

Article

Body, Mind and Spirit—Philosophical Reflections for Researching Education about the Holocaust

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Abstract: This reflective essay draws a sketch of the theoretical and philosophical foundations in preparation for conducting a research project that investigates how German school learners deal with the memories of Shoah survivors. The essay explores some communication challenges and opportunities presented by the use of the double linguistic medium—German and English. The central philosophical argument is that there is a conceptual conflation of and confusion around the word *Geist* (spirit/mind), and that the difference between the spirit and the mind needs to be explored and clarified. For this purpose Hegel’s thoughts on the spirit are considered and related to theories of memory. Also, Theodor Lessing’s reflections on the origins of hatred are touched upon, which he traces back to the splitting of the spirit from the mind. How the body, mind and spirit work together is highlighted with a biographical example of a descendant of a Nazi perpetrator. By way of conclusion, the philosophical and methodological implications for researching education about the Shoah are briefly discussed.

Keywords: education about the holocaust; Hegel; spirit; mind; *Geist*; memory; language

1. Introduction

This essay sketches out some theoretical and philosophical ideas in preparation for conducting a research project that investigates how learners deal with the memories of Holocaust survivors in German schools. The empirical part of the project will be concerned with what and how learners think with regard to the Holocaust and how they communicate their thoughts and responses to this historical topic when personal narratives of survivors are used. But before I could move into the field, I needed to prepare for it theoretically, which has meant a need for reflecting on difficult philosophical questions tied in with the moral-ethical nature of the subject matter. Such reflection was also required in order to locate the project in a disciplinary “home” and to gain clarity about the opportunities and challenges presented by the use of both English and German as languages of interaction, reading and writing. For this reason, this essay is dedicated to such philosophical considerations and reflections.

I start with the linguistic challenges and opportunities that this project entails. These contribute to the enabling of a larger perspective with a more precise lens. The essay then moves onto the core piece, which is about the confusion around the concepts of the mind and the spirit in German (and also English) relevant literature. I will clarify their difference and explain why it is so important, in the context of researching a topic that deals with hatred, to differentiate between the two. Hegel’s concept of the spirit, and more specifically the absolute spirit, is instrumental in this explanation, and his ideas, together with those of Lessing, are related to theories of memory-in which trauma and mourning also play an explanatory role-in an attempt to make them relevant for the present research topic. However, seeing that Hegel is not “current” in today’s social-scientific endeavours, the main strands of opposition to his philosophical foundations are identified and questioned. In attempting to clarify how body, mind and spirit work together I provide an example of a life story of someone who can be

seen to represent a “perpetrator” perspective. This is another way of affirming the need for looking at body, mind and spirit when researching this topic. Finally, I discuss the implications of this approach, firstly in terms of its moral significance in which a spiritual understanding becomes important, and secondly in terms of the implications for researching education about the Holocaust.

2. Literature Orientation: Finding a Disciplinary “Home”

Searching for an optimal way of approaching this subject matter theoretically resulted in an initial cross-disciplinary selection of literature, taking into consideration offerings from history, psychology, literature and philosophy. Such a selection poses a challenge because the tradition in Germany has been to separate psychoanalysis (the personal) and history (the impersonal) [1], even though in more recent years the sub discipline “psychohistory” has developed, using personal narratives or biographical methodologies to get to the object of study [2]. This type of literature aims to overcome the gap between knowing the basic facts about what happened in Germany between 1933 and 1945, and the (up to recently) marginal meaning that has been ascribed to this history for “our” personal lives [1].

This strand of cross-disciplinary literature has been very helpful in constructing a theoretical framework for this research. It is a narrative genre by or about so-called perpetrator children, for example, the seminal work by Dan Bar-On [3]; a similar set of interviews with children of Nazi families conducted by Peter Sichrovsky [4], to name just two Jewish writers who worked in Germany. Other prominent examples of actual perpetrator descendants are Ute Althaus and Alexandra Sennft who investigated their family’s history and faced ostracisation by them as a result [5,6]. Such narratives by descendants of perpetrators face their personal pasts with enormous courage, honesty and strength, but also with trepidation, sadness and a sense of unresolved future. These stories explore in depth what these “perpetrator children” have been left with by their parents in an emotionally impactful way as they deal with the problem of a sense of inherited guilt. The literary style of these narratives allows a deeper, more personal reflection on the core issues faced by the protagonists than the more scientific literature gives access to. Although the topic itself is historical, the problems that the protagonists discuss are psychological and philosophical as they question not only how to deal with this burdensome legacy on an individual basis, but also what this means on a larger existential scale. They discuss the very meaning of human existence, which is a philosophical issue.

This type of literature provides deep insights, written in a simple, directly accessible way, in a narrative form by German authors who have had personal encounters with this historical event. Such narratives have not found their way into Holocaust Education in Germany, where the focus in textbooks is more on laws, official documents and excerpts from Hitler’s speeches [7]. Where personal narratives are used, this tends to be in the form of victims’ accounts of their experiences, whereby schools are encouraged to invite survivors to speak to school classes. The more scientific literature informing Holocaust Education in Germany includes textbook analyses [8]; theoretical works about empathy and emotions [9–11] or aesthetics in history education [12]; learning virtually with video-interviews [13,14]; historical imagination [15] and consciousness among adolescents [16]; and international ideological—political studies on Holocaust education generally [17–19].

3. About the Language(s)

Reading and interpreting such literature opened new doors and presented new challenges. At the time of writing, I had just arrived in Germany after having lived and worked in an English-speaking country previously. Both the theoretical and empirical research has to take into account the German scientific context, which requires a knowledge of the research done in this country with its associated scientific language and discourses used. This proved to be one of the greatest challenges but also opportunities, namely operating in a fully dual linguistic medium of German and English. This instantly doubles the possibilities of conducting, understanding, processing and communicating the research as a whole and makes the choices for selecting literature, theories and approaches seemingly endless. Not only this selection, but also the language itself poses both a problem and an

opportunity. The problem is that some German concepts (e.g., *Betroffenheit*, *Triftigkeit*, *Konflikthaftigkeit*, *Standhaftigkeit*, *Sinnwidrigkeit*) are next to impossible to translate; in attempting to do so, their power of expression (*Aussagekraft*) becomes defused (*entschärft*). Here are some similar but by no means equivalent respective English meanings: *Betroffenheit*: a sense of being profoundly personally or emotionally impacted by something; *Triftigkeit*: the truthfulness of an argument; *Konflikthaftigkeit*: something controversial that triggers the need to have an argument; *Standhaftigkeit*: the ability and willingness to stand by and defend one's position, no matter what, *Sinnwidrigkeit*: something that makes no sense in its absurdity.

On the up-side, I get a glimpse into a whole new world in which the precision with which thoughts, feelings, ideas and concepts are expressed becomes a constant source of amazement, joy and a childlike bewilderment at the ingenuity of it. The German language uses many more graphic words and vivid imagery than English, allowing the imagination to capture more immediately, directly and concretely what it is that the words try to communicate. This becomes a major advantage in doing this type of qualitative-interpretative research, which can be summarised as an "imaginative act" [20]. This is why reading the narratives in German written by descendants of perpetrators offers uniquely powerful, expressive precision, possibly leading to a better understanding of in-depth spiritual matters.

Another factor to consider when talking about the difference between the languages is to pay attention to the sounds produced by a word like "*Betroffenheit*". Memory culture expert and literature scholar Aleida Assmann explains the concept of *Betroffenheit* as a "sentiment or disposition that combines the personal, intimate feeling of mourning with a vague and abstract social and political sense of engagement" [21]. These sounds resonate very differently in the mind than, say, "consternation" and it is therefore possible to imagine that the two are like chalk and cheese in their effective thought-production. In addition, certain words communicate a way of thinking about the world that is very different across the two languages—a point I will illustrate later. And although useful, dict.cc, a widely used online dictionary, is certainly not fool-proof. This means that my on-going translations from the German literature are not fool-proof either. I apologise in advance for not doing full justice to German authors. Some things get lost and misunderstood in translation and there is no way around it. In fact, as will be shown, it can be translational inaccuracies, which are sometimes impossible to avoid given the different ways of thinking about the world, that cause conceptual flaws and philosophical errors to arise in the first place.

Working in a dual medium generates a whole new way of ordering, structuring, managing and interpreting the thought processes. Added to that is the fact that language not only orders, structures and determines the possibilities for thought, it also creates social rules and normative values for behaviour and communication. These are inextricably embedded in the language. For example, the little ritual around using the formal and informal address of "Sie" or "Du" creates very different boundaries of familiarity between two or more people than a one-for all address of "you." Therefore, not only does the conceptual transaction between English and German present a personal challenge, but also having to learn new rules of behaviour in response to the experiences created in a whole new language-culture reality.

4. Hegel's Thoughts on the Spirit and Its Relation to Cognition, Emotions and Memory

The intended research for which the philosophical foundations are explored here is concerned with what and how learners think with regard to the Holocaust and how they communicate their thoughts and responses to this historical topic when personal narratives of survivors are used. One of the most widely employed concepts in German history education generally (and including such a focus) is that of historical consciousness. It is the exploration of how the past is experienced and interpreted in order to understand the present and anticipate the future [22]. At a purely theoretical level, historical consciousness is a concept that tries to establish how the flow of time influences awareness. It involves analysing the structures, procedures and functions underlying the specific meaning-making patterns of those who study history. According to Rüsen und Straub [23], the tradition

has been to conduct such analyses only on the level of the conscious, even though, as the authors say, psychoanalysis has shown repeatedly that there are factors at all levels of meaning-making that are not consciously known to the subject, but that are nevertheless instrumental and conditional for such meaning-making. This has been taken into consideration in more recent constructions of historical consciousness, for example by Bodo von Borries, for whom emotions, aesthetics, personal biography and imagination—in other words factors that include the subconscious—play a central role in developing historical consciousness [24]. Moreover, according to the same authors, historical consciousness is always determined by meaning-making processes that are tied to one's autobiography (or subjective experiences). And conversely, an autobiographical (or subjective) self-understanding relies on theoretical concepts or categories that refer to a general and fundamental understanding of time. Memory can be understood to play a central role here because it acts as a subjective and variable bridge between the past and the present [25], given its ability to move freely between past, present and future and through it to suspend time and place. The act of remembering is also tied to emotions and aesthetic experiences. Through the connection to aesthetic experience, the act of remembering is a physiological act and thus the body plays a central role in memory studies. The authors distinguish here between “body, spirit-mind and society” (“*Körper, Geist und Gesellschaft*”) [25].

This way of distinguishing between three concepts brings me to the central problem I have discovered in the relevant literature. The problem is that in German the word “*Geist*” can mean both spirit and mind. (The conflation between the spirit and the mind does not only happen in German. It is also present in English texts where it is common to use “spirit” and “mind” interchangeably, or to refer to the “spirit of mind” as exemplified in Munslow's work on the history of history [26]) For example, the first sentence in Clifford Geertz's seminal work on the interpretation of cultures is translated as follows: “In her book, ‘Philosophy in a New Key’, Susanne Langer remarks that certain ideas burst upon the intellectual landscape with a tremendous force”—“In ihrem Buch ‘Philosophie auf neuem Wege’ bemerkt Susanne Langer, dass bestimmte Ideen ungeheuer nachhaltig in die *geistige* Landschaft einschlagen” [27]. Here, we see that the word “intellectual” is translated as *geistig*.

This is echoed in the literary work of Jean Améry, according to whom if someone is described as a *geistige* person, it can mean an intellectually minded, scholarly person; someone who has a skeptical-humanistic disposition [28]. A “spiritual” (*gläubige*) person, on the other hand, can be seen as someone who is either “ideologically-schooled” or *gottgläubig*—a believer in God [28]. So, the distinction is not between the spirit and the mind but between a non-believer and a believer. This is misleading, because everyone can be seen as having a mind and a spirit, regardless of what that person may believe in. Furthermore, the “*geistige*” or “intellectual/spiritual” level is often put into a dichotomous relationship to the “material”, i.e., the distinction is between a material and a spiritual/mental level of existence [12]. Again, this is misleading, because a person can be seen to exist not on two but on three levels: body, mind and spirit.

The fact that the distinction between the spirit and the mind has become so blurred in both German and English is evidence for the lack of clarity concerning the spirit in scholarly thought. Antonio Damasio alludes to the same problem from a neuroscientific perspective when he writes that “for some nonspecialists [. . .] mind, consciousness, conscience, soul, and spirit form one big region of strangeness that sets humans apart, that separates the mysterious from the explainable and the sacred from the profane” [29]. Although he does not provide an explanation of the spirit as such, he nevertheless shows how science has found ways of distinguishing between many of these spheres of the “biology of consciousness” [29].

The literal meaning of “*Geist*” refers to a non-material form of being or the spirit, implying that there must have been a time in German thought when this concept was an accepted category in its own right, different from the mind and the body. This becomes evident in German literary master Goethe's (1749–1832) work:

Dummes Zeug kann man viel reden,
Kann es auch schreiben,

Wird weder Leib noch Seele töten,
 Es wird alles beim alten bleiben.
 Dummes aber vors Auge gestellt
 Hat ein magisches Recht:
 Weil es die Sinne gefesselt hält,
 Bleibt der Geist ein Knecht [30].

One can talk a whole lot of foolishness,
 One can also write it,
 It will not kill the body or the soul,
 Everything will stay the same.
 But foolish things before the eye
 Have a magical claim:
 For they keep the senses shackled,
 The spirit remains a slave [30].

Thus, Goethe makes a clear distinction between the body, the soul and the spirit. He also alludes to the—somewhat mystical, that is, not quite easy to understand—connection between the senses and the spirit and emphasises the significance and power of the spirit. It is this “mystical” connection that is of interest here. It draws attention to the very foundational issue of what knowledge is and how it relates to faith and to science. Social psychologist Angela Moré explains that the dialectic opposition between rational or reasoned knowledge and irrational, magical or religious belief is a socio-political construct of the late Enlightenment period, connected to the French Revolution (1789–1799) [31]. It resulted from the interest of civil society in the secularisation of political rulership. Hegel picks up on exactly this point when he objects to the modern assumed difference between faith and science, i.e., that of believing and knowing. For him, knowing was believing:

The differentiation between believing and knowing has become a common dichotomy. It is taken as a fact that the two are different . . . but in its essential determination (*wesentlichen Bestimmung*) this distinction is empty: because that which I believe is that which I know. I am certain of it . . . To know means to have an object before one’s consciousness and to be certain about it; and believing is the same thing [32].

This view is not that different from modern versions of understanding knowledge, namely as interpreted information and as a set of ordering principles [33]. As such, knowledge production is seen as a creative activity that is inseparable from value judgements, given that it is produced or ordered by people who have particular traditions, ways of thinking, linguistic parameters, and culturally developed perception, cognition and interpretation schemas. It is just that these are no longer called beliefs. Perhaps this is because beliefs are seen as emotional or irrational and have been contrasted with unemotional, rational cognition patterns—a false dichotomy as Hegel has documented two hundred years ago. Today, there are convincing arguments from neuroscientific literature confirming that our actions are as much emotionally as cognitively motivated, even if we believe to have made cool and calculated decisions that apparently rest on a purely intellectual weighing up of options [34]. Rösen also argues that both dimensions of the human mind, namely emotion and cognition, are so much intertwined that we are not normally aware of their degree of connectedness [11].

But the real issue at hand is not whether or how emotions and cognition are related, but rather whether the ordering principles by which we judge knowledge to be true or not are the result of culturally formed “growth patterns” as evolutionary perspectives would hold, or whether they have a structure and substance of their own that are valid regardless of time and place in the sense of being “given” [33]. Hegel’s philosophy attributes the latter view in terms of a spiritual connectedness between humans and a greater spirit. According to this view, the world or nature is subjected to a spiritual reality to which man can establish a connection and through parts of which he can experience

and find himself [35]. Although Baberowski holds that “no one today would share this condition of the Hegelian system today”, he also says that, nonetheless, the hope that is embodied in this system, namely that of a unity or “one-ness” of expression and autonomy, has not gone away with the death of Hegel. The author explains that this one-ness has to do with wanting to unify the seemingly non-unifiable, or to make identical “identity and non-identity”; to “seek a unity between life-processes and the separation between subject and object that is implicit in rational consciousness” [35].

This unity of expression can be seen to be unattainable because, as Baberowsky explains, even though according to Kant the outside (noumenal) world may well exist independent of us and beyond our consciousness, we can only have access to this world in a mediated way [35]. Consequently, so the Kantian logic goes, it is impossible to make a statement about the world “as it really is”. While this certainly sounds logical, making statements about the world “as it really is” is not the same as having an ability to experience or communicate with this world. For example, Ankersmit refers to Dutch aesthetic historian Huizinga’s conception of truth as not something we say about reality, but something that is to be found in “the movement towards reality and not in that toward abstraction that is the perennial seduction of language. [. . .] It is a truth that arises from a quasimystic union with the world” [36].

This reference to the “union with the world” can be used to illustrate the difference between the mind and the spirit. The two can be seen to operate in two distinct numerical logical systems: that of the number one and of the number two. Matters of the spirit can be compared to the number one, meaning indivisible, unchanging and in agreement. To a German-speaking person this may seem obvious because the word *eins*, or “one” is used to describe the very process of agreeing (*sich einigen*). This is not so obvious to an English speaking person. It is distinct from the temporal and spatial limitations of the here and now, to which the mind is subjected. The highest yearning of the human spirit, according to Rösen, is to reconcile its inner contradictions and inconsistencies [37], which, when drawing on Hegel, could be understood as a yearning for reconciling the contradiction between man’s own time-bound consciousness as an individual and that which is unchanging [35]. Rösen expands on this idea by arguing that the human spirit “expresses itself in the ideas of a life quality that supercedes all concrete conditionality of life. These ideas could be identified in the form of a universal principle of justice or righteousness (*Gerechtigkeit*) or as a fundamental transformation of suffering into an all-encompassing notion of happiness [. . .] Such emphatic intentions transcend the historical experience” [37]. In this quote, the idea of the principle of one becomes apparent (‘superceding the conditionality of life’) together with a different notion of time at the level of the spirit (‘transcending the historical experience’).

In contrast to the spirit, matters of the mind operate through the logic of two, meaning divisible, giving rise to disagreement and argument. The whole existence of modern science and associated ways of reasoning rests on the use dialectic thinking. Theodor Lessing, through his study of the Jewish “self-hatred”, has explored this in depth by asking the question: under which conditions does man lean towards the splitting of the balanced unity (or “one-ness”—*Einheit*) of life [38]? He comes to the conclusion that this happens only in a wakeful condition, or where conscious and unconscious life can be observed and reflected. Without splitting experience from reflection about experience, it would be impossible to do or have any the following: ability to judge, pay attention, humour, intellect, critical ordering, evaluation, faculty of choice, will, decision-making [38]. All these are functions of the mind: “Alles ‘Meinen’ setzt die Zwei und Zweiheit voraus”—“Every type of reckoning or opinion-holding presupposes the concept of two and duality” [38].

According to Lessing, two, or the concept of duality, has no meaning whatsoever in the whole sphere of experiences that one could describe as religious (in its actual sense), or what Hegel would call the union between man and the absolute spirit. In Lessing’s terms, having a religious experience means “being tied into the absolute” [38]. It means not standing in opposition to the universe as a subject. Or, it means being absorbed by the logic of one. Accordingly, religious and aesthetic forms of experiencing are unmediated or immediate (*unmittelbar*) forms of life [38].

The splitting of the mind or (the soul) from the spirit, according to this logic, can be seen as the origins of hatred:

Diese Unmittelbarkeit ganz entgegen ist das Wissen um Lebendiges, welches geist-schöpferisch, aber leben-zerstörerisch dem Lebenselemente gegenübertritt. Erst dort, wo dieses Ablösen des Geistes von den Seelen beginnt, da entsteht auch die Möglichkeit des lebenspolaren Hasses [38].

In stark contrast to this immediacy is the knowledge about the living, which opposes in a spiritual-creative but life destroying way the elements of life. Only where a detachment of the spirit from the souls begins, there also begins the possibility of life-polarising hatred [38].

What this could mean in the context of Shoah research is that if the logic of two persists over the logic of one, then rational arguments can be used to justify everything that is morally reprehensible. (But the logic of one is key to understanding how this horror came to be in the first place. Evil is also a form of a spiritual union but it leads to death, not life. That is what Lessing meant when he said that the logic of one is “spiritual-creative”. Nazis ideology was precisely so “successful” because it too rested on Hegel’s notion of the spirit, but it perverted it into something that was not intended by Hegel. Hegel was talking about God as the absolute positive and not as the absolute evil). This is exactly how Harald Welzer, based on his extensive psychological studies on the possibilities of perpetrating mass violence in the context of the Shoah, explained such perpetration: “for every facet that seems morally somewhat questionable even to ourselves, we immediately try to legitimise why we did this or that against our better judgement, why we could not live up to our capacities, what the reason was for having to lie, cheat, betray or disappoint. Astonishingly, we generally find good reasons why behaviour felt to be wrong seems, in retrospect, to be sensible and thus, at least to ourselves, justified” [39]. Such justification through reasoning has the function of repressing the conscience, which is the gateway to the spirit. Therefore, it serves a self-protecting (or self-preserving) function as well as having the effect of a progressive desensitisation of the perpetrators (of the Holocaust) by promoting diffusion of responsibility and de-individuation [40]. Such de-individuation could be understood as the disconnection between the mind and the spirit. Once justified, the conscience is no longer sensitive to a higher principle of justice and the matter is believed to have passed. But this may not mean that it has disappeared on the spiritual level.

At this level, it is no longer adequate to only talk about individuals. Understanding how the relationships between people in society are ordered and structured becomes crucial at the level of the spirit. According to Hegel, the ordering principle is as follows: man’s primary objective and task is to recognise God as the absolute spirit [32] and after that to understand his relative position to this spirit. This secondary recognition finds expression in our communication with others: “We recognise the spirit that speaks through us only in dialogue with others. [. . .] Human nature is an expression of the spiritual relationships in which it broods over itself and others” [35]. Modern theories of memory confirm this position, although they express it quite differently, breaking down the larger philosophical issue to more digestible theories of communication and memory. For example, Welzer, referring to Antonio Damasio and Umberto Eco, and using a literary example, shows that we continually produce sentences or parts of speech for which we anticipate certain interpretations by the persons with whom we communicate [34]. This anticipation is already part of our speech or sentence production. It is because of this, according to Welzer, that we are always already part of the actions of those with whom we communicate and vice versa. Classical communication theories that work according to a sender and receiver model of information exchange—and I would interject that those theories that ignore the spiritual plane of existence—miss this important social aspect of interaction. “What a speaker says is as much a common social product as that which the other speaker says. The result is that both participants in the conversation draw different conclusions from the commonly created event and both will have a different memory of it” [34].

The implication is that if memory of an event is so individually and thus variably constructed, then how is it possible to refer to such a thing a “collective memory”, which would call into consciousness a larger spiritual dimension? Aleida Assmann’s answer would be that it depends on the role such memories play in terms of their function as intra-psychological “stabilising agents” (*Stabilisatoren*) and that there are at least three possibilities: affective, symbolic and traumatic [41]. Affect has to do with authenticity—its truthfulness cannot be proven, but it is possible to create mechanisms of identification through it because of its connection to emotions. As such, affect, a non-conscious experience of intensity [42] or the “raw” component of emotions, has intersubjective-empathetic functions. Symbolic ways of “stabilising” memory are created when events remembered are furnished with retrospective interpretations of personal or biographical stories. Accordingly, such symbolic meanings are elevated to the level of *destiny* [41]. In terms of trauma, Assmann refers to Langer’s discourse on the victims of the Holocaust for whom concepts like choice, will, strength to survive and expectation of a secure future came to an abrupt end [41]. Taken together, all three ways of working with memory point to a suspended or interrupted notion of time and a significance beyond the here and now. As such, they move into the spiritual realm as they move from the principle of two to the principle of one through notions of identification (or agreeing), destiny (a sense of higher determination) and the death of intellectual dualistic concepts like choice and will. And this is how they become “collective memory”; a term that has its own problems and critics [43].

Theorists of memory have also established that people actively construct meaning when they hear or read stories in a way that interjects their own rationalisations into the story [44]. To summarise and simplify: Bartlett conducted an experiment in which he read folk-tales to his (British) students. These folk-tales contained names and cultural elements that were totally unfamiliar to his students. He then asked them to retell the stories by means of serial reproduction (telling one person who then tells the next, and so on). He concluded from the experiment that existing cultural schemas and their consequent memory processes determine perception to such a degree that foreign parts of stories become personalised in subtle ways that were not apparent to the teller [34]. This is called the process of rationalisation: “The general function of rationalisation is in all the instances the same. It is to render material acceptable, understandable, comfortable, straightforward; to rob it of all puzzling elements. As such, it is a powerful factor in all perceptual and in all reproductive processes” [44].

This could be interpreted to correspond with Hegel’s assertion that “man recognises the power to change things and to bring them into subjection according to his imaginings. He sees in the world the objects which he himself created a reflection of himself as a general, thinking being” [35]. But it does not stop here. Beyond the cognitive and emotional faculties of man, there is, according to the Hegelian world view, a spiritual plane of existence: “In the end he learns how to look at the material world and at himself as a spiritual being as he tries to subjoin to himself the outer reality. In this process, he considers his own consciousness as an individual and recognises the contradiction between itself and that which is unchanging; he cannot but be an individual and because of this the union between himself and the unchanging cannot succeed” [35], or is at least in a continual state of struggle. But there are moments when this union succeeds. Baberowski expresses it in the following way:

Die schöpferische Vereinigung des Bewußten mit dem Unbewußtem ist das, was man gewöhnlich Inspiration nennt [. . .] Jeder echter Schriftsteller kennt Augenblicke des Schaffens, wo jemand anderer, Stärkerer, ihm die Hand führt. Jeder echter Redner kennt Augenblicke, wo aus seinem Mund etwas stärkeres spricht, als er selbst in seinen gewöhnlichen Stunden ist. Das ist ‘Inspiration’. Sie entsteht aus der höchsten schöpferischen Anspannung aller Kräfte. Das Unbewußte erhebt sich aus den tiefen Höhlen und unterwirft sich die bewußte Gedankenarbeit, verbindet sich mit ihr zu einer höheren Einheit [35].

The creative union between the conscious and the unconscious is what one would usually call inspiration. Every real author knows creative moments when someone else, a stronger

someone, leads his hand. Every real orator knows moments when something stronger speaks out of his mouth than to what he is usually accustomed. That's 'inspiration'. It results from the highest creative exertion of all powers. The subconscious rises out of its deepest caves and submits itself to the conscious effort of thinking, and ties itself with it to a higher union [35].

The author calls this inspiration but it could also be understood as the connection to a higher spiritual level that Hegel was alluding to and which has been explained with the principle of one (*Einheit*). The importance of Hegel in this context is that it takes seriously the spiritual dimension of human existence. In the context of the Holocaust, this becomes important because the topic broaches on areas of human life that cannot be explained or apprehended at the intellectual, emotional or psychological level alone, and not as a purely historical event either. For example, survivor and torture victim Jean Améry reflects on the contrast between himself, an unbeliever, and others who had religious or political convictions: "he who, in the widest sense of the word, is a believer, whether this faith is metaphysical or immanent, exceeds himself. He is not a prisoner to his individuality, but belongs to a spiritual continuum that does not get interrupted anywhere, not even in Auschwitz" [28]. According to this view, there is a type of time-space continuity at the spirit level, which is qualitatively different from the level of the body and the psyche.

In the context of extreme human suffering, mourning and trauma also act as instances of illustration of the spirit dimension. In the case of mourning, Rösen says that it is a mental reaction to a loss of a loved one that concerns one's own identity because a part of oneself dies through the identification with the person who died [37]. This loss is painful because it is not a final ending and can thus not be healed completely. Part of one's own identity lives on in the memory of the loved person. There is therefore a possibility of a dimension where the time-space continuum persists indefinitely. Rösen uses the description of Marcel Proust's experience to illustrate this point, who refers to a state of being where the "shortness of life is a mere deception of our senses" [37].

It is similar with traumatic experiences, which are experiences of the past that, according to Rösen, negate and even destroy the possibility of giving them a historical meaning because through trauma the coherence between past, present and future is disrupted [11]. According to Rösen, Dan Diner's description of the Holocaust as a "fracture of civilisation" can be seen as "broken time" in historical interpretation [11]. This "broken time" is activated through trauma because when faced with trauma, our psychological abilities are rendered ineffective and often "result in a cognitive and affective paralysis from whose vantage point we can only relate to the events as if they had not happened" [45]. It is possible to conclude therefore that history, with its focus on time segmented, coherently presented experiences, cannot adequately deal with notions of time that are radically interrupted on the one hand—as in the case of trauma—or understood as continuous without end, on the other—as in the case of mourning. For this, the concept of the spirit (or at least a belief therein)—where time and space are not definite and finite—is necessary. But this concept, and especially its "absolute" variety, meets with stark opposition in the academy.

5. Opposing Ideas

There are at least three reasons why Hegel is thought to be irrelevant today: evolutionary thinking, relativism, and the bureaucratisation of the sciences. I shall elucidate each briefly.

One can discard Hegel's ideas because of evolutionary, progressive, linear thinking—which in itself is embedded in a particular belief system—that assumes that the old is outdated and has been replaced with a necessarily better, newer system of thought. An example of this is 19th century French philosopher Auguste Comte for whom the "development of the human spirit" was an evolutionary progression from the primitive to the advanced. Thus, the realm of the spirit was related to "childish religion" and seen as a theological or fictive condition; the realm of the soul to "youthful metaphysics" or "philosophy, existing on the level of the abstract; and the realm of the material body", "at last", to the "grown up positivist science" [12]. If this view were taken to its

logical conclusion, then we would be moving towards a spiritually more “advanced” state of being. The Holocaust, as a regression to barbarism in a time of the Enlightenment’s highest achievements, as outlined by Horkheimer and Adorno [46], together with today’s continuing plagues associated with racial, ethnic, national, sexual, religious and other types of hatred, to name just a few of today’s multiple societal problems, attest to the fallacy of this evolutionary system of thought.

Freud also helped to contribute to this evolutionary view by emphasising the temporality of life and attributing the realisation of this supposition to a type of psychological maturity. Conversely, for him, the hope in the continuation of the soul after death was equated with regression, “Verschmelzungssehnsucht” (a childish desire to melt into something) and reality-denying wishful thinking [31]. According to Angela Moré, who traces the history of the apparently recent emergence of an esoteric or spiritual search for transcendence, intellectuals in the natural sciences also equated religiosity with an expression of immaturity and naivety. This, in turn, meant that the ability to withstand the temptations of transcendental illusions was rewarded with a sense of maturity and reason, which was nothing more than a “narcissistic gratification” that acted as a consolation for the renouncement of the hope in an afterlife. But what is often overlooked, according to Moré, is that within these are embedded narcissistic desires for total power, personal recognition and legitimation, and a mania or delirium for creating (*Schöpferwahn*), which are in themselves a type of absolutisation (*Verabsolutierung*). Therefore, certain political or philosophical convictions and a corresponding “belief in science, intellect and rationality” [31] became objects of faith in their own right.

A further reason why some of Hegel’s thoughts are discarded today is linked to a form of relativism that stands in contrast to a particular interpretation of Hegel’s thoughts. This interpretation is that Hegel was referring to an absolute knowledge order in which the thinking person could orientate himself critically in relation to definite points of departure (*Ausgangsbestimmungen*) [33]. Reference is made here not to Hegel’s original texts but to an interpretation thereof in which the focus is only on what Hegel supposedly said about a system of knowledge, and not on his core concept of the absolute spirit on which all else rests. According to this theorist, this kind of approach is “obsolete” today because of the “*Siegeszug einer sich strukturell fortwährend weiter ausdifferenzierenden Erfahrungswissenschaft*” [33] (“triumph of a structurally continually further differentiated empirical science”) which assumes that we can only know our relative determinedness based on experience. The question remains of how this supposed triumph could be established with such certainty. This view ignores Lessing’s lucid explanation of the difference between experiencing and talking about that experience as two very distinct realities and different ways of knowing.

Clifford Geertz also shares this deterministic interpretation of Hegel’s thought, talking about “the terrible historical determinism with which we have been plagued from Hegel forward” [20]. Meanwhile, Hegel was talking about man’s primary objective and task as that of recognising God as the absolute spirit [32] and then of understanding his relative position to this spirit. As already mentioned, in this relative position, “man recognises the power to change things and to subdue them according to his imaginings” [35], which sounds anything but deterministic. Whether or not man attains the purpose of recognising God as the absolute spirit is of course a matter of personal choice. Most men tend to choose other absolutes instead, as Moré has pointed out [31].

A third reason why a consideration of the spirit may be unconventional or problematic is that the study of human beings has metamorphosed into a divided practice that makes it impossible to understand people as holistic, triune body/soul/spirit beings. The medical world has made the body its unit of investigation, in the same way as the social and behavioural sciences have claimed the soul/mind as their object of study. The realm of the spirit, if at all recognised and accepted as a legitimate category, has been the domain of theology, religion or the occult. This separation is unfortunate because these three realms can be seen as coexisting together, meaning that each influences the other in each individual. By separating them out, the view of their interdependence and coexistence is distorted.

6. Body, Mind and Spirit: An Example of How the Three Work Together

An example of how the body, mind and spirit operate together is that of Claudia Brunner [47] who wrote about her experiences and thoughts of being the grandniece of a “prominent” Nazi, Alois Brunner. He went into hiding to South America after the war and was not heard of again. She writes extensively about notions of guilt as she experienced it. In one chapter, she describes a scene in a Paris courtroom where her great-uncle is tried and sentenced in absentia. She captures the emotions that she feels in that courtroom, such as that associated with the heavy burden of shame, guilt and sadness as she hears the names of 345 children read out—surname, first name, place of birth, date of birth, 345 times, for two hours non-stop. Her great uncle was responsible for their murder. He sent them to Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen. She says: “it is possible to use rational thoughts for turning things into adequate arguments. But these would not withstand the pressure that comes from elsewhere” [47]. She recognises that, firstly, there is an “elsewhere” that is beyond the realm of words, secondly, that this realm is much more powerful than rational arguments, and thirdly, that it has power not only over individuals but beyond because it is governed by distinct legal—moral principles, just as German law professor and bestselling author of “the Reader”, Bernhard Schlink says: “the concept of guilt is not only associated with the standards of existing law, but also with norms of religion and morals, etiquette and custom as well as day-to-day communications and interactions” [48].

After reading many such accounts of children of Nazi perpetrators, a picture emerges that shows that there is a more powerful level of existence than the mind and body, which in turn influences how the latter two respond. It would be important for Holocaust Education to take this into consideration. In Brunner’s case, after that courtroom episode, she was so shaken that she spent a few weeks in hospital with a serious case of meningitis and had no doubt that it was her body’s direct response to the shock and emotional stress she experienced in that courtroom: “and suddenly I feel the direct connection between what I say and do and that which I feel in my body as a response” [47]. In other words, she experienced a type of one-ness mentioned earlier in that her body, soul and spirit were united completely as one by connecting the conscious and the unconscious. At the physiological (body) level, she suffered inflammation of the protective membranes covering her brain and spinal cord (meningitis). At the psychological level, this was the result of the emotional stress she felt when hearing the sobs, sniffs and heavy breathing of the representatives of the murdered. At the spirit level, this in turn was caused by the unresolved issue of guilt left by her great-uncle for the murder of the innocent. The courtroom experience, where she was present representatively for her great-uncle, shook the literal/physical core of her being to such a degree that her normal immune system could not withstand the pressure. It would be a mistake to think of this pressure as trauma. Trauma is a result of a life and therefore identity-threatening experience of extreme violence [21]. Brunner was not a victim in this case of a life threateningly violent situation.

7. Implications for the Current Shoah-Research

In order to approach this research project holistically, I need to be clear on my assumptions and conceptions of the human being as a whole, including the spirit, or at least a belief in it. Otherwise, there is no point in finding out how learners deal with the memories of Holocaust survivors in terms of constructing their knowledge and experience of this subject matter. The pursuit of this research is not only to find out what kinds of emotions are evoked when this topic is discussed or how they are discursively handled in communicative social-institutional settings. Neither is it to just explore the testimonies of the witnesses affects learners’ attitudes towards knowledge of the subject matter. I also want to know what the implications of this are for thinking and speaking about guilt, shame, and individual and social responsibility in Germany. With this question a consideration of the realm of the spirit (where notions of time are interrupted in various way) is invoked, implying that atrocities committed by someone that are not equalised, forgiven or otherwise paid for (neutralised) reach into this realm, so that “70 years thereafter” becomes questionable in terms of its temporal meaning.

This phenomenon has been demonstrated in, among other things, a relatively recent documentation project called “Holocaust by Bullets”, led by French Catholic priest Patrick Desbois whose team has been collecting information about the killings of Jews and Roma between 1941 and 1944 in the Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Moldova and Romania [49]. Eyewitnesses in tiny villages, who were children and on-lookers at the time, are interviewed about the mass shootings that took place in their immediate vicinity. Many of them are still deeply affected emotionally by their memories and ask themselves whether they are guilty or innocent because they had not spoken about these events in all these years.

Surely 60–70 years would be more than enough to heal the psychological damage suffered by these village witnesses as a result of their visual and proximal association with the crimes they have witnessed. But this is not the case according to Desbois’s study, which can lead one to believe that unless crimes and atrocities are brought to the light by speaking about them (in the first instance), they will continue to have an effect into the future. And this is where the difference between the German word “*schweigen*” (to remain silent) and its English translation becomes significant. In the German version, the word is an active verb; it is something that a person wilfully and consciously chooses to do and it does not have any positive connotations like “silence”, which can be associated with tranquillity, peacefulness and quietness. In English, there is only a two-word version like “remain silent” or “keep silent” and tends to imply a more passive communication strategy. The German version expresses with much more force that it is a wilful action and, by implication, that it has consequences. Moreover, there is an even more intention-describing word in German that is not nearly as strong in English: *verschweigen* or to silence something.

German psychologist Müller-Hohagen who has been studying the after-effects of silencing and suppressing the Nazi past in German family-circles [1] explains that *verschweigen* happens at the fully conscious level. In other words, it is a distinct form of communication and not an absence thereof (as is implied by the English version). And if this were not enough, in German there is a type of superlative of the word *schweigen*, namely “*totschweigen*” for which there is no easy English translation. It is a type of recognition that a matter can be silenced to such an extent that this action of keeping it quiet can become deadly to the person doing it. It has a poisonous effect—not necessarily literally, but at the level of the psyche and the spirit. In the Holocaust context, Schulz-Hageleit talks about a “poisoned historical consciousness” [50] of the perpetrator-children, resulting from the silence of their forefathers [51] and the death of the victims who could not speak up.

There is a link to the material body as well. Memory and emotions are linked through objects and aesthetic (through the five senses) experiences. Father Debois used this theoretical principle quite effectively in his attempts to elicit witnesses’ accounts of events that had happened 60 years prior. He used memory triggers or “filters” as he calls them to do so: horses, carts, harvests, the cold, snow, rain, sun, meals, trees children climbed on, spades, houses, hiding places, colours, odours, clothes, etc. All these physical objects and aesthetic impressions help memory to take information from the physical body-world into the mind or the soul through verbalising them. The emotions attached to these objects and aesthetic impressions then continue the communication by connecting to the spirit, using memory to do so and thus to suspend time. This is where they acquire meaning through a moral—legal system that governs the continuity between the generations—and thus throughout time. The witnesses would not be motivated to remember and tell their stories if they did not think that their actions had some relevance for the future. Similarly, it would not make much sense to conduct this research if the learners did not think the subject matter still bore relevance for them today.

There are also methodological implications for researching Holocaust Education. The theoretical sketch mapped out in this essay points towards a holistic approach when attempting to gather data about the empirical world, taking into account body, mind and spirit. What this means, firstly, is that such research is multi-disciplinary, using insights from psychology, philosophy, literature and history. As Geertz explains, in the social sciences, the objective is to look for systematic relationships among diverse phenomena and to do this effectively, the researcher needs to think synthetically

about the various aspect of human existence in which biological, psychological, sociological and cultural factors can be treated as variables within unitary systems of analysis [20]. Applied to this research, the disciplines might vary, but the logic of looking at their factors as variables, rather than looking for “substantive identities among diverse phenomena” [20], remains. The purpose is to synthesise different types of theories and concepts in such a way as to be able to formulate meaningful propositions embodying findings that are now isolated in separate fields of study [20].

Secondly, it means that the research is as much a science as a communicative art, implying that the researcher herself becomes part of the research instrument, just as the “methodology of discovery” typical for psychohistory requires, which is a methodology that expressly relies on the deployment of the researcher’s own emotions as part of the research instrument [52]. Of course, this must happen in a reflected way and the results should be communicable in an intersubjective manner [20]. It is a similar methodology used by anthropologists or ethnographers who want to gain an overall impression of the cultural systems they study in “remote” places. This means that I will not be searching for general educational laws, but for meanings generated within social interaction, using “thick description” [20] as a means of collecting data. Such descriptions aim to record a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures of behaviour [20], paying attention to their production, perception and interpretation. The importance of what is observed is determined by relying on “guessing at meanings” [20], implying that all spheres of human existence should be considered when analysing the data. In ethnographic research, the conditions of science or validity are met when an interpretation “takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation” [20]. Such validity can only be realised, especially in the context of this—in Germany sensitive—topic, if the researcher relies on all physical (sensory), mental (analytical) and spiritual (“gut feeling”) faculties at her disposal, be they social and emotional attunedness, time spent with the respondents, opening herself emotionally and personally, or using aesthetic, sensory and circumstantial data for both asking questions and for making sense of the data.

8. Conclusions

In this essay, I have argued that in German history education the concept of historical consciousness is often used to make sense of the past as it explores how the past is experienced and interpreted in relation to the present and the future. It is a concept that establishes how the flow of time influences awareness. As such, the conscious and the unconscious elements of human awareness are both important when wanting to understand how meaning-making happens. Since I aim to find out how learners make sense of Shoah survivors’ life stories, memory plays a key role in its ability to suspend time and place. Within this suspension, the dimension of the spirit becomes key in its crossing over to a time-space continuity that is different from linear, chronological time. Concepts such as inspiration, identification, trauma, mourning, and destiny were used, in addition to Hegel’s and Lessing’s philosophical explanations, to illustrate how the spirit level achieves this and why it is important to take it into account: the Holocaust is a topic that cannot be grasped at the psychological, intellectual or emotional level alone and also not as a purely historical event that took place in the past, because its effects continue to this day. In the “land of the perpetrators”, this effect has been studied by descendants of perpetrators and by psychologists who came to the conclusion that the silencing by the(ir) forefathers has resulted in a poisoned historical consciousness.

I have also argued that the conceptual conflation and confusion around the word “Geist” (spirit) evident in modern social sciences leads to certain problems. One of them is the resultant dialectic opposition between rational knowledge and “irrational” or religious belief, which is misleading because it suppresses the spirit (and anything that is absolute), which, given the moral—legal weight of the subject matter, cannot be ignored. It is not only misleading, but also dangerous, because if the logic of two (mind) persists over the logic of one (spirit), then rational arguments can be used to justify anything that is morally reprehensible. This point is even more weighty when considering that success in the whole western-based education system today is built on a student’s ability to give plausible

reasons for every statement and argument. The approach I am putting forward in this essay suggests that this may be an insufficient foundation for defining what knowing and understanding—and also learning—is, especially when it comes to a topic like the Holocaust because it ignores the moral implications of this history. To my mind, there can be no doubt that Nazism and the Holocaust are expressions of an absolute evil, or, to use a less categorical term, it was an example of total *Sinnwidrigkeit*—a type of irrational absurdity that does not make sense at the levels of the body and the mind alone. For it to make sense, a principle of union with a spirit that is more powerful than dualistic, rational thinking or fleeting emotional states is necessary.

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