The philosopher Jürgen Habermas has consistently maintained that the intellectual's true home is not the ivory tower of the mandarin, but the public sphere. Indeed, in the trajectory of a critical interrogation and practice that begins in 1953 with a powerful expression of dismay over Heidegger's Nazism, and continues into the present through — among other things — his defense of the human rights of asylum-seekers, one finds him engaged in a philosophical practice that makes its home in the world through political involvement. One moment in this trajectory that perhaps could be singled out as emblematic was his participation in the Historikerstreit (henceforth, Histori-
ans’ Debate), which transpired in 1986, in the-then Federal Republic of Germany. At the center of the debate stood the question: “Is Auschwitz unique?” From 1986 to 1988, the op-ed sections of Germany’s leading newspapers published the answers put forward by leading German historians — Michael Stürmer, Andreas Hillgruber, Hans Ulrich-Weller, Jürgen Kocka, Hans Mommsen, Martin Broszat, Eberhard Jäckel, among others. Figuring prominently as well in the debate was the lone non-historian, Jürgen Habermas. His role in it is gen-

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erally acknowledged to have *made* the Debate. The question, “Is Auschwitz unique?,” was his question, posed in face of what seemed to him a carefully orchestrated campaign to lift the stigma brought upon the German people by Auschwitz. In face of Habermas’ vigorous espousal of the question, it was not long before two competing positions emerged: the first, attacking the uniqueness of Auschwitz (“Auschwitz is not unique; it is high time we de-stigmatized it”), the second, mounting a defense of it (“Auschwitz is unique and cannot be de-stigmatized”). The first position was held by those whom Habermas had characterized as the “neoconservatives.” Habermas’ own position was the second position.

Nearly all accounts of the Historians’ Debate trace its beginnings, not to the essay that, in a sense, formally inaugurated it, but to the so-called “Bitburg controversy” — a reference to the 1985 visit by then-U.S. President Ronald Reagan to the Bitburg cemetery in the Federal Republic of Germany where 47 Waffen SS officers and 2,000 regular German soldiers lay buried. Although the visit (which coincided with the series of events commemorating the 40th anniversary of the ending of the war in Europe) was intended as a gesture of reconciliation with the German people on the part of the Reagan administration, it drew sharp expressions of outrage from the American Jewish community, WWII veterans, and a great many other critics, Jürgen Habermas and Elie Wiesel, among them. Wiesel, who had just been awarded a *Congressional Gold Medal of Achievement* for his writings on the Holocaust even intoned:

> May I, Mr. President ... implore you to do something else, to find another way, another site. That place, Mr. President, is not your place. Your place is with the victims of the SS. The issue here is not politics, but good and evil. And we must never confuse them, for I have seen the SS at work and I have seen their victims. There was ... terror, fear, isolation, torture, gas chambers, flames, flames rising to the heavens.⁴

Wiesel's entreaties fell on deaf ears. On May 8, 1985, Ronald Reagan went ahead and paid an official visit to the Bitburg cemetery, with then-Chancellor Helmut Kohl at his side:

On May 17, 1985, Jürgen Habermas took off from where Wiesel had left off. In an essay entitled, "Entsorgung der Vergangenheit" ("Relieving Concern about the Past") which appeared in the liberal newspaper Die Zeit, Habermas characterized Reagan's visit to Bitburg as a matter of quid pro quo,\(^5\) or if you will, of reciprocation — with the Reagan administration deferring to the German Chancellor's wishes concerning Bitburg in a gesture of appreciation for his government's accommodation of U.S. nuclear weapons in Germany, despite considerable local opposition. By capitulating to the wishes of Chancellor Kohl and the C.D.U., Habermas argued, Reagan had unwittingly played into the hands of German conservatives who were working to relativize the historical importance of Auschwitz in the interests, or so they claimed, of national stability. It was an objective they sought to achieve, according to Habermas, by: (1) representing Germany's Nazi past as the work of a handful of Germans; (2) tracing the connection between initiatives the Nazis had taken when they were in power and the extraordinary economic and political success of present-day Germany; (3) portraying Nazi anti-communism as similar in character to the anti-communism of the Federal Republic of Germany. In "Entsorgung der Vergangenheit," Habermas registered his most strenuous opposition to what he was afraid was an elaborately orchestrated attempt to downplay, even to suppress, Germany's preoccupation with its Nazi past.\(^6\)

\(^{5}\)This overview of the essay was culled from Holub, Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere, pp. 162-164.

\(^{6}\)In a more recent contribution to the debate, Habermas revisits the so-called Bitburg fiasco, and calls attention to three elements of its revisionist bias. "The aura of the military cemetery was to awaken national sentiment and thereby 'historical consciousness'; the juxtaposition of the mass graves in the concentration camp and the SS graves in the cemetery for those buried with honors, Bergen-Belsen in the morning and Bitburg in the afternoon, implicitly contests the uniqueness of the Nazi criminals; and the handshake of the veteran generals in the presence of the American president finally confirmed that we had always been on the right side in the fight against Bolshevism." (NC, 231).
As much as Habermas’ interpretation of the Bitburg event might have appeared to some the outcome of paranoia, the publication, a scant eleven months later, in the April 25, 1986 edition of the Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung (the conservative counterpart of Die Zeit), of Michael Stürmer’s “Geschichte in einem geschichtslosen Land” (“History in a Land Void of History”), provided a powerful vindication of his worst fears. For in that piece, Stürmer announced his support for state intervention in the matter of shaping, for strategic considerations, a national historical consciousness. Stürmer was, at the time, a historian based at the University of Erlangen. Following his teaching stint, he became a speech writer for Chancellor Kohl. He also served as Director of the Ebenhausen Foundation for Science and Policy. In that same year, Andreas Hillgruber published Zweierlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums (Two Sorts of Demise: The Shattering of the German Reich and the End of European Jewry). As its title suggests, the book is comprised of two essays: the first, on the collapse, in the winter of 1944-45, of the German Eastern Front, the second, on the Holocaust. In the first essay, he defended the German army against the accusation that, as a consequence of its obstinate compliance with Hitler’s orders that the so-called “fortress cities” be defended at all costs, the horrors to which the Nazi death camp prisoners were being subjected, came unnecessarily to be exacerbated; in the second essay, he provided a brief, and rather indifferent, account of the end of European Jewry. A highly-regarded historian based in the University of Cologne, Hillgruber, had also written extensively about the strategies deployed by Hitler in the war. Finally, on June 6, 1986, Ernst Nolte’s ”Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will” (“A Past that will not Pass Away”) appeared in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. The point he argued in this essay is that the time had come for Germany to de-stigmatize its Nazi past, so that Germans could turn their attention to other important matters. What is more, as the stereotypical scapegoat for Germany’s problems, it was overexhausted; and besides, the only groups that maintained an interest in the issue were the youth and the Jews. Nolte, a student of Martin Heidegger, had risen to prominence following the publication of his 1963 classic, Three Faces of Fascism, where he treats of the proto-fascism present in French thought, in the Italian movement, and in the German Nazi Party. On the day following the appearance of Nolte’s article, Habermas attended the Römerberg
Colloquium in Frankfurt, where he delivered "Remarks from the Römerberg Colloquium," his rejoinder to the views expressed by the aforementioned writers, arguing the point that the question, "[w]hether and, if so, to what extent historical scholarship can carry out the tasks of ideology planning today" (NC, 209), had to bring focus to bear upon attempts on the part of historical scholarship to paper over not only Hitler's lies concerning the Aryan race, but also the moral catastrophe that was Auschwitz.

On July 2, 1986, the S.P.D. held a hearing on the C.D.U. government's plans to build a German Historical Museum in Berlin. Habermas was invited by its organizers to deliver the keynote address. In his speech, he took to task the so-called gang of four — Andreas Hillgruber, Joachim Fest, Michael Stürmer, and the conservative publisher Wolf Jobst Siedler, for the revisionist positions that it seemed to him they had taken in their essays. His remarks earned for him a mention on page 18 of Time Magazine's September 22, 1986 edition.

The event, an all-day public hearing in Bonn on plans for a new national historical museum, had been called by the opposition Social Democratic Party and seemed to have all the potential for controversy of a Rotary meeting. But that was before the appearance of Frankfurt University Sociologist Jürgen Habermas, best

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The S.P.D. (Social Democratic Party) was the major opposition party at the time in Bonn. It represented the interest of the working class and the labor movement. Formerly known as the German Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), it was founded on April 11, 1917 and re-founded in 1945. The C.D.U. (Christian Democratic Union) is the party of former Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Established by Konrad Adenauer and Jakob Kaiser in December 1945, and popularly perceived as a Catholic-Protestant alliance, it counted on the middle class for support. At the height of its power, it shared a coalition with the C.S.U.-F.D.P. The C.S.U. (Christian Social Union) was established in October, 1945, and the F.D.P. (Free Democratic Party) in December, 1948. The C.S.U. counts as its supporters farmers, merchants, tradesmen and small industrialists. The F.D.P. platform, on the other hand, places much importance on individual initiative and the protection of private property. It is possible to characterize the position of the S.D.P. within the political spectrum as left-of-center (not unlike the Green Party, founded in July, 1978; and the position of the C.D.U./C.S.U.-F.D.P. as right-of-center For more on this, see Holger H. Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil? Modern Germany: 1648-Present* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath, 1994). Habermas has made no secret of his own political sympathies: "I vote for the S.P.D., and have always done so" (AS, 210).
known as the intellectual mentor of the student revolts that swept through West German universities in the late 1960s. Waving a 110-page volume before the audience, Habermas angrily declared, ‘This book is a scandal’ ... The offending work turned out to be a book based on two lectures of Cologne University historian Andreas Hillgruber.  

Despite the polemics engaged in by Habermas at both public events, it was not until the publication on July 11, 1986, in Die Zeit, of his essay taking on Stürmer, Hillgruber and Nolte, “Eine Art Schadensabwicklung” (“Apologetic Tendencies”), that the Historians’ Debate was underway. The historian, Jürgen Kocka, reports on what transpired next:

A large number of articles in widely-read national newspapers appeared, written primarily by historians. The media, radio and television covered the debate to a certain extent — a debate which also included controversies over some concurrent government plans such as the building of two historical museums, one in Bonn covering the history of the Federal Republic, and one in Berlin depicting German history as a whole. The debate also touched on other projects such as the thus far futile attempt to erect a national monument in Bonn to commemorate those who died in World War II and under the Nazi dictatorship ... The debate continues, although with few new arguments. It has moved away from the weekly and daily newspapers to lecture series and panel discussions organized by university departments, student groups, church-related academies, and other such fora. Recently some professional journals have started to reflect on the debate. For those who have started to participate and want it to continue, it has become something of an industry. There are events in the Federal Republic and abroad on the subject, and book publications have already occurred with more to follow.  

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Concerning the critical importance of this turn of events, Harvard historian Peter Baldwin has this to add:

[A]t its peak, even the president of the Federal Republic, Richard von Weizzäcker, intervened with a major speech, delivered at the convention of the German Historical Association in 1988. There he attempted to bring the controversy to an end by insisting that the Nazi past could and would not be normalized out of existence.\(^{10}\)

Four years previous to the Historians’ Debate, Habermas gave the following characterization of neoconservatives both in the United States and in the Federal Republic of Germany:

[They are] a matter of loose groupings of intellectuals with common orientations. The neoconservatives in both countries share a collection of critical positions and conceptions that are the result of similar disappointments. From the middle of the 1960s, these social scientists and philosophers found themselves confronted with economic, political and intellectual developments that did not conform to their primarily affirmative image of Western industrial societies. In this sense, neoconservatism emerges from an attempt to deal with a disappointment. (NC, 23)

It was not that Habermas thought the neoconservatives on both sides of the Atlantic to be necessarily cut from the same piece of cloth. In Habermas’ view, what set the Americans apart from the Germans was their “anti-communism understood in terms of the concept of totalitarianism, and [their] anti-populism, based on the theory of democratic rule by elites.” (NC, 24). German neoconservatives, on the other hand, could trace their roots back to a general disapproval of “progress” (civilization, capitalism, and Americanism), and a practice of cultural critique that had been harnessed to the objective of preserving tradition and securing a unique national and cultural identity. Subsequent to 1945, that position metamorphosed into an “affirmative stance toward social modernity,” that went in tandem with a “devaluation of cultural modernity.” Both moments, writes Habermas, “are typical of the evaluative schema implicit in all neoconservative diagnoses of the contemporary situation” (NC, 28). According to this diagnosis, at the same time

\(^{10}\)Reworking the Past, p. 6.
that the traditional and moral bases of modern society are protected and deepened by the administrative and economic systems of modern society, they are undermined by modernist culture. So even as the prospects opened up by capitalist modernization are given a boost by social modernity’s “religiously anchored willingness to achieve and obey on which an efficient economy and a rational state administration are functionally dependent” (NC, 28), they stand in danger of being severely compromised by dispositions and paradigms developed in people by cultural modernity, hostile to capitalist modernization. In Habermas’ view, under the impact of this diagnosis, neoconservatives, had worked themselves into a corner, insofar as issues of “ungovernability, decline in credibility and loss of legitimacy” (NC, 25-26) predominate over issues dealing with the causal connections between the manner in which the economy and state function and the problems of society. Around the time of the betowal on him of the Theodor W. Adorno Prize (September, 1980), he wrote:

Neoconservatism shifts onto cultural modernism the uncomfortable burdens of a more or less successful capitalist modernization of the economy and society. The neoconservative doctrine blurs the relationship between the welcomed process of societal modernization on the one hand, and the lamented cultural development on the other. The neoconservative does not uncover the economic and social causes for the altered attitudes towards work, consumption, achievement and leisure. Consequently, he attributes all of the following — hedonism, the lack of social identification, the lack of obedience, narcissism, the withdrawal from status and achievement competition — to the domain of ‘culture.’

The neoconservatives thus welcome progress and development in modern science, at the same time that they disapprove of cultural modernity. The esteem in which they hold modern science is in direct proportion to their faith in its ability to advance technological progress and capitalist expansion. Cultural modernity, in their view, consists in the effort to stymy or reverse these this progress and this expansion. They throw their support, as such, behind any political initiative promising

to neutralize the explosive potential of cultural modernity. It is important to note that Habermas’ understanding and appreciation of cultural modernity and social modernity is much broader than that of the neoconservatives. Indeed, Habermas regards cultural modernity and social modernity analogously to Max Weber’s “cultural rationalization” and “the modernization of society.” By cultural modernity Habermas means

the cultural rationalization from which the structures of consciousness typical of modern societies emerge embraces cognitive, aesthetic-expressive, and moral- evaluative elements ... With science and technology, with autonomous art and the values of expressive self-presentation, with universal legal and moral representations, there emerges a differentiation of three value spheres, each of which follows its own logic.  

By social modernity, on the other hand, Habermas means

the modernization of society as the differentiation of the capitalist economy and the modern state. They complement one another in their functions so as to mutually stabilize one another. The organization nucleus of the capitalist economy is the capitalist enterprise ... The organizational nucleus of the state is the rational public institution. (TCA 1, 158)

Habermas credits Joachim Ritter, Ernst Forsthoft, and Arnold Gehlen with articulating the neoconservative doctrine concerning the importance of maintaining a powerful sovereign state apparatus that could serve as a check against (or, if you will, provide compensation for) the potentially disastrous consequences, for both the status quo and the industrial and economic gains engendered by social modernity, of cultural modernity’s project of unconventional and anti-traditional innovation. The French Revolution, argues Ritter, laid the groundwork for the establishment of a society that is “the locus of both emancipation and estrangement” (NC, 33) — of emancipation, to the extent that as a consequence of its abolition of “the historically transmitted life order,”

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the individual has come into his own and is able to actualize his own freedom, but of estrangement, to the extent that the price exacted from the individual for subjective autonomy is his reduction to the status of a plaything of production and consumption. The modern individual produces and consumes, not as a matter of volition, but as a matter of necessity. He is no different from the structure of his needs. Unless something is done to arrest his deepening estrangement from himself, modern economic man stands to gain nothing from the subjective freedom ushered in by modernity. Tradition, in Ritter’s view, is the only thing capable of compensating for the abstraction endemic to modern economic society. Tradition, as such, must be strengthened, and this, through historicism. Forsthoff, for his part, proposes a compensation scheme centered on a powerful endorsement of the sovereign state. Steps must be taken to ensure that the state is “immune to arguments presented in the name of social interest. The guardian of the general welfare must have the political power to decide rather than to argue” (NC, 34). As the bearer, not of utility, truth, beauty, and morality (the cultural), but of the political (that is, the purely bureaucratic and administrative), the state, Forsthoff argues, must be left alone to do what it is designed to do, namely, administer society. Gehlen, for his part, asserts that our fragile human nature continues to require the regulatory force of such sacred institutions as the church, the military, and the state. Social modernity, unfortunately, has succeeded in divesting these

13David Reisman’s reflections on the culture of consumption hinges on this motif. As Habermas notes, “David Reisman considers it to be practically the essence of the means of mass entertainment that it raises consumers, beginning in childhood and constantly accompanying the grown-ups: ‘Today the future occupation of all mouse pets is to be skilled consumers.’ The culture of harmony infused into the masses per se invites its public to an exchange of opinion about articles of consumption and subjects it to the soft compulsion of constant consumption training” (Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), p. 192 [hereafter cited as STPS]).

14From the perspective of historicism, “a practice is said to be comprehensible, and susceptible to judgment, only from the standpoint in the life-context and traditions in which it is embedded. That is plausible for as long as we can be confident that practices prove their worth in being passed on from one generation to the next, thereby acquiring the strength of tradition. This conviction testifies to a kind of primal anthropological trust.” (AS, 238).
institutions of their archaic and quasi-natural character, creating, in the process, a void that has come to be filled by "the psychic energies of an inflated inwardness, the subjectivity of experience and the reflexivity of self-enjoyment" (NC, 34). These psychic energies, in the long run, overwhelm the individual, "rob[bing] him of automatic mechanisms for regulating his actions, abandon[ing] him without protection to desultory motivations, strain[ing] him with excessive demands for decisions, and render[ing] him increasingly unfree (NC, 34).

In the 1960s, a challenge to the neoconservative position came in the form of "a militant social criticism, an Enlightenment tradition, an anti-authoritarian movement, a new avant-garde movement in the visual arts and an aesthetically inspired counterculture" (NC, 35), exemplified by the student movement. Habermas writes:

The most active groups among the student body are no longer pursuing university reform. Instead, they desire the immediate overthrow of social structures. Radical students have become the backbone of an extra-parliamentary opposition that seeks new forms of organization in clubs and informal centers and a social basis wider than the university. Its first goal is the transformation of the precarious four-power status of Berlin and the establishment of an open city ... Since the beginning of 1966 the intra-university conflict has been enmeshed with a conflict between the politicized sections of the student body and the population and Senate of the city of Berlin. In particular, Vietnam protests have made this conflict break out into the open ... All organs of the government, the police, the administration of justice, house of representatives, and the mayor himself distinguished and compromised themselves by foolish prejudice and repression: illegal prohibitions of demonstrations, dubious confiscations and problematic arrests, indefensible court proceedings, open police terror, and a Mayor who even thanked the police after Ohnesorg was shot. A week later more than twelve thousand Berlin students marched behind the coffin of their fellow student.15

Indeed, the challenge posed to the \textit{status quo} by the student movement of the 60's, by the "flower people," by the "hippies," by the "communes," by the "activists," was so formidable that it seemed only a matter of time before everything would be overturned completely. To prevent this from happening, the neoconservatives proposed the strategy of portraying the carriers and purveyors of cultural modernity as domestic enemies intent upon disrupting progress and subverting the \textit{status quo}.

They had only to name the agents responsible for the disagreeable phenomena that seemed to shake the foundations of the compromise, those who had unleashed a cultural revolution. This turn to the practical and the polemical explains why the German neoconservatives could tread a beaten path and were not compelled to offer much that was new. (NC, 36)

In the 1970s the neoconservative position varied little from its previous incarnation: support technical progress and capitalist growth, reject whatever poses a threat to the \textit{status quo}; defend tradition against cultural innovation. Habermas writes:

The modern world is focused on technical progress and capitalist growth; any social dynamic ultimately based on private investment is modern and desirable; the motivational resources that nourish this dynamic are also in need of protection. Danger, in contrast, lies in cultural transformations, motivational and attitudinal changes, and shifts in patterns of values and identities, which are attributed, through a kind of intellectual short circuit, to the entry of cultural innovations into the lifeworld. For this reason the legacy of tradition should be preserved in static form as far as possible. (NC, 36)

In the 1980s, neoconservative doctrine took the form of the critique of intellectuals, the allegation concerning cultural modernity's condition of exhaustion, a renewed and unstinting advocacy of tradition. Concerning the first — what Habermas characterizes as the endeavor to "personalize and moralize, i.e., blame on left-wing intellectuals [intent upon] carrying on a cultural revolution in order to ensure their own authority, the 'priestly rule of a new class,'" whatever "[does] not correspond to the picture outlined by Ritter, Forsthoff, or Gehlen of a
compensatorily pacified modernity" (NC, 36) — there were three "therapeutic" suggestions the neoconservatives wished to make. First: deploy immemorial clichés in casting intellectuals in a negative light: they are "abstract, abstruse, agitator, and arrogant to critical, cynical, decadent, formalist, free-floating, lacking in substance, mechanistic, opportunistic, racially foreign, radical and revolutionary" (NC, 37). Second: portray intellectuals as the representatives of an intellectual theocracy, as members of "an exploitative class of mediators of meaning" produced and supported by the science, scholarship, education systems that were the legacy of post-industrial society. Third: make it appear that intellectuals are responsible for the crisis in the educational system, that, for example, their left-leaning social critique is intrinsically related to left-wing terrorism. An example of this is the so-called German Autumn (a reference to the string of terrorist acts that befell Germany in the Fall of 1977).¹⁶

[A] renewed accusation [was made] by leading figures on the German right that critical intellectuals undermined the value-system of the Federal Republic and this fostered attitudes conducive to terrorism. And thus in the fall of 1977, the C.D.U.'s Alfred Dregger, appearing on national television, accused the Frankfurt School of direct responsibility for the recent wave of German terrorism. (NC, xxx)

Habermas had the critique of intellectuals in mind when he noted, in 1979, that

when the vibrations in a few societal sectors, particularly in the sphere of cultural reproduction, reach cacophonous levels, however, they are regularly traced back to the subjectively distorted perception of leftist intellectuals who, owing to their supposedly towering influence, can turn their own crises of consciousness inside out and contaminate the general population with their dis-

¹⁶These events were the Red Army Faction's abduction of Hans-Martin Schleyer, head of the German Employers' Association; the RAF terrorist hijacking of a Lufthansa jet to Somalia; the German commandos' bungled rescue attempt which led to the execution of Schleyer; and the still unexplained deaths of Ulrike Meinhof and Andreas Baader (leaders of the RAF) while they were in the custody of the police. For more on this, see, Richard Wolin, (NC, xxx).
eased imaginations ... What is new is rather the implicitly inculcated definition of normality, according to which crises of consciousness are not crises, disturbances in socialization are not disturbances, privatized conflicts are not conflicts, susceptibilities to political culture are not susceptibilities, the erosions of value-orientations and forms of life are not erosions, constitutional violations are not constitutional violations — but instead merely leftist fantasies that have been blown out of proportion by the media."17

In the Historians’ Debate, this strategy was pursued by the neoconservatives through their efforts both to discredit Habermas as a scholar and to portray him as an enemy of the state (the west). Michael Stürmer intones:

We are all delighted that after so many years of profound doubt, Professor Habermas has finally discovered that the West has something positive to offer. At the same time however, Professor Habermas’ conversion to the West has not prevented him from hurling a terrible accusation at the gang of four (i.e., Andreas Hillgruber, Joachim Fest, Michael Stürmer and Wolf Jobst Siedler): theirs is a NATO-philosophy. Leaving aside the values embraced by the West, the strategic basis of the West happens to be the NATO alliance, whether the Professor likes it or not. I doubt that Western values would survive without this economic and strategic foundation. But it seems that you can have it both ways after all, that you can be for and against the West, whichever is more convenient. The squaring of the circle has finally been achieved by Jürgen Habermas, and I congratulate the Western world on this achievement.”18

Additionally, the neoconservatives attempted to discredit Habermas as someone who in the context of the present discussion was completely out of his intellectual depths. Robert C. Holub provides a sampling of such remarks:


- Hildebrand accuses him of not knowing 'the new sources, the new knowledge and the new questions that constitute the progress of scholarship ... (He) finds that one of the central problems of the entire debate is 'Habermas' dubious relationship to scholarship and research.'

- Geiss who devoted an entire book to what he calls the 'Habermas Controversy,' challenges his competence to make judgments in the field of history ... (He) devotes an entire section of his book and his entire appendix to an examination of how Habermas misuses the quotations of the historians he cites.

- Hillgruber, whose reaction was understandably the most vituperative in the group of rather caustic responses, disqualifies his opponent as a 'non-historian' ... (He) states flatly that he 'works with falsified quotations and manipulations of quotations.'

- Stürmer calls Habermas's article a combination of 'slipshod research and jumbled quotations.'

- Fest points to his 'miserable scholarly method' in operating with fragmented citations; Habermas 'confronts things with an insensitivity which has been without precedent for a long time.'

Fully cognizant of the situation, Habermas says:

In the beginning my opponents tried to evade a debate on substance by attempting to discredit me as a scholar ... To acquaint readers of Die Zeit with a diversionary technique one would expect more of brawling politicians than of scholars and publicists at their desks, I will give only one example. Joachim Fest asserts that on the main issue I imputed a completely false thesis to Nolte; Nolte, he says, 'does not [deny] the uniqueness of the Nazi extermination operations.' Nolte had in fact written that the mass crimes of the Nazis were far more irrational than their Soviet-Russian prototypes. (NC, 239)

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19Richard C. Holub, Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere, 177-178. Habermas, of course, was not without his defenders. Speaking his mind, Rainer Erd declares: "[T]hey are even making you [Habermas] jointly responsible for acts of political terrorism. To be made responsible, first by the Left and now by the conservatives, for things with which you really have nothing to do — is that the price an intellectual who is critical and politically committed has to pay? Or is it specific to the political culture of the Federal Republic that intellectual opponents are called political enemies regardless of the situation?" (NC, 186)
Quite the reverse of trading *ad hominens* with the neoconservatives, Habermas proceeded to subject their position to an "ideology critique," that is, an analytical practice, "Marxist" in inspiration, that would lay bare their "false consciousness," that is, their "ideologically imprisoned consciousness," their conflation/confusion — as a consequence of the operations upon them of a social awareness mystified by ideology and ignorant of its own class basis" — of the legitimate and universal with the particular, ideological, and, as such, non-universal. "Ideology critique," then, as practised by Habermas, is the effort to display the nexus between knowledge and human interests.\(^{22}\)


\(^{22}\)Another example of the deployment by Habermas, in his own work, of ideology critique, can be found in his remarks on Heidegger.

[A] productive relation to his (Martin Heidegger's) thinking can be gained only when one engages those arguments and takes them out to their ideological context. The farther the argumentative substance sinks into the unchallengable morass of ideology, the greater is the demand on the critical force of an alert and perceptive appropriation. (NC, 166)

In an effort to call attention, as far back as 1954, to the fact that Heidegger’s disturbing ideological endorsement of the Nazi movement had not ceased to inform his philosophy, he notes that Heidegger had approved the unqualified inclusion in the 1953 publication of his 1935 lectures, the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, of a sentence that appeared in the earlier set of lectures equating "inner truth and greatness" with "the encounter of planetarially determined technology and modern man" (Jürgen Habermas, "Martin Heidegger: On the Publication of Lectures from the Year 1935," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Fall, 1977), p. 157 [hereafter cited as MH]). For Habermas, that only went to show Heidegger’s views concerning both the Nazis, and the 1935 context of the lectures — Heidegger’s 1933 National Socialist reading of *Being and Time* — had not changed. Concerning that context, Habermas writes:

If he had hitherto used *Dasein* in an unmistakable way for the existentially isolated individual on his course toward death, now he substitutes for this ‘in-each-case mine’ *Dasein* the collective *Dasein* of a fatefully existing and ‘in-each-case-our’ people (*Volk*). All the existential categories stay the same and yet with one stroke they change their very meaning. (J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Fred Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 1987), p. 157 [Hereafter cited as PDM])
The concept of knowledge-constitutive human interests already conjoins the two elements whose relation still has to be explained: knowledge and interest. From everyday experience we know that ideas serve often enough to furnish our actions with justifying motives in place of the real ones. What is called rationalization at this level is called ideology at the level of collective action. In both cases the manifest content of statements is falsified by consciousness' unreflected tie to interests, despite its illusion of autonomy. The discipline of trained thought thus correctly aims at excluding such interests. (KHI, 311)

This Nazi-oriented reading of Being and Time, is remiscent, of course, of the pro-Nazi election manifesto authored by Heidegger on 10 November 1933:

The German people is called by the Führer to an election; but the Führer asks nothing of the people. Rather he gives them the most direct possibility of the highest free choice: whether the entire people wills its own Dasein or not ... This election simply cannot be compared to previous elections. Its unique quality is the simple greatness of the decision to be made ... This final decision reaches out to the uttermost boundaries of the Dasein of our people ... The election choice that the German people now makes it — apart from its outcome — already the occurrence of and the strongest testimony to the new German reality of the National Socialist State. Our will to the self-responsibility of the people wills that each people find the greatness and truth of its determination ... The Führer has awakened this will in the whole people and has fused it into a single decision. (PDM, 157)

The point Heidegger wishes to make concerns, of course, the present forgetfulness of Being. Nations today have a relationship to objects through technology, but they have come to forget Being. They acquiesce before its domination of the world. By means of their technology and their industrialized mass societies, the Soviet Union and the United States hold the prospect of destroying the world as we know it. Europe stands as the lone rampart against the prospect of such world-wide destruction, and within Europe, the German people (the metaphysical people), have a special responsibility, by genuinely thinking being, to bring about "the turning of the planetary fate" (NC, 154). World-historical greatness will be their lot, provided their traditions are reappropriated by them with creativity.

Let us understand this correctly: Heidegger sees in the political situation of 1935, in the formation of the double front against East and West, the reflex of a being-historical situation which has been in preparation for over two thousand years and which now entrusts to the German people a world historical mission. (MH, 158)

Habermas further notes that the philosophical position expressed in these lectures, and addressed to students in 1935, was entirely consistent with Nazi Germany's determination to implement the Final Solution and advance Hitler's grand design for the Aryan race. This prompts two questions: Is fascism essentially grounded in German tradition? What is Heidegger's motivation behind the publication of his lectures in 1953, without any attempt to clarify his dubious political standpoint?
The goal, then, of ideology critique is to bring a person to acknowledge the gap between what he thinks himself to be and what he really is.

[T]he ego of the patient recognizes itself in its other, represented by its illness, as in its own alienated self and identifies with it. As in Hegel’s dialectic of the moral life, the criminal recognizes in his victim his own annihilated essence; in this self-reflection the abstractly divorced parties recognize the destroyed moral totality as their common basis and thereby return to it. (KHI, 236)

To be sure, this is easier said than done. For in the same way that it is only through the application of a considerable amount of analytic work that the ideological underpinnings of a political apparatus come to be recognized, so also it is with the alienated self. Habermas uses the analogy of self-reflection in psychoanalysis:

The intellectual work is shared by physician and patient in the following way. The former reconstructs what has been forgotten from the faulty texts of the latter, from his dreams, associations, and repetitions while the latter, animated by the constructions suggested by the physician as hypotheses, remembers .... Only the patient’s recollection decides the accuracy of the construction. If it applies, then it must also ‘restore’ to the patient a portion of lost life history: that is it must be able to elicit a self-reflection. (KHI, 230)\textsuperscript{23}

Can the planned murder of millions of people, of which we all know today, be made being-historically comprehensible as a madness dictated by fate? Is it not the factual crime of those of sound mind who committed it — and the bad conscience of an entire people? Must we not risk eight years later the confrontation with that which was, which we were? Is it not the prime task of thoughtful persons to clarify the responsible acts of the past and to keep awake the knowledge as to why they happened? Instead, the great majority of the population carries out a continual rehabilitation with those in responsible positions, then and now, in the lead. Instead, Heidegger meanwhile publishes words (already) eighteen years old on the ‘greatness and inner truth of national socialism,’ words which have grown too old and which certainly do not belong to those whose comprehensibility is contemporary. It appears to be time to think with Heidegger against Heidegger.” (MH, 163–164)

\textsuperscript{23}Rainier A. Ibaa builds on the Habermasian and Marxian origins of ideology critique when he defines ideology critique as “a technique of unmasking hidden motives that propel human beings to participate in the historical process” (Rainier A.
In all fairness to the neoconservative historians who figured in the debate (Michael Stürmer, Ernst Nolte, Andreas Hillgruber), it must be stated that none of them denies the Holocaust really happened. More importantly, none of them is accused of harboring either pro-Hitler/pro-Nazi, or anti-Semitic sentiments. They are criticized, however, for making the prospect of a reinvigorated Germany depend on the construction of new meanings for Auschwitz that would downplay the role of any collective sense of guilt. For Stürmer, the development of new historical perspectives on Germany’s role in the Second World War is a matter of legitimate state-intervention. He writes: “[I]n a land without history whoever supplies memory, shapes concepts, and interprets the past, will win the future.”

By arguing the point that the Allied Powers moved against Germany, not for the sake of Hitler’s victims, but in order to bring about the destruction of Germany, and with that, “the dissolution of the European centre,” Hillgruber, for his part, thinks he can add, a “‘profound’ dimension to the Jewish and German catastrophe.”

Nolte, on the other hand, paints a picture of Auschwitz that by

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Ibana, Philosophical Approaches to Social Reality: Selected Essays on Social Philosophy (Quezon City: Sublime Paralytic Publications, 1994), p. 27. To validate the explanatory power of this methodology, Ibana inquires into the hidden agenda of the French Revolution. His analysis proceeds in three stages. First, he explicates the ideals that fired the revolution. Second, he exposes the particularist bias of these ideals, demonstrating that they were merely excuses to mask the interests of the bourgeoisie. Third, he amplifies the critique undertaken in the second stage by examining it from the optic of a will to power. Ibana writes:

The first step in ideological critique is to identify the explicit ideals of the participants in the historical process. Initially, such ideals must be interpreted sympathetically in order to find their universal significance. But the social analyst must not become naive with respect to political platforms. He or she must be willing to employ the second and crucial step in ideological critique — the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ — which aims to expose the hidden motives of historical agents ... hidden motives can be derived from the historical actor’s desire to propagate, their need for money, and their will to power ... the third step in ideology critic is the unmasking of the critics themselves. The critic of ideologies cannot be exempted from his or her own suspicions. The critic must also attempt to employ the method of suspicion on himself or herself. (Ibid., pp. 34-35).

24 The Unmasterable Past, p. 44.
25 “Normalizing the Holocaust?,” p. 63.
downplaying the "originality" of its horror (prescinding from its deployment of "gassing" as a method of execution, it was no different from earlier, and sometimes, far worse, atrocities), will make it possible for the Germans to finally move beyond it, as opposed to having it continue to hang over their present, "a vision of horror and an executioner's sword." 26

Habermas' rejoinder to Stürmer is that the practice of compensating a people for its collective loss of a sense of identity in and through the contrivance, by the state, of a new historical consciousness and new identity-creating meanings, does a profound disservice to history.

It is .... a misunderstanding of this hermeneutic insight to proceed, as the revisionists are currently doing, on the assumption that one can turn the spotlights of arbitrarily reconstructed past histories on the present and from the options illuminated select a particularly appropriate picture of history. Rather, the intensified methodological awareness signals the end of all images of history that are closed or ordained by government historians. (NC, 226)

He objects to Hillgruber's portrayal of the Allied Forces' invasion of Germany in World War II as the triumph of the Allied Forces' objective of bringing about Germany's destruction (not as their response to the criminal actions of Nazi Germany), insofar as it has the effect of reducing Hitler's war down to the size of an instance of national assertion. As for Nolte, Habermas maintains that his reduction of Auschwitz to "a technical innovation [that is] explained [away by] the 'Asiatic' (i.e., Bolshevist) threat of an enemy who is still at our doors" (NC, 224), not only relativizes Auschwitz, but also reinforces the spurious position "we have always been decidedly anti-communist; it is just that, at that time of the war, Hitler happened to be our Führer; today, thankfully, we are in the right company."

Anyone who reads Ernst Nolte's circumspect article in the last issue of Die Zeit and has not followed the emotional discussion in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung must get the impression that this is a debate about historical details. In reality, what is involved is the translation into politics of the revisionism appearing in con-

26 Ibid., p. 65.
temporary historiography, a translation that is impatiently urged on by the [conservative] government of the 'ideological shift.'

\[27\]
(NC, 229)

Habermas characterizes the connection between the Bitburg Fiasco and the aforementioned historians’ revisionist work in terms of the construction of a historical paradigm that will relativize and destigmatize Auschwitz to such an extent as to finally allow Germany to set aside its unmastered past and assume its rightful place in the Western World. Habermas writes:

[A] Federal Republic of Germany that is solidly anchored in the Atlantic community of values is to regain its national self-confidence through identification with an acceptable past, without going astray to become a neutral nation state. Of course, such a seizure of national history for purposes of promoting identification requires the support of two screening operations. First of all, the memory of the negatively charged portions of recent history, which would inhibit identification, has to be leveled; then, under the banner of freedom or totalitarianism, the ever virulent fear of Bolshevism has to be kept alive through an appropriate stereotype of the enemy. (NC, 214-215)

In Bitburg, this “took the form of a handshake.” In the Historians’ Debate, it took the form of “well-meaning” journalistic historiography. In calling their bluff, Habermas is able to show that the view of history advocated by the revisionists are advocating is one that is no different from that of the C.D.U. government. C.D.U. party chairman Alfred Dregger’s explicit advocacy of the revisionist agenda serves to lend even greater credence to Habermas’s exposé.

Lack of history and lack of regard for our own nation are cause for concern. Without an elementary patriotism, which other

\[27\]The “ideological shift” that Habermas refers to here pertains to the C.D.U./C.S.U.-F.D.P. coalition of Helmut Kohl and Hans-Dietrich Genscher which came to power on October 1, 1982 effectively ending the political dominance of the SPD in the German political arena. In October, 1998 the SPD returned to the political centerstage when Kohl was defeated by the SPD’s Gerhard Schroeder.
peoples take for granted, our people will not be able to survive. Anyone who misuses the so-called ‘mastering of the past’ which was necessary, to be sure, to make our people incapable of having a future will meet with opposition from us. (NC, 230-231)

Dregger’s stand is reinforced further by the C.S.U.’s Franz Joseph Strauss. The C.S.U., it will be recalled, is the coalition partner of the C.D.U. government.

It is now high time for us to step out of the shadow of the Third Reich and the aura of Hitler and become a normal nation again ... Without a national identity in which Germans can find their relationship to themselves and their past, but also to their future, the German people cannot fulfill their mission in the world ... And therefore, ladies and gentlemen, we need — and I do not say this presumptuously — to hold our heads higher here. (NC, 246-247)

In this sense, the neoconservative historians’ relativization project is both instrumental and strategic. It is instrumental because it advances the political designs of the C.D.U. government to further legitimate the status quo and reinforce its pro-NATO stance. It is strategic because it impacts upon the collective and individual political decisions of Germans in their daily life in such a way as to draw them into a condition of subservience to the ideological project spelled out by the conservative government of Germany. We need not belabor the nexus between Schmitt’s political reflections and the neoconservative position as manifest in the Historians’ Debate.28 The Schmitt of the Nazi era and the neoconservatives of the eighties are fired by the same vision: the centrality of the state. Against this, Habermas states:

28Habermas understood that what stood at the center of the neoconservative critique of intellectuals was a conception of the political which the neoconservatives had culled from Carl Schmitt’s conception of the political as something that manifests itself in the collectively organized self-assertion of a politically existing people against external and internal enemies ... the political ‘extreme case’ is characterized in terms of the phenomenon of defining one’s own identity in the struggle against the alieness of an enemy who threatens one’s very existence, and thus in terms of the situation of war between peoples or civil war. (NC, 129).

The political for Schmitt is a matter, ultimately, not of the management of power by the state for the sake of the greater majority, but of the war the state wages against the alien and foreign, and inimical, to its existence. The state, in Schmitt’s view, is
Someone who nevertheless persists in mourning collective fates without distinguishing between perpetrators and victims must be up to something else. Someone who "does" Bergen-Belsen in the morning and holds a veterans meeting in Bitburg in the afternoon has something else in mind — something that not only formed the background for May 8, 1985, but also inspires current planning for new memorials and new museums: a Federal Republic of Germany that is solidly anchored in the Atlantic community of values is to regain its national self-confidence through identification with an acceptable past, without going astray to become a neutral nation state. (NC, 214)

sovereign in the measure that it is able to successfully overcome the revolutionary opposition to it. He writes:

The state consists of the ongoing prevention of civil war. Its dynamic consists of the crushing of revolt, the containment of chaos inherent in the evil nature of individuals. Individuals press for their autonomy and would perish in the terrors of their emancipation if they were not rescued through the facticity of a power that overcomes every other power. He who decides in the exceptional situation is the one who is sovereign. And because the subversive forces always appear under the name of truth and justice, the sovereign who wishes to guard against the exceptional situation will also reserve the power to define what is publicly held to be true or just. His decision power is the source of all validity. The state alone determines the public creed of its citizens." (NC, 130-131)

What is more, the state, in Schmitt's view, must be prepared to manifest its hegemony not only in the public, but also in the private, dimension of the life of its citizenry. It is in the private sphere, after all, where all ideas, including ideas potentially subversive of the status quo, appear. There they gestate, and in the absence of any effort on the part of the state to contain them, and with a little help from the apparatuses of the parliamentary democracy, they come in time to be incorporated into public discourse and even into public law, signaling the beginning of the state's own demise. The only way to prevent this from happening, Schmitt asserts, is for the state to become the total state. It must thwart the parliamentary democracy if it is to be able to assert its right to absolute governance and control. Habermas' critique of Schmitt's political philosophy presfigures his differences with neoconservatism, maintaining it rejects a secularized concept of politics and along with it democratic procedures as a basis for legitimating law; twists a concept of democracy that has been deprived of its deliberative heart into one involving merely the approval of the educated masses; opposes the myth of an aboriginal national unity to social pluralism; and denounces the universalism of human rights and human morality as a criminal fraud. (ABR, 112)
Motivating Habermas' vigorous engagement of and challenge to the neoconservative revisionist historians is a sense of humanity that is outraged by even such things as "a sentence ... by the New York correspondent to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" concerning attempts on the part of many Jews, previous to Barbra Streisand's popularization of her characteristic nose, "to assimilate [by means of plastic surgery] their noses to the Anglo-Saxon ideal of beauty." Reflecting upon the early years of his intellectual formation, he writes:

What really determined my political views was the year 1945. At that point the rhythm of my personal development intersected with the great historical events of the time. I was fifteen years old. The radio was reporting the Nuremberg trials, movie theaters were showing the first documentary films, the concentration camp films that we're seeing again today. These experiences undoubtedly helped develop motifs which then further determined my thinking ... During my time at the university, from 1949 to 1954, the politically dominant factors for me were first of all a strong moral reaction to the Nazi era, and secondly the fear that a real break with the past had not been made. (AS, 77, 79)

The impact of 1945 on his life is further clarified by Habermas when he speaks of Auschwitz as a first rupture that gapes still.

At the age of 15 or 16 we sat before the radio and experienced what was being discussed before the Nuremberg tribunal; when others, instead of being struck silent by the ghastliness, began to dispute the justice of the trial, procedural questions, and questions of jurisdiction, there was that first rupture, which still gapes. Certainly, it is only because I was still sensitive and easily offended that I did not close myself to the fact of collectively realized inhumanity in the same measure as the majority of my elders. For the same reason, the so-called Jewish question remained for me a very present past...”

It is no wonder, then, that Habermas should fight so hard to prevent the stigma of Auschwitz from being watered down in any way.

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Auschwitz was an integral part of his own "life-form," the destruction of which would in some way have meant the dissolution of his person. He writes:

Our form of life is connected with that of our parents and grandparents through a web of familial, local, political, and intellectual traditions that is difficult to disentangle — that is, through a historical milieu that made us what and who we are today. None of us can escape this milieu, because our identities, both as individuals and as Germans, are indissolubly interwoven with it. This holds true from mimicry and physical gestures to language and into the capillary ramifications of one's intellectual stance. As though when teaching at universities outside Germany I could ever disclaim a mentality in which the traces of a very German intellectual dynamic from Kant to Marx and Max Weber are inscribed. We have to stand by our traditions, then, if we do not want to disavow ourselves.” (AS, 233)

The second motive behind Habermas discomfiture with the neoconservatives was his performative understanding of active citizenship. Active citizenship for him involved a lot more than mere membership in a state. It meant as well the affirmation and practice of civil rights. This explains why Habermas's notion of active citizenship dovetails with what he calls the republican understanding of citizenship, concerning which he writes:

"Political autonomy is an end in itself that can be realized not by the single individual privately pursuing his own interests but only by all together in an intersubjectively shared practice. The citizen's legal status is constituted by a network of egalitarian relations of mutual recognition. It assumes that each person can adopt the participant perspective of the first-person plural..." 30

It ought to be evident from the aforementioned remark why only in a liberal political culture, where citizens make full use of their political freedom, and right to self-determination, would republican citizen-

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ship find the means and have the motive to thrive. Among these rights are civil or negative liberty rights (e.g., right to property), political or democratic rights (e.g., right to vote and participate in the democratic process) and social rights (e.g., social security and welfare rights). Of these, it is rights of the second kind, which accord the citizen with a say in the democratic process, that are the most important. The operations of both "negative" and "social" rights upon citizens have the effect of reducing them to clients with little more than an understanding of their entitlements, with respect to certain services and benefits.\(^{31}\) They need to be complemented by political or democratic rights. Active citizens do not stay content with "compensations." They deploy their democratic rights by taking part in and creating their impacting on a public sphere powered by a liberal political culture. Within this sphere, they examine and discuss, together with their co-citizens, a variety of issues and considerations of value. Under the impact of this understanding of citizenship, Habermas spoke up when the issue came up concerning Auschwitz and the prospect of its "revision."\(^{32}\)

\(^{31}\) Habermas eschews and demolishes this impoverished understanding of citizenship in his reflections on radical democracy as well as in his critique of the administrative dimension of the colonization of the lifeworld. For Habermas, any understanding of citizenship is always performative. One is a citizen because one works at being one — by participating in the political process.

\(^{32}\) To be sure, as mentioned above, though it bears mentioning again, citizen Habermas' role in the Historians' Debate was informed as well by his own decidedly anti-neoconservative political convictions. Of these, he has never made any secret: "I have always been a red flag for the conservatives" (NC, 186). Elsewhere, he tells us:

For people like me, it is good luck that the S.P.D. is now in opposition again — we are not so marginalized any longer. I vote for the S.P.D., and have always done so. Naturally, I would like to see an alliance between the S.P.D. and the Greens, what is left of the labour movement and the new social movements. (AS, 210)