



# Is it possible to understand the Germans? *Reflections on the life and writings of Primo Levi*

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Vortrag in englischer Sprache

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In four decades of thinking and writing about the Holocaust following his liberation from Auschwitz, the Italian-Jewish writer Primo Levi carried on an intense moral and intellectual engagement with Germany and the Germans. His greatest wish was to understand the people who had been his persecutors, to judge them, and, if possible, to forgive them. But despite many years of probing reflection on the Nazi crimes and those who had perpetrated them, Levi came to the conclusion that he was a failure. Why?

This lecture will examine Levi's sustained confrontation with these issues in the post-Holocaust period and offer insights into why an impassioned need to come to clarity about the Germans was both so critical and so frustrating in the life and writings of this important author.

**Alvin H. Rosenfeld**, Professor of English and Jewish Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington, received his Ph.D. from Brown University in 1967 and has taught at Indiana University since 1968. He holds the Irving M. Glazer Chair in Jewish Studies and is Director of the university's Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism. He founded Indiana University's well-regarded Borns Jewish Studies Program and served as its director for 30 years. His numerous publications include *Confronting the Holocaust: The Impact of Elie Wiesel* (co-edited with Irving Greenberg) in 1979 and his *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (1980). His *The Writer Uprooted: Contemporary Jewish Exile Literature* appeared with Indiana University Press in 2009. His most recent study, *The End of the Holocaust*, is due to be published in 2011.