The Agonies of Defeat: “Other Germanies” and the Problem of Collective Guilt

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In 1986, the conservative German historian Andreas Hillgruber (1986) published a small book called *Two Kinds of Destruction: The Shattering of the German Reich and the End of the European Jews*. The book’s first part provided a substantial and passionate account of the German army on the Eastern Front in the winter of 1944–45; the second part was a much shorter, dryer report of the “end” of the Jews in the same period. Hillgruber explained the difference in his treatments as appropriate to what he saw as the natural sympathies of a German historian with the terrible plight of Hitler’s soldiers rather than with the Jews. The repugnance of this assertion was obvious to critics, though as we will see, it was not wholly unprecedented.

Another anecdote reinforces the point: In 1955, members of the reconstituted Frankfurt Institute for Social Research published the results of a study they had conducted in Germany in 1950 into the persistence of fascist attitudes in the German population (Pollock 1955). Dissatisfied with opinion polls, which showed a remarkable turnaround in German political culture, the Frankfurters used an aggressive strategy to “provoke” what they referred to as “nonpublic opinion,” the deeper yet truer indications of the persistence of fascist sympathies. In a highly critical review, however, the conservative psychologist Peter Hofstätter (1957) charged the Frankfurters with expecting too much of Germans, who bore the burdens of the atrocities committed in their names; the Germans, Hofstätter seemed to be saying, carried a very great weight indeed, and the Frankfurters were adding to their suffering inappropriately by expecting too
much. In turn, Theodor Adorno (who had been the leading intellectual force behind the study and whose interpretive essay formed a major section of the report) fired back that Hofstätter was forgetting that “it is the victims of Auschwitz who had to take its horrors upon themselves, not those who, to their own disgrace and that of their nation, prefer not to admit it” (Adorno 1957:116). Quoting Hofstätter’s language, Adorno (1957:105–17) continued, “The ‘question of guilt’ was ‘laden with despair’ for the victims, not for the survivors, and it takes some doing to have blurred this distinction with the existential category of despair, which is not without reason a popular one” (ibid., emphasis added).

It is thus with great care that one approaches German perspectives in the context of an inquiry into the legacies of the Holocaust. On the one hand, one seems to risk a relativization of damages, which has certainly been a common enough trope in German discourse (not least during U.S. president Ronald Reagan’s 1985 visit to a military cemetery at Bitburg, during which both Reagan and the West German chancellor Helmut Kohl asserted that all the dead soldiers of World War II were victims equally). On the other hand, as with Adorno, it is also possible to move from describing the discourse of German victimhood to condemning it as despicable self-pitying, in the process bypassing the tasks of sociological analysis, which include explaining the sense of victimhood and the implications of that sense for the reconstruction of German identity.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that we can and must be more differentiating both morally and sociologically. For do we indeed want to deny that Germans were often victims? One thinks not only of the firebombing of Dresden during the war but of widespread rape and starvation at the onset of the occupation. “They reaped what they sowed” is far too convenient and assumes an indefensibly Manichaean worldview in which all Germans were evil perpetrators and the opposing armies purely good. Sociologically, moreover, there were many different attitudes in Germany during the war, many different kinds and degrees of complicity, as well as different responses to the moral and social burdens by Germans in the aftermath. Indeed, insofar as German responses to their moral burdens were highly structured, a sociological rather than philosophical analysis is of primary importance.

Aware of the discomfort of treating so-called perpetrator legacies in the same context as those of the victims—who, pace Hillgruber, surely must have everyone’s sympathies—in this essay I inquire into what I think of as the agonies of German defeat, using the term agonies in the classical sense of struggles. How did the Germans define the legacies of perpetration? Among what alternatives did they...
see themselves forced, and how did they negotiate those symbolic choices? This case of legacies of perpetration, it should be clear, has been consequential not only for Germans but for subsequent cases elsewhere, as well as for our moral and political thinking about political accountability more generally. That thinking—and here I would include cases ranging from how to handle the remnants of repressive regimes in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism to the “de-Baathification” of Iraq—must, it seems to me, be founded on clear sociological knowledge. That knowledge includes an understanding not only of moral gradations of perpetration and victimhood but also of the effects even justified condemnations of perpetrators have on their wider societies.

In the pages that follow, I focus in particular on two agonies that, taken together, illustrate the complexity of the major defensive German trope, that of the “other Germany,” which served as the principle alibi for a guilty nation.1 According to the Israeli journalist Tom Segev (1993), the term other Germany was coined by the editors of the newspaper Haaretz, which used it in 1933 to argue that “all Hitlers in the world cannot eliminate the names Kant, Goethe, and Schiller from German history,” thus implying that not everything German was discredited or associable with Nazism. There were, however, two major dimensions to the other Germany trope (17–18). One was the distinction between an other Germany in exile and an other Germany of so-called inner emigrants (intellectual and political figures who stayed in Germany during the Third Reich but whose posture was mainly one of disengagement). The second variety was the distinction between the inner emigrants as representatives of an other Germany in contrast to “ordinary” people, who either more actively supported the regime or whose disengagement was not postured as ironic.

A major locus for the first aspect of the trope was the controversy over whether or not the author Thomas Mann should have returned from exile after the war; a perspicuous example of the second is a debate between the psychoanalyst Carl Jung and the commentator Erich Kästner over Jung’s diagnosis of collective guilt. These are, of course, but two examples from a series of public efforts to limn a postwar German identity that would allow Germans to move beyond the unprecedented destruction of life, infrastructure, order, and pride perpetrated in their name without damning themselves forever.

**The Mann Affair**

Negotiation between the other Germany in exile and the other Germany that had remained took the form of a public debate over the role of Thomas Mann (see
especially Glaser 1990; Hermand and Lange 1999; Kurzke 2002; Mann 1999; Sontheimer 2002). One of the most prominent and active German exiles, Mann was perhaps Germany’s preeminent man of letters and thus a major propaganda thorn to the Nazis. During the war, Mann published numerous critical essays, delivered important speeches, nurtured contacts with circles close to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and eventually became an American citizen. At the same time that he served as a leading symbol of the other Germany, however, Mann harbored reservations about that very idea. In August 1943, at a meeting in Los Angeles that Mann attended along with a who’s who of famous German exile politicians, writers, artists, and scientists, the National Committee for Free Germany issued a declaration asserting the difference between the Hitler regime and its supporters, on the one hand, and the German people as a whole, on the other. Mann first signed the declaration, but a day later removed his signature, arguing that the declaration sounded too patriotic. This vacillation was emblematic.

The political landscape of German exile in the United States was indeed a complex one. At one extreme were staunch defenders of the so-called other Germany who claimed that the current regime had nothing to do either with the German Volk or with German traditions: it was a plague visited on Germany from the outside, the result of flaws that had allowed a small clique of criminals to hold the real Germany hostage. The boundaries of the other Germany, of course, could be drawn with varying extents: it could include only those few who understood the true meaning of Germany and were preserving this sacred essence in the “lifeboat of exile,” or it could include virtually the entire people, who, according to the argument, were currently suffering the wildest abuses by a terrorist regime. At the other extreme in the exile community were those who diagnosed deep pathologies in the German tradition itself, and thus rejected the idea of an other Germany as the illegitimate defense of a pathological entity.

Thomas Mann fell into neither of these camps—was neither an attacker of all things German nor a defender of an unsullied other Germany. In a radio broadcast of January 16, 1945, Mann declared, “Let us not speak of guilt. That is a name for the fatal concatenation of consequences of a tragic history, and if it be guilt, it is intermixed with a great deal of guilt belonging to the whole world.” In perhaps his most famous speech, at the Library of Congress in May 1945, however, Mann argued that “any attempt to arouse sympathy, to defend and excuse Germany, would certainly be an inappropriate undertaking for one of German birth today” (48). By the same token, “to play the part of judge, to curse and damn his own
people in compliant agreement with the incalculable hatred that they have kindled, to commend himself smugly as 'the good Germany' in contrast to the wicked, guilty Germany over there with which he has nothing in common—that too would hardly befit one of German origin" (Mann 1963:48). Most important and unusual for one with easy recourse to an identity-saving claim, Mann (1963) went on to argue that "there are not two Germanys [sic], a good one and a bad one, but only one, whose best turned into evil through devilish cunning" (48).

Mann (1963) thus saw the German tradition as a complex contradiction: "Wicked Germany is merely good Germany gone astray, good Germany in misfortune, in guilt, in ruin" (64). Indeed, Mann ([1947] 1997) concludes his great novelistic reflection on National Socialism—Doctor Faustus—by arguing that the great and the horrible are inextricably bound in the German soul:

Our thick-walled torture chamber, into which Germany was transformed by a vile regime of conspirators sworn to nihilism from the very start, has been burst open, and our ignominy lies naked before the eyes of the world... I repeat, our ignominy. For is it mere hypochondria to tell oneself that all that is German—even German intellect, German thought, the German word—shares in the disgrace of these revelations and is plunged into profoundest doubt?

... Was not this regime, both in word and deed, merely the distorted, vulgarized, debased realization of a mindset and worldview to which one must attribute a characteristic authenticity and which, not without alarm, a Christianly humane person finds revealed in the traits of our great men, in the figures of the most imposing embodiments of Germany? (505–6)

Mann ([1947] 1997) is thus arguing that good Germany and bad Germany are not alternatives, but mere moments in a dialectic: hence to "proclaim that such a state was forced upon us as something without roots in our nature as a people, something totally alien to us... would, so it seems to me, be more high-minded than conscientious" (505–6). No easy defense that National Socialism perverted the true other Germany. Mann thus argues, is possible.

Despite the subtleties of Mann's arguments, many of his contemporaries nevertheless read him as an advocate of collective guilt. Clearly, highly differentiated arguments did not work well in this context, despite charges by Germans against the occupation authorities that their treatment of Germany rested on insufficiently differentiated understandings. The question was obviously one of the kind of differentiation.
EXILE VERSUS INNER EMIGRATION

These reflections burst the bounds of politically engaged belles lettres in August 1945, within the crucible of U.S. reeducation policy. It was in the Münchner Zeitung (one of the newspapers published by the Psychological Warfare Division of the U.S. Military Government), as part of an ongoing discussion of German responsibility, that Walter von Molo published a letter of August 8, 1945, to Thomas Mann (see especially Glaser 1990:73–77; Mann 1999:23–36). Von Molo, who had been president of the poetry section of the Prussian Academy of the Arts from 1928 to 1930 and who had remained in Germany during the Third Reich, called on Mann to return to Germany. Mann, who according to von Molo represented the best of the other Germany, was to tend to his compatriots like a "good physician," proving to the world that in its "innermost core" the German people really had nothing in common with the "misdeeds and crimes, the horrible atrocities and lies." In the last analysis, so many had "remained reasonable people" despite the "slogans" and "humiliations" of the occupation, these "Germans who yearned and yearn for the return of that which gave us respect in the counsel of nations." "Please come back soon," von Molo wrote, "and give to these crushed souls consolation through humaneness; revive their faith that justice does exist, that it is indeed wrong to split humanity so cruelly, as has been done here in our recent, gruesome past." Mann represented German humanism, and with him on the scene, no one would be able to deny that this was a core German virtue; Mann was living proof of the difference between regime and Volk.

As already clear from Mann's statements at the Library of Congress and the passage from Doctor Faustus (which Mann had worked on since 1943 but which was not published until 1947), von Molo's letter was anathema to Mann's argument that Nazi Germany was not something separate from an "inner core" of German identity but a pathological emanation of it. On less of a theoretical and more of a visceral foundation, however, Mann found distasteful the idea that an exile like himself had anything in common with self-styled defenders of German humanism like von Molo who had remained in Germany. Indeed, Mann had specific occasion to respond to that association because of an article following von Molo's by Frank Thiess, a writer who had been editor of the Berliner Tageblatt from 1915 to 1919. Thiess's article was titled "The Inner Emigration," thereby coining a term that would appear throughout subsequent discussions (see also Paetel 1946). Thiess claimed a unity of exiles and inner emigrants as
representatives of the other Germany, on the basis of which German identity could be rehabilitated, new (old) foundations strengthened, and collective accusations repudiated.

Thiess's argument, however, was not only immodest, it was also supercilious. Responding to the question as to why he had not emigrated, Thiess wrote: "If I were to succeed in surviving this terrible epoch ... I would gain thereby so much for my intellectual and human development that I would emerge richer in knowledge and experience than I could possibly become by observing the German tragedy from seats in the loges or orchestra stalls of foreign countries." Thiess went so far as to argue that it was more difficult—and thus a more worthy achievement—to preserve one's character in Germany than it was "to send messages to the German people from over there, which fell on deaf ears while we knowledgeable ones always felt ourselves many lengths ahead." Comparing leaving Germany during the Third Reich to leaving one's mother in her sickbed, Thiess nevertheless condescended on behalf of the inner emigrants that they "expect no reward for not having left Germany. It was natural for us that we stayed by it." But he warned Mann and other exiles not to wait so long that they lose their linguistic, and by implication, cultural credibility. Thiess and many others clearly saw themselves as generous, allowing those who abandoned Germany in its time of need to return and participate in the recovery: "That is not to say that I want to rebuke anybody who did leave," Thiess offers backhandedly.

Thiess and von Molo, it is important to note, were not without good reason for their defensiveness. In his wartime speeches, Mann had argued that German intellectuals were partly responsible for the Third Reich since they had failed to resist, especially in the form of a "general strike." In particular, Mann had criticized Ernst Jünger, perhaps the leading conservative writer of the Weimar period, who had been an early enthusiast for National Socialism. Mann charged Jünger with more responsibility for his early flirtations with the Nazis than Jünger and others were prepared to accept after they had withdrawn their support; whether or not Jünger and others had eventually withdrawn their support, their nationalistic "saber rattling" was, for Mann, a serious indictment. For Jünger, in contrast, Mann was a traitor for giving speeches while German cities were going up in flames. In a notorious 1973 interview, Jünger stirred controversy when he criticized Mann for abandoning Germany, fully aware that Mann would have been imprisoned had he stayed: for Jünger, that was a cost Mann should have been willing to bear (Neaman 1999:104-7).
Mann struggled with the issue for many weeks, finally responding to von Molo in October 1945. He gave three reasons for not returning. First, as he had already stated during the war, he was disappointed that Hitler’s seizure of power in 1933 had led to a general strike of all intellectuals. Second, Mann argued that one could not simply forget the horrors of what followed. And third, he had become an American citizen, he admired the United States, and his children had become assimilated there. More emphatically, Mann rejected the charge that he and his coexiles had comfortably observed Germany from afar and thus had not suffered for their views. Thiess and others, Mann argued, did not appreciate the psychic trauma of exile. Mann did not explicitly use Thiess’s term *inner emigration* so as not to credit the claim. “I confess,” Mann wrote, “I fear . . . that in spite of everything, understanding between one who experienced the witches’ Sabbath from outside and you who joined in the dance and served Herr Urian [the name of the devil in Goethe’s *Faust*] would be difficult.” Mann went so far as to dismiss all intellectual work produced during the Third Reich—the legitimacy claim of the inner emigrants: “It may be superstition, but in my eyes books that were even printed in Germany between 1933 and 1945 are less than worthless and should not be touched [*nicht gut, in die Hand zu nehmen*]. An odor of blood and shame clings to them: They should all be pulped.” Despite this indignant rejection, Mann ended the letter by assuring von Molo that he had never stopped seeing himself as a German writer and that he remained true to the German language. More important, he had always sympathized with those condemned by an “undifferentiated Anti-Germanism.” The positive benefit, for Mann, of not distinguishing a good, other Germany from the bad was that one could, on that basis, reject judgments of Germany as purely bad; the good and the bad together constituted Germany, preventing collectivist accusations as well as collectivist defenses. Neither absolute innocence nor absolute guilt made for a justified claim.

As could be expected, Mann’s response caused a storm of indignation, and the newspapers were filled in the months that followed with letters and articles addressing Mann’s arguments. Mann himself expressed no interest in modifying his position, though very little of the reaction was even remotely sympathetic to him. One of the only examples of public support for Mann came from Hermann Hesse, who had survived the war in Switzerland. Hesse addressed the question of what a “right-minded decent German should have done in the Hitler years.” He rejected those responses focused only on the latter years, that is, on what one should have done after 1938 or later. Of those who argued that resistance was
dangerous, Hesse asked "why they first discovered Hitler in 1933," rather than since at least the Munich putsch (1923); why, instead of supporting the Weimar Republic, they had voted for Hindenburg and Hitler, who were the ones who made it life-threatening "to be a right-minded decent person" (qtd. in Kleßmann 1982:442–44).

Regarding inner emigration, to those who defended their actions in the Third Reich by saying that they had always had one foot in the concentration camp, Hesse quipped that he only trusted "those who had two feet in the camps, not one foot in the camps, the other in the Party." Most important, Hesse rued the fact that of all the people who were writing to him, none admitted to having been a Nazi and to now seeing things differently. Hesse was writing around the same time that leaders of the Evangelical Church in Germany were decrying denazification because it denied people the right to a change of heart, and in response to an argument articulated most forcefully in a widely read article by Eugen Kogon titled "The Right to a Political Mistake." According to Hesse's evidence, no one was acknowledging a change of heart because no one was admitting to having been a Nazi in the first place. For Hesse, the question of political responsibility extended far back into the Weimar Republic, associating early origins and ultimate ends in a more direct fashion than those who focused only on the war did.

**Collective Guilt**

Whether in the context of the Thomas Mann affair or elsewhere, the central intellectual and cultural issue in postwar Germany seems to have been a cognitive one: What analytical categories were relevant, and who belonged in which ones? What kinds of distinctions were legitimate, which were not? In the Mann affair, the question was whether inner emigrants and exiles together constituted the Other Germany or whether the inner emigrants belonged to the larger culpable mass. Who was guilty? Who was not? What kind(s) of guilt required what kind(s) of responses, and from whom? How widely should the circle of guilt be drawn? These questions proved central to framing how to be German after World War II. These challenges of "boundary work" (Lamont and Fournier 1992), moreover, are constitutive features of reconstruction more generally—that is, moral, in addition to physical and institutional, reconstruction.

The overriding fear of many German commentators, regardless of field, was the possibility of a collective guilt, though what exactly that might mean, we will see, was far from clear. Most German commentators at the time believed that they
were being accused of something unbearable, and this perception has remained
axiomatic in German public memory—that Germany was indiscriminately and
inappropriately charged with collective guilt in the first years of the occupation.
This perception is not entirely unreasonable: the original American occupation
statute and other official documents often referred to Germany and "the Ger-
mans" as a whole; so-called placard actions (in which photographic evidence of
camp atrocities was posted in town squares with captions like "The Atrocities:
Your Fault") and documentary films were intended to awaken not only disgust
(which they did) but also a sense of responsibility and even guilt (which they
usually did not, producing instead more vigorous boundary work: this is the work
of monsters, not of us!); denazification formally placed all German adults under
suspicion until they could be classified; the so-called Morgenthau plan (calling for
the deindustrialization of large parts of Germany) raised the possibility of de-
stroying German political and cultural unity once and for all; Thomas Mann, as
we just saw, called for all intellectual works produced in Germany between 1933
and 1945 to be pulped; and public opinion in the United States and Britain
remained anti-German, with an expectation of punishment.

By the same token, the occupation authorities were by and large careful, after
the first weeks, to avoid vigorous accusations of collective guilt in their official
rhetoric. Newspapers sponsored by the United States were careful not to advocate
collective guilt, even if their pages did provide a central forum for German and
other intellectuals to debate the issues. Extreme ideas (rightly or wrongly) associ-
ated with the Morgenthau plan had not carried the day unmodified. While
rejecting the inner emigrants, Mann also rejected undifferentiated anti-German-
ism. And despite negative opinion polls, Germany's desperate food situation
produced a historically unprecedented and extensive response from abroad in the
form of care packages and other personal aid. Regarding denazification, it was true
that the entire adult population was technically under suspicion; by the same
token, the fact that the overwhelming majority were classified as unburdened
could have been, but was not, interpreted as a rather generous exculpation.

In what sense, then, was Germany truly accused of collective guilt? In some
ways, it does not really matter. There were enough reasons for either interpreta-
tion in the early months. The more interesting questions are whether most
Germans felt accused, why they felt that way, and how they reacted to their
perceptions. Given that evidence for genuine accusations was harder to find after
the first postwar months, however, the German reaction to collective guilt theory
must be understood as a traumatic memory (Assmann and Frevert 1999); many Germans felt that they were victims as much—if not more—than anyone else (Moeller 2001). Indeed, the sense of trauma—an irreparable harm posing challenges to the narrative sense of continuity—is apparent throughout the discourse. As Eugen Kogon, a former Buchenwald inmate and prominent Catholic intellectual, put it in 1946, “While it was still half-dazedly struggling for the first consciousness, a chorus of accusatory voices of repugnance and resentment crashed over the German people. It received nothing else to hear except the thousand-fold cry: You, you alone are at fault! All you Germans are guilty! The heart of the people was confused, in many it hardened” (7). For many official speakers in later decades, the validity of Kogon’s perception was taken for granted.

GUILT AND OPPOSITION

Another of the most important intellectual voices of the time was that of Erich Kästner, a world-renowned children’s book author both before and after the war, whose books for adults were burned and banned during the Third Reich and who spent the war as an inner emigrant, suffering numerous arrests by the Gestapo. As the war came to an end, Kästner assumed one of the most influential positions in the Allied-sponsored discourse as editor of the feuilleton section of the U.S.-sponsored Neue Zeitung. As a victim of the regime, Kästner was particularly struck by any implication of German collective guilt, which he perceived as adding insult to injury. For this reason, Kästner expressed personal relief at the chief prosecutor Robert Jackson’s opening remarks at Nuremberg, in which Jackson stated clearly that the whole German people was not accused, that the very fact of the oppressive apparatus of the Nazi state testified to the non-support of the German people, and that the Germans themselves had accounts to settle with the defendants. According to Kästner (1998), “The ranks laden with grief, distress, and worry breathed a sigh of relief, because a just thinking man took a remaining burden from them, which they perceived had been unjustly loaded on them. Their burden is still heavy enough. But hope, while still small and timid, patters alongside and helps carry it a bit” (501). For Kästner, this was no mere observation of his compatriots. As we will see shortly, it is clear that he took the accusation—whatever it may have been—quite personally.

For both Kogon and Kästner, and for many others, American reeducation policy was based on an arrogant misunderstanding of German experience and culture and, no matter how it was packaged, revealed a deeply held accusatory
attitude. According to Kogon (1946): "To awaken the powers of contemplation in the German world was the task of a far-reaching realpolitik of the Allies. It was included in the program of 'reeducation.' And it stemmed from the thesis of a German collective guilt. The shock of accusation, that they were all complicit [mitverantwortlich], was supposed to bring the Germans to the realization of the true causes of their defeat." Instead, the accusation produced the opposite: "Because of the awful clamor around it and because of its own blindness they [the German people] wanted to hear nothing more of self-examination. The voice of their conscience did not awaken." Finally, "a justified feeling of millions defended itself against the collective accusation, which had a leveling [egalisierend] appearance" (Kogon 1946:10). This sense that Allied policy was responsible for whatever "repression" or "silence" about the Nazi past existed was to become a pillar of German leftist critiques in the 1960s.

Kogon, however, was no apologizer. In rejecting collective guilt both on principle and for its effects, he warned his compatriots not to use this move as an argument against individual guilt, which many were doing with ever more elaborate schemas. For Kogon, a devout Catholic, guilt was both solely individual and the right of God alone to judge. He duly chastised those who defended Germany with the argument that the Allies were no better and thus in no position to accuse Germany: "Many today in Germany say: Where do the Allies get the right to sit in moral judgment of us? Is their history free from violence and atrocities?" Kogon responds that who is doing the accusing has no bearing on the accuracy of the accusation. To illustrate this, however, he chose a telling analogy: "To this moral question the Bible has already answered, insofar as the prophet named the dictator Nebuchadnezzar the 'servant of God' who was sent by him to lead the people of Israel out of error." According to the analogy, Germans are the people of Israel who erred, and the Allies are Nebuchadnezzar. This is an interesting reversal, consistent with the widespread theory that Germany was the new pariah, just like the Jews. Nevertheless, according to Kogon, whoever examined his own conscience in all honesty did not care where the impulse came from; he made a virtue out of necessity: "The others are servants of God to him, whether just or unjust: he allows them the victor's triumph, even when they have gone the same or similar way that has made him guilty, and does not consider himself the toll collector: 'Lord, I thank you that I am not like that Pharisee over there!'" (8–9).

Kogon's argument, religiously inspired, is that everyone, Germans and Allies,
answers to a higher authority: "Most of them [the Germans] sensed that a higher judge would not set them in the same dock with the criminals and activists of the Nazi Party—to say nothing of the countless noble and fearless fighters or at least respectable and effective carriers of the inner opposition against the regime, as of yet so unknown abroad." Again, the implication was that the insult of being charged indiscriminately as a collectivity was responsible for the unwillingness of Germans to face their individual guilt: "Had one allowed the yearning expectation of at least half of the German people finally to be freed from the terror of National Socialism, which they could no longer shake off alone, to rise to the heights of true excitement, then the unveiled concentration camps would have become landmarks of German self-reflection, of a deep horror towards the abyss into which the nation had sunk" (Kogon 1946:11). Whether Kogon's optimism was justified about the preparedness of many Germans to engage in this reflection (if only it were not for the insult of reeducation), however, remains an unredeemable counterfactual.

While Kogon's authority rested at least in part on his unassailable credential as a former concentration camp inmate, Kästner's response was somewhat more defensive. Given the discursive context, it is not surprising that this would be so: as we saw, the inner emigration, much to Kästner's dismay and incomprehension, had been impugned by no less a moral authority than Thomas Mann. In many ways, Kästner's attitude was typical of the inner emigration, if not quite as strident as Frank Thiess's. Explaining why he did not emigrate, for instance, Kästner (1959) wrote, "A writer wants to and has to experience how the people to whom he belongs bears fate. To go abroad just then is only justified through acute mortal danger. Otherwise it is his professional duty to accept every risk if by doing so he can remain an eyewitness and someday provide written testimony" (61–65). And this testimony he does indeed provide. For Kästner (1998), the most remarkable accomplishment of the Nazi regime was the reversal of values and the misuse of character they extorted from the population: "For here, in the area of conscience and character, lay the most terrible, the most frightening malediction of those twelve years. The men in power and their party systematically aspired to the biggest, most devilish spiritual corruption of all time.... The disorientation [Raillösigkeit] of conscience, that was the worst. The lack of escape out of a muddy labyrinth into which the state had driven a people and at whose exits the executioner stood" (515). Clearly, Kästner saw good Germans like himself as victims of the Nazi state, and he drew a sharp line between regime and
Volk. The perversions of National Socialism, moreover, were no special fault of Germans, "who were not better or worse than other people on earth." The warning is clear: "Whoever did not experience it, whoever was not despairingly caught up in this labyrinth throws the first stone at this people [Volk] too easily."

As for Thomas Mann, Kästner (1959) had unbounded respect for Mann the writer; for Mann the man, he had none: "It was foolishness to call him. Instead, one should have asked him for goodness sake to stay over there!" (90–92).

**DIAGNOSIS AND DENIAL**

The full brunt of his scorn, however, Kästner reserved for the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Indeed, Jung has served as a mnemonic imago of collective guilt theory: Jung is considered to have introduced the term collective guilt into the public discourse (this is unlikely to be true) and to have proffered a most vicious version of the accusation (also, as we will see, not exactly true). This imago is partly due to Kästner's response to him.

With the exception of Sigmund Freud, who had died in 1939, Jung was perhaps the most famous psychiatrist in the world, and he enjoyed an exceptional international reputation for his theory of archetypes and of the collective unconscious, to say nothing of having introduced the terms complexes and free association into everyday language. Unfortunately, Jung had also flirted with the Nazis in the first half of the 1930s, seeing an opportunity to establish the predominance of his own views against those of his former friend Freud, who was Jewish. Jung collaborated with the psychotherapist Matthias Goering, the brother of Hermann, in the formation of a psychotherapeutic society free of Jewish influence, as well as in the editing of its international journal. In 1933, Jung also gave an interview on Berlin radio in which he seemed to endorse the Führer principle. Indeed, Jung entertained a fascination for the occult dimensions of National Socialism that was more than purely opportunistic; also, it is likely that he personally was not entirely free of anti-Semitic prejudice. So it is not completely incomprehensible why a diagnosis of German collective guilt by Jung would rankle the sensibility of an inner emigrant like Kästner.

In February of 1945, Jung gave an interview to a Zurich newspaper in which he stated that "the popular sentimental distinction between Nazis and opponents of the regime" was psychologically illegitimate. In the interview, Jung referred to the "general psychic inferiority of the Germans" and to a "national inferiority complex," for which, he argued, they had tried "to compensate by megalomania" (Jung 1989:72). Elsewhere, Jung argued that all Germans were
either actively or passively, consciously or unconsciously, participants in the atrocities, that the collective guilt of the Germans was "for psychologists a fact, and it will be one of the most important tasks of therapy to bring the Germans to recognize this guilt." Jung acknowledged that this might seem unfair, particularly to those Germans who believed themselves to have opposed the regime: "It may be objected that the whole concept of psychological collective guilt is a prejudice and a sweepingly unfair condemnation. Of course it is, but that is precisely what constitutes the irrational nature of collective guilt: it cares nothing for the just and the unjust, it is the dark cloud that rises up from the scene of an un-expiated crime" (Jung 1989:52–53). These statements were reprinted in the Neue Zeitung where, again, Kästner was a top editor.

Kästner’s response to Jung was withering. Whether or not one accepts Kästner’s arguments, one cannot fail to appreciate that this literary master brought to bear here his prodigious talents as a stylist. Throughout, Kästner refers to “the researcher of the soul [Seelenforscher] Prof. Dr. C. G. Jung,” as if Jung’s reputation as an insightful observer were a huge joke, since no one with any insight could possibly have uttered such nonsense as Jung did. For Kästner (1998), however, the issue concerned more than just Jung, who was important not only because of his fame but because his arguments were indicative of an ill wind indeed: “If even one of the most famous judges of the soul in Europe doesn’t understand us, one can count on even less understanding from the overseas victors” (520). But this is unfathomable to Kästner, because less understanding seems to him hardly possible.

The real tragedy for Kästner (1998) is that German opponents of the Nazis, who had “for twelve long years resisted the greatest malice,” had dared “to count on a bit of consolation and help, encouragement and sympathy. . . . They were, God knows, not proud but tired. A drop of understanding would have been an immeasurable gift for them” (520). Instead, they received the reproach of “the researcher of the soul Prof. Dr. C. G. Jung.” For Kästner, “It sounded as if the important man had swallowed the trumpet of final judgment.” The result for those such as himself was devastating:

Then the poor, exhausted opponents of the regime sunk into themselves without a word. Granted, they had not been able to overcome the Genghis Kahn of Inn [Hitler was born in Brannau am Inn] and his bronzed horde. But they did try to withstand the demons of torture and bloodlust, the furies of the gas chambers and crematoria, the vipers of surveillance, blackmail and dispossession. Not every one of them could be so valiant and incorruptible as the researcher of the soul Prof. Dr. C. G. Jung most certainly would have
been if he had been in their position rather than living in Switzerland. . . . So the opponents of the defeated regime silently covered up their pale, tired, starved heads. The “popular sentimental distinction” between them and the Nazis was not permitted. The researcher of the soul Prof. Dr. C. G. Jung was decidedly against it and informed the entire world of his expert opinion.

For Kästner, Germans like himself had a right to expect more than this slap in the face. The charge was even more outrageous because it came from one who himself was not free of guilt. Jung had tried to avoid the charge that such a psychoanalytic diagnosis as his was born of self-righteousness by invoking the New Testament parable “Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will be able to see and take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:10), saying that “we love the criminal and are ardently interested in him because the devil lets us forget the log in our own eye in the examination of the speck in someone else’s” (Jung 1989:52). Kästner (1998) responded: “Too bad that Jung didn’t send his log in a special freight train to Germany. The log could have provided many opponents of the regime and their freezing families with a warm oven for months this winter. But unfortunately Jung does not belong to those who make ‘that sentimental popular distinction’ between opponents and the Nazis. And so he didn’t grant us his log” (523–24). Kästner thus argued that any accusation of collective guilt not only made for one further humiliation good Germans like himself had to suffer but that the charge was incomprehensible. In comparison to the religiously inspired Kogon, however, Kästner seemed less concerned with the individual contemplation of guilt. Kästner’s evaluation of Nuremberg, for this reason, was resultantly more positive: the big fish are the true criminals. Indeed, he was particularly disgusted with those defendants who, having once claimed to be the masters of German destiny, now claimed to have been caught up in a system beyond their control. Without Kogon’s religious devotion, Kästner was less confident of a higher judge, or at least more concerned with the court of public opinion.

One can indeed appreciate Kästner’s feeling that accusations of collective guilt did not fairly account for individuals like himself who had never wanted not only the worst outcomes of National Socialism but also its first, more widely praised stirrings. What is more difficult to appreciate is that Kästner deliberately refused to consider Jung’s motives and that he misrepresented Jung’s argument, in part by responding only to Jung’s interview and not to the more considered essay by Jung reprinted in the Neue Zeitung from a Zurich newspaper. Jung’s argument is in
fact not nearly as outrageous as Kästner made it out, though it is rather shrill in places. The crucial questions are thus why Kästner responded as he did, whether Kästner’s reaction was representative, and why his reading appears to have stuck in popular memory.

Jung (1989) began by making a crucial distinction between a psychological guilt and a moral or criminal one: “The psychological use of the word ‘guilt’ should not be confused with guilt in the legal or moral sense. Psychologically, it connotes the irrational presence of a subjective feeling (or conviction) of guilt, or an objective imputation of, or imputed share in, guilt” (51). Jung argued that “guilt can be restricted to the lawbreaker only from the legal, moral, and intellectual points of view, but as a psychic phenomenon it spreads itself over the whole neighborhood. A house, a family, even a village where a murder has been committed feels the psychological guilt and is made to feel it by the outside world” (51). Indeed, Jung warned that “naturally no reasonable and conscientious person will lightly turn collective guilt into individual guilt by holding the individual responsible without giving him a hearing. He will know enough to distinguish between the individually guilty and the merely collectively guilty” (53, emphasis added).

This last turn of phrase is perhaps the crux of the dispute: for Kästner and many of his compatriots, collective guilt is in many ways a much more serious matter than mere individual guilt; because the latter (individual guilt) clearly does not affect them, only the former (collective guilt) is a real challenge. For Kästner, however, any imputation of a guilt beyond the criminal risked placing him in community with the Nazis when he and others had already paid a tremendous price to maintain the distinction; he thus felt any imputation of collective guilt—whether an accusation that he shared in this objectively or a diagnosis that he must feel guilty for having been present at the scene of the crime—as unacceptable; Kästner denied not only that he was guilty (individually or collectively) but also that he should feel guilty even if he had not done anything punishable. The latter seems to be the implication of Jung’s diagnosis of psychological collective guilt.

One explanation of the gulf separating Kästner and Jung comes from the sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf (1967), who attributes the debate over collective guilt to linguistic and cultural differences, emphasizing the different ways different societies draw the boundaries between public and private:

Collective guilt has a very different, much more “external” connotation for Anglo-Saxon ears schooled in public virtues than it has for Germans. "Guilt" (Schuld) in German always
has an undertone of the irredeemable, incapable of being canceled by metaphysical tormene; Kollektivschuld binds every individual as such for all time. On the other hand, one of the corollaries of collective guilt is the notion of reparations or, more generally, of making up for past failures; what is meant is a collective responsibility that forces those responsible to answer by common effort. That is, in political and economic ways, for the damage they have brought about. Such guilt does not really involve the individual as a person, as a human being—as one would say in the language of private virtues—but in his membership role, thus as a German national. In principle, one can cast off the guilt with the role. (288–89)

Whether it is individual guilt or collective guilt that is "mere" is thus of the essence. While Jung was certainly not the least bit Anglo-Saxon, there may well be something to Dahrendorf's explanation. Again, Kästner felt himself accused personally by collective guilt when Jung claims he did not mean it that way. Just as Jung refused to acknowledge the distinction between Nazis and opponents, Kästner was unable to understand the difference between individual and collective guilt, as Dahrendorf's explanation would predict. Kästner appears to have taken collective guilt as a deeply private accusation.

What, then, can be said of Jung's diagnosis? His assessment of German collective guilt draws on his theory of the shadow, his belief that each individual is in some way exactly what that person has no wish to be: "Everyone harbours his statistical criminal in himself, just as he has his own private madman or saint" (Jung 1989:55). An individual is healthy not because he conquers his shadow, but because he understands and has integrated it; the shadow is most dangerous when it remains unconscious. Indeed, this concept of the shadow helps Jung explain National Socialism. Hitler, Jung argued, symbolized something in every individual: "He was the most prodigious personification of all human inferiorities...He represented the shadow, the inferior part of everybody's personality, in an overwhelming degree, and this was another reason why they fell for him" (6). For Jung, National Socialism as a mass movement was an unconscious compensation for the universal chaos of the twentieth century that was "merely" much worse in Germany: "The Germans wanted order, but they made the fatal mistake of choosing the principle victim of disorder and unchecked greed for their leader" (6).

But the shadow also explains Jung's (1989) diagnosis of collective guilt in postwar Germany: "The wickedness of others becomes our own wickedness because it kindles something evil in our own hearts. The murder has been suffered by everyone, and everyone has committed it: lured by fascination of evil,"
we have all made this collective psychic murder possible; and the closer we were to it and the better we could see it, the greater our guilt” (54). Clearly, then, Jung’s charge of collective guilt is not meant in any conventional sense. His point is to understand the ways in which one can feel badly for an act that one has not in fact committed, both because no one can honestly claim never to have had a bad motive and because one is always stained by the very proximity to its realization: “Since no man lives within his own psychic sphere like a snail in its shell, separated from everybody else, but is connected with his fellow-men by his unconscious humanity, no crime can ever be what it appears to our consciousness to be: an isolated psychic happening” (53). Collective guilt is thus “a state of magical uncleanness,” but it is also “a very real fact” (Jung 1989:53).

In an essay entitled “Die Schuld und die Schulden” (“The Guilt and the Debts”), Kästner (1998) addressed exactly the same issue that informed Jung’s discussion about the feeling of guilt spreading out over a neighborhood: “If I had a brother who had robbed someone, and someone came and said I was guilty, that would be unjust. But if he said that because the thief was my brother I should help the victim get his property or its equivalent back, I would answer without hesitation: ‘That I will do.’ The guilt I must reject. The debts I would recognize” (502). As Dahrendorf implied, for Kästner a debt is payable, but guilt is permanent.

Kästner, we should recall, was indeed a remarkable individual. Unlike many compatriots who looked away when confronted with Nazi atrocities, Kästner was genuinely struck by the horror of it all. Tasked with reviewing Die Todesmühlen (The Mills of Death), for instance (an atrocity film about the camps that the Americans forced Germans to watch in exchange for rations), he was baffled by the defenses of his compatriots. And he grew so upset that he was unable to produce his review: “I just can’t manage writing a coherent article about this unimaginable, infernal insanity…. What happened in the camps is so terrible that one can neither remain silent nor speak about it. We Germans will certainly never forget how many people were killed in these camps.” Nevertheless, consistent with his feeling of victimhood, he added: “And the rest of the world should every now and then remember how many Germans were killed there” (Kästner 1959:64 qtd. in Barnouw 1996:2–3).

One is thus tempted to say that Jung’s diagnosis of a feeling of collective guilt has some merit, redeeming itself not only in the worst dregs of German society but here in its best representative. This is exactly the kind of defense Jung’s theory expects, a “me too” claim of victimhood. Jung’s argument certainly takes
on a patronizing tone, particularly when he claimed he did not wish to excite the hysterics and, as a physician, was merely telling his patient the hard truth. But instead of examining the argument, Kästner dismissed it from the outset with sarcasm. Instead of engaging with the theory—well rooted in Jung's theoretical system—Kästner attempted to delegitimize it via ad hominem critique: an early Nazi sympathizer himself, Jung had no right to cast the first stone. Of course, if one followed Kogon's Christian ethic of introspection, the origins of the accusation should not matter.

**Conclusion**

The agonies of German defeat were many, including death, physical injury, psychic trauma, material devastation, and social dislocation. Pointing this out in no way implies a relativization of burdens or necessarily leads one to conflate perpetrator and victim. German and Jew, in a great postmodern hodgepodge of suffering, though such analyses have often been used for that morally and politically suspect purpose. What have interested me, however, are the moral agonies of German defeat, in part because these are the agonies that were—and continue to be—the most consequential for Germans. Buildings can be rebuilt and new generations grow out of the rubble, but individual and collective identities depend on early reactions to transformative experiences, as well as a continued engagement with them. If collective responsibility means anything, it is just this: what kinds of answer do people give in the face of moral challenges to their sense of self, both individual and collective.

A common myth about postwar Germany is that Germans were silent or "in denial" about the past. The foregoing pages have demonstrated, however, that at least for public intellectuals, parsing trumps outright denial. There were indeed those who offered halfhearted statements about who knew what and when, or who did not. And such statements did serve their purposes. But how Germans confronted atrocities seems more important than how they denied them. In the critical literature of the 1960s, psychoanalytically influenced thinkers drew an opposition—quite similar to Jung's—between denial and "working through." The foregoing account of the Mann and Jung-Kästner debates, however, has been a sociological and historical investigation of what kinds of working through were possible, rather than a philosophical investigation into what might have been desirable. Given the consistencies of the discourse and the cultural patterning of the agonies, as well as that the interventions presented above were emblematic of
the problems faced by the collectivity, it is clear, moreover, that the dimensions of this discourse are social rather than purely psychological.

The way public commentators draw boundaries among perpetrators, victims, and bystanders, between before and after, indeed between good and evil—what many cultural sociologists have recently called boundary work—is thus of vital importance. Understanding the way individuals, whether in public or private, speak on behalf of a morally challenged nation as part of the work of reconstruction is thus to investigate the most important legacy of all: whether memory leads to "next time" or "never again." Following World War I, the memory of destruction stoked new flames through a rhetoric of retrenchment and revenge. Even the deficits of the discourse just outlined, however, point in a different direction.

Notes

1. While more pervasive, claims that "we did not know" were less effective and, because they always begged the question of what people did not know (for surely they knew some things), seemed disingenuous and are thus less interesting analytically.

2. A further interesting portion of this passage is Mann's association between the situation of the Germans and that of the Jews: "What will it be like," his narrator asks, "to belong to a nation whose history bore this gruesome fiasco within it, a nation that has driven itself mad, gone psychologically bankrupt, that admittedly despairs of governing itself and thinks it best that it become a colony of foreign powers, a nation that will have to live in isolated confinement, like the Jews of the Ghetto, because the dreadfully swollen hatred all around it will not permit it to step outside its border—a nation that cannot show its face" (Mann [1947] 1997:505–6). The assertion that Germans were being treated like Jews, or would somehow assume the pariah status of the Jews in the world, was a common trope in the German postwar discourse.

3. It seems strange to lament the slogans and humiliations of the occupation rather than those of the Nazi period.

4. Whether von Molo was referring to the cruel splitting done by the Nazis or currently being done by the Allied occupation authorities through denazification is not entirely clear, through it is more likely the latter. Crucial passages from von Molo's letter, as well as from that of Frank Thiess (discussed below), along with Mann's response, are reprinted in Glaser, The Rubble Years, 73–77, among many other places. Mann's complete response is reprinted in Mann, Fragile Republik, 23–26.


6. "We would also make clear that we have no purpose to incriminate the whole German
people... If the German populace had willingly accepted the Nazi program, no storm troopers would have been needed in the early days of the Party and there would have been no need for concentration camps or the Gestapo... The German, no less than the non-German world, has accounts to settle with these defendants" (qtd. in Taylor 1992: 118).


8. Jung’s attitude toward Jews is a much-debated issue in the secondary literature. Understandably, a loyal following minimizes and even denies that Jung was anti-Semitic.

9. In this context, it is important to point out that Kästner’s disdain was not for a psychoanalytical approach per se. In an essay entitled “Nuremberg and the Historians” (reprinted in Strich 1989:39–44), Kästner remarked positively on the ideas of the psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich. Mitscherlich argued that a more interesting outcome of Nuremberg would have been to encourage the defendants to undergo psychoanalytical inquiry without overt resistance. Doing so would have produced invaluable knowledge, which could then have been used to prevent future such crimes. Kästner entertained this idea because, consistent with his own view, it drew the circle of guilt narrowly.

10. In fact, Jung justifies his essay by pointing out that “the spoken word very quickly gives rise to legends” (Jung 1989:50).