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II.11 Heinrich Himmler's speech to *Gauleiter* in Posen, Poland (6 Nov. 1943)

In this context and within this intimate circle I can refer to an issue which you, my fellow Party comrades, have all accepted as self-evident, but which has become for me the most difficult issue of my life, the Jewish issue. You all take it for granted as a self-evident and gratifying fact that there are no more Jews in your *Gau*. All Germans – with a few exceptions – are clear in their minds that we would not have held out against aerial bombardments and the pressures imposed by a fourth year of war, and maybe the fifth and sixth that lie in store, if we still had this plague destroying our people. The few words of the sentence 'the Jews must be exterminated' are easy to say. Yet for those who must carry out what it demands it is the hardest and most difficult thing there is. You see, of course they are Jews, it is obvious, they are only Jews, but think yourselves how many – even Party members – have made their famous request to me or some other authority stating that of course all Jews are swines, only that so-and-so is a decent Jew and should not be harmed. [...] In Germany we have so many millions of people each of whom knows decent Jews that this figure is already bigger than the actual number of Jews. [...]

I ask you really only to listen to what I have to say in this circle, and never to talk about it. The question has arisen: What about women and children? I resolved to find an utterly clear solution for this as well. For I did not consider myself justified to eradicate the men – that means kill or have killed – and allow the avengers of their deaths to grow up in the form of the children and grandchildren. Thus the difficult decision had to be taken to make this people disappear from the face of the earth. For the organization which had to carry out this task it was the most difficult one we had ever had. It has been carried out – I believe I can say this – without inflicting damage on the minds and souls of our men and their leaders. The danger that it might was a real one. The path between the two possibilities of either being too cruel and heartless and losing respect for human life, or too soft and so suffering distress to the point of a nervous breakdown – the strait between this Scilla and Charybdis is narrow indeed. [...]

With these words I would like to close the issue of the Jews. You know the score and will keep what you know to yourselves. At a future point we will perhaps be able to consider whether to tell the German people more about this

matter. I believe that it is better for us all to have endured this for our people, and accepted our responsibility (the responsibility for deeds not the idea behind them), and then take the secret with us to our graves.

(Roger Griffin (ed.) *Facism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.161–2)