

## The Limits of Tolerance:

### Jews, the Enlightenment, and the Fear of Premature Burial

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“La mort est certaine, et elle ne l’est pas. Elle est certaine, puisqu’elle est inévitable, elle ne l’est pas, puisqu’il est quelquefois incertain qu’on soit mort.”

—Jean-Jacques Bruhier, *Dissertation sur l’incertitude des signes de la mort et l’abus des enterrements et embaumements précipités*

In 1798, a little-known German journal, the *Schlesische Provinzialblätter*, published a report about a case of narrowly averted tragedy. It concerned a young Jewish boy in Breslau who had been pronounced dead in November of the previous year. Actually, the boy was not dead, he only seemed to be, and since Jewish ritual law required rapid burial—within twenty-four hours at the latest unless the Sabbath intervened—he was at great peril of being buried alive. He escaped that fate because the misdiagnosis of death occurred late in the afternoon—too late in the afternoon to permit a burial before nightfall. The burial had to be postponed until the following morning, and by then, the boy was showing signs of life. Had it not been for the late hour of his apparent demise, it is quite possible that he would have awakened to find himself entombed beneath the earth. Instead, he awoke, as if after a long sleep, in his bed.<sup>1</sup>

All’s well that ends well? Not according to a small coterie of Jewish reformers in Breslau, a group comprising some doctors and a handful of like-minded allies. The reformers were well

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<sup>1</sup> In English, the epigraph reads, “Death is certain, and it is not. It is certain because inevitable; not certain because it is sometimes uncertain whether one has died.” On the Breslau boy nearly buried alive, see “Darstellung der Vorgänge und Resultate wegen der aufs neue in Anregung gebrachte frühen Beerdigung der Juden, bey der jüdischen Gemeinde in Breslau; vom November 1797 bis Ende May 1798,” *Schlesische Provinzialblätter* 28 (1798): 21-53. For historical accounts of events in Breslau, see Max Freudenthal, “Die ersten Emancipationsbestrebungen der Juden in Breslau,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums* (1893): 565-79; and Michael Edward Panitz, “Modernity and Mortality: The Transformation of Central European Responses to Death, 1750-1850” (Ph.D. diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 1989), 146-50.

aware that for roughly a half century, doctors in Europe had been calling attention to the difficulty of distinguishing between “seeming death” and real death, and the consequent danger of premature burial. Hardly any educated reader in Germany or France could have been unaware of it, so vast was the accumulated body of literature dealing with the subjects of seeming death and premature burial—treatises, pamphlets, and journal articles in both French and German, nearly all of which sounded the same alarms and made the same basic points: that the absence of such vital signs as respiration and arterial pulsations proved nothing in itself, that the only infallible sign of death was the putrefaction of the corpse, and that unless burial were postponed until the onset of putrefaction, untold numbers of innocent victims would suffer the horrible torture of being buried alive.<sup>2</sup> For the reformers in Breslau, the case of the young Jewish boy seemed to confirm the wisdom of the medical warnings. In their view, the appropriate response to such a case was action, not complacency—prompt and coordinated action to protect the Jews of Breslau against the danger of being buried alive. Shortly after the revival of the boy in November, the reformers launched a bold initiative: the creation of a new burial society (*Beerdigungsgesellschaft*). The new society elected officers and printed statutes, which it submitted for approval to the Prussian authorities, and in which it stipulated that no one should ever be dispatched to his grave until the body showed signs of decomposition.

But what authority did the reformers have to launch such an initiative? Within the traditional structure of the Jewish community, none whatsoever. The new burial society had no official standing, and there already was an official institution responsible for looking after the dead and the dying, the burial confraternity, which was one of the pillars of the Jewish community. The creation of a rival burial society was an open challenge to the corporate

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<sup>2</sup> For a list of publications dealing with “seeming death” and premature burial, see the appendix at the end of this essay.

organization of the Jewish community, so brazen and provocative a challenge that it tore the community apart.

The reformers and their adversaries became embroiled in a bitter conflict, an intra-communal battle of words that grew increasingly poisonous until it finally came to a head in mid-April 1798, following the real death of a young boy, the infant son of a certain Doctor Zadig. As it happened, Zadig was one of the founding members of the new burial society, so the body of his infant son was treated in accordance with the statutes of the group: corpse watchers observed it night and day until the first signs of decomposition began to appear, at which point Zadig made a request to the directors of the confraternity for a burial plot in the Jewish cemetery. The request was denied. Then a second request was denied. And, eventually, after several more days had gone by and the corpse had reached a state of advanced decomposition, Zadig became so desperate that he decided to appeal to the Prussian state for help against his own coreligionists. He submitted a petition of grievance to the Prussian minister, Privy Councilor von Osten, who issued an official order requiring the confraternity to grant a burial plot. That did the trick. Soon afterward, Zadig’s infant child was indeed laid to rest in the Jewish cemetery of Breslau, the burial watched over by the lieutenant general of police and four other police inspectors, who were there to ensure compliance with the government order.

And so ended the burial controversy in Breslau. In retrospect, it seems to have prefigured much of the future course of German-Jewish history in the nineteenth century: the battle between modernizers and traditionalists within the Jewish community, the victory of the modernizers, and the gradual erosion of communal autonomy under pressure from an expanding sovereign state.<sup>3</sup> By way of comparison, however, consider how it appeared to a contemporary, the journalist

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<sup>3</sup> On German-Jewish history, but without any mention of burial practices, see Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743–1933* (New York: Holt, 2002).

writing in the *Schlesische Provinzialblätter*. He viewed the burial controversy as a momentous event—less because of its significance for German Jews than because of its significance for the eighteenth century as a whole:

The remarkable events and the staggering revolutions in the thinking and the behavior of mankind which in the short time span of the past nine years [i.e., since the outbreak of the French Revolution] have followed one another in rapid succession have made the eighteenth century seem remarkable; but the century could with justification be called the most extraordinary [in all of history] if before it comes to an end, it witnesses a general revolution in the thinking and behavior of the Jewish nation, a salutary and wise reform of a religion that has been totally perverted by rabbinical hair-splitting [*Rabbinerschnitzelei*]. In general, however, one cannot expect this religious revolution, whose consequences for all the Jews and for the states in which they live would certainly be very beneficial, since the entire Jewish nation will not, of its own free will and from a rational conviction, undertake to reform its antiquated and useless dogmas, and since the state, constrained by the principles of justice, will not force it to do so. But the already enlightened [*erleuchtet*] part of the Jewish nation can take advantage of the contemporary climate of opinion and the enlightened attitude [*helle Den kungsart*] of princes to work for the realization of a proposal that will lay the foundations for and consolidate the civil well-being of themselves and their coreligionists for all eternity. And truly, if one considers how in the short span of six months a small society of Jews here in Breslau managed to overthrow one of the oldest Jewish practices—or rather abuses—which had endured down to the present despite the attacks against it from Jewish scholars and famous physicians and despite the conviction of the government, which held that the practice was not a matter of religion and that it was outrageous and inhumane—[if one considers all of these things], one requires no special illumination and need make no claim to the art of divination in order to foresee that before the end of this century the better part of the Jews will indeed bring about the aforementioned reform [in the thinking and behavior of the Jewish nation].<sup>4</sup>

A local dispute among Jews in a remote province of Prussia the crowning event of the eighteenth century? A more significant turning point than the storming of the Bastille or the execution of Louis XVI? A harbinger of world historical change? The claim seems so extravagant that the historian may be tempted to dismiss it as nonsense. But that temptation should be resisted. “The most promising moment in research can be the most puzzling,” Robert

<sup>4</sup> “Darstellung der Vorgänge...,” 21–23.

Darnton has argued.<sup>5</sup> And Darnton’s dictum can be applied to a seemingly extravagant claim about a burial controversy in Breslau no less than to the joke of a cat massacre in Paris. If we can solve the puzzle of why the Silesian journalist ascribed such enormous significance to a movement for burial reform in Breslau, then other pieces of his contemporary culture are likely to fall into place, too.

But first a general point about being buried alive. All of us can conjure up in our minds the terrors of such a fate: the immobility, the confinement, the solitude, the unrelieved silence, the sense of utter helplessness. Those terrors were not at all peculiar to the eighteenth century. One finds them depicted in gothic literature of the nineteenth century—in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, for example—as well as in horror movies today—most recently, in the Dutch film *Spoorloos (The Vanishing)*. So also in documents of much earlier ages—the tragedy of *Antigone*, for example, where Creon condemns the heroine to be walled up inside a cave, or early modern plague chronicles, which evoke the horror of the plague by describing how the ailing and the dead were thrown together pell-mell and consigned to the same mass graves for burial. Premature burial has inspired dread in so many times and places that one could describe it as one of the archetypal fears of the human imagination, like drowning at sea or falling into an abyss, and yet to describe it in that way, *sub specie aeternitatis*, does not help us in the least to grasp the historical significance of burial reform among the Jews of Breslau in 1798. Even archetypal fears, after all, have a history. They wax and wane; and, most important, they change shape. For our purposes, the important question is not whether the fear of premature burial has always existed. Rather, it is what people *did* with that fear in the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre, and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage, 1985), 262.

<sup>6</sup> On the fear of premature burial, see Martina Kessel, “Die Angst vor dem Scheintod im 18. Jahrhundert: Körper und Seele zwischen Religion, Magie und Wissenschaft,” in *Hirntod: Zur Kulturgeschichte der Todesfeststellung*, ed.

Take the treatise of the French physician Jean-Jacques Bruhier, *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des signes de la mort* (1742–49), the first of the many French works on the danger of premature burial to be published in the eighteenth century. To impress on his readers just how serious the danger was, Bruhier told stories, 181 gripping, lurid tales of torture or narrowly averted torture, many of which played variations on a single necrophilic theme. A young woman has been given up for dead and is called back to life by the ardent embrace of her lover, just in time to escape the fate of expiring in her grave. It looks like a timeless theme, the myth of love conquering death, which traverses the ages from the Christian Gospels to *Sleeping Beauty* to Pedro Almodóvar's *Habla con ella* (*Talk to Her*). But Bruhier was not using it that way. In his telling of the tales, love does not conquer death because the women are not dead to begin with—they only *seem* to be dead. The difference is crucial, and it gives the tales an admonitory meaning. Beware of inferring death from the usual outward signs. When people wake up in their graves, Bruhier implied, it is simply because some ignorant fools made a misdiagnosis of death. There is nothing the least bit mysterious about it. Indeed, once one takes account of the phenomenon of seeming death, all kinds of mysteries dissolve, like the supposed resurrection of Lazarus in the New Testament, which Bruhier dismissed as a religious hoax.<sup>7</sup>

Bruhier, in short, was a man of his age: a scientist who wrote like a philosophe. He treated the reported cases of premature burial in the manner of Voltaire, by stripping them of their mystery and explaining them in naturalistic terms; then he forged them into critical

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Thomas Schlich and Claudia Wiesemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 133–66; Jan Bondeson, *Buried Alive: The Terrifying History of Our Most Primal Fear* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001); and Ingrid Stoessel, *Scheintod und Todesangst: Äusserungen der Angst in ihren geschichtlichen Wandlungen (17.–20. Jahrhundert)* (Cologne: Forschungsstelle des Instituts für Geschichte der Medizin der Universität zu Köln, 1983). Bondeson cites examples of the fear from antiquity to the eighteenth century, including the descriptions of premature burial in early modern plague chronicles; see *Buried Alive*, 32–34.

<sup>7</sup> Bruhier, *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des signes de la mort* (Paris, 1749), 522–53. Cited in Bondeson, *Buried Alive*, 59. One version of the necrophilic theme concerned a randy monk who impregnated and thereby revived a woman in a state of seeming death. That story and the reactions to it are discussed in Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1–4.

weapons, to be wielded, rapier-like, for the skewering of superstition and credulity. Other writers who discussed cases of premature burial after Bruhier treated them in much the same way. Why had so many people testified to having heard horrible, bone-chilling screams in cemeteries during the night?, asked an anonymous author in a German journal of the 1770s. Not, he answered, because those people had stumbled on a witches' Sabbath—the hoary legends about witches and their nocturnal gatherings in cemeteries had no basis in reality. The most likely explanation of the screams was that they came from victims of premature burial who were crying out to be released from their subterranean prisons.<sup>8</sup> That explanation did not make the screams any less terrifying; quite the contrary. But at least it removed them from a supernatural frame of reference. The writers of the eighteenth century who sounded the alarm about the danger of premature burial were men of the Enlightenment.

I say “the” Enlightenment, knowing that some readers will object to the use of the definite article. And there are good reasons for objecting to it. The Enlightenment, after all, did not take the same form in France as it did in Germany, and in neither country did it stand for a set of fixed and immutable beliefs. But it did cohere as a process, as an open-ended debate revolving around certain central topics of concern—for instance, that of prejudice. The most radical Enlightenment authors, like Paul-Henri Thiry Baron d'Holbach in France, condemned prejudice categorically; the more moderate ones, like Moses Mendelssohn in Germany, were prepared to concede that certain prejudices contained moral truths and were therefore useful—at least for the uneducated classes, which had not yet learned to apprehend those truths rationally. But the question of how to deal with prejudices—whether to combat them, and if so, by what means, or to tolerate them, and if so, under what circumstances—was a recurrent subject of

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<sup>8</sup> *Deutsches Museum* 1 (1778): 445. An almost identical explanation of screams in cemeteries appeared a decade earlier in *Hannoversches Magazin* 82 (October 10, 1768): 1302.

discussion in the European Enlightenment. It was also one of the main reasons why reported cases of premature burial took on such great significance: those cases exemplified prejudice in both of the senses in which that concept was understood in the eighteenth century—prejudice as precipitate or “overhasty” (*übereilt*) judgment and prejudice as uncritical attachment to tradition (the prejudice in favor of authority).<sup>9</sup> To send someone to his grave before the evidence warranted a definitive pronouncement of death was to be guilty of prejudice in the first sense; to follow the traditional practice of rapid burial, simply because that practice was traditional or because it enjoyed the sanction of religious authority, was to be guilty of prejudice in the second sense. Either way, victims of premature burial were victims of prejudice. And so a great deal was at stake for the Enlightenment in the reform of burial practice—the elimination not just of any evil but of an evil that epitomized the harmfulness of prejudice.

The obstacles to reform, however, were every bit as formidable as the stakes were high. To begin with, there was the sheer scarcity of doctors and their physical distance from the actual sites of death. In the eighteenth century, the vast majority of people did not die with doctors anywhere near their bedsides. If they were lucky enough to die “well”—which is to say, in their native villages, rather than destitute and on the road—then they would, in most cases, have been attended at their deathbeds by family members, some of their fellow villagers, the local vicar or parish priest, and perhaps some traditional healers like the village cunning man or wise

<sup>9</sup> In the German debate on the question, what is Enlightenment?, Moses Mendelssohn took the position that some prejudices contained truths necessary to morality, and that in certain instances the “virtue-loving [*Tugendliebender*] Aufklärer . . . would do better to tolerate the prejudice than to drive out the truth with which the prejudice was so closely intertwined.” See Moses Mendelssohn, “Über die Frage: Was heisst Aufklären?,” *Berlinische Monatsschrift* 4 (1784): 198–99. In his *Essai sur les préjugés* (1770), D’Holbach denounced prejudices unconditionally, arguing that they were ipso facto harmful and incompatible with virtue and happiness. Compared to D’Holbach’s position, Mendelssohn’s looks quite moderate. But Mendelssohn’s formulation, “better to tolerate the prejudice” (*lieber das Vorurteil dulden*), implied that it would have been better still if the truths necessary to morality were grounded in reason rather than apprehended in the form of prejudice. Even for Mendelssohn, therefore, the tolerance of prejudice was merely a provisional concession, not an ideal. On the concept of prejudice in the German Enlightenment, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989), 271–85; and Werner Schneiders, *Aufklärung und Vorurteilstheorie: Studien zur Geschichte der Vorurteilstheorie* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzbock, 1983).

woman—but not by doctors. The “medicalization” of death, like the “professionalization” of medicine, was a development more of the nineteenth than the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it was not enough for doctors alone to grasp just how easily life could counterfeit death. The general population had to grasp it, too, and many people were bound to balk at the idea of keeping unburied bodies lying around in their houses or cottages for days on end. As an alternative to keeping bodies in homes, the German physician Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland advocated the construction of a new kind of public health institution: waiting mortuaries (*Leichenhäuser*), in which bodies would be laid out and monitored by specially trained corpse watchers before burial. Hufeland was one of the most renowned and respected figures in German medicine, as well as the court physician of Karl August, Grand Duke of Weimar, and with the backing of the duke, he was able to bring his project to fruition: the first German *Leichenhaus* opened its doors in Weimar in 1791, followed over the next two decades by *Leichenhäuser* in Berlin, Brunswick, Ansbach, Kassel, Mainz, and Munich. The German medical establishment embraced Hufeland’s project enthusiastically; the public, on the other hand, much less so. Working-class Germans in towns proved reluctant to surrender the bodies of their loved ones to the tender mercies of the corpse watchers. The *Leichenhäuser*, therefore, were rarely filled to capacity, and some of them sat practically empty, notwithstanding Hufeland’s tireless propagandizing. In 1791, he published a short work about the public health benefits of the *Leichenhäuser*, and then, seventeen years later, he published a second, much longer work in which he tried to win support for his project by repeating many of the same horror stories that

<sup>10</sup> On eighteenth-century German medicine, see Thomas Broman, *The Transformation of German Academic Medicine, 1750–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Claudia Huerkamp, *Der Aufstieg der Ärzte im 19. Jahrhundert: Vom gelehrten Stand zum professionellen Experten: Das Beispiel Preussens* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 23–45; Ute Frevort, *Krankheitspolitisches Problem: Soziale Untersichten in Preussen zwischen medizinischer Polizei und staatlicher Sozialversicherung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 11–83; and Mary Lindemann, *Health and Healing in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). None of these works, however, devotes any attention to the issue of seeming death and premature burial.

had originally appeared in Bruhier's treatise more than a half century earlier. But even if Hufeland's project had caught on with the public, it would only have affected town-dwellers, and most Germans in the late eighteenth century lived in the countryside.<sup>11</sup>

In order to promote the reform of burial practices in rural areas, the Prussian government launched a small public health initiative of its own. It allocated monies from the royal coffers to underwrite the printing of short and simple books on the subject of seeming death. In their form, the books were modeled on religious catechisms; ideologically, they belonged to what Germans called the "popular enlightenment" (*Volksaufklärung*), which was a kind of philanthropic publishing campaign whose chief goal was not to make peasants into philosophers so much as to convey practical information to the "common man" (*gemeiner Mann*)—in this particular case, practical information about reanimation techniques, diagnosing death, and the importance of observing waiting periods before burial.<sup>12</sup> It was one thing, however, to print and disseminate such books, and quite another to ensure that their message would get across. By the second half of the eighteenth century, most German states had introduced laws requiring some schooling for the whole population, but the laws were not always enforced, and in any case, most village schools were so ill equipped and poorly run that one could have attended those schools and still not had sufficient literacy to decipher even so simple a book as a medical catechism. In practice,

<sup>11</sup> See C. W. Hufeland's *Über die Ungewissheit des Todes und das einzige untrügliche Mittel sich von seiner Wirklichkeit zu überzeugen: Nebst der Nachricht von der Errichtung eines Leichenhauses in Weimar* (Weimar, 1791); and *Der Scheintod* (Berlin, 1808). On the public reaction to the *Leichenhäuser*, see Bondeson, *Buried Alive*, 100–110.

<sup>12</sup> *Katechismus der anscheinenden Todesfälle oder sogenannten Pulslosigkeit: Wodurch der gemeine Mann unterrichtet wird, wie er bey den verschiedenen Arten anscheinender Todesfälle verfahren soll: Auf Befehl Sr. königlichen Hoheit des Prinzen Heinrich von Preussen zum Druck befördert* (Berlin, 1787); *Unterricht vom Scheintode und dem sichersten Mittel das Lebendigbegraben zu verhüten für Ungelehrte* (Breslau, 1798). On the *Volksaufklärung* in general, see the discussion in Jonathan B. Knudsen, "On Enlightenment for the Common Man," in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 270–90.

the message of such a book was unlikely to reach its intended audience unless some literate intermediary like the local vicar or schoolmaster transmitted it verbally.<sup>13</sup>

It is easy to understand, therefore, why educated Germans would have been pessimistic about the prospects for successful burial reform. And yet the degree of pessimism is remarkable all the same. For several decades, beginning in the 1770s, German journals repeatedly issued gloomy pronouncements about the futility of efforts to eliminate the scourge of premature burial. In one journal, for example, an author began his article about seeming death and premature burial by announcing that he planned to discuss "our mishandling of the dead," which he held to be a subject of the greatest importance. In the very next sentence, he went on to say that he did not believe his article would be the least bit useful: "To believe such a thing, I would have to be ignorant of the force that traditional practices have on human minds and the slowness with which improvement occurs in such cases where the power of reason has to triumph over common prejudice."<sup>14</sup> Another author writing about the danger of premature burial admitted that the "common people" (*das Volk*) were not even aware of the existence of the journal in which his article was being published.<sup>15</sup> So why bother? The question was inescapable, and it hung over the discussions of premature burial like a dark cloud. To all appearances, the cause of burial reform was trapped in a closed circle: the already enlightened speaking to the already enlightened. The problem of how to break out of that circle looked well-nigh insoluble.

And if the problem seemed so difficult to solve for the German population in general, then how much more so in the specific case of the Jews. Jewish communities defied the medical consensus about the danger of same-day burial not out of lethargy or fatalism or ignorance, but

<sup>13</sup> On literacy and the circulation of the printed word among the laboring classes in late eighteenth-century Germany, see Rudolf Schenda, *Volk ohne Buch: Studien zur Sozialgeschichte der populären Lesestoffe, 1770–1910* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1970).

<sup>14</sup> *Neues Hamburgisches Magazin* (1778): 23.

<sup>15</sup> *Lausisches Wochenblatt* (1792): 327.

because it contradicted their religious law. To them, same-day burial was a commandment and a way of showing respect for the dead; to the partisans of burial reform, it was an abomination. German journals fulminated against the “inhumanity” and “cruelty” of same-day burial, a practice all the more intolerable as it also provided a camouflage for the most dastardly crimes—poisoning, for example, which was likely to go undetected because the bodies of the victims were dispatched to their graves before autopsies could be performed. Under the cover of same-day burial, it was alleged, Jews were able to murder their own coreligionists with impunity.<sup>16</sup> Those allegations made the Jews seem perfidious and depraved at the very moment, it should be noted, that Germans were also debating the issue of Jewish emancipation, which the Prussian official von Dohm had launched with the publication in 1781 of his pamphlet “On the Civic Improvement of the Jews” (“Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden”).<sup>17</sup> Given that Jewish burial practice and Jewish emancipation were being discussed simultaneously, it would be natural to suppose that those who denounced Jewish burial practice were hostile to Jewish emancipation—but it was not that simple.

Anton Büsching, a writer who made some particularly nasty comments about the Jewish practice of same-day burial, presented himself with some plausibility as a friend of the Jews. It was only because enlightened Christians regarded Jews as fellow human beings, Büsching argued, that they felt duty bound to speak out against Jews murdering their own coreligionists. Had they said nothing, their silence would have bespoken indifference to Jewish suffering.<sup>18</sup> And

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, “Abscheuliche Vergiftung in einer jüdischen Familie in Hamburg,” *Historisch-politisch-literarisches Magazin* 8 (1790): 357–59.

<sup>17</sup> On the debate about Jewish emancipation, see Gerda Heinrich, “‘... man sollte itzt beständig das Publikum über diese Materie en haleine halten’: Die Debatte um ‘bürgerliche Verbesserung’ der Juden 1781–86,” in *Appell an das Publikum: Die Öffentliche Debatte in der deutschen Aufklärung, 1687–1796*, ed. Ursula Goldenbaum (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), 814–95.

<sup>18</sup> Anton Friedrich Büsching, “Über die frühe Beerdigung der Juden,” *Berlinische Monatsschrift* 5, no. 2 (1785): 112. On the other hand, the Christian Hebraist Johann David Michaelis, who wrote a lengthy article in his *Orientalische Bibliothek* (6 [1789]: 51–77) on the subject of Jewish burial practice, was indeed a staunch opponent of von Dohm.

yet speaking out did not do any good, either, if the Jews were not listening. “It is futile to present to the Jews the most vivid depictions of the terrifying consequences of rapid burial and to refute their erroneous religious scruples. It is futile to persuade them that their treatment of the dead is indecent and that it violates the rights of man,” another German author concluded bitterly in a journal article of the early 1790s. “As long as the rabbi remains what he now is, the all-powerful of the nation, capable of grinding into the dust with complete impunity whomever he wishes, ... all efforts to enlighten the Jewish nation, to instill in it true feelings of humanity and self-worth and to suppress the old national prejudice in favor of rapid burial, will be totally useless.”<sup>19</sup> By clinging to their “old national prejudice” and ignoring the voice of reason in the matter of burial reform, the Jews seemed to dramatize one of the weightiest problems of the late eighteenth century: the impediments to the spread of Enlightenment.

So what was to be done? The German commentators were convinced that some Jews harbored secret misgivings about same-day burial but dared not say so for fear of incurring the wrath of their all-powerful rabbis. The solution, therefore, was to curtail the power of the rabbis. Governments, it was argued, would have to adopt laws mandating waiting periods before burial, then enforce those laws in the teeth of rabbinic opposition, by coercive means if necessary.<sup>20</sup> And that was precisely what German governments did. Gradually, laws calling for waiting periods before burial were enacted in the major states of the old Reich: the Habsburg lands of Austria and Bohemia (1786–87), electoral Saxony (1792), and, finally, following the events in Breslau mentioned earlier, Prussia (1798). The laws caused tremendous turmoil in Jewish communities, but the German commentators were absolutely right that some Jews harbored

<sup>19</sup> “Über die frühe Beerdigung der Todten und über die Ungewissheit der Kennzeichen des wahren und falschen Todes,” *Almanach für Ärzte und Nichtärzte* (1790): 182–83.

<sup>20</sup> Such an argument was advanced in “Abscheuliche Vergiftung,” 358–59, and “Über die frühe Beerdigung der Todten und über die Ungewissheit der Kennzeichen des wahren und falschen Todes,” 183.

misgivings about the wisdom of same-day burial, not least Mendelssohn, the most famous Jew in all of Europe, who argued as early as 1772, in a letter to the Jewish community of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, that the Jews would do well to heed the warnings of doctors. A conciliator by nature, Mendelssohn blunted the sharp edge of his argument by wrapping it in exegesis—he endeavored to show that the practice of same-day burial was based on a misreading of the relevant sources and that Jews could abandon the practice without abrogating Jewish law.<sup>21</sup>

Mendelssohn's followers in the next decade, however, were not nearly so circumspect. For Marcus Herz, a Jewish physician writing in the 1780s, the authority of doctors trumped the authority of Jewish law, and that was that.<sup>22</sup> When German governments acted against the power of the rabbis, therefore, they did enjoy the support of a minority of self-styled “enlightened” Jews. David Friedländer, one of the leaders of the Jewish Enlightenment in Germany, went so far as to publish an article in a Berlin journal hailing the emperor Joseph II for having outlawed same-day burial in Bohemia: “My enlightened brothers recognize with gratitude this paternal concern for our well-being [which] marks a new victory over an old prejudice that inspires feelings of indignation.”<sup>23</sup> For anyone who felt frustrated at the apparent tenacity of traditional prejudices, the mere existence of Jews like Friedländer and Herz, or the reformers in Breslau who challenged the burial confraternity, was a source of hope. It made it possible to argue that Jews, too, had the capacity to heed the voice of reason, and therefore that the chief obstacle to the spread of Enlightenment among the Jews was not any intrinsic flaw in the Jewish character, it

<sup>21</sup> Originally written in Hebrew, Mendelssohn's letter to the Jews of Mecklenburg-Schwerin was translated into German and published after his death. See “Schreiben des Herrn Moses Mendelssohn an die achtbare Gemeinde zu Schwerin,” *Berlinische Monatsschrift* 9 (1787): 325–29. When Jacob Herschel, the rabbi of the Jewish community in Altona, learned of Mendelssohn's position, he wrote an angry letter to him in which he castigated Mendelssohn for his “pride” and “arrogance.” See M. Kayserling, *Moses Mendelssohn: Sein Leben und seine Werke* (Leipzig: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1862), 276–80.

<sup>22</sup> Marcus Herz, *Über die frühe Beerdigung der Juden* (Berlin, 1788).

<sup>23</sup> David Friedländer, “Über die frühe Beerdigung der Juden: Ein Brief aus Prag an die Herausgeber, nebst einigen Urkunden,” *Berlinische Monatsschrift* 9 (1787): 318.

was institutional—the organization and autonomy of Jewish communities—and as such removable through political action. Our Silesian journalist did not spell out that argument precisely, but something like it was clearly implied in his comments about the burial controversy in Breslau.

And so the pieces of the puzzle have finally fallen into place. Why would anyone regard the burial controversy in Breslau as the crowning event of the eighteenth century? In the first place, because premature burial epitomized the iniquity of prejudice and because the Enlightenment, in whatever form it appeared, was deeply concerned about the problem of prejudice. But also, and most important, because the prejudice in favor of rapid burial proved so difficult to root out. With the Jewish resistance to burial reform, the Enlightenment seemed to have reached an impasse—there was much hand-wringing among the already enlightened about the power of prejudice but little progress toward the goal of eliminating same-day burial. Then, suddenly, at the very end of the “century of Enlightenment,” there was progress—at least in Breslau—and it pointed a way out of the impasse. The way out lay in a new kind of alliance: an enlightened minority of educated Jews and the enlightened Prussian officialdom marching together to reform Jewish rituals.

With all the pieces of the puzzle in place, our work of historical reconstruction might seem to be at an end. But there is a problem with applying the metaphor of puzzle solving to the work of historical reconstruction: the pieces of a puzzle are designed to fit together whereas the elements of a culture are not. Different value systems, for example, will often coexist within a single culture, even within a single individual, and it would be a mistake to suppose that they can always be so neatly fitted together. By way of conclusion, therefore, it may be instructive to go



back over some of the same ground we have already covered, this time with a view not to solving the puzzle but to highlighting certain unresolved tensions.

Consider, first, the recurrent use of fear in the campaign for burial reform. From Bruhier to Hufeland, nearly all the authors involved in the campaign appealed openly to fear, describing the horrible suffering of being buried alive so as to raise public awareness of the need to delay burial. As we have said, however, those same authors were also men of the Enlightenment, committed to understanding the universe in rational terms; and it was one of the core convictions of Enlightenment authors that rational understanding would diminish the terrors of human existence. "The more Enlightenment [*philosophie*, in French; *Aufklärung*, in German], the less fear" was practically a definition of Enlightenment. All the *philosophes* and *Aufklärer* would have endorsed it, just as most of them would have endorsed the proposition "the less prejudice, the better." And, of course, fear and prejudice were closely linked, for prejudices led to fear—notably, religious prejudices, like the beliefs in hell or purgatory, which caused humanity to fear the prospect of death. In the campaign for burial reform, however, that link had been severed. Instead of exposing prejudice in order to banish fear, authors like Bruhier and Hufeland incited fear in order to combat prejudice.<sup>24</sup>

Fearmongering to advance the cause of the Enlightenment? Clearly, the means and the ends were in tension. But how deep did that tension go? And what are we to make of it? Of course, it was never in the Enlightenment's power to banish fear completely. Some old fears

<sup>24</sup> On the Enlightenment and fear in general, see Christian Begemann, *Furcht und Angst im Prozess der Aufklärung: Zu Literatur und Bewusstseinsgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: Athenaeum, 1987); Hartmut Böhme and Gernot Böhme, *Das Andere der Vernunft: Zur Entwicklung von Rationalitätsstrukturen am Beispiel Kants* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983); and Jean Deprun, *La philosophie de l'inquiétude en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1979). The generally accepted thesis is that the Enlightenment inaugurated an historical shift from "fear" (*Furcht*), which has a specific object—for example, witchcraft or hell—to "anxiety" (*Angst*), which is a diffuse state of disquiet. The fear of premature burial, however, does not fit that thesis for the obvious reason that it did, in fact, have a precise object: awakening to find oneself entombed beneath the earth. On the traditional, pre-Enlightenment fears of early modern Europe, see Jean Delumeau, *La peur en Occident (XIVe–XVIII siècles): Une cité assiégée* (Paris: Fayard, 1978).

were bound to survive, like the fear of famine, which burst into the open during *la grande peur* of the French Revolution. This incident derived from the widespread belief in an aristocratic plot to starve the French people, and apart from the fact that the supposed villains were aristocrats rather than, say, witches, something very like it could have broken out in the seventeenth century, too. All the myth bashing of Enlightenment authors could not dent the fear of famine for the obvious reason that famine was not a myth. It was grounded in real conditions of material scarcity. There was only one effective cure for the fear of famine, and it was not philosophy. It was an increase in agricultural production, which was, in fact, occurring during the second half of the eighteenth century, but not fast enough to guarantee adequate food supplies for the entire population when harvests failed.<sup>25</sup> Within the conditions of the eighteenth century, the fear of famine made eminently good sense. The fear of premature burial, however, belonged to a different category. It did not survive *despite* the Enlightenment, it flourished *because* of it. The publications on seeming death and premature burial contributed to reactivating an ancient fear, and there is no question that some of the readers of those publications were really frightened. One example is Mme. Necker, the salon hostess and wife of the French finance minister, who lifted a long list of reanimation techniques and precautionary measures against premature burial from Bruhier's treatise and wrote them into her last will and testament.<sup>26</sup> During the last years of

<sup>25</sup> On famine in eighteenth-century Germany, see Wilhelm Abel, *Massenarmut und Hungerkrisen im vorindustriellen Deutschland*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> On Mme. Necker's obsessive fear of being buried alive, see Antoine de Baecque, *La gloire et l'effroi: Septs morts sous la terreur* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1997), 217–51. Another French historian, Jean-Louis Bourgeon, has tried to track the fear of being buried alive by using the quantitative methods of the Annales school. He compared Parisian wills during fifteen-year periods from the first and second halves of the eighteenth century in order to determine whether there was any increase in the number of wills requesting safeguards against premature burial, and, in fact, there was an increase. In the period from 1710 to 1725, only two out of a thousand wills prescribed safeguards; in the period from 1760 to 1775, the number was thirteen out of a thousand, and additional thirty-four requested delays in burial for unspecified reasons. Bourgeon's study does not support the conclusion that there was a widespread panic, but it does indicate some rise in the fear of premature burial, probably due to the works of Bruhier and others. See Bourgeon, "La peur d'être enterré vivant au XVIIIe siècle: Mythe ou réalité?," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 30 (1983): 139–53. See also Bondeson, *Buried Alive*, 77.

her life, Mme. Necker dreaded the prospect of her own death just like any believing Christian of an earlier period, except that the suffering she dreaded pertained to the body rather than the soul and was situated in an in-between state this side of the divide between life and death: the grave as this-worldly purgatory.

And yet the fear of being buried alive was not the same thing as the fear of languishing in purgatory or burning in hell, either. In the latter case, the fear was of something belonging to the domain of religious dogma. Purgatory was a reality because the Catholic Church said it was. So, too, with hell, except that hell was dogma for all Christians and not just Catholics. One could not question the reality of purgatory or hell from within the discourses of Catholic or Protestant orthodoxy, only from without—by subjecting the dogma to rational critique. The fear of being buried alive was different. It was a fear of something that belonged to the domain of scientific “fact,” and the Enlightenment never conferred unimpeachable authority on scientific fact; quite the contrary.<sup>27</sup> In the eighteenth century, at a time when scientists had not yet withdrawn behind the protective walls of professional journals and technical jargon, scientific facts were open to critique in the public sphere, and so, too, were the fears those facts supported.

In 1776, for example, the magistrates in Zurich became convinced that someone had poisoned the communion wine in the main cathedral of the city. The evidence for the crime came from a team of eminent physicians who performed a chemical analysis on the wine and concluded that it contained arsenic. The crime, therefore, was a scientific “fact,” and it reactivated the ancient fears of poisoning and sacrilege, which found a wide echo in the press coverage of the event. To contemporary observers, it seemed one of the worst crimes imaginable—until Friedrich Nicolai, a prominent figure of the Berlin Aufklärung, published an

<sup>27</sup> On the “fragility” of scientific facts and the “fear” of that fragility among Enlightenment authors, see Lorraine Daston, “Enlightenment Fears, Fears of Enlightenment,” in *What’s Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question*, ed. Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 115–28.

article in a leading Berlin journal in which he argued that the evidence was flawed and that the wine had never been poisoned. Nicolai retrospectively declared the “fact” to be a nonfact, and, as far as one can tell, most people agreed with him, including some of his bitterest enemies.<sup>28</sup> In the case of premature burial, the outcome was the other way around: the fearmongers defeated the doubters. Or so it would appear from the published record, for most of those who wrote on the subject of premature burial took the view that a great many people were, in fact, being buried alive. But the doubters made their voices heard, too.

In 1792, for example, a German author published a journal article in which he took issue with another author who had claimed, in the pages of the same journal, that throughout history one in thirty people had been buried alive. How could anyone claim to know such a thing?, he asked. Only by performing an experiment of first burying and then exhuming thousands of bodies, he answered. No such experiment had ever been tried; therefore, the claim was nothing but “theory and hypothesis”—“an arbitrarily adopted proposition...beyond the reach of any possible experience.” The author did not go so far as to affirm that no one had ever been buried alive; he could not have done so without violating his own empiricism—the phrase “beyond the reach of any possible experience” was a nod in the direction of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*—but he was convinced that the fear of premature burial was overblown and that all the talk about it was doing more harm than good: “The otherwise praiseworthy condemnation of rapid burial that is now widespread in Germany and that has prompted governments in many regions to enact edicts on the subject has also caused much anguish among the common people, especially among those who have lost loved ones and who now torment themselves night and day with the thought that they may have buried their loves ones too soon. I shall not conceal my

<sup>28</sup> Jeffrey Freedman, *A Poisoned Chalice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

view, therefore, that we have gone a little too far—a little too far, that is, in our damning remarks about frequently occurring premature burials.”<sup>29</sup>

Or consider the physician writing in a medical journal in 1790 (a medical journal, however, that was clearly addressed to both doctors and nondoctors alike). He was prepared to admit that it was sometimes possible to mistake seeming death for real death, but only in those cases where the outward signs of death appeared suddenly and no previous indication of illness had been present, as after strokes, seizures, fainting, or suffocation, and such cases were too rare to justify the shrill alarmism of the campaigners for burial reform. “The terrors of life and death are for the most part only imaginary. Why then do we wish to multiply and enlarge them without cause?” the physician concluded.<sup>30</sup> Or, finally, consider the Jewish physician M. J. Marx, who published an article in support of the Jewish practice of same-day burial. Whatever the danger of premature burial, Marx argued, it paled beside the public health danger that resulted from leaving dead bodies unburied: better to run the infinitesimal risk of premature burial than to expose whole populations to the threat of contagion. The argument was clever and well designed to impress other physicians; eighteenth-century physicians were greatly concerned about the noxious effects of the “miasmatic vapors” that decomposing bodies were thought to emit, no less concerned than they were about the danger of premature burial.<sup>31</sup> On the advice of physicians, laws mandating the removal of cemeteries from areas of dense habitation were being enacted at the same time as the laws mandating waiting periods before burial. The two sets of laws

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<sup>29</sup> The passages cited appear in footnotes to the article that was being criticized. *Lausitzisches Wochenblatt* (1792): 137–38, 325.

<sup>30</sup> “Über die frühe Beerdigung der Todten und über die Ungewissheit der Kennzeichen des wahren Todes,” *Almanach für Ärzte und Nichtärzte* (1790): 215.

<sup>31</sup> Alain Corbin, *Le miasme et la jonquille: L'odorat et l'imaginaire social, XVIIIe–XIXe siècles* (Paris: Aubier, 1982).

contradicted each other, and Marx deftly exploited the contradiction in order to mount a rational, medically sound defense of a traditional Jewish ritual.<sup>32</sup>

So what can we conclude? Certainly not that Marx or the other doubters made much difference in the end. The important point is simply that they had the opportunity to challenge the consensus, that there was a debate, however lopsided, and that the fear of premature burial had to withstand the test of critical scrutiny in the public sphere. As it existed in the eighteenth century, therefore, the fear of premature burial could well be described as a rational fear. But whether rational or not, it was still a fear, and fear tends to create an environment inimical to tolerance—a point that brings us to the final unresolved tension in the campaign for burial reform.

To anyone who feared premature burial, the Jewish practice of same-day burial posed a stark choice: either tolerate the practice and thus accept the suffering of innocent Jews, or accept coercive measures to end the practice and thus violate the principle of religious tolerance. Our Silesian journalist tried to evade the choice by emphasizing that the original impetus for burial reform had come from within the Jewish community. In that way, he was able to make it seem that the Jews of Breslau were reforming their “antiquated” ritual on their own, with just a little help from the Prussian state. But, in fact, the Jews as a whole were doing no such thing; only a small minority of them were. And how did the reform appear to those Jews in Breslau who did not belong to that minority? To some of them at least, it must have seemed coercive and intolerant. David Friedländer, who represented the view of the Jewish minority, saw this position quite clearly. To him, it was obvious that one had to make a choice between two incompatible options. Hence his support of Joseph II’s decision to outlaw same-day burial in Bohemia, an

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<sup>32</sup> M. J. Marx, *Journal von und für Deutschland* 1 (1784): 227–35.

opinion worth citing at length because it presented the two options without any attempt to soften the opposition between them:

Praised be the Eternal One that the antiquated abuse of burying the dead beneath the earth on the same day as their demise has finally been abolished forever among my coreligionists in this land. My enlightened brothers recognize with gratitude this paternal concern for our well-being. It marks a new victory over an old prejudice that inspires feelings of indignation.... To be sure, this hard-won victory was not of the noblest sort. It was won not through persuasive reasoning [*überzeugenden Gründen*] but through force [*Gewalt*] and not without encountering resistance. But the prejudice that had to be overcome was itself of such an ignoble and harmful sort that it had to be eliminated root and branch without delay and consideration.<sup>33</sup>

Here it is also worth pointing out that Friedländer's article was published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, the same journal in which Kant had published his famous essay "What Is Enlightenment?" just a few years earlier. By framing the opposition in the way that he did, "persuasive reasoning" on the one hand and "force" on the other, Friedländer was echoing and, to some extent, challenging Kant's conception of Enlightenment, which revolved around exactly the same opposition but which repudiated the use of force as a means of spreading Enlightenment. As an ideal defined by Kant, Enlightenment could only spread through the free "public use of reason." To impose it by force was to violate it as an ideal—and as far as the ideal went, Friedländer agreed with Kant, which was why he admitted that outlawing same-day burial was "not a victory of the noblest sort." Friedländer, however, was writing as a social reformer, which Kant never did. Kant's philosophy did not bother with the messy business of reforming social institutions, nor did it concern itself with human beings as they really existed in eighteenth-century society. The person for whose dignity the categorical imperative commanded respect was an abstraction from social reality: the self-legislating individual who determined the ends of his own existence. An eighteenth-century social reformer had to deal with human beings

<sup>33</sup> David Friedländer, "Über die frühe Beerdigung der Juden: Ein Brief aus Prag an die Herausgeber, nebst einigen Urkunden," *Berlinische Monatsschrift* 9 (1787): 318.

as they really were—in other words, as members of communities, groups that imposed their own forms of coercion and determined the ends of human existence on behalf of their members. And as with human beings, so with their prejudices. The prejudice in favor of same-day burial was not the prejudice of free-floating, autonomous individuals who just happened to be Jews; it was the prejudice of the Jewish community. With all the weight of a community and an ancient tradition behind it, such a prejudice could not be dislodged through the force of argument alone. To the force of argument, one had to join force tout court.

Or so it appeared to Friedländer—but not just to Friedländer. As already mentioned, non-Jews, too, argued that German governments should take action to end the practice of same-day burial among the Jews. That practice did not affect them directly, so why did they care? Of course, one cannot discount the possibility that they did not really care about the well-being of the Jews, and that, on the contrary, they disliked Jews and merely wanted to see them discomfited by laws that compelled them to change their traditional customs. Such an interpretation would fit nicely with the current scholarly fashion to look for anti-Semitism and intolerance of cultural diversity in the Enlightenment.<sup>34</sup> The textual evidence alone, however, does not support it. When a German commentator said the following—"Oh, Princes! Remove from these bearded priests [i.e., the rabbis] their antiquated power, their unlimited authority, their freedom to subject anyone to their heavy ecclesiastical yoke according to their pleasure and fancy, and the Jew will bless your memory and will bury his dead just like Christians only after he has exhausted all possible means of reviving the body and only after having waited several days"—his professed motive was to benefit the Jews by freeing them from the authority of their

<sup>34</sup> For a criticism of that scholarly fashion, see Ronald Schechter, "Rationalizing the Enlightenment: Postmodernism and Theories of Anti-Semitism," in *Postmodernism and the Enlightenment: New Perspectives in Eighteenth-Century French Intellectual History*, ed. Daniel Gordon (New York: Routledge, 2001), 93–116.

rabbis.<sup>35</sup> Why assume that the professed motive had to conceal one darker and more sinister? It is just as likely that the German commentator was reasoning empathically: what if I were a Jew and had to be exposed to the torture of being buried alive? To reason in that way, by imagining oneself in someone else's skin, was to perform a mental operation that could, in some cases, lead to tolerance of other cultures; it is just that same-day burial was not one of those cases. It was a prejudice whose consequences seemed so dreadful as to make tolerance intolerable.

Were the consequences really so bad? That question is difficult to answer, for we have no way of knowing just how widespread premature burial was in the late eighteenth century—the most we can say is that a great many people believed it to be widespread.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the *objective* fact, however, most of us will have no difficulty grasping the *subjective* moral dilemma. Where to draw the boundary between tolerance as respect for other cultures and tolerance as indifference to human suffering is a problem that the Enlightenment bequeathed to the whole tradition of modern liberalism, and it has reappeared in various guises throughout the modern era, from widow burning in the British raj to female genital mutilation in contemporary Africa. It is a genuine problem even if the idea of stamping out “native” customs for the good of the “natives” has sometimes been used to nefarious ends, to provide ideological cover for British imperialism or to buttress the notion of Western superiority. For the Western liberal, the question is still, more or less, the same: what if *I* were a Hindu widow, or an African Muslim girl—or, for that matter, a Jewish boy in eighteenth-century Breslau? To see the similarity of such cases is not to deny the cultural differences between the early twenty-first, the mid-nineteenth, and the late eighteenth centuries, it is merely to identify a connecting thread, and of course that thread is only

<sup>35</sup> “Über die frühe Beerdigung der Todten und über die Ungewissheit der Kennzeichen des wahren und falschen Todes,” *Almanach für Ärzte und Nichtärzte* (1790): 183.

<sup>36</sup> Bondeson reviews the evidence and concludes that some people probably were buried alive in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though many fewer than the anti-premature-burial activists alleged. But, of course, precise figures cannot be obtained. See *Buried Alive*, 238–57.

visible in retrospect—our Silesian journalist was bound to see things differently. To him, the elimination of same-day burial in Breslau was the crowning event of the eighteenth century because it signaled the victory of the Enlightenment over prejudice. To us, looking back, that same episode seems to point beyond its own epoch to one of the enduring dilemmas of the modern liberal conscience.

#### Appendix

The work that inaugurated the concern about “seeming death” and premature burial in the second half of the eighteenth century was *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des signes de la mort* by the French physician Jean-Jacques Bruhier—a work based loosely on a Latin treatise, *Morte incertae signa*, published two years earlier by an expatriate Danish physician living in Paris named Winslow. Bruhier's French version appeared in one volume in 1742, a second volume came out in 1746, and, finally, the two volumes were published together in 1749, the first volume having been considerably revised in the meantime. The publication of Bruhier's work was then followed by a spate of other works in French: H. Le Guern, *Rosaline, ou les mystères de la tombe: Recueil historique d'événements nécessitant qu'on prenne des précautions pour bien constater l'intervalle qui peut s'écouler entre la mort imparfaite et la mort absolue* (Paris, n.d.); M. Pinot, *Mémoire sur le danger des inhumations précipitées, et sur la nécessité d'un règlement pour mettre les citoyens à l'abri du malheur d'être enterrés vivants* (Paris, n.d.); M. B. Durande, *Mémoire sur l'abus des ensevelissements des morts* (Strasbourg, 1789); Thiery, *La vie de l'homme respectée et défendue dans ses derniers moments* (Paris, 1787); Marin Bunoust, *Vues philanthropiques sur l'abus des enterrements précipités* (Arras, n.d.); Janin, *Réflexions sur le triste sort des personnes qui sous une apparence de mort ont été enterrés vivantes* (The Hague,

1772); J.-J. Gardanne, *Avis au peuple sur les morts apparentes et subites* (Paris, 1774). These works echoed Bruhier's main thesis on the matter of seeming death. One French author, however, did take issue with Bruhier and challenged the credibility of his evidence: Antoine Louis, *Lettres sur la certitude des signes de la mort* (Paris, 1752). In the second half of the eighteenth century, German booksellers were quick to publish translations of successful French works, and a German translation of Bruhier's work was published in 1754. To the body of translated literature, however, Germans made their own original contributions, among them an anonymous collection of horror stories, *Wiederauflebungs-Geschichten scheinodter Menschen* (Berlin, 1798); H. F. Köppen, *Achtung des Scheintodes*, 2 vols. (Halle, 1800); H. V. C., *Wirkliche und wahre mit Urkunden erläuterte Geschichten und Begebenheiten von lebendig begrabene Personen, welche wiederum aus Sarg und Grab erstanden sind* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1798), and two works by the famous Weimar physician C. W. Hufeland, *Über die Ungewissheit des Todes und das einzige untrügliche Mittel sich von seiner Wirklichkeit zu überzeugen: Nebst der Nachricht von der Errichtung eines Leichenhauses in Weimar* (Weimar, 1791) and *Der Scheintod* (Berlin, 1808). In the latter work, Hufeland noted that no fewer than twenty-six German books and pamphlets had been published on the subject of seeming death and premature burial in the seventeen years since the publication of his first work on that subject in 1791. Finally, there was also a widespread discussion of seeming death and premature burial in German journals of the second half of the eighteenth century, including *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, *Journal von und für Deutschland*, *Deutsches Museum*, *Neues Hamburgisches Magazin*, *Historisch-politisch-literarisches Magazin*, *Orientalische Bibliothek*, *Ephemeriden der Menschheit*, *Hannoverisches Magazin*, *Lausizisches Wochenblatt*, and *Almanach für Ärzte und Nichtärzte*.

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