Dachau concentration camp for several years. Despite his own victimhood, he insisted on a solidarity of guilt among all Germans that closely resembled Jaspers's notion of political and metaphysical guilt. In the Christian concept of repentance and forgiveness, a collective admission of guilt together with individual acts of contrition represented the only way that Germany could find a new beginning. Salvation would be achieved through a loving and forgiving God who could liberate Germans from the past.¹²

While the Stuttgart declaration aimed at keeping Germans from absolving themselves from all responsibility, it did not condemn the German people for all eternity. Niemöller realized that many Germans could honestly say that they had not been directly implicated in the crimes nor had wished them on anybody.¹³ But he remained concerned that Germans made no real attempt to discuss the conceptions of guilt and atonement. "When ... in the midst of a Christian people 6 million persons are deliberately murdered only because they belonged to another race, no one can maintain that guilt is not a fearful reality."¹⁴ For the next two years, Niemöller traveled through the country to preach this declaration of guilt.¹⁵

The German public reacted with outrage to the declaration and Niemöller's preaching. A vast majority of Germans condemned the declaration as a treasonous capitulation to the victorious powers' attacks on German integrity. Whatever the actual meaning of the declaration, it was denounced as another attempt to fix a collective guilt on the German people.¹⁶

This idea of *Kollektivschuld* dominated the German public discourse on guilt. It remains a staple of German historiography of the early occupation period that in the beginning American

policy towards the Germans was determined by a concept of collective guilt. According to this interpretation, American outrage over the emerging facts of the Nazi system of concentration camps and the lingering impact of the Morgenthau Plan heavily influenced an unwise and unfair punitive occupation policy. This outrage was reflected in JCS 1064, in the deindustrialization of Germany, in denazification, reeducation, nonfraternization, and Western acquiescence to the displacement of Germans in the East. German collective guilt was supposedly used to justify the harsh measures taken against all Germans, regardless of their individual responsibilities under the Nazi regime.¹⁷

Since the end of the war Germans felt that they had been pelted with ever new accusations of their alleged crimes. The first posters put up by the occupiers with photos of Dachau and the heading "This is your fault" ("Das ist Eure Schuld"), the enforced visits to recently liberated concentration camps, compulsory viewing of the movie "Todesmühlen" and numerous other attempts to prove to the Germans the criminal nature of the previous regime appeared to proclaim all Germans equally responsible.¹⁸

This sense of an unjust accusation of collective guilt helped to solidify a community of innocence based on heterogeneous justifications and excuses. The chorus of protest was made up of many and sometimes contradictory voices of self-exculpation. The choice of arguments depended on one's dominant identity or identities as a German, a member of a political party or religion, social group, profession, or shared experience. German feelings of innocence were amplified with each further injustice - real or imagined - committed against Germans. In effect, the blame for the suffering of the postwar years was put not on Germany as the aggressor but on the victors and their unfair policies. The Nuremberg trials helped to further limit guilt to a few criminals who were in charge and had misled the honest and hardworking German people.¹⁹

For the ordinary German, the main strategy was to emphasize one's passive role as "Befehlsempfänger," i.e. of just having followed orders, and as an oppressed and obedient

"kleiner Mann", literally a little man, who was merely an inconsequential cog in a gigantic social machine. Personal virtue was allegiance to the larger whole, the *Volksgemeinschaft*, honor lay in loyalty to the state. The onus of responsibility sat with the leadership of the Nazi *Führerstaat*, where responsibility was always shunted one level higher until it landed with the ultimate leader, the Führer himself.

Personal responsibility was reduced to the faithful and unquestioning execution of orders. From this perspective, the mass of German soldiers could not accept guilt or responsibility because they had been faithful to their soldierly values, just as soldiers in the enemy armies had been. To lose the war may have been frustrating, but the German soldier retained his warrior honor and *Anständigkeit*, or decency. It was an act of bad faith for the victorious powers to blame them. In fact, every German had become a victim; everybody suffered some type of loss or injury. Germany was united in a community of suffering rather than guilt, in a community of resentment towards the occupying powers. Accusations of German guilt only added insult to injury, even more so if voiced by German pastors.²⁰

Interestingly enough the new German political elite that emerged during the founding of the second German republic put the blame for the German catastrophe precisely on the common man, the "einfache Mann". His limited vision and unquestioning obedience, his love for leadership and susceptibility to the seductive spells of grandeur by talented but evil demagogues were blamed in large part for the rise of Hitler and the Nazi state.²¹ As a consequence the new democratic constitution aimed at limiting individual political influence through the mediation of political parties and organizations. The conservative republic would be organized by a responsible elite who felt little guilt for the German past but often enough perceived themselves as blameless victims who were now repairing the damage done by others.²² These ideas were supported by the remnants of the German intelligentsia, whose greatest thinkers had either left the country or fallen victim to Nazi persecution. The intellectual debate was left to the survivors of the so-called inner emigration, not all of whom had remained

uncompromising enemies of the Nazis. In general, the broad discussion did not lead to an open and critical analysis of the last dozen years, but only to vague philosophizing.

The bourgeois intellectual elite, or *Bildungsbürgertum*, looked forward to the restoration of moral values from an idealized German past. The Nazi era was seen as a deviation that could not be considered as German in nature.²³

Friedrich Meinecke, the doyen of German historians, wrote an influential interpretation of what he called the German catastrophe. His belief in the culturally superior German spirit and his philosophical opposition to West European Enlightenment ideas and rationalism had survived the Nazi era.²⁴ The German people, he claimed, had not fallen sick with criminality but only suffered from a single bad case of poisoning. Hitler, the consummate criminal, and his gang of thugs were atypical of Germany; they were a demonic infectious disease to which Germans had fallen victim to. Meinecke turned the Nazi era into an historic episode resulting from the conflict between the forces of nationalism and socialism that had begun in the 19th century. It could have happened to any other Occidental nation as it was only a matter of contingency that placed the demagogue Hitler in the position "to ensnare the German people and eat out their substance."²⁵ Meinecke dignified Germany's fate as a parable with a valuable message for the world. The highly cultured German people were the tragic hero in a faustian drama, in that "the essence of the tragical consists foremost in the indissoluble interconnection of the divine and the demonic in mankind..."²⁶ As the German people emerged from this tragedy, it did not need radical reeducation but rather the elimination of Nazi megalomania and "Unkultur" and their replacement with a spiritual world citizenship inspired by the German *Geist*. "This we may hope and believe, that the German spirit having refound itself still has to fulfill its special and unsurpassed mission in the Occidental community."²⁷

Meinecke's brazen denial of any German culpability²⁸ was shared by historians like Gerhard Ritter and Ludwig Dehio who would not accept a broad responsibility for German crimes, at least not without pointing at the alleged guilt of the victorious powers. Historians in the early

postwar period maintained that Germany was not unique but experienced the same problems that other Western nations had during the 19th century. Materialism and the power politics started by the French Revolution had undermined the moral values of the West. Germany had not followed a "Sonderweg"; it had become victim to a catastrophe that was merely a part of the larger Occidental crisis²⁹.

Ludwig Dehio, in his 1948 work on power balance and hegemony, went even further back in history to the year 1494 to explain how Germany's condition in Europe had always been subject to the vicissitudes of an international system that went out of control during the post-Romantic period. Dehio's organic world view perceived natural forces of power and decline, competition and cooperation. By taking a broad approach, both chronologically and thematically, he obfuscated Germany's responsibility and studiously avoided the question why other countries did not follow the German route. He turned Germany's aggression into merely the latest fight for hegemony and equilibrium in Europe. As a result of the ensuing shift of power it was vanquished Germany that had to suffer most.³⁰ No word here about Germany's fight for racial superiority and the murder of six million Jews. Instead, he called on Germans to reassert their role in Europe and "to save ourselves from a base peasant existence without a past or a future concerned only with the daily struggle for survival. Now is the time to save our spiritual personality which has been in mortal danger for half a generation."³¹

Where Niemöller pointed directly to the responsibility of every German for the very real crimes committed against real people the star representatives of Germany's *Bildungsbürgertum* resorted to metaphors of apocalypse, catastrophe, and spiritual suppression. By emplotting the Nazi era as a tragedy where a disastrous outcome was preordained by destiny, they absolved the individual from guilt and left him to grieve over his misfortune and, after catharsis, to accept his fate and rebuild.³²

The rare public appeals to exiled cultural icons of the twenties like Thomas Mann to return to Germany exposed this misguided notion of innocent German cultural superiority. Walter von

Molo, president of the Prussian literary academy before 1933, inadvertently revealed the self-centered German vision of humaneness and humanity in an open letter to Mann. He implored Mann to return and "to comfort the downtrodden hearts through humaneness and to give them back a belief in justice..." The Germans, he claimed, had remained a reasonable people, "without arrogance or presumption," yearning for the "return of that which once earned us respect among the council of nations." There was no real feeling of remorse or responsibility, merely a sense of personal and national loss, a shame not for the war and the genocide but for the loss of face and honor.

Mann saw no reason to return from his comfortable Californian existence. To ask for his solidarity as a duty to the German people was an outrage after the denunciation and humiliation he had suffered. "That it has come out the way it has is not my affair. ... It is the result of the German people's character and destiny - a people strange enough and tragically interesting enough that one takes a lot from it, that one puts up with a lot from it. However, it should also accept the results and not just let it all fade away in a banal 'Please come back, all is forgiven'."³³

Mann was unwilling to help an unrepentant German people against the alleged injustices of the occupying powers. "It would always be taken as a defense rooted in egocentric patriotism of that which other peoples have suffered for years from Germany."³⁴

He found it repugnant to accept the common excuse "that given the circumstance a highly evolved people of 70 million had no choice but to suffer for six years a regime of bloody scoundrels that it detested from the bottom of its heart, that for another six years it waged a war it recognized to be sheer madness and that it had to go to extremes, with all its inventiveness, bravery, intelligence, sense of duty, military punctuality, in short all of its power to bring victory and eternal existence to this regime."³⁵

In his reply, Thomas Mann had adopted American attitudes on individual responsibility in society. The importance of the righteous individual in American thinking was reflected in the popularity that Reverend Niemöller enjoyed in the US during the war years.

He had become famous to Americans as the pastor "who defied Adolf Hitler". His courageous stand against the Nazis, his arrest and confinement in Dachau as "Hitler's personal prisoner" gave a face to German resistance against Nazi oppression. This upright German was introduced to a larger audience through the highly successful wartime movie "The Hitler Gang" (1944). In contrast to the leftist and communist resistance, his status as a Protestant minister fighting for freedom on a Christian platform and his principled disobedience to an unjust regime made him highly useful to governmental propaganda agencies, which turned him into a martyr for the cause of democracy.³⁶

When Niemöller was freed on May 7, 1945, he was presented by the American press as the spokesman for a different Germany and the hope for a better future. His agreement with American plans for a thorough reeducation of the younger generation of Germans established him as a possible new leader for Germany.³⁷ "[W]hile Niemöller lives," the *New York Times* editorialized, "at least one lonely star shines over Germany."³⁸

This assessment was confirmed by the Stuttgart declaration which made Niemöller the spokesman for German guilt.³⁹ Emphasis was put on his clearcut acknowledgment that "[the] German people themselves are to blame for their present sufferings and the 'horrors of the past twelve years'" and that they carried a "titanic responsibility" toward the nations of Europe which they had occupied.⁴⁰

As an independent, self-confident, brave, and free man, Niemöller had become an "American hero."⁴¹ On several occasions he visited the United States to repeat his sermon of repentance and Christian forgiveness, of "Christ's sovereignty in the midst of a world full of guilt, sin and misery."⁴²

However, his star began to sink rapidly when his other pronouncements and his past as a German nationalist caught up with him. Niemöller turned into a "hero with limitations" whose statements no longer suggested that he could be a leader in the moral reconstruction of his country. He agreed with his Lutheran brethren about the inadvisability of introducing democracy in Germany. "The German people like to be governed, not to mingle in politics" he proclaimed, they were unable to live under a democratic government as Americans knew it. In American eyes, however, a peaceful Europe could not be created unless a democratic system were established in Germany.⁴³

Reports appeared in the mainstream media about Niemöller's nationalist views, his role as a former U-boat commander in World War I, and his early support for the Nazi party. Though well known among a more critical media,⁴⁴ these aspects of his biography had been played down when America had needed a clean German hero. Now it turned out that at the beginning of the recent war he had offered Hitler his services as a marine officer. His explanation that "[if] there is a war a German doesn't ask is it just or unjust, but he feels bound to join the ranks" negated the image of him as the independent patriot.⁴⁵

Explaining his early support for the Nazis, he alleged that in 1933 he had not been "directly informed as to the actual aims of this party and ... thought that the essential preoccupation of Nazism was a fight against unemployment and against the inferiority complex that had held our people since 1918."⁴⁶ Similar explanations were offered by Bishop Teophil Wurm of Württemberg, head of the EKD. Wurm called the early support of Protestants for the Nazis a political mistake that should not be held against anyone. In 1933 many of the clergy had joined the party believing, like himself, that it might promote a religious revival and that the church could influence the party from within. "How can those who joined for idealistic reasons now be called guilty?"⁴⁷

Obviously, Niemöller's anti-Nazi stance had not been based on a sincere belief in Western values of liberty and equality. His early sympathies for Hitler's program to reorganize Germany

according to openly propagated anti-democratic and racist ideas could not be taken for a mere political mistake or misguided idealism. Any collaboration with or sympathy for the Nazis proved a personal failure to grasp the fundamentals of the democratic spirit. Niemöller had exposed himself as an opportunist who had had no quarrel with Hitler politically and only begun to oppose the Nazis when Hitler threatened to attack the churches.

Eleanor Roosevelt attacked him in her syndicated column. "I am sure he is a good man according to his lights, but his lights are not those of the people of the United States, who do not like the Hitler political doctrine." She could not see why the American people should be asked to listen to his lectures.⁴⁸ The American Military Government (OMGUS) now considered Niemöller "nationalistic and Junker-monarchical rather than international and liberal-democratic in its political outlook."⁴⁹ Further evidence of his moral duplicity was found in his statement that anti-Semitism had come to an end in Germany and would not recur.⁵⁰ All this disqualified him in the eyes of the American public from any role as spiritual leader in Germany. With leaders like him, Germany would be rebuilt without a real moral regeneration of the German people.⁵¹ He was now "a known Nazi collaborator". As a result, the Philosophical Library withdrew from distribution Niemöller's publications "God is my Fuehrer" and "Of Guilt and Hope" as it had been demonstrated that the author had supported the Nazi party as early as 1924.⁵²

German attitudes to Nazism as demonstrated by Meinecke in his books drew equal objection. Meinecke was pitied by his American colleagues as a tragic figure who had to suffer the end of his illusions about Germany. But while forthright and blunt in its condemnation of the Nazi era, his book on the German catastrophe showed that he was a nationalist, insensitive to the plight of Jews in Germany, and most of all an unabashed elitist.⁵³ In American eyes, his antimodernism and his mistrust of politics and the masses so typical of German intellectuals revealed an inability to understand modern democracy. By arguing along the lines of a dialectic

of nation spirit he provided Germans "with a kind of fatalistic alibi." Instead of dwelling on a nation's spirit one reviewer argued "that a major emphasis upon the universal ideals for our Western tradition is more conducive to human cooperation".⁵⁴ Louis L. Snyder charged that Meinecke repeated "all the beautiful ideas of Western liberalism and at the same time finds himself unable to cast off the persistent German traditions of authoritarianism, discipline, obedience, and even 'racial' prejudice. He is the 'good German' who must not under any circumstances be blamed for the excesses of Hitlerism." Snyder dismissed outright Meinecke's fatalist argument and mocked his notion that "[it] is always someone else who takes away German freedom." Meinecke showed a disappointing inability to draw the necessary conclusions about Nazism and instead attempted to promote a new stab-in-the-back theory. The book showed again how German academic liberals were unable to withstand one authoritarian onslaught after another.⁵⁵ A young Gordon Craig agreed that "this is in some ways a disappointing book." In his opinion, Meinecke was too reluctant "to conclude that Hitlerism was, in fact, a logical outgrowth of Germany's development in the nineteenth century." Craig found it disturbing that Meinecke instead saw a force at work that was beyond human control. He developed a "theory of fatalism which, if carried too far, can be used to exculpate statesmen, politicians and peoples of all responsibility for their actions."⁵⁶

Even Jaspers' outright acknowledgment of German guilt was not satisfactory. To an American observer, Jasper's ideas on guilt and his call for the recognition of individual responsibility as the first step toward inner liberation sounded like platitudes "but to a German audience ... these are challenging words."⁵⁷ However worthy of attention and noble in intent, Jaspers' apologetic acceptance of the antirevolutionary German tradition disappointed. While it was true that the Nazis had used terror to subjugate opponents, there was ample evidence of other nations "which were able to break the gates of their political prisons from within." In this regard Jaspers was not asking enough of his fellow Germans. His book was "illustrative of the limitations of

German liberalism as well as of its promise."⁵⁸ Jasper drew his sharpest rebuke from the Jewish historian Ben Halpern, who called his essay "congenial and acceptable palaver ... appreciated by the West" while at the same time "entirely without offence to the Germans." Jaspers' insistence on self-improvement as the only way to deal with German guilt created "an atmosphere of subtle superiority around the Germans and so yields a kind of masochistic gratification which could prove quite flattering to the German ego." Jaspers showed far too much sympathy with the perpetrators while his noble concept of self-examination denied the victims the right to accuse their German tormentors. In this way, Germans could "nurse the suffering which guilt has called down upon them like a private vanity, with a strangely boastful meekness." Guilt became "an esoteric doctrine" for a "self-indulgent" and "insufferably self-pitying" people. Halpern had his most scathing comments for Jasper's notion of metaphysical guilt, which he characterized as merely a cheap excuse for the Germans' failure to act according to the basic standards of humanity. "Was there ever in the history of human conscience so canting a document, so snivelling and whining an extenuation, so false an account?" It was "disheartening when one begins to think that this may be the best we can expect from the best among the Germans."⁵⁹

American reports from Germany reaffirmed this concern. The overall impression of the mood in Germany, later confirmed by sociological studies and opinion polls conducted by different American military government agencies, was that the vast majority - regardless of political affiliation, social situation or religious belief - did not feel guilty or responsible for the war and the crimes committed. Whatever happened to them was not the result of their own evil doings but a consequence of having lost the war. They failed to realize that they lost because their "transgressions against civilized behavior aroused the organized anger of most of humanity."⁶⁰ The early campaign through radio and print media, posters and pamphlets to inform Germans about the extent of crimes committed in concentration camps had aimed at developing a sense

of collective responsibility among the German people. Yet some perceptive critics pointed out that a guilt-evocation campaign could not be the first step in German reeducation "because it skips over the prior need to start reversing the process of the demoralization of the Germans." They did not feel guilty because they lacked the necessary values that made them realize the immorality of their deeds.⁶¹ "What is in reality dead in Germany is the humanist tradition and its attendant values."⁶²

Instead, Germans had developed a "particular Teutonic form of Social Contract." They abdicated their private judgement and conscience to the ruler. In return, they "received the right to commit any act at all, criminal ones included, and not be held morally or otherwise responsible for them."⁶³ For the Germans, it was the leadership of Germany that created truth, justice and the law. To believe in the leadership, to be obedient and faithful in the execution of their orders was the road to personal fulfillment.⁶⁴ Germans became "human robots" who dispassionately and unthinkingly carried out any brutalities ordered. "[No] question of morality entered into their execution, except the eternal German morality of 'doing one's duty.'"⁶⁵ Conversely, American democratic symbols had no meaning for Germans. "They do not believe that our victory over their armed forces bears any relationship to our cultural and political beliefs."⁶⁶

Hitler's failure and death atoned for the real evil created. Now the responsibility for Germany's well being lay with the winners who represented the new authority of the land. "Father Hitler has quit; now Father Eisenhower should provide"⁶⁷ was their motto. Germans would faithfully follow the new leadership, or as the mayor of one town assured a military government officer: "Das Volk ... is 'streng demokratisch' - strictly democratic, strictly."⁶⁸

Ironically, this "vorauselender Gehorsam" or diligent and anticipatory obedience to US democratic ideas may have been the best way for the eventual success of German westernization. Initially, the liberal democratic structure of the Federal Republic was not based

on a strong democratic belief but depended on a general obedience to democratic rules. Eventually, democratic convictions replaced mere acceptance among authoritarian elites and citizens. The westernization of Germany would be completed when the acceptance of the new German republic relied less on the power of its institutions and laws than on each citizen's consciousness about his or her individual rights and responsibilities as a member of a democratic society. Whether and how this point has been achieved is still an open question. Westernization as a rapprochement of the German to the American value system still awaits description. The development of the public discourse on guilt in the Federal Republic, now termed "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" or coming to terms with the past, is one indicator of how German westernization is progressing.

- ¹ Ingrid Laurien, "Die Verarbeitung von Nationalsozialismus und Krieg in politisch-kulturellen Zeitschriften der Westzonen 1945-1949," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 4 (1988): 223-27; Thomas Koebner, "Die Schuldfrage: Vergangenheitsverweigerung und Lebenslügen in der Diskussion 1945-1949," in Thomas Koebner, Gert Sautermeister, and Sigrid Schneider, eds., *Deutschland nach Hitler: Zukunftspläne im Exil und aus der Besatzungszeit 1939-1949* (Opladen, 1987), 301-29; Barbro Eberan, *Luther? Friedrich "der Grosse"? Wagner? Nietzsche? --? --? Wer war an Hitler Schuld? Die Debatte um die Schuldfrage 1945-1949* (Munich, 1983); Jürgen Steinle, *Nationales Selbstverständnis nach dem Nationalsozialismus: Die Kriegsschuld-Debatte in West-Deutschland* (Bochum, 1995).
- ² Space does not permit to further explore the American conception of guilt by an analysis of the discourse on the use of strategic bombing and nuclear bombs as part of the American war effort. Even then a highly contentious debate it has resurfaced in recent years with the controversy surrounding the Smithsonian Institution's planned exhibition of the Enola Gay. See Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (New York, 1985); Michael J. Hogan, *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (New York, 1996); Edward Tabor Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, *History Wars: The Enola Gay and other Battles for the American past* (New York, 1996). The debate lends itself to a comparison with the more recent German debate on the exhibition on Wehrmacht atrocities. See Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, eds., *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg, 1995); Heribert Prantl, ed., *"Wehrmachtsverbrechen": Eine deutsche Kontroverse* (Hamburg, 1997).
- ³ Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage: Ein Beitrag zur Deutschen Frage* (Zurich, 1946), translated as *The Question of German Guilt* (New York, 1948).
- ⁴ Jaspers, *Schuldfrage* (1946), 10-14.
- ⁵ Jaspers, *Schuldfrage* (1946), 11-12.
- ⁶ Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage: Für Völkermord gibt es keine Verjährung* (Munich, 1979), 88.

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