Ethics and Theology after the Holocaust
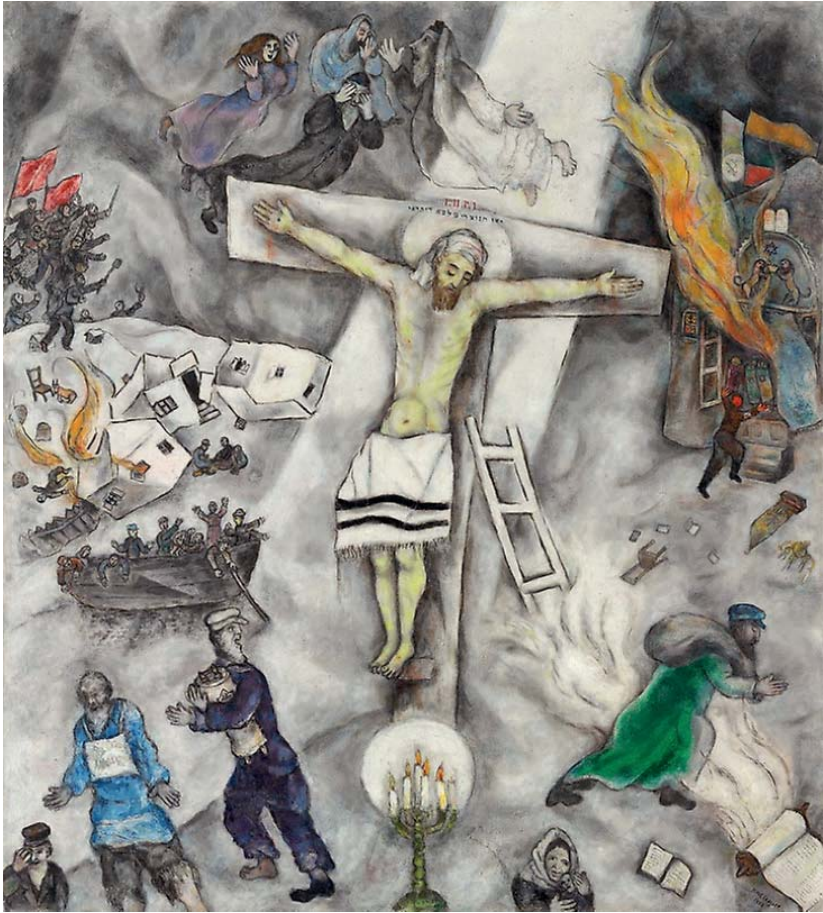
Didier Pollefeyt

ETHICS AND THEOLOGY AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

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For my sons, Nikolaas and Florian, the greatest gifts of my life,
that they and their children may be blessed by the Love that even
the Holocaust could not destroy.

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Introduction

Chapter One

Post-Holocaust Ethics and Theology:
A Catholic Perspective

My struggle with the Holocaust started when I was a young Catholic bachelor's student in theology at the oldest operating Catholic university in the world, KU Leuven (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), in Belgium. In those days, we had finally reached the year used as the title of Orwell's dystopian book: '1984'. The Holocaust was not yet a common subject of teaching and research in European faculties of theology. After mentioning to fellow students that I worked on 'the Holocaust', conversations would often include them remarking "... I haven't heard of that author". The first substantial book I read on the Holocaust was then for me, as an eighteen year old Catholic, an unexpected and deep shock. It was a Dutch translation of the ground breaking work of the Jewish rabbi and Holocaust scholar Richard Rubenstein,: *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*[1]. I remain convinced that this book forms the *status quaestionis* of every theology after Auschwitz, and that it has lost nothing of its relevance today. Rubenstein challenges in this book almost all fundamental beliefs of Judaism and Christianity. For him, Auschwitz demonstrates the death of the interventionist, loving and redeeming God of history. His book further undermines the foundations of natural ethics and the traditional concept of Jewish election. The Holocaust is a culmination point both of Christian anti-Judaism and of modern rationality. Tellingly, the librarian of my university did not at that time find the topic of the Holocaust really relevant for theology, so creating a section on the subject in the library was not a priority. Later, I would meet much more apathy, distrust and even resistance against this subject of research, especially among Christian theologians. Christians often have great difficulties with evil, and especially with giving a place —after the coming of Christ—to an unredeemed or unredeemable evil. Searching for a positive meaning in the Jewish 'no' to Jesus is often not their first concern and even a disturbing demand that profoundly

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[1] R. RUBENSTEIN, *De God van de joden na Auschwitz*, translated from English into Dutch by P. TELDER, Utrecht, Ambo Boeken, 1968.

challenges all theologies of so-called 'non-Christian religions'. Like some-one who spoils a party, post-Holocaust theologians interrupt traditional theology. Furthermore, tensions about the Holocaust were not eased by our cultural context. Because of the history of Nazi collaboration, Belgium, and Flanders in particular, holds to this day a complex historical relationship with National Socialism. Belgium's own genocidal history in Congo under Leopold II (1884-1925), and further in that colonial history's relation to the Rwandan genocide, remains constantly at play beneath the surface of contemporary Belgian identity. Indeed, with the theme of the Holocaust, one enters a most sensitive political arena—no less in ecclesial discourse as in civil or academic.

I was standing at the threshold of my university years with a Catholic belief that was radically questioned in and by a context that resisted the topic and with almost no explicit resources at hand. My promotor, and later spiritual father, prof. dr. Roger Burggraeve was at that moment an internationally renowned scholar on the Jewish thinker Emmanuel Levinas and I became deeply familiar with Levinas,' philosophy of the 'face of the other' as his answer to Hitlerism. But Levinas,' response to the Holocaust was also radically questioned by Rubenstein. For Rubenstein, the Holocaust is proof that 'the face of the other' has no intrinsic power, but is only the pathetic cry of the powerless to be respected. For him, people have no intrinsic rights, but only the rights that are protected and can be enforced by a state. In this way, for Rubenstein, no crime was committed in Auschwitz, since the victims were stateless, were not protected by any state. 'How could the power of the face of the other fail so dramatically in Auschwitz?' became an important question in my search for answers to the Holocaust.

When I started my PhD in post-Holocaust theology and ethics, help came unexpectedly from technology. The Library of Congress of the United States has opened its catalogue online and I could access it from my university in (what now would look like) a rudimentary way through a computer with a green monochrome display and an extended IBM keyboard. It was there that I discovered the richness of the international (and especially American) scholarship on the Holocaust and Holocaust theology. The Library of Congress had a very performant service of inter-library loan and I spent a great deal of my student budget to grant books on Holocaust theology and ethics an intercontinental trip to Belgium and back. Later, I would meet their authors during the influential *Annual Scholars' Conferences on the Holocaust and the Churches* that I've attended

from the nineties on and the biannual *Wroxton Symposia on the Holocaust* I've attended since 1998.

Convincingly, Richard Rubenstein had deconstructed several theological ideas that had become untenable for me and from a Catholic point of view 'after Auschwitz', including: (a) a God who directly and randomly intervenes in history (or not), (b) an exclusivistic idea of divine election; (c) a Christology that entails supersessionist violence; and (d) a naïve and romantic idea of natural ethics and (e) an optimistic view on modernity and rationality. What I admired in Rubenstein, was that he not only deconstructed religion—like the philosopher with a hammer—but also reconstructed Jewish moral and religious identity by re-reading the Jewish tradition in light of the Holocaust. He didn't call himself an atheist. His rejection of the traditional God of history did not entail the end to religion or the end to Judaism. For him, death is the new Messiah, and omnipotent Nothingness is the Lord of all Creation. In this pagan religion, in which all life is ultimately meaningless, the human religious community with its rituals and *rites de passage* becomes all the more important. Of course, from my Catholic perspective, these nihilistic answers were completely unconvincing. But the challenge that the Holocaust poses was the same, rendering plausible the hermeneutical method of reconstructing religion after Auschwitz. My research question became: how to re-read and re-interpret the Catholic tradition in such a way that it could be an authentic answer 'from within' to the tragedy of the Holocaust.

In the course of the past decades, and up to now, a Rubenstein-like pagan theology has become more and more popular in the West, as Christianity became at the same time more and more marginal: God as nature; the role of safe communities; the importance of the body; religion without God; death as redemption; the nation as the new God; a growing critique on the excesses of modernity; etc. As a Holocaust scholar, I have always remained critical of an over-romanticised contemporary paganism. I think that Rubenstein reveals the true, realistic, rude or pessimistic face of paganism, at least in his early work (later, he formulated a softer and more optimistic version of his theology) which includes: (a) God as a cannibalistic Mother; (b) growing nationalism that creates endless streams of stateless people; (c) religions disconnected from their transcendent sources, becoming ethnocentric and violent; (d) a general support in the West for euthanasia as redemption and an act of grace, even for psychic suffering and for children; (e) the introduction

of a concept of post-Truth in politics reflecting a general crisis of rationality and even of human rights.

So, my intellectual journey became one of finding—as an answer to Rubenstein,—a way to re-configure or to re-contextualise Catholic faith that is at the same time theologically legitimate in light of the tradition, and historically plausible in light of the drama of the Holocaust. This book reflects this journey of almost 35 years of research in this field. In 1995, I finished my PhD on post-Holocaust theology and ethics, and since 1998, I teach among others several courses on Post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian Relations at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies KU Leuven (as well as in the faculties of Arts, Psychology and Pedagogy, as well as of Kinesiology and Rehabilitation Sciences of the same university). Things have changed drastically in Belgium: today the Holocaust is a generally accepted topic of reflection and action in universities and even secondary and primary schools; secular Flanders has Holocaust memorials and a Holocaust museum (Kazerne Dossin, Mechelen); and the Holocaust plays a role in the public debate (even if Holocaust comparisons are often met with scepticism and critique).

In this book I try to find consistent answers to central moral and theological questions: What does the study of the perpetrators and the victims teach us about human nature and the nature of evil? What can we learn from the reformulation and rediscovery of Jewish thinking in light of the Holocaust? How can Christians reaffirm their belief in God and in Christ after Auschwitz? What approach to dialogue best honours post-Holocaust thinking and especially Jewish-Christian relations? How do we read the Bible after Auschwitz, and especially the 'texts of terror' (for e.g., John 8,44 calling the Jewish people 'children of the Devil') that can cause (anti-Jewish) violence and can legitimise genocide? Is there an alternative non-pagan relation to nature possible that nevertheless takes Auschwitz into account? Given the clear influence of evil in the world, does the Holocaust mean the end of the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation? How can the Holocaust be used (or avoided) in political discussions in the West and in the Middle East? How are teachers discussing the Holocaust in terms of history, ethics, politics and religion in the classroom? What does the Holocaust mean for our ultimate beliefs in life after death? So, in this book, we try to re-interpret the central categories of Catholic theology: God, Christ, the human person and his relation to the natural environment, good and evil, the dialogue with the other, especially the Jew, forgiveness and reconciliation, law and grace, our relation to modernity and postmodernity, life, death and life after

death. This introductory first chapter invites the reader to discover the connections between the chapters and the general configuration that arises when all sections and chapters are taken together: toward a post-Holocaust Catholic theology.

Chapter Two of the introductory section deals immediately with a delicate but crucial fundamental question: has a non-survivor and a non-Jew, someone of a later generation (as I am) any right to speak and to reflect on the Holocaust since he has not experienced it himself? And if yes, what authority does such a reflection have? This is an important question, both from a methodological and a moral point of view. This second chapter goes deeper into the phenomenon of so-called 'insiderism', that we find in many fields of the human sciences, and especially in Holocaust studies. As we shall develop, 'insiderism' is a position that argues that only the 'insider' can speak with sufficient knowledge and understanding about a particular phenomenon. As a consequence, for example, we ask whether ultimately only women can do feminist studies, only married people can speak about marriage, etc. In the case of the Holocaust, an insiderist would claim that only the survivors—and potentially also their descendants, contemporary Jews and Israelis—have the right to speak about Holocaust experiences, in their own names or in the names of other victims. Chapter Two critically assesses insiderism as a perspective to develop Holocaust studies. Of course, the insider deserves special attention and respect in dealing with the history of the Holocaust, not only from a historical, but especially from a human and moral perspective. Holocaust studies should never happen over the heads, or worse, at the cost of the victims, whose voices are used and sometimes misused for political or ideological goals coming from agendas other than the study and the memory of the Holocaust itself[2]. On the other hand, Chapter Two also warns against the risks of insiderism. Insiders often had a very limited perspective during the Holocaust. Also, their view can be distorted by the trauma of the event itself or by post-Holocaust agendas that are projected into their recontextualisation of the Holocaust. Finally, by only giving the right to the survivors to speak with authority, one runs the risk that the Holocaust and its message will die altogether with the last survivor. That would be injustice to the legacy of the victims of the Holocaust. In our analysis, and in this book, we

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[2] D. Tollerton, *Was Jewish 'Holocaust Theology' Ever Really About the Holocaust? Assessing the Roots and Implications of a Recurring Critique*, in *Holocaust Studies* 22(1) (2016), pp. 125-139.

think that by critically analysing the Holocaust, including the perspective of the victims, we have on the long term a better guarantee that the legacy of the Holocaust will be transmitted into the future. If we make of the testimonies of the survivors unquestionable 'holy scriptures', we run the risk that the unavoidable mistakes in these human works of narrative will be used and misused by revisionists and negationists to 'question' and even deny the Holocaust as a whole.

Theologians are used to taking this position in relation to biblical studies. The Bible is a book with holy texts, with privileged witnesses of the encounter with the divine. They have a very special ('canonical') authority and are inspired sources for understanding and for relating to God. But at the same time, they are written by human beings in a certain context with limited possibilities and not free from human sin. For that reason, they are in need of critical analysis by all possible historical-critical, linguistic, and hermeneutical methods. Also here, there is a danger that exegesis kills the spirit of the text, imprisons the text in its esoteric context and reduces it to a pure historical artefact of the past. The critical analysis of holy texts is an antidote for a fundamentalist reading of the text and the violence it can legitimate. But good exegesis at the same time does more than reducing the text to a play thing of archaeology, linguistics, historical research or hermeneutics. It remains aware all the time that these texts reveal a deeper meaning of divine life and should be integrated 'after the critique' ('post-critically') into a deeper and more integral life perspective. In a similar way, we will study the Holocaust using all possible relevant academic disciplines and with a critical mindset towards all possible reconstructions of it, with special attention to its manipulations and distortions. The goal is not to deconstruct the Holocaust, but to move to its deeper human and religious meaning in a post-critical way.

In this context, we believe that the perspective of the perpetrator offers sometimes a better point of entree for Holocaust research because it helps us better to understand 'from within' how the dynamics of the Holocaust came into being. Therefore, we start this volume with the study of the perpetrators. A central idea in my approach to the Holocaust is the critique on the traditional and common diabolisation of the perpetrators, which is often a reaction from the survivor's perspective and is easily accepted in popular culture. The line of argumentation for diabolisation is simple and clear: the Nazis were evil monsters, we have to take distance from them and to condemn their monstrous acts and if we do so the world will be a better place ('Never again'). Diabolisation is a

strong way to present the perpetrators, to create a clear overview in the chaotic moral landscape of the Holocaust and ends with an unambiguous condemnation of all evil of Auschwitz[3].

The second section of the book ('on the perpetrators') starts with this presentation since it is the most evident way people deal spontaneously with Nazi atrocities[4]. At the same time, this approach is criticised because the human character of evil is snowed under the binary presentation of 'us' versus 'them'. The history and complexity of the Holocaust is sacrificed for a black and white presentation that more than often obstructs a good analysis of the mechanisms of evil. We often accept this presentation spontaneously because it expresses our enormous moral indignation in confrontation with the Holocaust and its perpetrators but it also creates a safe difference between the Nazis and ourselves. It is comforting, too comforting. It was the Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt who challenged for the first time this paradigm to understand the perpetrators based on her analysis of the trial of Eichmann. She did not accept the *synthetic* presentation of all evil in one monstrous perpetrator (Eichmann), but centred instead on the *analysis* of the system and context that can explain how normal, so-called ordinary or 'banal' people can become perpetrators of genocide. Her analysis of the banality of evil is much more challenging then the diabolisation paradigm because it confronts us with ourselves. Survivors were often not very happy with Arendt's analysis. But also her approach does not satisfy since it runs the risk of making of perpetrators ('thoughtless') victims of the system (while at the same time making of the victims perpetrators in the case of the Jewish councils that—in Arendt's (unfair) critique—collaborated with the Nazi regime). The Nazis were not blind machines, they were creative and enthusiastic innovators of the genocidal system. I develop in this Chapter Three also a third paradigm to make genocidal evil understandable. The Nazis redefined good and evil in such a way that millions of normal civilians could participate and contribute in an engaged way to the process of the genocide. They did not act in an *immoral* or *amoral* way, they were *morally* driven (normal) human beings. The conclusion is here that the Nazis had their own ethic so that they were no longer able to recognise evil as evil, but saw it as a motivating good. This is the paradoxical conclusion of the third chapter, namely that an atrocity of this scale that asks for an immediate and unambiguous moral

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[3] P. WHITEHEAD, *Demonising the Other: the Criminalisation of Morality*, Bristol, Policy Press at University of Bristol, 2018.

[4] See Chapter Three: *The Perpetrator: Devil, Machine or Idealist?*

condemnation (as in diabolisation) ends up with a conclusion where ethics itself is relativized and has become an instrument in the hands of the perpetrators (ethicisation).

To analyse and criticise this outcome, a fourth chapter of this book goes deeper into the so-called 'morality of Auschwitz'. Here we encounter again the challenge of Richard Rubenstein for post-Holocaust ethics. Responding to this challenge was a student of Rubenstein, the rabbi and professor Peter Haas who wrote the ground breaking book *Morality after Auschwitz: the Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic*. In fact, Haas further develops the idea in Rubenstein's work that people have no natural rights except the rights that are defended and protected by a nation-state. Ethics is a narrative construct of a community and the Nazis created a new frame ('Nazi ethic') in which genocide no longer appeared to be evil. In this fourth chapter, I argue against Haas, that he is mixing up ethics with ideology. Perhaps the Nazis were looking for a legitimation of their evil acts during or after the horrifying events. But this ideological underpinning does not make of it an ethic. Haas cannot explain well in his theory how different individuals living at that time and space made sometimes totally different moral choices, the one becoming a perpetrator, the other a bystander or a rescuer. Even in the narrative framework of Haas, a particular ethic is never something that exists isolated from other ethical systems and from inter- and trans-narrative dynamics. In a later part of this book, I will explain how the perpetrators used 'Nazi ethics' to legitimise for themselves what could not be legitimised. Self-deception will be a central key to understanding the perpetrators.

Section Three looks to the perspective of the victims: what was the fate of ethics seen from this angle? This is analysed in Chapter Five. By analogy with the third chapter, we develop three different paradigms to look to the victims of the Holocaust. Also here, we encounter the same lines of argumentation. In a first ('Rubensteinian') view, the extermination camps are seen as the end of humanity and morality: in the absence of any law, the victims became monsters *vis-à-vis* each other (with the exception of some heroes who form the binary opposite of the spectrum). This one-sided presentation is rejected because ethics was overwhelmingly present among the victims, as Fackenheim showed convincingly, and could only be destroyed by very extreme circumstances. A second approach is milder for the victims, arguing that the moral choices offered to them in fact were not real choices ('choiceless choices', a concept of Lawrence Langer). The fact, however, that the Nazis made it very

difficult for victims to choose 'the good' does not mean that victims were not—even in the most extreme circumstances—driven by the desire to avoid evil as much as possible or by trying to choose for the lesser evil. There is also a variant of the 'Nazi ethic' that can be developed in relation to the victims. The idea of this third approach then is that the victims in the extermination camps reformulated conventional ethics in such a way that it could work well—but in a pragmatic sense and adapted to the circumstances. This makes clear that even in the camps, ethics could not be destroyed among the victims. In their terrible lives in the camps, the victims showed expressions of dignity, solidarity and creativity on a daily basis, as Viktor Frankl and Tzvetan Todorov made clear. Often they did not do the absolute good ('vertical morality') but showed small signs of goodness ('horizontal morality') or so-called 'daily virtues' (Todorov). Of course, one should not be naïve about the possibilities of victims to do the good. Therefore, we argue against Frankl, that often the physical conditions and circumstances in the camps were so bad, that people were not able to transcend themselves anymore. The story of the victims is not in the first place one of the moral winner in each of us, as Frankl seems to stress, but of the potential or real vulnerability of every human being. The Holocaust makes us aware of the importance of the body and of the natural and social context as preconditions to understand how ethics works (or doesn't work).

In the fourth section of the book (on 'Jewish responses to the Holocaust'), I introduce the Jewish thinking of Emil Fackenheim (Chapter Six) and Emmanuel Levinas (Chapter Seven) as positive Jewish responses to the moral challenges of the Holocaust. In fact, it was through the research of my promotor on Levinas that we came across the work of Fackenheim. A confrontation with the work of Fackenheim cannot be missing in any serious reflection on post-Holocaust theology. Fackenheim took up the challenges of Rubenstein and formulated his response to it. I have always been surprised or moved by the hard intellectual confrontation between both. In my opinion, Fackenheim has a crucial point in the moral debate around the Holocaust. In short, Fackenheim answers to Rubenstein that by declaring God 'death' and deconstructing the moral message of Judaism, he is completing the work that Hitler himself could finally not complete. The foundation of post-Holocaust ethics and theology is for Fackenheim exactly the commandment not to grant Hitler a posthumous victory by finishing his work. In my own words, it is not because Nazism was created in a nihilistic framework that this also shows the moral legitimacy of this framework. Rubenstein

confuses facts and normativity (a form of historical fallacy). For Facken-
heim, it is possible to answer the ethical commandment(s) *after* Aus-
chwitz because victims were able to answer it *during* Auschwitz. Nazism
wanted to make *beasts* of the victims, ones willing to forsake all others
for self-enrichment and survival. Against its own will and on an unprec-
edented scale, however, Nazism instead created *saints*: people who fought
Nazi terror to survive as Jews and to give an ethical response to moral
nihilism. For Fackenheim, it is the biblical God who revealed Himself
in the midst of the catastrophe and who continued to reveal himself after
it. Fackenheim,'s thinking has been very influential in recreating Jewish
identity after the Holocaust. As a student in moral theology, I was
very enthusiastic about Fackenheim's moral framework. Over the years,
the disappointment grew especially when I started to understand
Fackenheim's position in the Israeli-Palestinian debate. Fackenheim's
ethical analysis was more and more narrowed to the idea of Jewish phys-
ical survival as an answer to a divine commandment ('Thou shalt not
give Hitler a post-humous victory') and in relation to Judaism alone.
This is in fact a very poor presentation of Judaism, a religion that has
also other rich and positive sources. The survival of Israel and the Jewish
people became the main answer to the absolute and unique evil of the
Holocaust (very much in line with diabolisation) and this again at all
costs. Fackenheim seemed not to be able to connect his theology to the
universality of Jewish ethics in favour of all victims in the world. For me,
it became too much an ideology that was insensitive for the legitimate
question of other people in other times to survive, at the cost of the
essence of Judaism itself. I saw a growing gap between the ethnically
motivated 'no' to Hitler and the theological 'yes' to the fullness of the
Jewish tradition.

Nevertheless, Fackenheim offered a definitive contribution to post-
Holocaust ethics and theology: the Holocaust did not kill God nor
destroy ethics, but made them necessary more than ever. To further
underpin this position, I include in this section of the book also a chap-
ter (Chapter Seven) on the Jewish philosophy and ethics of Emmanuel
Levinas, who often referred to Fackenheim as one of his sources of inspi-
ration, even if Levinas was much more sensitive for the complexities and
dark sides of Jewish survival after 1948[5]. In my analysis, Levinas gave the
most authentic and fullest Jewish response to the Holocaust, as will

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[5] R. Burggraeve, *Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love. Emmanuel Levinas on Justice,
Peace and Human Rights*, Marquette, Marquette University Press, 2002.

become clear in this chapter, even if he does not mention the topic so often explicitly in his work. For Levinas, especially in his discussion with Heidegger, God does not reveal Himself in 'sameness' or in the selfishness of 'being' (nation, race, state, people, nature, etc.), but in 'otherness' or 'otherwise then being'. God is not a natural but a *trans*natural reality. It is in this way that Levinas opposes Rubenstein's theology: the immanent experience of 'Nothingness' is not God, but what Levinas calls the '*il y a*' ('there is'), the anonymous 'being' that destroys all particularities. Rubenstein confuses God with selfishness, absorption, death and destruction. For Levinas, God is the Opposite, the absolute Other, the One we can never reduce to our self-interest, but who disturbs time and again our being by revealing himself as Other, as exterior of our egoistic, survivalist orientation. It is through the face of the vulnerable other that the absolute Other enters our existence giving our freedom a complete new orientation—beyond ourselves and our totalitarian goals.

If the possibility to experience 'alterity', as both interruption in being and call to 'respons-ibility', are universal human possibilities, as expressed in all religions and humanist traditions, how then is it possible that the Nazis could deny and even destroy the face of the Other on such a massive scale? In the fifth section of this volume (on 'sociological and anthropological response to the Holocaust'), to find answers to this question, I present the critical analysis of modernity by two influential authors in Holocaust studies: Zygmunt Bauman (Chapter Eight) and Tzvevan Todorov (Chapter Nine).

An important corpus of Holocaust literature has been devoted to the relationship between modernity and the Holocaust, starting with the work of Arendt and Rubenstein. From a Christian perspective, it is often more easy to 'accuse' modernity and modern rationality of the Holocaust than to see and to accept that Christianity created the fertile ground from which the Nazi genocide sprung. This accusatory posture exteriorises the Holocaust, reduces it to a modern attack on the Jewish and Christian traditions—as opposed to an outcome from the heart of Christian anti-Judaism. I will return to this 'easy escape route' later. At this stage in the book, the analysis of Bauman and Todorov are very helpful to understand how the Levinasian dynamics of otherness could be neutralised and even destroyed. The approach of Bauman is sociological, the approach of Todorov more historical and anthropological. For Bauman, the Holocaust was not (like in the paradigm of diabolisation) a kind of deviation of modern civilization, but the ultimate expression of it. We are close here to the second paradigm of banalisation (Arendt,). The Holocaust was

made possible because a modern machine of murder operated completely isolated from the inter-individual sphere of the Levinasian 'face to face'. Responsibility depends upon proximity, Bauman argues. When distance is created among people, like in modern bureaucracy and technology, the force of the face of the other is weakened, as became clear in the Holocaust but also e.g. in the experiments of Milgram. In one of the best books ever written on ethics after the Holocaust, *Facing the Extreme*, the Bulgarian-French philosopher Tzvetan Todorov describes the modern mechanisms that were used by the Nazis to make the Holocaust possible. They are all 'daily vices' (Todorov) that in one way or another neutralised the face of the other: fragmentation, depersonalisation and lust for power. My argument with Bauman grants that bureaucracy and technology were *necessary conditions* for the genocide, but I instead contend they remain *insufficient* for understanding it. Modernity made the Holocaust easier, but was it to blame as well? Indeed, Nazism used modern means. But it turned against the ideals of the modern world, including critical rationality and human rights. In Bauman's approach, the power of the face of the other only works because of the 'proximity' of the other, a proximity that was destroyed in the genocidal system. In Levinas' view, however, the face is irreducible to a physical reality, creating a kind of mechanical response when it appears, like in physics. The otherness of the other cannot be reduced to his physical appearance, to his 'plastic form' (Levinas). It is present, even in its absence, not only in the small-scale love for my neighbour but also on the large-scale love for all human beings. This is also the reason why I will later in the book criticise Todorov's central concept of modern fragmentation to understand the indifference of the perpetrator. Fragmentation was never a complete success story, not even in the minds of the Nazis. It is difficult and almost impossible to choose for fragmentation without being aware of the process of fragmentation itself. The alterity of the other is always searching for ways to penetrate the protective shield of the perpetrator and its Nazi ideology. I will propose an alternative explanation using 'self-deception' as a crucial mechanism to understand perpetrators, as well as bystanders. In self-deception, the perpetrator always remains not only product but also producer of his or her own fragmentation. The 'Nazi ethic' was then used and misused to camouflage the bad faith at work in fragmentation with moral categories. Thus, in my analysis, modernity did not so much motivate than facilitate the Holocaust, in the end failing only to overrule the appeal of the transcendent other.

The sixth section of this volume (on 'Christian responses to the Holocaust') makes the shift from ethics to theology, looking for a Catholic anthropology after Auschwitz and answering the questions of the possibility of God, forgiveness, and reconciliation after Auschwitz. Until now, we have analysed and revealed the strength of ethical responses to the Holocaust, especially through Fackenheim and Levinas, Bauman and Todorov. But religion is, of course, more than ethics, especially for the Christian religion. From a Jewish point of view, which is Torah-centred, it is more evident to understand God as the One who reveals himself through the ethical commandments. But in a Christian perspective, which is Christ-centred, the question is whether forgiveness and reconciliation are 'already' potential expressions of God's Kingdom on earth through the first coming of Christ. In Christ, the law is fulfilled and 'love for the enemy' is the strongest manifestation that the Kingdom of God is near. 'After Auschwitz', this is an extremely sensitive issue, where less-than-robust concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation ('cheap grace') create opportunities for perpetrators to escape responsibility and guilt. Christians should take this question seriously: 'Did the Holocaust not reveal such an extreme form of unredeemed and unredeemable evil, that we should admit that forgiveness and reconciliation are not always possible?' Must we then speak of the 'unforgivable'? Of course, there are also risks connected to the reduction of religion to ethics at the cost of forgiveness. Such an ethical system can become very quickly dualistic and even violent. A purely ethical approach can easily become merciless when people do not meet the moral standards. Paradoxically, Nazism was so dualistic, so totalised by binaries of good and evil, etc., that expressions like forgiveness and reconciliation became utterly inexpressible except in terms of 'weakness'. In this sense, the critique of Fackenheim against Rubenstein,—that his 'God is dead theology' presents a post-Holocaust victory for Hitler—could also be formulated back in his direction: a religion that only values its own ethical commandments risks becoming insensitive and merciless for the vulnerability of all who do not meet these standards. The same argument can be made against Levinas. "Making forgiveness almighty is creating an inhuman world"[6], he says. But is the same not true when forgiveness is eliminated from a post-Holocaust ethical and theological discourse?

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[6] E. Levinas, *Het menselijk gelaat. Essays van Emmanuel Levinas,* chosen and introduced by A. Peperzak, Baarn, 1984, p. 46.

In the first chapter of this section (Chapter Ten), we will look into the implications of the three formulated paradigms for understanding the evil of Auschwitz (from Chapter One) in light of the quest for forgiveness and reconciliation. This chapter contains also in full our own anthropology for understanding Nazi evil, based on the concept of 'self-deception'. The perpetrator is and always remains connected with the absolute Good that is revealed in otherness. His capacity to do the good is the precondition to make him responsible for his evil acts. In this way, an evil person cannot 'do evil' since, properly speaking, this would for him be the good. It is this virtually good person who chooses for fragmentation when he or she gets involved with evil. He uses moral arguments—delivered by a Nazi ideology—to give him good reasons while he knows at the same time it is evil. Fragmentation is always made to fail, exposing our underlying concept of 'self-deception'. We think it is a crucial mechanism to understand how evil occurs: the good is not only *fragmented* off, it is also *perverted* by ideology to serve evil purposes. This approach integrates and transcends the insights of the three paradigms: the deceiving intentionality of the first paradigm (diabolisation), the deceptive context of the second paradigm (banalisation) and the use of ideology (ethicisation). A central insight of this book is that evil always happens through a certain degree of self-deception. Therefore, a reduction of religion to ethics will not work to combat evil and will even be counterproductive because it will drive 'evil doers' even more into the hands of ideologists that produce binary 'Nazi-like ethics' that can legitimise their evil acts calling them good. Hyper-ethical systems create anxiety, force failing people into fragmentation and self-deception and makes vulnerability, *metanoia* and moral protest impossible. Nazism considered forgiveness as a form of weakness and replaced grace by mercilessness.

Of course, this does not mean that forgiveness is unconditional. In the Catholic tradition, forgiveness is related to certain conditions, such as confession, repentance, restitution and remembrance. Because several of these conditions can no longer be fulfilled in the case of the Holocaust, I conclude that Nazism created for itself a factual situation of *l'impardonnable*, the unforgivable. The unforgivable becomes a concept to describe the factual condition of closeness in which individuals and groups can remain when they cut themselves off from the otherwise dehumanising consequences of the violence and evil committed in the name of their own ideology.

In a next chapter (Chapter Eleven), we go deeper into a post-Holocaust recontextualisation of this concept of forgiveness. We describe the conditions for forgiveness, the relation between remembrance and forgiveness, the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation, the problem of individual versus collective guilt, the (im)possibility of substitutive forgiveness and the concept of the unforgivable. All these concepts are tested to their limits in confrontation with the Holocaust. We criticize strongly after Auschwitz every form of 'cheap grace' that does not take the victims and their suffering seriously. Moreover, we argue that a radical unmerciful position driven by a Manichaean worldview runs the risk of reproducing the very evil it wants to combat. Forgiveness is connected to a series of conditions, not so much on the side of the victim (where forgiveness is an act of grace), but on the side of the perpetrator, and where, if these conditions are not fulfilled, we can end up in a factual situation of the unforgivable. There are no easy solutions here. Forgiveness in the name of the victims is in our analysis not possible since they are dead. But refusing forgiveness in the name of the victims is also not possible. Therein, forgiveness becomes a broken category for the new generations and communities of past victims and perpetrators[7]. Often, the only thing that remains possible are fragile symbols and rituals that bring together what was and is broken. Reconciliation (understood as 'reconnecting') is often more easy then forgiveness (understood as 'lifting the burden of the past'), but, on the other hand, the first without the second is, at the very least, difficult and unsure in light of the future. The unforgivable then becomes a human and historical tragedy to be shared by both victims and perpetrators, and their heirs, rather than a category of eternal condemnation without hope. In general, a central idea of this volume is that by restoring a critical concept of forgiveness in normal human relations, one can deny Hitler a posthumous victory. True forgiveness takes justice seriously and creates space where perpetrators can repent from their evil acts and victims can be recognised and healed in their suffering—all things Nazism didn't know and condemned as weakness.

In the seventh section of this book, we go into central theological issues in post-Holocaust Catholic theology: the existence of God in relation to evil. Chapter Twelve questions the presence or absence of God in Auschwitz. Rubenstein declared God dead in Auschwitz: the extermi-

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[7] S. Juni, *Second-Generation Holocaust Survivors: Psychological, Theological and Moral Challenges*, in *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation* 17(1)(2016), pp. 97-111.

nation camps mean the end of the loving, all-powerful God of history. God is replaced by Nothingness. Other theological approaches place evil *in* God (Blumenthal), or, like Levinas and Fackenheim: rediscover God as the One who reveals himself as a moral protest *against* the evil of Auschwitz. In this chapter, we recontextualise the traditional theory of evil as *privatio boni*, as the absence of the good, and of God in a post-Holocaust context. We use the dynamics of fragmentation and self-deception (developed in the previous chapters) to reformulate and reinterpret the idea of evil as the absence of God, developed by Thomas Aquinas (based on Plato). For Aquinas, no one can choose evil for evil's sake, since this would make the human being unintelligible and even logically incapable of doing evil and being responsible for it. Only good people can do evil things. When they are confronted with evil, people will try to avoid the (im)moral consequences of their actions (fragmentation) or to find a moral justification for them through an 'ethic' (self-deception). While mostly the Holocaust is seen in opposition with ethics, our analysis shows that ethics was involved and perverted in it. Evil is always parasitic on the good and on this Nazism was not an exception.

Theologically, in Auschwitz, the good was made absent (*privation boni*) and perverted (*perversio boni*). With ethics, of course, I mean the understanding that Fackenheim and Levinas give to it, and not the ideological perversion we see in Rubenstein and Haas. And here also the place of God comes into play. If God reveals himself as the radical Other in the face of the victim, the Holocaust then can be seen as a place where God was excluded (*privatio Deo*) and misused (*perversio Deo*) by the perpetrators: an eclipse of God as the call of the Other. God was thus not absent in Auschwitz, he was *made absent* by and in the perpetrators. But he was recognised, heard and answered in the daily virtues of the victims, in their suffering and tears. Even more, God himself was perverted by the Nazis: *perversio boni* became *perversio Deo*. God who is with the Other has become a God 'with us' (*Gott mit uns*).

In section eight, we not only wrestle with God after Auschwitz, but also with Christ after Auschwitz. It is all-too-easy to blame modernity or paganism alone for the Holocaust, as some Church documents try to do (e.g. *We Remember*, 1998). Holocaust scholars have shown convincingly that Christianity, too, prepared and co-created the ground for the extermination especially of the Jewish people. Christology played a major role in the legitimation of Christian anti-Judaism, even if, as *Dabru Emet* admits, anti-Judaism only became genocidal when it became racial (anti-Semitism). For this reason, we include in this section two chapters on a post-Holocaust

Christology. Substitution theology has played a crucial role in preparing the Holocaust, introducing the idea that with the coming of Christ the election of the Jewish people has been abolished and transferred completely, definitively to the Church. The Church 'substitutes' herself to the Synagogue. Christ has fulfilled all promises of the Old Covenant and there is no reason to 'remain Jewish' any longer or to give a continuous place to Judaism in the history of salvation after the coming of Christ. In this section of the book, we look to reformulate a Christology in such a way that it allows 'after Auschwitz' an authentic place for Judaism without undermining the unique salvific meaning of Christ. A first chapter (Chapter Thirteen) explains how Auschwitz means the end of traditional Christological triumphalism. It is inspired by the question of Emil Fackenheim if the Good News of the 'Overcoming' of evil in Christ is itself not overcome by Auschwitz. Indeed, the Holocaust also teaches Catholics that the world is 'not yet' redeemed and this opens a positive space for a Jewish 'no' to Jesus. For Christians, Christ constitutes salvation—not in an exclusivist or automatic way, but by making the Christological dynamism true in our lives, especially in relation to those who are different, and explicitly towards our enemies. The question is not who will be the Messiah, but who will be able to recognise the Coming of the Messiah, since he will come as a stranger. The other chapter (Chapter Fourteen) deals with the tension between official teachings of the Catholic Church and the historical and contemporary relations between Judaism and Christianity. Since Vatican II, the teachings of the Church have undergone a drastic transformation. The starting point was *Nostra Aetate* and the climax was the pontificate of Pope John Paul II recognizing the "never revoked covenant" of God with the Jewish people. My point in this chapter is that the teachings of the Church did not succeed until now in developing a consistent post-Holocaust Christology that really overcomes supersessionism and takes Jewish existence ('as never revoked') seriously to the end. I am looking for a new step forward in the form of a Logos-Christology. Jewish people live through the words of the Torah. Christians seek to do the will of God by following the way of Jesus Christ. Both Judaism and Christianity live in the light of the Logos, the Word of God. The Jewish life is Torah-shaped and the Christian life is Christ-shaped, where Christ is understood as the One who incarnates God's divine Word or Logos. But both faith traditions are founded in the one God of the Covenant who reveals Himself time and again through the Logos. It is clear in the teachings of Pope Francis that Jews and Christians have two distinctive but mutually respectable experiences of the Word of God. This includes a recognition that God's Word animates Jewish covenantal life today.

This brings me in a next section (Section Nine, Chapter Fifteen) to a more fundamental reflection on the implications of post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian relations for the theology of interreligious dialogue. My argument is that the three traditional approaches to interreligious dialogue cannot survive a critical confrontation with the Holocaust: (1) exclusivism is potentially or effectively genocidal; (2) inclusivism recognises the other only on my own terms; and (3) pluralism does not take the particularities of religions seriously. In addition, a particularist position cannot bring a solution since this approach reduces religions to closed linguistic systems that are no longer able to interact with each other and with the world. They close themselves off for otherness which constitutes their essence. We argue for a 'translational' and 'hermeneutical' approach of religions. Interreligious dialogue is to accept hospitality in the space of the religious other and to offer to the other hospitality in return. In the crossing of the boundaries and coming back to one's own religious space[8], Christians are invited and inspired to become better Christians, and Jews to become better Jews. For Jews, this means to live more Torah-centred, for Christians to live more Christ-centred, as different ways to answer to the call of the Logos.

A tenth section deals with reading the Bible in a post-Holocaust perspective. In the course of history, the Bible has not only been *misused* to legitimise anti-Jewish feelings and thoughts, as is the case in a supersessionist use of typology, but sometimes the texts themselves are *intrinsically* oppressive and violent. In Chapter Sixteen, I work together with one of my *promovendi*, and now biblical scholar, Dr. David Bolton, to develop in a paradigmatic way a new approach to violent texts in a post-Holocaust perspective. We choose the text attributed to Saint Paul: 1 Thessalonians 2,14-16, a text that accuses the Jews of deicide and therefore legitimises God's wrath upon them. "Thus they [the Jews] have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last". We show in this chapter what are the main strategies used by exegetes to neutralise the violent potential of such texts 'after Auschwitz', but also how they all fail at the end. These strategies are: saying that the text is not written by Paul, creating a canon in the canon to isolate the text, limiting the referent of 'the Jews'

⁸ M. MOYAERT, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality*, Amsterdam – New York, Editions Rodopi, 2011; & ID., *In Response to the Religious Other: Ricœur and the Fragility of Interreligious Encounters* (Studies in the Thought of Paul Ricœur,) Lexington, Lexington Books, 2014.

in the text, or the other way around, expanding the referent, under-standing the text as an intra-Jewish polemics, presenting the passage as mysterious, distinguishing the (good) intentions of the text by the author from the bad effects in its later readers. We choose for another, non-apologetic approach of the text: the goal here is not to save the text as such, but to understand how revelation happens in the space between the text and the reader, especially the post-Holocaust reader. Resistance between a reading of the text and its human (sinful) aspects is often inevitable. God does sometimes reveal Himself in our resistance against the text. Does this mean that biblical texts have no revelatory meaning anymore 'after Auschwitz'? We propose a contemporary 'normativity of the future' approach (Bieringer,) of the Bible. Biblical texts opens an eschatological horizon, a future, a dream of God for humanity, some-times in spite of its human authors: salvation for all men. Every post-Holocaust reading of biblical texts should be guided by that normativ-ity of the future: 'does it open or does it destroy the future of human beings whoever they are?'

An eleventh section of the book goes deeper into a post-Holocaust understanding of nature. Nature was not best friends with the victims in the extermination camps. It was often an extra source of suffering in the form of cold, heat, hunger, sickness, etc. Nature also seemed to be indif-ferent toward the suffering of the victims. On the other hand, the Nazis had very explicit understandings of nature, and often showed more respect for nature than for men. In their racial hierarchy, animals stood higher in order than Jewish people. Their *Weltanschauung* was based on 'Blood and Soil'. Their *Gott mit uns* was not a transcendent, personal God, but an impersonal, pagan power that speaks through nature, sup-porting the strong, and destroying the weak. For this reason, the conclu-sion of Rubenstein who defines God after His death as Holy Nothing-ness, as the cannibalistic Mother Nature, can be seen as a posthumous victory for Hitler: Rubenstein duplicates the Nazi divinisation of Nature. In Chapter Seventeen, we develop a post-Holocaust answer to this approach of nature as such, by recontextualising the theological concept of 'creation'. We do it in such a way that we also avoid and criticise the instrumentalist view on nature inherent to modern society. It is the 'estrangement' that modernity created of man *vis-à-vis* nature that formed the ground for the Nazi desire 'to turn back' to nature and to restore the relation with 'blood and soil'. In this context, we also deal with the critique that especially Judaism and Christianity with their transcendent God—far removed from nature—made modernity and

thus the Holocaust possible. The answer will—again—be found in an understanding of God who comes to us from elsewhere, an *au-delà* of nature, who can be experienced by a human being that has the hermeneutical space to receive Him, to read the traces He left in His creation, giving men a new orientation beyond pure self-preservation. Again, it were the victims of the Holocaust that were able to experience this transcendent reference in nature as a source of hope, prayer and comfort.

Section Twelve deals with Holocaust education. The two chapters of this section are based on decades of teaching post-Holocaust ethics and theology at university level and as chair of the teacher training program in religion for secondary schools in Belgium. The question in Chapter Eighteen is how to overcome 'Holocaust fatigue' among young people. 'Holocaust fatigue' is a phenomenon we see in Western Holocaust classes (e.g. history, language, arts, religion, etc.) when young people spontaneously show moderate resistance when the topic of the Holocaust is presented. It is not the same as an attitude of disrespect or denial of the Holocaust. It is more passive, subtle, but not less serious. My hypothesis is that Holocaust fatigue is not the effect of 'too much' Holocaust education as such but of an overdoses of certain didactical ways to present the Holocaust to young people. I analyse different approaches in Holocaust education: a canonised presentation of the Holocaust (which I call 'first naivety approach'), a moralising approach of the Holocaust and an exclusively historical approach. All these three approaches have one thing in common. They turn back to the past and try 'to fix' the meaning of the Holocaust: in its philosophical essence, its moral message or its 'true' historical reconstruction. Holocaust education is then a pre-programmed didactical strategy to bring the students to the 'right' and 'fixed' conclusions concerning the past, without much engagement from their side. Holocaust education becomes predictable, pre-programmed, boring and sometimes even manipulative, since not open for complexities and new perspectives. Overcoming Holocaust fatigue is in our view only possible by a shift in Holocaust education from so-called monocorrelation (one event = one meaning) to multi-correlation (hermeneutical complexities of meanings), and from a normativity of the past to a 'normativity of the future' (Bieringer)[9]. Students should be allowed, stimulated and supported to develop a 'second naivety' (Ricœur) approach to the Holocaust: knowing the facts of the 'canon of the Holocaust' (pre-critical), but also learn to deal with all intricacies, discussions, uses and misuses of it

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[9] R. Bieringer – R. Burggraeve – E. Nathan – M. Steegen, *Provoked to Speech. Biblical Hermeneutics as Conversation*, Leuven, Peeters Publishers, 2014.

(critical), ending up into a 'post-critical' reading, embracing the meanings of the Holocaust and especially its victims as crucial milestones and orientation points for our future societies.

Another chapter in this section (Chapter Nineteen) deals with whether we can use the Holocaust as a moral, political or ideological argument by comparing it with other actual topics of injustice, such as the refugee crises in the Western world. We develop three paradigms for Holocaust education: a premodern paradigm (historicism), a modern paradigm (the turn to social sciences) and a postmodern paradigm ((de)constructivism), and using these paradigms, we distinguish three types of Holocaust education: past-oriented, present-oriented and future-oriented Holocaust education. These three approaches reveal also three different attitudes towards Holocaust comparisons. A modern approach will facilitate comparisons making the Holocaust relevant to our times, a premodern paradigm will be much more aware of the differences in contexts and warn against too easy comparisons, while the third postmodern approach will go deeper into the mechanisms of power at play when we make comparisons (or resist making them). We propose a holistic approach integrating all three other approaches: we call this a 'recontextualising' approach. 'Recontextualisation' means that one brings the Holocaust as a historical event into a new 'context' being aware of the risk of this enterprise, but also open for new perspectives and meanings that this (multi-correlational) encounter between then and new can produce for new generations.

The thirteenth section brings us to the intersection of Holocaust and politics. This is perhaps one of the most delicate issues in this volume: how to look to the state of Israel from a Catholic post-Holocaust perspective? Often, this topic creates strong division and conflict, even among Holocaust scholars that work together for a long time and on many other topics. It is a theme with a lot of Manichaean potential: 'you have to choose a side' and 'this shows where your loyalties really are'. In this book, we always choose for loyalty for the victim and his or her rights, because it is in the face of the suffering other that God reveals himself in the first place. The main problem in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is that both sides are at the same time victims and perpetrators, and both are at the same time a minority and a majority, Palestinians are a minority in Israel, but Israel is a minority in the Middle East[10]. What does it mean in such a complex context not to grant Hitler a posthumous victory? As Christians, we act

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[10] M.S. DAOUDI – M.J. O'MALLEY, *Encountering the Suffering of the Other*, in *Cross Currents* 65(1)(2015), pp. 4-13.

like a third party here, between Muslims and Jews, and the question is how we can overcome Manichaeism which is in our view the central characteristic of Nazism and the engine of all violence and conflict. Being a Belgian citizen, confronted with the same kind of tensions and often conflicts between different people in one nation, we propose in Chapter Twenty to consider 'binationalism' as a possible way out for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a perspective based on human rights, international law and interreligious dialogue.

The fourteenth and final section deals with 'the last things': death and life after death. In this chapter I show with Robert Lifton how the Holocaust—as well as the other big catastrophe of the Second World War, Hiroshima—has disrupted the traditional symbols with which we imagine immortality: the socio-biological, the creative, the theological and the ecological modes of immortality. The only mode that is left is the transcendent modus of immortality: experiencing immortality in the here and now through transcendent experiences. We see nevertheless how 'after Auschwitz' all modes of immortality are renewing themselves. We finish Chapter Twenty-One with a reinterpretation of the Catholic vision on life after death in light of the Holocaust. The theological mode of immortality gives a foundation to the hope that trust in a God of justice and mercy is not in vain. For us, this is the most ultimate answer to the Holocaust: the hope that finally the Holocaust will not have the last word, that goodness is stronger than evil.

This book ends[11] with a hermeneutical reading of the *White Crucifixion* (1938) of the Jewish painter Marc Chagall. This painting was chosen also as the cover for this book. It brings together many of its topics in an overwhelming artistic synthesis: anti-Judaism and the Holocaust, politics and ethics, Christ and the Jewish people, evil and suffering, mourning and hope, destruction and redemption, heaven and earth.

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Chapter Two

Post-Holocaust Ethics and Theology:
A Non-Insider Perspective

In Holocaust studies, we discern over the decades a growing rupture between a tendency of *normalization* in the historiography on the one hand, and an emphasis on the *unrepresentability* and uniqueness of the Holocaust in survivor testimonies and in the arts, philosophy and theology on the other. One of the great challenges of this book is how to bridge this increasing gap between historians and other Holocaust scholars, and thereby secure a true interdisciplinarity in Holocaust studies. Historians often criticise the mystification of the Nazi genocide, especially in autobiographical documents of survivors and in a certain kind of ethical and theological reflection based on these. Historians are themselves criticised because their 'science of history' is a kind of post-religious theodicy that explains away the 'pain of history' of the victims. Daniel Goldhagen's work[1] was a break from such a tendency to 'normalize' the Holocaust, as well as an effort to rehabilitate the perspective of the victim.

In contrast with a common approach in post-Holocaust ethics—which starts from and grants unconditional respect to the perspective of the victim—the Belgian Holocaust scholar Gie van den Berghe, an ethicist, non-survivor and outsider, radically deconstructs the perspective of the insider, the survivor and the authority granted to him in Holocaust studies[2]. For him, memory is always a construction, a construction that is not only threatened by forgetting or denial, but also by the possibility of changing, misrepresenting and even manipulating history[3]. Moreover,

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[1] D. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, New York, NY, Knopf, 1996.

[2] G. van den Berghe, *Met de dood voor ogen. Begrip en onbegrip tussen overlevenden van nazi-kampen en buitenstaanders*, Berchem, Epo, 1987; Id., *De uitbuiting van de Holocaust*, Baam, Houtekiet, 1990; Id., *Why Day Follows Night. The Scholarly Way of Thinking of Daniel Goldhagen*, in *Bijdragen. Cahiers d'Histoire du Temps Présent* 2 (1997), pp. 91-128.

[3] A. Baer, *Memory and Forgetting in the Post-Holocaust Era: the Ethics of Never Again*, London & New York, Routlegde, 2017, Chapter 5: 'Beyond Antigone and Amalek: Toward a Memory of Hope'.

such reconstructing of the past is not only determined by *what* one remembers, but also by *who* does the remembering, and with what *goal*. In this chapter, I contemplate what we can learn from van den Berghe's analysis of the insider-outsider issue for the relation between survivor testimonies and Holocaust scholars. It is a methodological chapter trying to delineate the conditions under which a non-survivor and a non-Jew can approach the Holocaust from the perspective of academic ethics and theology.

Central in van den Berghe's research is the phenomenon of "insiderism" (Merton[4]): the affirmation of an unbridgeable rupture of knowledge and communication between insiders (survivors) and outsiders (non-survivors). Defenders of insiderism consider knowledge based on experience as the irreplaceable touchstone for all theoretical knowledge. Because outsiders lack some formal conditions of practical knowledge, they have problems—or are even incapable of—coming to real empathy or understanding. Insiders often claim an absolute monopoly on knowledge. *In extremis*, only black, female, homosexual, Catholic or Jewish scholars, for example, can do meaningful research about blacks, women, homosexuals, Catholics or Jews.

Van den Berghe severely criticises such insiderism because it leads to a 'balkanization' of human science and makes the study of the Holocaust senseless. While experience can yield insight, experience does not automatically guarantee correct insight. Accordingly, for him, it is not accurate to oppose knowledge based on experience and theoretical knowledge as if they were two different forms of knowledge. Rather, both need each other. Experience is never a passive or pure reflection, but an active and creative event which is always and inevitably limited and incomplete. Gaps in limited, individual knowledge are filled in with all kinds of associations, generalisations, abstractions, stereotyping and deductions. This stimulates perspectivistic interpretations of reality in the direction of the cognitive and psychic characteristics of the knower.

Because people perceive reality from different perspectives, there is no objective or true presentation of reality. Neither the view of the actor, nor the view of the observer constitutes the entire reality. Insider and outsider perspectives are therefore not complementary, but supplementary approaches. They are not simply pieces of a puzzle; each one is

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[4] R.K. MERTON, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, New York, NY, Free Press of Glencoe, 3rd ed., 1959; ID., *Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge*, in *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1) (1972) pp. 9-47.

already an interpretation of the whole and not merely a part of it. Insider and outsider perspectives can enrich each other, or combat each other. The latter is sometimes the case in studying the Holocaust.

The more extreme the experience, the greater the distance between the world of the insider and the outsider, giving insiderism greater plausibility. Because most Holocaust victims were confronted with the incommunicability of their experience already while in the camps, it is not surprising that many survivors consequently embraced insiderism. The presuppositions of camp experience had so little in common with the presuppositions of life outside the camps, that most of the prisoners did not have convenient tools for expressing their camp experience for themselves and for others. Van den Berghe speaks about "KZ-insiderism", which points to the problematic relation between insider and outsider in the context of the experience of the Nazi extermination camps. In KZ-insiderism, the absolute distinction between insiders and outsiders is primarily made by survivors, and sometimes duplicated by Holocaust scholars. Insiders often refer to their personal experience in radically rejecting the understanding and judging of outsiders. The experience of the camps was so extreme and so deviant that at first glance the suggestion of monopoly by many insiders does not seem to need a justification. For the survivor Elie Wiesel, for example, those who did not survive the Holocaust will never be able to understand it. And the survivor will never be able to communicate his experience to the outsider. He writes:

> You, who never lived under a sky of blood, will never know what it was like. Even if you read all the books ever written, even if you listen to all the testimonies ever given, you will remain on this side of the wall, you will view the agony and death of a people from afar, through the screen of a memory which is not your own[5].

Many insiders (and outsiders) confirm this monopoly as self-evident and acknowledge that outsiders cannot understand because they have not experienced the Holocaust. In the work of van den Berghe, this self-evident reasoning is critically analysed. Whereas ethics and theology mostly stress the unique and inaccessible character of the insider perspective, van den Berghe questions and deconstructs this perspective critically. One can compare van den Berghe's analysis of the autobiographical documents of victims of the Holocaust with the historical-critical

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[5] Quoted in A. ROSENFELD – I. GREENBERG, *Confronting the Holocaust: The Impact of Elie Wiesel*, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1978, pp. 203-204.

approach to biblical texts in modern exegesis. Since the Enlightenment, the biblical scriptures, considered as holy and untouchable, were analysed in their historical context, for their content, their different linguistic forms and their underlying motives. The autobiographical document of Holocaust survivors can thus be compared even more easily with the historical facts.

Van den Berghe situates the autobiographical documents consistently in their historical context and reveals their motives and goals. He emphasizes that camp testimony as such does not exist, since a lot depends upon the place and duration of imprisonment, the period of imprisonment, and especially the category of prisoner. Because of the extreme context in which they were written, camp testimonies entail a very specific pattern of motives and purposes. Van den Berghe stresses that the essence of autobiographical documents is that they are testimonies. This is not so exceptional and can be compared with biblical texts that were written 'so that we might believe'. It is a mistake, then, to consider autobiographical documents to be strict historical literature that furnishes an objective view on the camps. For van den Berghe, to raise the autobiographical documents above the possibility of historical critique, as unique, sacred texts, and direct revelations of camp life, make them vulnerable for revisionist misuse. Their obvious inconsistencies, contradictions and exaggerations can easily be misused by revisionists as 'proof' for their inauthenticity.

Two central motives are at work in the autobiographical documents: the motive of remembrance, as a tribute to the victims, and the motive of mission, a call that it may 'never happen again'. Other motives that van den Berghe distinguishes include: the therapeutic motive, the clarifying motive, the motive of justification, the motive of deculpabilisation and the motive of witnessing as a reason to survive. These motives are mostly implicit and are present in different combinations. They can be distinguished from the purpose or the goal of the survivor testimonies, even if motive and goal actually coincide. Survivor testimonies are mostly goal-oriented action: witnesses try to some degree to change, enforce or realise certain attitudes of outsiders. After the liberation, many survivors had very strong utopic views on the future: after such terrible moral horror, the world would surely convert so that a new time of peace and justice could begin. Many testimonies were written as a contribution to that goal, or later, as a reaction against the delay of that new world. The motives and goal of these writings are not only to be found in the camp experience, but also in the personal and political events of survivors after

the war, especially when confronting the misunderstanding and/or unbelief of outsiders.

This brief overview of the specific motives and goals of survivor testimonies reveal the 'hidden agenda' that is characteristic for most of these autobiographical documents. Most testimonies were written in the light of their publication for a wider audience and with one or more of the mentioned motives and goals. Publications written out of the motive of justice, for example, will extrapolate the relation between perpetrator and victim to a maximum. Extreme sadist cruelties will receive greater attention than the everyday evil or the systematic character of the genocidal system. Some aspects of camp life are only rarely examined in testimonies, for example, the mutual rivalry and hierarchy among prisoners, the sexual life of prisoners, robbery and murder among prisoners. The fact that van den Berghe is analysing especially these aspects of camp life in detail, undoubtedly, makes his work very controversial.

Of course, the basis of insiderism is the experience of camp life itself, in which the prisoner was completely abandoned and forgotten by the outside world. For van den Berghe, the failure in the realisation of the goals of the witnesses after the war was the primary cause for survivors to postulate an unbridgeable rupture of understanding between insiders and outsiders. The argument of knowledge based on experience was thus used later, when survivors were confronted with the lack of understanding and social change after the war. Insiderism is caused by the unrealised hopes for the future, the hope, for example, that the survivor would be received at home with open arms and with great care.

Two important characteristics of many testimonies are the stereotypical picture of the camps and conspiracy theory. In the light of their witness motive, survivors tried and pretended to give a total view on the camps. This is not only impossible from the historical point of view, but many prisoners themselves did not understand exactly what had happened to them during their imprisonment. Indeed, the constant situation of uncertainty and ignorance about their own fate was precisely a fundamental element of camp experience itself. Moreover, many prisoners lived in a continuous situation of undernourishment and anxiety, which also played an important role in their perception of camp reality. Finally, the permanent lack of correct information among the prisoners, in a constantly (life) threatening context, created an incredible gossip factory about the most heroic deeds and the most terrible cruelties. Of course, this does not undermine the value of survivor testimonies, but rather places it in another perspective. A sound understanding of the

autobiographical documents presupposes a careful analysis of the testimonies in terms of the form and content of the specific experiences, and the social position of the victim in the camps. The stereotypical picture of the camps in many of the testimonies makes them vulnerable to revisionist critique and is sometimes a boomerang that destroys the credibility of the testimony itself. For the outsider, the fact that the witness is also a survivor can falsify the stereotypical picture of the camps.

The stereotypical picture of the camps is a generalisation of all possible cruelties that ever occurred in the camps as the situation for all prisoners at all moments. It is based on an absolute distinction between perpetrators and victims. All Nazis were evil, all victims were good, and all victims have undergone the same suffering. Conspiracy theory is the *leitmotiv* of the stereotypical picture. Because everything in the camps was planned strictly, there is no room for the accidental, or the development and excesses of individual SS men. Certain aspects of the terrible circumstances in the camps, which were actually the outcome of overpopulation, bad organisation, or simply the laxity of SS men, are attributed completely to the demonic plan of the Nazis. Since every aspect of camp life was prepared and planned, the Nazis must have been ingenious, almost diabolical monsters. The consequence of this conspiracy theory is a sharp division between good and evil, persecuted and persecutors, insiders as privileged carriers of knowledge and the uncomprehending outsider. In later chapters, I will call this the diabolisation of the perpetrators.

The combination of stereotyping and conspiracy renders the Holocaust something unique, even transcendent. The Holocaust becomes completely incomprehensible and explaining is blasphemic. The only acceptable attitude towards the testimonies is horror and humility. Moreover, the Holocaust cannot be compared with other genocides and every comparison has to be avoided. Even if in insiderism there resonates a justified protest against a purely reductionist and objective approach to the suffering of the victims, the consequences of this position are very perilous. If taken literally, it can demotivate *a priori* every effort to understand the Holocaust. So Katz writes:

> Those persons most affected by horrendous deeds may unwittingly stand in the way of understanding the causes of the deeds. The victims, in their passionate—and justified!—espousal of the uniqueness of the horrors that have befallen them, may hinder dispassionate analysis[6].

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[6] F.E. Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil. A Report on the Beguiling of Evil*, New York, NY, State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 21.

As such, it is difficult to see how the words of Elie Wiesel, quoted in this chapter, can be reconciled with Wiesel's own complaint that "nothing has been learned: Auschwitz has not served as a warning. For more details consult your daily newspaper"[7]. On the one hand, for the insider, the Holocaust is inaccessible for the outsider, but on the other hand, the outsider is nevertheless asked to draw lessons from this event. If the outsider does not succeed in that, this becomes a source of disappointment for the survivor. If we create a radical opposition between the comprehensibility (for the survivor), and the incomprehensibility (for the non-survivor), then we place the non-survivor—and accordingly all future heirs of the Holocaust—in the midst of an unsolvable contradiction. The danger exists that the Holocaust will then die with its last survivor, possibly to resurrect as certainly and incomprehensibly as before. Perhaps the great strength of Wiesel's position is that he finally refuses the fatality of this radical opposition between comprehensibility and incomprehensibility, and not only speaks of the rupture between both, but also tries to bridge it.

Just as the exegetes in the nineteenth century have been accused of atheism by church authorities, van den Berghe has been accused of lack of respect *vis-a-vis* the experiences of victims of the Holocaust and even of negationism. In fact, the scholarly work of van den Berghe has enlarged the rupture between insiders and outsiders. The central question of this opening section is how we can bridge this gap between insiders and outsiders, between survivors and historians, between Holocaust testimonies and Holocaust studies. The phenomenon of insiderism in victim testimonies and the objective and critical analysis of it in scholarly work has in fact often become a stumbling block in the relation between scholars and survivors, more than a solution.

How should Holocaust scholars deal with this phenomenon of insiderism after a critical analysis of it? Is van den Berghe sensitive enough for the heart of each camp testimony, its traumatic character? Can an academic analysis of autobiographical documents do justice to these testimonies of horror? Should not the outsider respectfully and even unconditionally respect the insiders' claim for the authority of survivors? Do the testimonies not earn more respect, especially in the light of the severe

[7] E. WIESEL, *One Generation After*, New York, NY, Random House, 1970, p. 15, quoted in S.T. KATZ, *Defining the Uniqueness of the Holocaust*, in D. COHN-SHERBOK (ed.), *A Traditional Request. Essays in Honor of Louis Jacobs* in *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament* 114, Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1991, 42-57, p. 51.

critique of survivors that they have not been listened to? Must we not listen more carefully? Van den Berghe has sought to answer this last question with a careful analysis of the insider. But the notion of insiderism has become more a diagnosis of the problem, and sometimes even an expansion of the problem, rather than a real answer.

In post-Holocaust Jewish and Christian ethics and theology, the identification with the victim has become very central. Post-Holocaust ethics and theology must be guided by the "authority of the sufferer", as Metz claims[8]. Indeed, van den Berghe's scholarly interpretation entails the danger that the call of the suffering other is no longer heard sharply. In and through rational explanations, one risks becoming invulnerable to the suffering other. Another danger is that in this rational analysis, the Holocaust scholar him/herself can become blind to his or her *own* moral and political presuppositions.

It is therefore imperative to remain close to the experience of the victim. Still, van den Berghe is correct that the insider does not possess a total, all-inclusive view of the reality of the camps. To understand the Holocaust, and to prevent a new one, Holocaust scholars not only have to understand the victim, but also the perpetrator. The perspective of the perpetrator has, at some points, some authority and will sometimes nuance, correct and even falsify the voice of the victim. Of course, the autobiographical documents have an irreplaceable value in Holocaust ethics and theology. But the question is: Do these testimonies have an absolute, sacral authority?

The objective analysis of a biblical scholar surely does not destroy faith. On the contrary, his/her scholarly work can be integrated in authentic belief, a belief that can thereby become stronger. Similarly, a scholarly critique of insiderism can become an important element in an adequate approach to and handing down of Holocaust testimonies, and create a scientific basis for the critique against negationism. Testimonies alone will not be enough to combat revisionism; on the contrary, they can make the Holocaust more vulnerable to it. But neither can scientific analysis alone guard against revisionism, because it can neutralize and even destroy our moral sensitivity to the Holocaust. The testimonies can teach us a lot, but from their *very specific* point of view. The same can be said for the *very specific* point of view of the perpetrator.

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[8] J.B. Metz, *Christian und Juden nach Auschwitz. Auch eine Betrachtung über das Ende bürgerlicher Religion*, in Id., *Jenseits bürgerlicher Religion. Reden über die Zukunft des Christentums*, München/Mainz, Suhrkamp, 1980, pp. 29-50.

Accordingly, the Holocaust scholar is called to a multi-directional partiality, which means that, as in family conflicts, all members must be listened to, even the so-called monster of the family. The family therapist tries to place him/herself in the position of every person in the system of the conflict, whether present or not. Of course, this does not mean that the therapist becomes insensitive to the victim of, e.g., incest, or no longer has moral judgment about the immoral behaviour of the perpetrator. In this book, one-sided partiality in post-Holocaust ethics becomes a multidirectional perspective on the horror in order to be fruitful for the future[9].

As with all reality, one point of view can never capture the whole truth. Insider and outsider must therefore not be opposed as two mutually exclusive approaches. Van den Berghe is right that the rupture of knowledge is not as great as some insiders suggest. If the incomprehensibility of the Holocaust for the outsider becomes central, one of the crucial conditions for a meaningful communication and reflection on the Holocaust is lost. This, however, should not imply that the experiences of the survivors are not unique and irreplaceable elements of knowledge about the Holocaust, but one should be aware that insider experiences do not automatically guarantee the quality of the transfer of knowledge. So Rosenberg writes that

> during the Holocaust, the persecuted were purposefully deceived about the nature of what was happening. As a result, the survivors' reports cannot be taken at face value. The survivor may have been fooled. Although the accounts of the survivors remain an invaluable source for knowing and understanding the Holocaust, we must nevertheless treat them as we would any other important historical record. We must evaluate their accuracy, but we must proceed with care[10].

Experience does not automatically guarantee adequate knowledge. Every achievement of knowledge will seek theory, that is, the transcendence of the 'I' and 'We' perspective to a 'They' perspective. Emil Fackenheim argues:

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[9] M. Rothberg, *Fractured Relations: the Multidirectional Holocaust Memory of Caryl Phillips*, in J. Lothe – S.R. Suleiman – J. Phelan (eds), *After Testimony: the Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narratives for the Future*, Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 2012, pp. 311-349, Chapter 15.
[10] A. Rosenberg, *The Crisis in Knowing*, in A. Rosenberg – G.E. Myers (eds.), *Echoes from the Holocaust. Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time*, Philadelphia, PA, Temple University, 1988, 379-395, p. 388.

> It is normally assumed that, with all due allowance for bias of perception and memory, the eyewitness is the most reliable source of "what actually happened." When the eyewitness is caught in a scheme of things systematically calculated to deceive him, subsequent reflection is necessary if truth is to be given to his testimony[11].

In short, experience and reflection can (and should) be supplementary realities, both having their own meaning and place. In fact, this was van den Berghe's main purpose, but he became misunderstood and even boycotted by some survivors themselves[12]. Outsiders are in a better position to develop theoretical knowledge because their distant position better enables them to come to theoretical knowledge on a meta-level on the basis of an interaction between induction and hypothesis. Similarly, one need not be able to cook in order to appreciate good cooking; one need not be a creative artist to appreciate a piece of art. In the same way, one need not be a victim of the Holocaust in order to enter into an empathic, respectful, and at the same time critical-(de)constructive, dialogue with the survivors and their testimonies.

It is important to see that total empathy is structurally impossible, and this is the case for negative as well as positive experiences, and for the point of view of the victim, as well as for the point of view of the perpetrator. In this sense, the indescribability is not only a characteristic of reality, but also of communication itself. Therefore, the notions of 'comprehensibility' and 'incomprehensibility' should not mutually exclude each other. The expression 'incomprehensible' should not mean *per se* that the cruelties of Auschwitz are in principle inaccessible for the human mind. It can also be the expression of an overwhelming feeling. This is not unique to the experience of the Holocaust, and can even happen in a positive experience, for example, a sunset. Even if the movements of the sun are no longer steeped in mystery for us, we can still be moved deeply by a beautiful sunset. We speak about these kinds of overwhelming experiences in terms of something 'mysterious', 'incredible' and 'incomparable'. These expressions do not mean that a sunset is theoretically unexplainable. They only show how people can deal with reality in a twofold, supplementary way, as Buber speaks, through *Ich-Du* and

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[11] See E. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return into History: Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem*, New York, NY, Schocken Books, 1978, p. 58.

[12] See the introduction of his book G. van Den Berghe, *De uitbuiting van de Holocaust*, Antwerpen & Baam, Houtekiet, 1990.

through *Ich-Es* knowledge, through experience and through science[13]. There is always a mix of interdependent subjective and objective factors. Only in such a position, is it possible to develop an authentic hermeneutic of the Holocaust that can do justice to the two oppositions: the Holocaust as an inhuman and incomprehensible cruelty and the Holocaust as a comprehensible *human* creation. It is this tension that also is at work in this volume, giving central voice to both perpetrators and victims, experiences and theoretical reflections on the Holocaust[14].

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[13] M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, Heidelberg, Schneider, 1974, and E. Fackenheim, *Martin Buber's Concept of Revelation*, in P.A. Schilpp – M. Friedman, *The Philosophy of Martin Buber* (The Library of Living Philosophers XII), Illinois, IL, Open Court La Salle, 1967, pp. 278-283.

[14] A previous version published as D. Pollefeyt, *'Insiderism': Cornerstone or Stumble Block for the Relation between Survivors and Scholars of the Holocaust?*, in S. Leder – M. Teichman, *The Burdens of History: Post Holocaust Generations in Dialogue* (Selected Papers from the 29th Annual International Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches, March 6-9, 1999, Nasau Community, Garden City, New York, U.S.A.), Merion, Westfield Press International, 2000, pp. 117-128.

Section Two

Perpetrators

Chapter Three

The Perpetrator:
Devil, Machine or Idealist?
Ethical Interpretation of the Holocaust

The writings of Franz Kafka (1883-1924) have often been understood as a prophetic announcement of the twentieth century's enormous moral catastrophes. For example, *In the Penal Colony*, his short novel from 1914, can be seen as Kafka's anticipatory answer to the question: "How could Auschwitz and Birkenau happen"[1]? In this chapter, I argue that this novel can be read from three different perspectives, which can function as points of departure for developing three alternatives for understanding the evil of Auschwitz. I refer to these alternative readings of the Holocaust as paradigms. These approaches will also be the basis for my reflections on *Forgiveness* in Chapter Ten.

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn describes a paradigm as a constellation of convictions, values, and techniques, used by a scientific community[2]. A paradigm provides, for a certain time, a successful habit of thought, as well as strong exemplary solutions for scientific problems. Such paradigms contain a specific vocabulary, implicit metaphysical and ethical presuppositions, and pioneering textbook cases. Normal scientific research is understood by Kuhn as the effort to grasp a subject matter within the framework of the ruling paradigm. Difficulties and criticisms are removed by numerous *ad hoc* amendments within the framework of the paradigm itself, so that the paradigm can function under more and more strict conditions. A "scientific revolution" occurs when the majority of scholars leave a particular paradigm and consider subject matter from another interpretative framework. For the most part, such scientific revolutions are

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[1] F. Kafka, *In der Strafkolonie: eine Geschichte aus dem jahre 1914*. Mit Quellen, Abbildungen, Materialien aus der Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungsanstalt, Chronik und Anmerkungen von Klaus Wagenbach, Berlin, Wachenbach, 1975. I quote the English translation as found in F. Kafka, *The Judgment and In the Penal Colony*, London, Penguin Books, 1995.
[2] T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 1970.

accompanied by serious clashes around the metaphysical and ethical presuppositions entailed by the different paradigms.

In popular and academic approaches concerning the moral aspects of the Holocaust, I distinguish in this chapter three successive paradigms. Respectively, they are: the paradigm of diabolisation; the paradigm of banalisation; and the paradigm of ethicisation[3]. With the 1963 publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*[4], the Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt unleashed the first "scientific revolution" in the study of the Holocaust when she provoked a struggle between the defenders of the classic, popular paradigm of diabolisation and those who espoused a new and controversial paradigm of banalisation. Arendt's ethical interpretation of the Holocaust, especially her concerns for the modern and amoral aspects of genocidal systems, was and continues to be heavily criticised by scholars who place greater stress on the immorality of the concrete, individual perpetrators.

In these discussions, it has been largely overlooked that another and at least as provocative interpretation of the evil of Nazism has been developed. It was first articulated systematically in 1988 by the Jewish ethicist Peter Haas in *Morality after Auschwitz: The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic*[5]. In this new interpretation, the Nazis are no longer understood in terms of immorality (first paradigm) or amorality (second paradigm), but described as acting out of 'ethical' concerns.

These two historical turning points—the first in modernity, and the second at the beginning of postmodernity—make it possible to distinguish three successive ethical interpretations of the Holocaust. Each paradigm can bring to light some aspects of the Holocaust, but at the same time, each paradigm also darkens and even disavows the others. Here I develop these different 'portraits' of the Holocaust, indicating their possibilities, presuppositions, and limits, as well as their dangers.

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[3] A point of departure for using the ideas of KUHN in Holocaust studies can be found in G.M. KREN – M. RAPPAPORT, *The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behavior*, New York, NY, Holmes and Meier, 1980, p. 128: "In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, T. KUHN suggests that this occurs in science when a dominant paradigm for theory and research is overturned by new ways of thinking about scientific phenomena. It is being suggested here that an analogous process occurs in history when real events outstrip the conceptual structures of historians, philosophers, and laymen alike". See also D. MARMUR, *Judaism after the Holocaust*, in *Toronto Journal of Theology* 9 (1993), pp. 211-220.

[4] H. ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York, NY, Viking Press, 1963, p. 5.

[5] P.J. HAAS, *Morality After Auschwitz: The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1988.

One of my goals is to show that any ethical interpretation of the Holocaust is always a vulnerable construction, which—as a *Gestalt*—brings both insight and blindness.

Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* is a good point of departure for elaborating the three different paradigms. It helps to show that, just as we can look at the same story with different eyes, we can likewise look at the Holocaust with different eyes. Kafka's story recounts the visit of a foreign traveller to a prison camp, but without mentioning the place or time. Full of pride, an officer of the prison shows the camp's instrument of torture and execution. It is an ingenious construction. Using a rotation mechanism and large needles, it ceaselessly scratches a slogan in the slowly turning body of the condemned, gradually and torturously bringing its victim toward death. At that moment the visitor is "lucky", since a soldier has the "privilege" of being executed by this machine.

I. Diabolisation

Kafka's reader is shocked by the brutal evil inflicted on the victim by the perpetrator and feels morally scandalised by this terrible, random, and incomprehensible violence. How can a human being carry out such a painful execution, such an inhuman crime? One feels powerless in the face of this atrocity, which is so sophisticated, so organised, and so well planned. One experiences deep moral indignation, and even abhorrence towards the perpetrator of this bloody, sadistic execution in which the executioner seems to find pride and pleasure. One identifies spontaneously with the victim, who not only does not know why he will be executed, but does not even know that he will be executed. This is precisely the sense of moral recalcitrance we feel when confronted with the horror of the Holocaust. The first paradigm offers a suitable language and framework through which we can easily express and interpret our moral revolt and our own spontaneous revulsion *vis-à-vis* the evil of Auschwitz[6]. We immediately recognise ourselves in the language of the paradigm of diabolisation, especially when it characterises the perpetrators of such inhuman acts as 'nonhumans', 'sadists', 'monsters', or 'devils'. The language of diabolisation (from *diabolos*, devil) is morally

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[6] D.M. Munch-Jurisic, *Perpetrator Disgust: a Morally Destructive Emotion*, in T. Brudholm – J. Lang (eds), *Emotions and Mass Atrocity. Philosophical and Theoretical Explorations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 142-161 (Chapter 8).

very powerful and expresses our intuitive moral feelings perfectly. It leaves no room for doubt: 'this is evil', 'absolutely', even 'uniquely'.

When people underpin in a more systematic and academic way such a representation in the context of the Holocaust, they usually stress specific characteristics of the Holocaust and use examples that depart from typical historical, anthropological, and ethical presuppositions. In deciphering the basic lines of this *Gestalt* of the Holocaust, certain characteristics emerge: a synthetic approach to evil, ethical Manichaeism, intentionalism, a pessimistic anthropology, an optimistic view of civilisation, and the incomprehensibility and the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Since this cluster of characteristics constitutes what we call the paradigm of diabolisation, concrete interpretations will always have, to a certain degree, resemblances with this theoretical construction.

First, the paradigm of diabolisation particularly highlights the extreme aspects of Nazism—its excessive crimes, anti-Judaic teasing, sadistic games, incredible moral excesses, licentious camp guards, and so on. The 'order' of the Nazi camps is represented as a very condensed concatenation of terrible horrors, monstrous cruelties, exorbitant pathologies, and satanic inventiveness. From the whole of Nazi politics, one selects the most extreme and traumatic events, bringing them together in one picture that is then presented as the exclusive image of Nazism. In this case, evil is synthesised more than analysed. Stories about senseless slave labour or humiliation of Orthodox Jews, apocalyptic pictures of mountains of corpses, walking skeletons or lamp shades made of human skin are paradigmatic in this stereotypical representation of the evil of Auschwitz.

At the basis of the paradigm of diabolisation, there is a prototypical representation of the camps' extremities. Evil is condensed and collected into one, recognisable, and overwhelming picture. This representation enables a description of Nazism as a "revolt against morality" (George Steiner) or as an "orgy of evil for evil's sake" (Berel Lang). The Nazis appear as the perverted figures in the stories of De Sade, as the apocalyptic dragons of Milton's Satan, as the ministers of the innermost circle of Dante's Inferno, or as fanatic, Teutonic cannibals who carry out their ritual cruelties to the music of Richard Wagner. This paradigm identifies the perpetrator as completely perverted by evil. In his camp testimony, the Polish Jew Klieger, for example, wrote in 1947: "They [the SS in Auschwitz] were no longer human beings who beat us, they were animals, unchained monsters. They shouted and they foamed at the mouth. Their eyes were bloodthirsty. I never saw so close and so precisely the face of men who were so decided upon killing. Only now I saw the face

of the murderer, now his mask was taken way, nothing remained but a bloody, deformed, satanic face. See here the *homo sapiens*, when all his instincts are unchained"[7]. In a more academic context, Holocaust historian Saul Friedländer wrote that "the perpetrators do not appear (...) as bureaucratic automata, but rather as beings seized by a compelling lust for killing on an immense scale, driven by some kind of extraordinary elation in repeating the killing of ever-larger masses of people"[8]. For this approach to the Holocaust, Eichmann's statement that he "would jump with glee into his grave knowing that over five million Jews had been exterminated"[9] is a revealing case.

It is certainly not my intention to question the fact that extreme cruelties did happen in the Nazi camps. The stereotypical picture of the Nazi camps contains few historical errors. The problem, however, is that this extreme picture of the camps is not universally applicable for all places and prisoners. The diabolisation is thus based upon a specific selection of facts, especially the extreme cruelties, which best fit within the idea of 'hyper-evil', whereby other, less spectacular aspects may be forgotten in favour of the more striking features. The presentation of the Nazis as 'diabolical' or 'hyper-evil' is the result of a purposeful and selective synthesis of the historical reality of the camps. From other paradigmatic perspectives, one could well question the historical accuracy of this selection and emphasise, for example, the more 'daily' aspects of Nazism and its genocidal program, which would show perhaps less 'hyper-evil' but better exemplify the destruction process.

Ethical Manichaeism is a second important feature of the paradigm of diabolisation: the distinction between good and evil is extrapolated to a maximum and declared to be an absolute difference. As in historical Manichaeism, the paradigm of diabolisation posits two completely oppo-

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[7] B. Klieger, *Le chemin que nous avons fait (Reportages surhumaines)*, 2d ed. French translation by Noah, Brussels, Editions Beka, 1947, p. 82: "Ce n'étaient plus des hommes [de SS in Auschwitz] qui frappaient là, c'étaient des bêtes, des monstres déchaînés, ils criaient et l'écume leur sortait de la bouche. Les yeux étaient injectés de sang. Jamais encore je n'avais encore vu de si près et si précises les figures d'hommes décidés à tuer. Maintenant seulement je vis la figure de l'assassin; maintenant qu'ils avaient enlevé leur masque il ne restait qu'une face sanglante, déformée, satanique. Voilà donc, 'l'homo sapiens' quand ses instincts primitifs étaient déchaînés!".

[8] S. Friedländer, *The "Final Solution": On the Unease of Historical Interpretation*, in P. Hayes (ed.), *Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World*, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1991, pp. 23-35 and especially 30.

[9] L. Abel, *The Aesthetics of Evil: Hannah Arendt on Eichmann and the Jews*, in *Partisan Review 30* (1963): pp. 211-230 and especially 224. Cited in B. Lang, *The History of Evil and the Future of the Holocaust*, in *Lessons and Legacies*, pp. 90-105.

site, irreducible forces at work: our daily world of light and the Nazi counterworld ("planet Auschwitz") of pure wickedness and darkness. For example, Gideon Hausner, the public prosecutor for the trial of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, saw the trial as a confrontation between "two worlds": the world of light and humanity and the counter-world of darkness. In his famous study on the rescuers of Le Chambon in France, the ethicist Philip Hallie wrote that there is an unbridgeable difference between those who torture and kill children and those who save children[10].

People are inclined to agree with extrapolated representations of 'good' and 'evil', sincerely believing that they would never throw living children into crematoria or be like Eichmann. Nevertheless, descriptions in which the evil-doer is represented as a diabolical, absolutely evil creature obscure the problem since only two extremes remain of what is, in fact, a continuity and since this polarity ignores all the gradations in between, which both separate and link good and evil. When good and evil are dealt with in such a dualistic way, moral indignation risks bringing people to sacrifice all historical, psychological, and ethical nuances to a single and extreme representation. In doing so, ethical dualism meets a fundamental and very old human need to separate humankind into good and evil, 'then' and 'now, 'us' and 'them', black and white (Athenians and Spartans, Hutus and Tutsis, Serbs and Croats, 'indigenous' and 'strangers', 'men' and 'women')[11]. Human complexity in doing good and evil is reduced to the aestheticised and fascinating confrontation between Beauty and the Beast. Such an orderly, dualistic view of good and evil can be very comforting.

The idea that people who do extreme evil are not fundamentally different from ourselves is extremely threatening to our own identity. No doubt this is why it is easy for people to choose a diabolical representation of the Nazis; indeed, in the context of the Holocaust, this representation at least brings some measure of reassurance. We certainly do not want to have anything in common with the 'monsters' who do such evil. If I do not look like that stereotypical version of the evildoer, then I am not likely to question myself as to whether I act unethically. The resulting ethical dualism creates a radical difference between good ('us') and

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[10] P. HALLIE, *Opdat geen onschuldig bloed vergoten wordt... : goedheid en gerechtigheid in Le Chambon sur Lignon in de jaren 1939-1944*, Dutch translation by H.M. MATTER, Kampen, Kok, 1981, p. 36.

[11] To express the notion of human 'averageness' in criminality, the Italian essayist and survivor PRIMO LEVI developed the category of "the gray zone". See, P. Levi, *De verdronkenen en de geredden: Essays*, Amsterdam, Meulenhoff, 1991, pp. 33-38.

evil ('them'). Such a vision situates evil entirely in the other, and every personal identification with evil is strategically evaded. Consequently, diabolisation can be a strategy of self-defence; it allows one to envision one's own identity comfortably and to limit oneself to moralisation, a very typical attitude for this paradigm. Indeed, defenders of diabolisation think that presenting the shocking hyper-evil of Auschwitz is the best way to mobilise people against fascism and genocide[12].

In this vision, a popular myth of civilisation emerges. In Hausner's opinion, for example, Eichmann acted from a "desire to obliterate two thousand years of 'Jewish' civilisation and 'rationalism' and to revert to a mankind guided by instincts"[13]. As such, Auschwitz would not be the logical end of the evolution of our modern civilisation, but rather a tragic, sometimes called "typically German"[14], relapse into barbarism, a pitiful deflection of the otherwise progressing trajectory of civilisation. Accordingly, Auschwitz would not force us to question our modern way of life. On the contrary, our civilisation is presumed to be on the right track, needing only more of that same modern civilisation. The paradigm of diabolisation thus places civilisation and cruelty in opposition to each other, viewing the Holocaust as an aberration, as a discontinuity with Western history. It was a unique 'regression' to pure hatred and rage, a kind of pathological deviation of the process of civilisation, which is in itself healthy and should not be unduly criticised. The history of humanity is depicted as the progression from a pre-social barbarity to a socio-ethical community. In this progression, the great importance of the Jewish (sometimes the Judeo-Christian) tradition as a factor of civilisation is recognised.

This myth of civilisation, in turn, goes hand in hand with a certain understanding of human nature. In essence, each human is a 'wolf' (Hobbes) in relation to others. The Holocaust is then proof that Hobbes's world is still not (enough) under control, and that the *homo homini lupus* is still a reality. Auschwitz underlines the unethical, egoistic essence of being human, showing how human culture and morality are necessary but are unnatural forces that have great difficulties in controlling our egocentric human nature in a structural way. In every human being, then, there is a violent beast that may awaken whenever

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[12] See *Section Twelve: Holocaust Education.*
[13] G. HAUSNER, *Eichmann and His Trial*, in *The Saturday Evening Post*, 3 November 1962, pp. 19-25.
[14] See also D. GOLDHAGEN, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, New York, NY, Knopf, 1996.

the flimsy coat of cultural veneer is worn away. From this perspective, our human essence is malicious, and ethics is an unnatural power imposed by civilisation. Accordingly, one would think that the extreme evil of the camps reveals our true nature. Such a view can be called 'essentialism'. In the Holocaust, it concludes, we can see naked, prehistorical, and pre-social human beings reduced to their real essence. It entails the conviction that people who were involved in the Nazi project were stripped of all their cultural refinements, and that we are then confronted with 'man without morality'.

One of the most significant characteristics of the paradigm of diabolisation is its preference for an intentionalistic interpretation of the Nazi genocide. Intentionalism is a current in the historiography[15] of the Holocaust[16] that understands the Nazi genocide as the outcome of a carefully planned, methodologically constructed, purposefully prepared, and systematically executed program of extermination, initiated in some way by Hitler himself. It understands Nazi policy as stemming from a central, hierarchical, and monocratic political organisation. The extermination is thought to be the result of a coherent, linear, and well-coordinated process in which Hitler had a crucial role. From an ethical point of view, intentionalism is an interesting historical representation, since it reduces the Holocaust to one very clear and localisable political or moral intention. One can then postulate a connection between the unambiguous will of individuals and genocidal evil[17], and collective evil receives a concrete face. Auschwitz is understood as consciously planned and executed with indisputably evil intentions. Intentionalism shows how the Holocaust was prepared with great precision by a group of immoral beings who did evil—evil for evil's sake—intentionally. Accordingly, genocide was the outcome of a diabolical plan through which evil was systematically realised and with malice aforethought.

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[15] Representatives of this position include: L. Dawidowicz, E. Jäckel, G. Fleming, and K. Bracher.

[16] T. Mason, *Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism*, in G. Hirschfeld — L. Kettemacker (eds.), *Der "Führerstaat": Mythos und Realität. Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1981, pp. 23-42.

[17] S. Friedländer, *From Anti-Semitism to Extermination*, in *Yad Vashem Studies* 16 (1984): 1-50 and especially 28: "The intentionalist position implies a key element: premeditation. Planning and premeditation at the top lead, of necessity, to planning and premeditation at various levels of the hierarchy and to (...) awareness of the events within the various agencies involved (...)".

As an authoritative historiographical theory, and as characteristic of the paradigm of diabolisation, intentionalism tends to explain everything the Nazis did in terms of an all-embracing dehumanising, Machiavellian, and Faustian system. All that happened in the camps was planned in advance, methodically programmed with 'German *Gründlichkeit*' and 'Prussian precision'. The elaboration of such a meticulous plan could never have been the work of a normal human being, but requires a diabolical spirit. Even the (exceptional) expressions of humanity of the perpetrators are sometimes interpreted in a contrary way; such moments are attributed to the evil intention that had orchestrated evil in advance, and that did not even shrink from a kind of moral 'cunning'.

For the most part, intentionalists deny or relativise the economic dimension of the Nazi genocide. The completeness of evil can be heightened when stressing that the evil was not committed for any material benefits, but for evil's sake alone. In the first paradigm, what is emphasised is that the extermination of European Jewry deprived Nazi Germany's war industry and economy of important labour forces, which was only partially compensated for by the Jewish slave labour and the confiscation of Jewish properties. In *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide*, ethicist Berel Lang provides a textbook case of the paradigm of diabolisation. He shows how the Nazis took trains from the eastern front for transporting Jews to the camps, even though Germany was losing the war at that time and needed the trains more than ever for transporting military machinery and supplies. Similarly, Steiner emphasises

> the deliberate decision of the National Socialist regime, even in the final stages of economic warfare, to liquidate the Jews rather than exploit them towards obvious productive and financial ends. Most enigmatic of all, perhaps, is the persistence of virulent antisemitism where no Jews or only a handful survived (...) The mystery, in the proper theological sense, is one of hatred without precedent[18].

Here we can see two final characteristics of the paradigm of diabolisation: its accent on the incomprehensibility and the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the central place it gives to (German) antisemitism.

The evil and the immorality of Auschwitz are considered un-fathomable mysteries that never will yield their secrets[19]. One can find this

[18] G. STEINER, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture*, London, Faber & Faber, 1971, p. 35.

[19] See D. MAGURSHAK, *The 'Incomprehensibility' of the Holocaust: Tightening Up Some Loose Usage*, in A. ROSENBERG – G.E. MYERS (eds.), *Echoes from the Holocaust. Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time*, Philadelphia, PA, Temple University Press, 1988,

opinion among historians, philosophers, and theologians. Elie Wiesel is an important representative of this idea[20]. He thinks that one cannot explain Auschwitz, because Auschwitz transcends history. Such a plea for incomprehensibility is an understandable reaction against outsiders who—in a hardly humble way—try to explain and use the Holocaust for their own purposes, and thereby profane it. Elie Wiesel has compared these people to the 'friends' of the biblical figure Job. Defenders of diabolisation likewise reject comparisons of the Holocaust with other genocides, preferring to reveal the 'unique' aspects of the Holocaust. Berel Lang, for instance, points out that it is dangerous for ethical reflection to reduce the Holocaust to one illustration of historical evil. In the Nazi genocide, he finds, "the internal history of evil had at once been asserted and found its end— that this history was now complete, reaching a boundary by which any future instance of evil would be measured. Like the limit set by the speed of light, an outer limit would now have been defined for moral violation"[21]. To cite another example, in his article "The 'Unique' Intentionality of the Holocaust" philosopher Steven Katz locates the uniqueness of the Holocaust in the intentionality that drove it, namely, the unique evil intention to kill all Jews—deliberately, continually for a period of twelve years, legally and without geographical limits—only because they were Jews.

In the intentionalist model, antisemitism—mostly seen in continuity with Christianity's anti-Judaism—is usually considered to be the primary motive of the Nazi genocide. Antisemitism is not merely one—albeit the most shocking—aspect of a broader Nazi racial policy but the central motive of the Nazi genocide. Often Hitler's 'last testament' is thought to be a strong illustration of the central place of antisemitism in his Nazi ideology—just before the end of the war he reiterated the need to fight against international Jewry. The American historian Daniel Goldhagen[22] even stresses the typical German character of this Nazi antisemitism. The

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421-431; A. ROSENBERG, *The Crisis in Knowing and Understanding the Holocaust*, in *Echoes from the Holocaust*, pp. 379-395.

[20] E. WIESEL, *One Generation After*, trans. L. EDELMAN, New York, NY, Random House, 1970, p. 167: "We shall never understand how Auschwitz was possible"; and ID., *Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-fact and Semi-fiction*, in The New York Times, 16 April 1978, p. 29: "The dead are in possession of a secret that we, the living, are neither worthy of nor capable of recovering".

[21] B. LANG, *The History of Evil and the Future of the Holocaust*, in *Lessons and Legacies*, p. 103.

[22] D. GOLDHAGEN, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, New York, NY, Knopf, 1996.

evil of Auschwitz is thereby reduced to a very clear cause, embedded in characteristics of German culture or even of the German *Volk*. In this way, Goldhagen's thesis all too easily implies a kind of collective guilt idea. We see here again a mechanism of defence. If we say it is 'made in Germany', we need not think that we ourselves could regress to such an immoral level.

II. The Anonymity of the Torture Machine

To continue our reading of Kafka's novel, one would now recognise from the first paradigm the description of a terrible bloody scene in which the torture is described in detail. Yet, an attentive reading of the description of the execution shows that Kafka is not primarily concerned with the immoral, sadistic character of the event or the perversion of the legal system, but more with the glory of the machine over the human being, by which Kafka's story takes an unexpected turn. The officer chooses to demonstrate the machine to the visitor by briefly submitting to it himself. He lays down, starts the machine, and then the machine takes over and tortuously kills him. The visitor watches but does not intervene because it is not up to him to interfere in foreign affairs.

In this part of the story, we discover another perspective on evil: the perfect working of the machine looks endlessly more important than the bloodthirsty hunger of a sadist or any discussion about justice and ethics. Kafka shows a human who is completely given over to instrumental rationality and moral indifference. Herein Kafka's story brings together some crucial themes of the second paradigmatic representation of genocidal evil: the power of technology, the self-destructiveness of modernity, the insensitivity of the executioners, and the moral indifference of the bystanders.

In his ethical analysis of the Holocaust, the Norwegian philosopher Harald Ofstad distinguishes immorality from non-morality. The immoral person of the first paradigm is still within the sphere of morality. He or she knows the difference between good and evil but chooses the later. The non-moral person of the second paradigm, however, lives "beyond good and evil", where moral distinctions are irrelevant[23]. From this

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[23] H. OFSTAD, *Our Contempt for Weakness: Nazi Norms and Values — and Our Own*, Gothenburg, Almquist and Wiksell, 1989, especially 92-104 ('Idealism and Indifference') and 105-125 ('Non-moral versus Immoral'), p. 105.

perspective, Auschwitz appears as a well-oiled machine, run by people who were not hampered by subjective involvement or specifically evil intentions, but who accomplished in a professional manner what they considered to be their duty. According to the second paradigm, it was not the excessive subjectivity of the Nazis but their purely objective attitude that made their crimes possible. If it is necessary from an economic perspective and it is practical and realisable, for example, why not kill the mentally ill or use Jews and Gypsies as medical experimental guinea pigs, before killing them anyway? If the government allows it, why not?

In the context of Nazi genocide, the paradigm of diabolisation was critically called into question for the first time by the philosopher Hannah Arendt in her study of Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem[24]. She had been struck by the contrast between Eichmann as a person and the manner in which Hausner portrayed him. Eichmann, she thought, was not a perverted "arch-monster" (Hausner) but an "awfully normal" (Arendt) bureaucrat. Hence, although she was often misunderstood, Arendt spoke of the "banality" of evil. She developed the idea that ethical Manichaeism was unable to explain how thousands of people cooperated in the genocide for more than a decade without stopping to consider their humanity in such cooperation. There surely were monsters among the Nazis, but alone they would not have been numerous enough to be really dangerous. It seems that ordinary people are more likely to be the most dangerous in such extreme circumstances, because they enable the system to continue working effectively[25].

Central to Arendt's interpretation is not the immoral, but the amoral character of the Nazis. This new *Gestalt* for understanding the Holocaust was severely criticised by the defenders of the first paradigm, and not always in a fair and scientifically correct manner. We can interpret this conflict as a 'struggle of paradigms' in which different historical, moral, and metaphysical presuppositions collide. To focus the second paradigm further, consider again its basic points and how the new character of this Gestalt of genocidal evil came to the fore.

According to the portrayal of the second paradigm, the perpetrators are not exceptionally evil persons, but 'awfully normal'. They find no pleasure in transgressing the law, preferring instead to act in perfect

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[24] H. ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1984.
[25] J. PRESCOTT – W.W. BEORN – J. CIARDELLI – G. SKIDMORE – D. FREY (eds), *Ordinary Soldiers: a Study of Ethics, Law and Leadership*, Washington, USHMM, 2017.

accordance with the law. They are even prepared to renounce their spontaneous ethical involvement with their fellow human beings and blindly deliver themselves to an insensitive and amoral system and machinery of murder. In this paradigm, the Nazis were not monsters, but dull, banal, and morally indifferent persons who helped to eliminate suspected enemies of civil order in a rational and thoroughly efficient manner. Arendt's notion of "banality" was offensive, first, because it criticised an ancient tradition that had invariably understood evil—in agreement with the first paradigm—as envy, hatred, seduction, and pure maliciousness. Arendt argued that evil in the modern (totalitarian) state had lost those characteristics by which people had always recognised it[26]. Her question was no longer how people can do evil, but rather how—in an evil situation—they can rid themselves of the involvement that implicates almost every human when facing human suffering.

In Arendt's opinion, the loss of autonomy belongs to the essence of modern bureaucracy, which reduces each person to a tiny cog in a gigantic machine that is characterised by 'the supremacy of no one'. The network of bureaucratic rules turns humans into 'thoughtless' robots that obey certain laws automatically. Such thoughtlessness is the ideal place for modern evil to take root; it is the "weak spot" (Ricœur) in our human constitution[27]. According to Arendt, it was difficult for Eichmann to conceive the situation of the other from behind his desk. Nevertheless, one would have thought that he might have followed his human feelings a little more and the regulations a little less. For the first paradigm, sensitivity is the problem and rationality would be the solution; for the second paradigm, rationality is the problem and sensitivity would be the solution.

Moreover, behind this second paradigm, there is not a pessimistic but a more optimistic anthropology at work, namely, the belief that humans are structurally endowed with ethical possibilities and that—for better or worse—the community and culture can manipulate our human capacity of being touched ethically. In the light of the unspeakable suffering in the Nazi camps, the neutralisation of our human sensitivity for the good is anything but obvious. To eliminate the inner feelings of moral resistance that one must inevitably have when seeing people being

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[26] *Ibid.*

[27] H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, London, Seeker & Warburg, 1978, and P. Ricœur, *Philosophie de la volonté. Finitude et culpabilité I: L'homme faillible*, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1960, p. 157.

transformed into non-humans, the Nazis used a number of modern techniques of 'depersonalisation' (Todorov[28]), such as depriving the victims of their clothing and their names. In doing so, the appeal of the face of the victim could be effectively neutralised. This 'depersonalisation' is not defined as typically German, but is considered to be a fundamental feature of modern warfare and even of modern society as such. The camps merely illustrated the worst possible consequences of this general, modern reality.

In her analysis of 'modernity', Arendt does not stand alone. Her 'desk killer' bears resemblance to Marcuse's 'one dimensional man', Adorno's *subjektlosen* Subject, Heidegger's *das Man-selbst* and Weber's *Ordnungsmensch* and *Fachmann*[29]. In the second paradigm, the 'technocratic' qualities of bureaucrats, much more than their personal immorality or evil passions, are what make them 'competent' for genocidal evil. As Eichmann's case suggests, those who organised and carried out the murderous system did not feel any particular hatred towards their victims. Technical precision, scientific objectivity, and emotional detachment were much more decisive. Efficiency was the only value of importance, and genocide was part of an intellectual puzzle that had to be solved as adequately as possible. Technology's task was to maximise productivity, not moral value. The second paradigm stresses how individual immorality, hate, and sadism—so central to the first paradigm—were even considered obstacles to the efficient elimination of the enemies of the German people. Albert Speer, for example, defended himself against accusations of cruelties not on moral but simply utilitarian grounds: the use of excessive violence would not have been an intelligent policy in the light of the productive ends of the genocidal system[30]. This attitude shows how the economic dimension of the Holocaust is relevant.

To understand the functioning of this extermination machine, the second paradigm no longer works with a condensed synthesis of some very extreme forms of immediate, concrete, and 'intentional' cruelty, which are incomprehensible and even mysterious, but concentrates on the analysis of the large-scale, abstract, functional, and 'thoughtless' system that 'produced' the evil of Auschwitz. This outlook stresses a functionalistic interpretation of the Holocaust. In contrast to intentionalists,

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[28] T. TODOROV, *Face à l'extrême*, Paris, Seuil, 1991.

[29] A. ROSENBERG – MARCUS, *The Holocaust as a Test of Philosophy*, in *Echoes from the Holocaust*, pp. 201-222.

[30] *Trial of the Major War Criminals*, London, HSMO, 1946-1948, 16 volumes.

functionalists do not view the Holocaust as a consequence of a planned and monolithic Nazi program, but as the (by-)product of a progressive radicalisation of Nazism as a system[31]. The genesis of extermination is not understood as a conscious and clear plan but as the interaction of successive and heterogeneous measures from different sources that were each submitted to trial and error. In and through the genesis of the genocide, the four most important factors of German society (the party, the army, the economy, and the bureaucracy) interacted with each other in a very complex and sometimes even conflicting way. The results were not clear in advance. For functionalists, the fact that the Holocaust was not planned in advance does not make that event any less horrible. On the contrary, the fact that mass extermination does not require a complete and uniform preparation makes it even more horrendous.

For the second paradigm, the Holocaust is also unique. The uniqueness, however, does not consist in the intentional, even 'meta-physical', evil it reveals, but in the unprecedented combination of modern features in a new and massively destructive constellation. By themselves, however, the basic elements of the Holocaust are not unique. The Holocaust is considered the most horrible, but understandable, expression of modern logic in which all 'primitive' forms of evil are transcended. Because modern civilisation produced Auschwitz, the Holocaust's threats remains an inherent risk to our very way of living. The Holocaust is unique precisely because it is not a kind of 'super-pogrom', a new high point in anti-Judaic madness. The cruelty of the Nazis was entirely different; it was a new kind of evil. Its novelty is not to be located in the unique intentionality of the Nazis, but in its uncritical use of modern and potentially genocidal methodologies.

The second paradigm likewise questions the first paradigm's myth of civilisation: Auschwitz is not simply a deviation from Western society but its logical consequence. In this context, the true face of the modern world—especially its manipulating rationality—reveals itself[32]. Arendt's analysis, for example, forces us to ask painful questions about our (mod-

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[31] H. Mommsen, *Anti-Jewish Politics and the Implementation of the Holocaust*, in H. Bull (ed.), *The Challenge of the Third Reich*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986, 117-140 and especially 123: "Even the most fanatical anti-Semites within the Nazi elite or the inner circle around the dictator did not conceive the 'Jewish problem' from the aspect of a possible extermination policy before the end of 1939, and even then there was no clear conception of what could be done against the Jews".

[32] This criticism, however, should not be applied to Hannah Arendt, who thought of Eichmann as personally responsible for the loss of his ability to think. See H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, pp. 187-216.

ern) way of life and about our Western civilisation. It breaks through the comforting dualist distinction between 'us' (the good) and 'them' (the evil). The second paradigm discloses an understanding that diabolisation painstakingly tries to avoid, namely, the inherent potentiality for evil contained in our present-day existence. This view makes clear that the distinction between good and evil is not the distinction between Germans ('them') and non-Germans ('us'), or between 'then' and 'now'. Instead, the Holocaust reveals the intrinsic possibility of modern life to rob millions of their human face through technology and modern bureaucracy and, in the process, to restrict human involvement in ethical concerns. Genocide is therefore not a specifically German phenomenon but an actual possibility within modern humanity itself. We do not live in a time 'after Auschwitz'. We still live in the time 'of Auschwitz'.

Next to efficiency, obedience to authority is a crucial element for understanding the neutralisation of ethics. The perpetrators did not act upon their own initiative; they executed the orders of Nazi policy. In the second paradigm, therefore, it is more difficult to draw a sharp Manichaean line between perpetrators and victims, because in the totalitarian system the (obedient) perpetrator can also be considered a victim of the system. Arendt even went further; in fact, she went too far. Insofar as the victims also collaborated in their own destruction, as her analysis argued, their purity and innocence were blemished and the Manichaeism of the first paradigm of 'absolutely evil perpetrators' versus 'absolutely good victims' was further called into question. In the ensuing debate, Arendt's (oversimplified) remarks on 'Jewish collaboration' in the extermination process caused considerable controversy[33].

Kafka's story also illustrates how modernity finally turns against itself. Characteristic of the second paradigm is a philosophical interpretation of the Holocaust that emphasises modernity's self-destructiveness. What is central here is not so much (Christian) antisemitism but Western thought itself, which is considered responsible—'from Parmenides to Heidegger'—for producing a totalitarian interpretation of reality. Antisemitism is then considered as one—very important—manifestation of this Western impossibility to deal ethically with 'the other'[34].

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[33] A. Brown, *Judging 'privileged' Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representation and 'the Grey Zone'*, New York, Berghahn, 2015, Chapter One on Primo Levi's concept of the Grey Zone, pp. 42-75.

[34] F. Kafka, *In der Strafkolonie: eine Geschichte aus dem jahre 1914*. Mit Quellen, Abbildungen, Materialien aus der Arbeiter-Unfall- Versicherungsanstalt, Chronik und Anmerkungen von Klaus Wagenbach, Berlin, Wachenbach, 1975.

In their *Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer showed how Western thought tried to submit, exclude, expel, and de-mythologise the impalpable, foreign, unrecognisable, and un-sortable. In that outlook's effort to realise a universal and homogeneous society —which deletes every particularism, renders every infinite finite, elim-inates every inexplicable—they understood the whole Western tradition as a striving for total control and thus as a foundation for Auschwitz. In the 'dialectics' of the Enlightenment, the 'thesis' of a repressive myth and the 'antithesis' of a liberating rationality are elevated to a 'synthesis' of repressive rationality. All that remains unknowable is considered hos-tile, and great efforts are undertaken to make the incomprehensible comprehensible. In spite of the great successes of this modern enter-prise, there always remain enigmatic entities that withdraw from this effort, thereby creating doubts about the chances of its success. So, for example, the Gypsies' transience escapes the demographics of the state. The absent look of the feebleminded reveals a world that is impenetra-ble for human reason. The silence of the homosexual evades the statis-tics of the calculating bureaucrat. The Jew refuses the universal church and continues to cling to 'strange habits'—an obscure language and indecipherable books. These 'disturbers' of order cause great annoyance, which finally ends in a physical assault on all that eludes 'reason'. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the Holocaust is an attack on all that is ulti-mately uncontrollable. Auschwitz is the last step of twenty centuries of Western civilisation.

Not only the Jews, but every 'disturber of the order' had to be elimi-nated. The second paradigm breaks open the Judeo-centric approach of the first paradigm, explaining why other people were victims of Nazi genocide as well. In this sense, antisemitism is 'only' the most striking and provoking form of the much broader violence of Nazi totalitarian-ism. The relativising—not denial—of the role of Christian antisemitism is for the defenders of the second paradigm no reason to absolve Chris-tianity of its role in the Holocaust. One must also look for other elements in Christian tradition that facilitated the Holocaust—for exam-ple, an ethic of obedience (especially in Catholicism) or a split between private and public life (especially in Protestantism).

With its critique of modernity, the second paradigm unmasks the mechanisms of mystification and self-defence that are so prominent in the diabolisation of evil. In the Holocaust we see the so-called progressive elements of our civilisation and our way of life at work: for instance, science and technology, bureaucracy, economics, propaganda, the

military industrial complex, anonymity, moral indifference, and instrumental rationality. These are elements with which we try to give our life further form and by which we hope to protect it, elements that for the most part continue to develop today without correction. Every effort to recognise the Holocaust only in the other (in the German, the premodern, the subhuman, the sadist, the evil person) reveals itself to be an effort to avoid seeing the Holocaust as a part of ourselves.

Of course, the second paradigm must also be subjected to serious criticism. While the first paradigm (over-)emphasised the free choice of evil, despite the psychosocial and historical background of the perpetrators, the second paradigm particularly stresses a number of determining factors that explain evil and to a certain extent even excuse it. This view may imply, for example, that in the long run and because of depersonalisation, obedience, and efficiency, the criminal did not know what he or she was doing. He or she was a 'thoughtless' creature. Such an approach entails the danger of slipping into determinism. Then the tragic dimension of evil can become a cowardly excuse for crimes committed. Responsibility becomes unthinkable, and human beings become playthings of extrahuman powers[35]. Ethics becomes irrelevant. In our era, evil is 'psychologised' and 'sociologised'. Such views suggest that the criminal who had a difficult youth or who has ended up in a marginal social position is not a perpetrator but a victim. Those who fail are tragic figures needing mercy more than critical moral judgment. This ignoring of ethics shows a fundamental misunderstanding of freedom, a typical human characteristic that is very much celebrated today. The possibility of evil is a condition for the affirmation of human freedom. In short, there is no freedom without the possibility of human failure. If we do not want to reduce humans to pitiful creatures, then we will have to affirm them, in the name of human dignity, not only as victims but also as perpetrators. Moreover, excuses such as 'we didn't know' or 'we didn't intend that' must not be used too readily as justifications. In short, the second paradigm risks too much empathy for the perpetrators and too little for their victims. Moreover, Arendt's notion of obedience and thoughtlessness is in contradiction to the engaged and even creative way in which the Nazis executed and 're-invented' their duties. Historian Raul Hilberg shows that Nazi orders from Berlin were often not very clear and did not reckon with the difficulties that often arose with their

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[35] Z. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989.

implementation[36]. Without the inventiveness of German bureaucrats, the *Führer*'s orders would have lacked results. The bureaucrats, however, assiduously made the orders concrete, found solutions for unforeseen problems, and generated their own initiatives. If each of them had only waited for orders, probably little would have happened. Obedience was only evil's 'outside', not its 'inside'.

The second paradigm's basic flaw is that technique and rationality are mistakenly presented as the motivating forces of genocide, while their actual roles are mainly limited to simplifying its execution. Clearly modernity facilitated the Holocaust, but it was not the reason for it. Technology was a condition for—but not an explanation of—the evil of Auschwitz. It can also be argued that Nazism was more a perversion than the outcome of Enlightenment ideals[37]. In the second paradigm, modernity is divorced historically and analytically from the categories of a universal ethos, human rights, democracy, and tolerance. Only in this way, is it possible to see modernity only as a preparation for genocide. In fact, modernity bears a very ambiguous legacy. Hitlerism can also be explained as a revolt against modernity, a fight against the ideals of universalism, and as an extreme form of particularism. The same critique can be levelled against 'moral indifference' and 'obedience' as explanations for the Holocaust. We must ask the question why people obeyed. Obedience is mostly motivated by the desire to follow a leader, to be a 'good' member of a society or to act in accordance with a ruling system. Such criticisms bring us to the third paradigm, a paradigm that searches for the motivating forces behind obedience and genocidal technology. And to our surprise, with the third paradigm, we will discover inside Nazi evil, ethics itself at work!

III. The Enthusiasm of the Perpetrator

In Kafka's novel, we can find a third interpretative perspective. His story need not be read only as a moral warning against 'hyper-evil' (first paradigm) or as a glorification of the machine over its modern creator (second paradigm), but also as a satire on the moral heroism of human

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[36] R. HILBERG, *La bureaucratie de la solution finale*, in *L'allemagne Nazie et le génocide juif*, ed. F. Furet, Paris, Gallimard, 1985, pp. 219-235 and especially 220.

[37] R. BUCHER, *Hitler, die Moderne und die Theologie. Überlegungen in Anschluß an ein umstrittenes Hitler-Buch*, in *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 44, 1992, pp. 157-176 and especially 167.

beings. The officer's death on the torture machine is then seen as the tragic story of a man who brings about his own ruin through his passion for certain ideals. The third paradigm provides a similar reading of genocidal evil: the executioners of the Nazi genocide failed to suffer a bad conscience, not because they were perverted completely by evil (immorality), nor because they were thoughtless machines (amorality), but because they devoted themselves consciously, creatively, and with passion to the meaning that the 'Nazi ethic' gave their (camp) behaviour. According to the third paradigm, the Nazis knew they were violating the ruling norms of the past, but they were nonetheless convinced to do so because of 'higher', community-approved values. Their contribution to the 'Nazi ethic' was very demanding, and thus deserved moral praise. Whereas the Holocaust appears as absolute evil to outsiders, for its creators, collaborators, and even bystanders the Holocaust's events were difficult but still a right way to deal with the Nazis' socio-historical situation.

The third paradigm's *Gestalt* can be summarised as follows. The Nazis knew what they were doing; they found these facts morally acceptable, and they acted consciously and creatively in accord with this new moral sense. The Germans were not suddenly deprived of their capacity to distinguish good from evil. They did not act out of purely immoral desires, or out of moral insensitivity, but precisely because they were ethically sensitive. Nazism was sustained by a very strict, almost puritanical, ethical code. The analysis of this code makes clear that the 'Nazi ethic' was a new construction, but it was constructed with the building blocks of Western morality. Because good and evil received a new meaning, millions of Germans and non-Germans were no longer able to recognise the evil of Auschwitz as evil. The Holocaust had become an acceptable component of a package of values that, in its totality, was very appealing. Nazism reveals something about the 'deceptive beauty of evil'.

We can illustrate this paradigm with one 'textbook case'. On August 15, 1942, when Hitler visited the Lublin camp, Dr. Herbert Linden of the Ministry of Internal Affairs asked him if it would not be better to cremate the bodies instead of burying them, for future generations might think differently about these things. In Hitler's presence, Globocnik, the SS major of the camp of Lublin, answered Linden as follows: "But, gentlemen, if after us such a cowardly and rotten generation should arise that it does not understand our work which is so good and so necessary, then, gentlemen, all National Socialism will have been

for nothing. On the contrary, bronze plaques should be put up with the inscription that it was we, we who had the courage to achieve this gigantic task"[38].

In his paradigmatic study, *Morality after Auschwitz*[39], the Jewish ethicist Peter Haas argues that the fundamental question is not why the Nazis did evil, as in the first and second paradigms, but why they failed to recognise evil as evil, and therefore why they did not distance themselves from it. Haas answers this question by referring to the prevalent patterns of ethical argumentation and acting among the Nazis that predetermined their perception of Jews in a very specific way. In the light of this ethical framework, the efforts to persecute and exterminate the Jewish people appeared to the Nazis as an ethically acceptable part of a greater good. In my view, Haas' pioneering point of departure has introduced an entirely new and original ethical approach to the Holocaust: not regarding it in terms of immorality or amorality but precisely in terms of morality. For him, the development of genocidal policy had an ethically logical progression, and the Nazis identified with it consciously, voluntarily, and even enthusiastically. If so, the Holocaust demonstrates the exceptional human capacity for redefining good and evil and for reconstructing reality in the light of new ethical categories.

Haas' study provides a provocative 'picture' of the Holocaust, one that is capable of answering certain questions about the Nazi genocide with great insight. Just as the analysis of Arendt was influenced by thinkers working on modernity (Weber, Adorno, Heidegger)[40], Haas' interpretation has been influenced by postmodern philosophers. It is no accident that this new 'paradigmatic' interpretation has received many critical reviews by Holocaust scholars. In this case we can speak of a paradigm struggle.

Haas distinguishes an 'ethic' from what he calls 'morality'. Taking 'ethic' to mean a systematic way of understanding the bipolarities 'good' and 'evil', in and by which a society shapes itself, he defines 'morality' as those values which we think should be incorporated or developed in an ethic. For Haas, when an ethic can produce a coherent and intuitively

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[38] In E.A. Cohen, *Human Behavior in the Concentration Camp*, trans. H.M. Braaksma, London, Free Association Books, 1988, p. 229.

[39] P.J. Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz: The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1988.

[40] K. von Lingen, *A Morality of Evil: Nazi Ethics and the Defense Strategies of German Perpetrators*, in N.J.W. Goda, *Rethinking Holocaust Justice: Essays Across Disciplines*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2016, pp. 100-125, Chapter 4.

right discourse about good and evil, and the results of such an ethic meet
the wishes and needs of a community, then it becomes possible for peo-
ple to be ethically motivated to do any action, even the most immoral.
In the interpretation of Haas, Nazism developed such a new discourse.
This ethical construction, however, was built with key ingredients of
traditional Western ethics. Nazism used and reinterpreted—this is a key
part of its 'uniqueness' —moral ideals that had long been accepted: for
example, the idea of just war, patriotism, the ethics of duty, the ethics of
labour, and nationalism. Nazism stood for certain values: anti-individu-
alism, obedience, loyalty, anti-pornography, anti-prostitution, and law
and order. In its 'ethical' construction, it likewise called upon a wide-
spread and deeply rooted religious antisemitism in which the Jews were
identified as the ultimate evil. These concepts were complemented by
'scientific' arguments from nineteenth-century racial theories. Once the
Jew was presented as a lethal threat to German culture, the ethics of
lawful self-defence could be put forward to legitimate genocide. Building
on these traditions, the Nazi ethic could easily link 'good' and 'evil' with
'Aryan' and 'Jew'.

The Nazi ethic used a Manichaean interpretation of good and evil.
'Absolute good' was identified with the Aryan race (*Übermenschen*), and
'absolute evil' was identified with the 'semitic race' (*Untermenschen*).
In the Nazi ethic, there was no grey area, but only black and white.
And for 'radical evil' there was only a 'radical solution'—a 'final solu-
tion'. This dualism stands as a warning against the first paradigm, which
also works with a Manichaean representation of the Nazis' 'absolute evil'.
The third paradigm can teach us that a Manichaean representation
of, and combat against, Nazi genocide may be nothing more than a
reproduction of the basic 'ethical' logic of Nazism, with all the risks that
'ethic' implies.

Like the second paradigm, the third also runs counter to the idea of
aberration found in the first paradigm, where the Holocaust is presented
as a sudden, formal break with the ideas of the last centuries. Even more
so than in the second paradigm, the third emphasises that the Holocaust
was only possible because it was morally acceptable in the light of Euro-
pean history. This continuity made it possible for the Germans to accept
the genocide of Jews while still considering themselves to be ethical.
Moreover, the 'Nazi ethic' mobilised the best ones among its supporters
to contribute enthusiastically to the expansion of the 'new order'.

In this respect, one cannot speak of an intention of doing evil as evil,
but rather of achieving the good of the Nazi story. How one dealt with

the cruelties in the camps is not explained by a sadistic hunger for evil (first paradigm) or by means of the modern techniques of depersonalisation that covered up these atrocities (second paradigm) but as the 'necessary price' that had to be paid if one wanted to contribute to a 'higher' Nazi goal. There were, of course, complex emotions among the perpetrators, but they were considered human weakness or the necessary price one had to pay in order to be ethical. Every ethic has its painful and emotionally difficult moments. Horror and disgust are therefore not necessarily a vaccine against evil, as the first paradigm would contend. As the Holocaust shows, if there are good reasons to do so, people can continue to do unethical things in spite of their own moral revulsion.

Haas can also explain why the Western world protested so little during the war. Despite being told of the atrocities, the Allies were unable to react against the Nazi ethic precisely because, like the Germans, they were caught in the same web of moral presuppositions. Since at that time the entire West reasoned using principles such as race, the sovereignty of the state, the right to self-defence, the importance of battling Bolshevism, and antisemitism, the Allies could not act forcefully and adequately against the Nazi policy of extermination until it was nearly too late.

In a certain sense, the perpetrators were also victims of this all-powerful Nazi ethic. This fact can be illustrated by Eichmann's decision to divert trains from the eastern front at a decisive point in the war in order to use them for transporting Jews. The first paradigm takes this decision as proof of Eichmann's diabolical nature. The second paradigm would argue that this action was a typical example of a machine and a bureaucracy that could no longer be stopped. The third paradigm, however, interprets Eichmann's attitude to be a consequence of his relentless ethical enthusiasm and stubbornness. The third paradigm stresses the strong impact of collective discourse on individuals so that 'essentialism' (first paradigm) is not crucial but one's situation is. Even stronger than in the second paradigm, humans are understood as conditioned by the socio-cultural framework in which they live. While in the second paradigm one uses modern techniques as though untouched by 'good' and 'evil', the third paradigm points out how the meanings of 'good' and 'evil' depend profoundly on social context.

In the end, it was not the power of argumentation of Western ethics that finally eliminated Nazism, but the (contingent) military victory of the Allies. The internal or external critique of morality was entirely powerless. It was only thanks to military intervention that the 'Nazi ethic' was finally defeated. With his thesis that an ethic depends upon the

political exertion of power, Haas comes very close to Richard Ruben-
stein's interpretation. In Rubenstein's view[41], people have no natural
rights but only the rights that are guaranteed by an organised commu-
nity powerful enough to protect those rights. After Auschwitz, Ruben-
stein contends, it is less than persuasive to think that there is a universal
morality by which all peoples and nations will be judged. People only
have rights as members of a polis. As such, people who have no power
to protect themselves must be prepared to become the victims of the
obscenities of their opponents.

In the postscript to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*[42], Arendt developed a
notion of moral responsibility in which resistance to social forces would
be possible. At this point, an important difference between the second
and third paradigms becomes evident. In the second paradigm, human
beings must be capable of distinguishing good from evil, even if they can
only rely upon their own judgment, a judgment that might well be in
conflict with the dominant and univocal opinions of their environment.
For Arendt, the normative force of good and evil can never be finally
legitimated by referring to the social forces that call them into life, pre-
serve, and sanction them, but for Haas, the Holocaust is a proof of the
overpowering influence of the 'ethical' framework in which one lives and
acts. For the second paradigm, the social foundation of moral authority
is not ultimately the most fundamental factor. Of course, this position
assumes the optimistic anthropology of the second paradigm, in which
people possess intrinsic ethical possibilities, in contrast to the pessimistic
anthropology of the first paradigm and the rather deterministic anthro-
pology of the third paradigm.

Haas has sought to make his interpretation acceptable by distinguish-
ing 'ethic' from 'morality'. Using this distinction, he can call the Holo-
caust a component of the 'Nazi ethic' without saying that the Nazi
genocide was morally permissible. But it is precisely this distinction in
his thought that is, in my view, very vulnerable. Since each and every
ethical judgment is determined by the ethical system in which one
stands, it is not clear on what grounds a certain ethical system can be
qualified in Haas' interpretation as moral or immoral. A critique of one
ethical system can only be formulated from within another ethical

[41] R. RUBENSTEIN, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*,
Indianapolis, IN, Bobbs-Merrill,1966.

[42] H. ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Harmonds-
worth, Penguin Books, 1984.

system that has the same formal characteristics (coherence, noncontradiction, intuitive rightness). There is no Archimedean point, no universal standard, from which all ethical systems could be evaluated as to their content. Because there is no intra- or trans-ethical touchstone for preferring one ethical system over another, it would be impossible to find in Haas' thinking any real criteria by which to judge Nazism as immoral. The outcome of the third paradigm is the opposite of the first paradigm—not ethical absolutism but ethical relativism. This result brings us to an exceptionally paradoxical conclusion, namely, that such a terrible evil as the Holocaust, which calls out for an immediate and absolute condemnation, brought into life a (sincere) process of thought that seems to undermine the very foundations of morality itself. And if there is no longer a foundation for judging good and evil, why then should not the strongest rule over and even eliminate the weakest?

Against the third paradigm, we will argue in the next chapter onward that the 'Nazi ethic' cannot simply be seen as a reorganisation of the values of Western ethics. It is not a rearrangement of the classic values of our moral tradition, but a perversion of its ethical principles. In Nazism's abuse and corruption, the basic inspiration and main concerns of Western values were completely lost. Only the veneer of an ethical form was left. While in the first paradigm, the discontinuity between Western history and the Holocaust is mistakenly overemphasised, the third paradigm too easily stresses the fact that the Nazi genocide was in continuity with the Christian and humanistic civilisation of the West. Nazism, however, is more a manipulation than a continuation of Western ethics.

As a result, even if the Nazis legitimate their crimes, one should not conclude that they acted out of ethical concerns. Perhaps Haas too quickly believes the way the Nazis presented themselves. Their so-called ethical language could also be the expression of the need they felt to legitimate their actions in the face of what they still recognised as unambiguous evil. The Nazi ideology should be interpreted as the supplier of an arsenal of skilful pretexts and 'ethical' sophisms to facilitate the implementation of evil (and not good) with a more peaceful (but not good) mind. With this last remark, we come to the heart of our critique of the third paradigm. Haas' distinction between 'ethic' and 'morality' is best replaced by the distinction between 'ideology' and 'morality' (the latter in Haas' sense). Ideology is a way of legitimising the evil in one's own story. If the Nazis had submitted their ideology to a genuinely moral questioning, one can doubt if the ideology would have come through this test successfully. In other words, it is not certain that the Nazis really

believed in their own story. For the most part, their 'ethical' (ideological) discourse was nothing more or less than a legitimation of evil.

Another criticism against the third paradigm is that it has very deterministic implications. For Haas, ethical choices are always given within the story in which individuals situate themselves. If so, the Nazis, given their framework, could not have possibly made other choices. Within the third paradigm, it becomes difficult to explain how different individuals, coming from the same story, can arrive at entirely different ethical attitudes, as some did even in Nazi Germany. One must remember that people always live in complex, even contradictory and mutually questioning, ethical stories.

IV. Conclusion: Ethics after Auschwitz

In this chapter, I have taken Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* as a point of departure to identify three paradigms for ethical approaches to the Holocaust. However conflicting or even incompatible these paradigms may be, we should not forget that each reveals a part of the Holocaust's ethical complexity. The first paradigm stresses the objective side of the Nazi genocide: evil in its most unambiguous and extreme form. The second and third paradigms explore the subjective side of the Nazi genocide: evildoers who are human beings with moral capacities. The first paradigm describes evil from the outside; the second and third paradigms attempt to understand evil more from the inside. The first paradigm places greater emphasis on the most extreme outcomes of the genocide; the second and third paradigms are more sensitive to its genesis and daily aspects. The first paradigm better portrays the experience of the victims; the second and third paradigms bring in the perspective of the perpetrators and the bystanders. Each of the three paradigms can also shed light on the different perpetrators: the sadism of the camp hangmen (first paradigm); the ordinary Germans, working in the Nazi (war) industry (second paradigm); and the convinced Nazi or the bystander outside of Germany (third paradigm).

In a later chapter, we will seek to explore further nuances to these paradigms regarding the (im)possibility of forgiveness in the context of the Holocaust[43]. But for now we note that, to nuance and correct its own deficiencies, each approach requires the other two. My analysis entails a

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[43] See Chapter Ten: *Ethics and the Unforgiveable After Auschwitz.*

plea to recognise the many faces of genocidal evil, to see the explosive mixture of hatred (first paradigm), moral indifference (second paradigm), and ideological conformity (third paradigm) that made the Holocaust possible. Post-Holocaust ethics needs to do justice to the different tensions in the understanding of (genocidal) evil and to recognise the historical and philosophical presuppositions (such as intentionalism versus functionalism, essentialism versus situationism, synthesis versus analysis of evil, pessimism versus optimism about humanity and culture) that are at work in every elucidation of good and evil.

Ethics after Auschwitz must particularly attempt to develop a theory for understanding the complex relationship between the objective and subjective sides of evil. The Holocaust is not simply about evil people doing evil things (first paradigm), nor about people doing what they took to be good things (third paradigm). Post-Holocaust ethics must make clear how (potentially) good human beings (in terms of anthropology) can (factually) do inhuman and evil things (in terms of morality)[44]. It is thus not enough that we call the perpetrators 'monsters' to recreate ethics after Auschwitz.

The problem is that our moral discourse itself has been involved in and perverted through the Holocaust. As a result, the Holocaust is not simply a lesson about immorality, but as much about the vulnerability of ethics[45]. In this way, the Holocaust can become more significant for our lives and our time. Indeed, Auschwitz is not completely ('qualitatively') different from our 'daily' misuse of ethics. It would have been much easier if the Holocaust was the work of moral monsters. The problem and the challenge are that this inhuman evil was the work of human beings. If we overemphasise the discontinuity, uniqueness, and incomprehensibility of the Holocaust's 'hyper-evil'[46], the contemporary moral significance of the Holocaust will disappear. In the end, such an approach risks that the moral meaning of the Holocaust will die together with the last survivor. We must try to understand, try to see the relevant universal elements in the Nazi genocide, even when this process is difficult, painful, and ultimately impossible. As is the case in every human enterprise of understanding, this effort to understand should never destroy the uniqueness and ultimately impenetrable character of the particular event,

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[44] See Chapter Nine: *Auschwitz, or How Good People Can Do Evil.*

[45] See also: J.K. ROTH, *The Failures of Ethics: Confronting the Holocaust, Genocide and Other Mass Atrocities*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

[46] P. BANKI, *The Forgiveness to Come: the Holocaust and the Hyper-Ethical*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2018.

surely not of such a complex and extreme event as the Holocaust. In this sense, uniqueness and universality need not exclude but can fruitfully challenge each other. Uniqueness without universality leads to moral irrelevance; universality without uniqueness leads to banality and superficiality[47].

Every ethical reflection on the Holocaust must not only meet the duty of continuously seeking a good balance between the polarities of uniqueness and universality but also between detached observation and sensitive human involvement, between reflection and experience, between comparability and incomparability, between analysis and synthesis, between scientific neutrality and pre-philosophical sensitivity, between moral universalism and particularism. Hermeneutical problems begin when we (inevitably?) disturb this balance.

One of the most important challenges that post-Holocaust ethics must address is the moral relativism so typical of the third paradigm. Why do I refer to the Holocaust not as involving an ethic, but as depending upon an ideological misuse of ethics? I think that the beginning of an answer to this question can be found in the distinction between openness and closedness. The difference between a community based on biblical-humanitarian values and a community based on totalitarian and racist values is not that the former has ethical concerns, and the latter does not. On this point, the third paradigm is correct—Nazism did have a concept of goodness. What makes the difference is that the basic structure of the Judeo-Christian ethic, for example, is characterised by openness —specifically by an openness toward the vulnerability of the face of the other, which, as Levinas points out, continually and unpredictably calls my closed system into question. By contrast, totalitarian and extremely nationalistic discourses are typified by closedness. In biblical and humanitarian ethics, centrality is given to the unpredictable encounters of fellow humans and God, always in new, different, and challenging ethical perspectives, so that people and communities might perpetually grow in their own humanity.

In a totalitarian ethic, priority is given to sameness. Closed totalitarian stories always seek to reduce otherness to sameness. In this logic, 'difference' is the greatest danger; it is even a crime. Everything that cannot be assimilated into the beautiful, safe, and closed system of absolute good and absolute evil must be excommunicated and even exterminated. All

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[47] C. Fogu, W. Kansteiner, T. Pressner, *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2016.

that is unprepared or unable to integrate into the 'wonderful harmony', thereby questioning the closed system, must be destroyed. A closed ethic knows neither grey areas nor mercy. Instead, it becomes ideological, bringing with it a legitimation of the evil that is anxiously directed against the disturbers of the closed black-white order[48].

Because it had no respect for alterity, and it required the eradication of everything that could not be reduced to the closed system with its extreme good-evil polarities, Nazism was a politics without an ethic. Misappropriating ethics and God for the ideological ends of its own ('good') group, Nazism was an idolatrous effort that radicalised itself and eliminated everything that did not conform.

Therefore, the basic structure of ethics after Auschwitz should be openness to the vulnerability of the other. This criterion can be an efficacious touchstone for testing every ethical system after Auschwitz: Is it open for (positive) alterity, growth, discussion, questioning, hesitation, falsification, new challenges, for the vulnerability of the weakest? What the third paradigm reveals is how human beings and systems can convert ethical openness to closedness by anxiously creating a Manichaean system of (good) super- and (evil) sub-humans that eliminates every hesitation and every grey area. The first paradigm shows the ultimate consequences of this development from ethics to idolatry: inhumanity on an unlimited scale. Nevertheless, the first paradigm is problematic because it creates a new kind of ethical Manichaeism. In fact, the first and the third paradigms are very close to each other in their definition of ethics. They both approach ethics as a system of binary oppositions of good and evil. Ethics then risks becoming an overly simple means for situating oneself on the side of the good and forgetting one's own evil potentialities. The Nazis are not the only ones susceptible to this temptation. We need to ask whether this binary system of good and evil is the central characteristic of ethics. My approach proposes another way for ethics, a way of living in openness for (positive) alterities. In the final analysis, my position is closest to the second paradigm, since this paradigm can best explain how good people can do evil things, namely, by neutralising and destroying—both passively and actively—our ethical openness by eliminating the 'face of the Other' (Levinas) that inherently and continually challenges our human closedness. In the chapter on Peter

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[48] K. VON LINGEN, *A Morality of Evil: Nazi Ethics and the Defense Strategies of German Perpetrators*, in N.J.W. GODA, *Rethinking Holocaust Justice: Essays Across Disciplines*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2016, pp. 100-125, Chapter 4.

Haas and Emmanuel Levinas we go deeper into the analysis of ethics after the Holocaust[49].

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[49] A previous version of this chapter was originally published D. POLLEFEYT, *The Kafkaesque World of the Holocaust: Paradigmatic Shifts in the Ethical Interpretation of the Nazi Genocide*, in *Ethics After the Holocaust: Perspectives, Critiques, and Responses* ed. J.K. ROTH, Minnesota, Paragon House, 1999, pp. 210-279.

Chapter Four

The Morality of Auschwitz?

For the American ethicist and rabbi Peter J. Haas, ethical reflection on the Holocaust has been dominated by the wrong question— namely, how people in Auschwitz were able to do what they recognized, or should have recognized, as evil[1]. In his pioneering ethical study, *Morality after Auschwitz*[2], as well as in numerous articles, Haas demonstrates how the fundamental question is not why the Nazis did evil, but why they did not recognize evil as evil and therefore why they did not distance themselves from it. Haas answers this question by referring to the prevalent patterns of ethical argumentation and action among the Nazis that predetermined their perception of Jews in a very specific way. In the light of this ethical framework, the effort to persecute and exterminate the Jewish people appeared for the Nazis as an ethically acceptable part of a greater good. However shocking Haas' thesis may be, it has become, in the words of Richard Rubenstein, "impossible for future researchers to work in the field [of ethics after Auschwitz] without taking serious account of his [Haas'] findings"[3]. Haas' analysis has provided a new

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[1] Peter Haas' father was born in Germany, and his mother has a Polish-Jewish background. During the war, his parents were arrested by the Nazis in the Netherlands and were deported to the Nazi camps of Westerbork, Voeght, and Bergen-Belsen. In 1944, they were exchanged for German prisoners-of-war in France. The last year of the war, they lived in a refugee camp in North Africa. After the war, they went to the United States, where Peter was born in 1947, in Detroit, Michigan. Peter Haas received his doctoral degree in Jewish ethics in 1980 as a student of Jacob Neusner. He became a professor of Holocaust studies at Vanderbilt University and later accepted an appointment at Case Western Reserve University. He is now retired.

[2] P.J. HAAS, *Morality After Auschwitz: the Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic,* Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1988. Some important reviews by M. BREARLEY in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46, no. 4, 1993, pp. 550-553; L. RASMUSSEN in the *Journal of Religion* 71 (1991), no. 1, p. 119; R.L. RUBENSTEIN in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60 (1992), no. 1, pp. 158-161; A.M. SUGGATE in the *Expository Times* 101 (1990), no. 7, p. 220; A. TOUBEAU in *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* 115 (1993), no. 3, p. 420; M. BAIRD in the *Journal of Spiritual Formation* 15 (1994), no. 1, p. 21; and the *Jewish Quarterly Review* 83 (1992), nos. 1-2, pp. 167-172. See also my own review in *Driemaandelijks tijdschrift van de Stichting Auschwitz* 32 (1992) , pp. 78-80.

[3] R.L. RUBENSTEIN, *Review of Morality After Auschwitz,* in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60 (1992), no. 1, p. 158.

paradigm[4] in Holocaust studies[5], a paradigm that enables us to under-
stand some difficult aspects of the Nazi genocide, but that at the same
time entails serious limits and weaknesses.

I. Ethics and Morality: A Critique of Modern Ethics

In Haas' interpretation[6], the Nazis were neither diabolical (Steiner)[7]
nor banal (Arendt)[8], but remained ethical throughout the course of the
war. For them, the development of genocidal policy had an ethically
logical progression with which they could consciously, voluntarily, and
even enthusiastically identify. Given this, the Holocaust proves the
exceptional human capacity to redefine good and evil, reconstructing
reality in the light of these new ethical categories. The Germans did not
suddenly become savages in 1941, nor did they accidentally return to
humanity in 1945. Through the entire period of the war they remained
the same people, doing their jobs professionally and with dedication,
devoted to their families, and functioning in society in a normal way.

At the core of Haas' position is a critique of the prevailing notion of
modern ethics. Western discourse about the good life usually begins with
the presupposition that all ethical systems rest on propositions that are
universally valid and that determine what is good and evil. All ethical
theories are thought to be rooted in universal and rational premises, a
common basis upon which all people agree and which functions as the
objective foundation for all ethical systems. For Haas, however, an ethical
system does not acquire its validity from a universal, rational principle,

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[4] For the notion of paradigm, see T. KUHN, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,
Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 1970.

[5] For an interpretation of Holocaust ethics in three paradigms, see Chapter 3: *The
Perpetrator: Devil, Machine or Idealist?*

[6] P.J. HAAS, *The Morality of Auschwitz: Moral Language and the Nazi Ethic,* in *Holo-
caust and Genocide Studies* 3 (1988), no. 4, p. 385: "two other general conclusions about
good and evil that have emerged in the confrontation between the Holocaust and moral
theory, both of which I find inadequate and which I mean to reject". This article was
first published as *The Morality of Auschwitz: Moral Language and the Nazi Ethic,* in Y.
BAUER, *Remembering for the Future: Papers to be Presented at an International Scholars'
Conference to Be Held in Oxford, 10-13 July, 1988, Theme II: The Impact of the Holocaust
on the Contemporary World*, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1988, pp. 1893-1902.

[7] G. STEINER, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Re-Definition of Culture*,
London, Faber & Faber, 1971.

[8] H. ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Harmonds-
worth, Penguin Books, 1984.

but from the coherent patterns of thinking and speaking it incorporates[9]. As such, ethical judgments are not objectively or scientifically provable, but are the result of the interaction of individual personalities, human relationships, cultural ways of thinking, juridical and social habits, generally accepted linguistic conventions, and experiences of the past[10]. Mistakenly, this description can give the impression that Haas views an ethic as an arbitrary system. This is far from the case. An ethic can only work if it conforms to some formal criteria; it must be coherent, noncontradictory, and intuitively right[11]. For Haas, the deep structure of an ethic is based on a coherent and logical structure of binary oppositions[12]. On a conscious level, every part of the opposition helps to define the other part. Good and evil mutually call each other into being. An ethic makes it possible to divide the cosmos into forces of good and evil, in an unambiguous way. An ethic is intuitively right when it is the expression of dominant values and interests, both individual and collective[13].

Haas distinguishes such an ethic from what he calls morality[14]. While he means by ethic a systematic way to understand good and evil, in and by which a society shapes itself, he defines morality as those values which we think *should* be incorporated or developed in an ethic. This distinction has the advantage of describing the Holocaust as an ethic without immediately assessing its moral character. Haas is not *a priori* excluding

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[9] P.J. Haas, *Morality of Auschwitz*, p. 385: "I propose a theory of ethics which makes our conceptions of right and wrong ultimately a function largely of discourse, that is, of patterns of thought, language and action".

[10] P.J. Haas, *Toward a Semiotic Study of Jewish Moral Discourse: The Case of Responsa,* in *Semeia* 33, 1983, p. 60: "(…) moral discourse is *moral* discourse because it expresses its conclusions in a way that links them to the grid values and principles which implicitly constitute the hearer's notion of the good or proper life. This means that moral discourse consists not only of what is said, but also of how and in what context it is said. In short, the rhetoric of moral discourse is itself an integral expression of that culture's moral universe".

[11] P.J. Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz*, pp. 1-3.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 175: "(…) ethical systems posit pairs of evaluative definitions (good-bad, right-wrong), the members of which are binary opposites. This means that at a deep, preconscious level, positive and negative evaluations will always be mirror images of each other".

[13] The structuralist approach of Patte and Greimas is at the background of Haas' interpretation of ethics. See, for example, D. Patte, *What Is Structural Exegesis?*, 2nd ed., Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1976, and Id., *The Religious Dimension of Biblical Texts: Greimas' Structural Semiotics and Biblical Exegesis*, Atlanta, GA, Scholars Press, 1990. Compare with G. Schiwy, *Strukturalismus*, in *Katholisches Soziallexikon*, ed. A. Klose, W. Mantl, and V. Zsifkovits, 2nd ed., Innsbruck, Verlag Tyrolia, 1980, pp. 2989-2992.

[14] P.J. Haas, *Morality of Auschwitz*, pp. 383-384.

the possibility that the moral reality coincides with the ethical structure[15]. He merely wants to stress how in reality people only live out of an ethical system immediately.

When an ethic can produce such a coherent and intuitively right discourse about good and evil, and the results of such an ethic meet the wishes and needs of a community, then, for Haas, it is possible for people to be ethically motivated to do any action, even the most immoral. The Nazi genocide would be the most extreme and clear illustration of this thesis. Haas argues that the carrying out of the Holocaust manifests all the characteristics of an ethic. Nazism created a specific public discourse about good and evil within which genocide became an ethically acceptable, even laudable, policy. Nazi propaganda portrayed the extermination of the Jews as good by connecting it to the ethical principle of the right to self-defence. The Jew was presented as a mortal threat to Germany's cultural and biological patrimony. In the light of the age-long history of anti-Judaism and antisemitism, this was not even a difficult task.

II. The Nazi Ethic

In the interpretation of Haas, the Nazi ethic can be seen as a new construction, but put together from the old building blocks of Western ethics. And this explains, at least in part, the success of the Nazi ethic in and outside of Germany. This brings us to one of the most challenging and startling of Haas' conclusions: that the ethical framework of Nazism stood in continuity with the formal framework of Western ethical discourse. In this view, Nazism ensues from the intellectual and ethical history of modern Europe, and its politics of extermination stems from ethical convictions and symbols that have influenced Western moral theology and philosophy for centuries. With this idea, Haas is criticising the idea of aberration which portrays the Holocaust as a sudden and formal rupture with the political, juridical, and moral thinking of the last centuries. Auschwitz has its roots in a complexity of moral and political lines of thought that were long evident and seemingly innocent. This is, in fact, a fundamental idea of Haas' the Holocaust was only able to take place because it appeared ethically acceptable in the light of Western history.

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[15] *Ibid.*, p. 388.

The choice of the Jew as the archenemy of the Aryan race could be readily convincing within the Nazi ethic, since it fit perfectly into the long Christian history of systematically depicting the Jew as the mythical symbol for evil[16], as well as the nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories of eugenics[17]. Building further on these traditions, the Nazi ethic could easily colour the notions of good and evil by using the opposition Aryan and Jew. The real battle against this evil only became possible within the political constellation of fascism, which was not an invention of Nazism, but the historical synthesis of three important intellectual elements of recent European history: economical socialism, nationalism, and racism[18].

When the Nazi Party came to power in 1933, the most important components of its ethic were already in place. While Nazi discourse was a complete and functional system, within which every action could in principle be interpreted in terms of good and evil, it was initially a very formal, abstract, and even sectarian announcement of a platform, without real impact on concrete political and social structures. When Nazism came to real political acts, this ethic became more and more concrete, attempting to forcibly shape reality within its formal ethical discourse. The wrestling of Nazi bureaucrats with the question of who was finally a Jew is a classic example of the way in which Nazism, with ups and downs, tried to accommodate reality to its predetermined ethical framework[19]. The definition of a Jew seemed to be a Gordian knot that could only be cut in two after long discussions. In a certain sense, the Nazi bureaucracy *created* an inferior race, using a complex of laws.

Once the Jewish evil was clearly localised, its persecution could begin. Still, the activities of murder were too concrete and too direct to keep the executioners wondering about the inhuman consequences. Haas does not explain this aspect of the Nazi genocide as the result of the distant,

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[16] See, for example, the early Church Father Gregory of Nyssa (330-394) on the Jews. Quoted in L. Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, vol. 1, *From the Time of Christ to the Court Jews*, New York, NY, Vanguard Press, 1965, p. 25: "Murderers of the Lord, assassins of the prophets, [who] resist grace, repudiate the faith of their fathers. Companions of the devil, race of vipers, informers, calumniators, darkeners of the mind, pharisaic leaven, Sanhedrin of demons, accursed, detested, lapidators, enemies of all that is beautiful".

[17] P.J. Haas, *The Killing-Healing Paradox*, paper presented at the University of California Medical School, San Francisco, August 21, 1992, p. 7.

[18] Haas refers to A.S. Lindemann, *A History of European Socialism*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1983, pp. 8-25.

[19] See further R. Hilberg, *La destruction des juifs d'Europe* (*Folio Histoire* 39), Paris, Gallimard, 1988, vol. 1, pp. 61-74.

bureaucratic attitude of its perpetrators, as Arendt did. Rather, he thinks that only a thoroughly convincing ethic could explain the unwavering conviction of the perpetrators. In spite of the repulsion and the physical and psychological problems with which, for example, the *Einsatzgruppen* were confronted[20], they continued to carry out their jobs. Haas does not explain this as due to some diabolical hunger for evil, or to mechanical and blind obedience to authority, but refers instead to the enormous influence of the Nazi ethic upon their minds and deeds. Moral and emotional feelings can be put aside more easily than one often thinks, especially when one employs a framework within which morally or emotionally difficult acts can be legitimized in an ethical way. There were, of course, emotions among the perpetrators, but any difficult emotions were considered to be human weakness, or the necessary price one had to pay to be ethical[21]. Every ethic has its painful and emotionally difficult moments. The Nazi ethic was a powerful way to trivialise, ridicule, and falsify emotional constraints as reminiscences of the old ethic.

Another convincing factor that established the persuasive power of the Nazi ethic and its genocidal policy was its economic advantages for Germany[22]. The Nazi ethic borrowed the old image of the Jew as an economic force and bloodsucker. From an economic point of view, the Holocaust could be characterised as an enormous and systematic transfer of possessions from victims to perpetrators. While there were no conflicts among the Nazis about the deportation of the Jews, considerable discussions were held about the destiny of Jewish properties.

Haas can also explain why the Western world protested so little during the period 1933-1945[23]. Despite being told of the atrocities, the Allied powers were unable to react against the Nazi ethic precisely because they, like the Germans, were caught in the same web of moral presuppositions. Since at that time the entire West thought in terms of such principles as race, the sovereignty of the state, the right to self-defence, the war against Bolshevism, anti-Jewish ideas, etc., the Allies could not react forcefully and adequately to the Nazi policy of extermination. Even more, their attitude toward Jewish refugees indirectly abetted the Nazis' genocidal policy. By closing their borders and refusing Jews the right to asylum, the Allies disrupted the efforts of the Nazis to cleanse their

[20] P.J. HAAS, *Morality After Auschwitz*, p. 86.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 169-172.
[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 191-199.

territories of Jews. This can also be seen as a reason why the anti-Jewish policy in Germany accelerated so steadily. Moreover, Western passivity also gave the Nazis the impression that their enterprise was acceptable in the eyes of the Western world. More than once, the Nazis used the unwillingness of the Allied powers to accept Jewish refugees as an argument for the ethical legitimation of their expulsion and extermination policies. In this way, it becomes clear that the Allied powers employed the same basic values. It became impossible for the Western world to launch a credible ethical critique of Nazi policy. It seemed more and more clear that the Nazis were working in behalf of a 'good cause' that was justifiable in the light of Western morality.

A good illustration of the ethical framework of the judeocide can be found in Haas' penetrating analysis of the medical experts working in the genocide process[24]. According to Haas, most of the Nazi doctors had a good conscience about working in the genocide program since they saw themselves as selective killers in the service of the life and health of the German people[25]. The principle of their ethical reasoning was the so-called killing-healing paradox. According to this principle, selective killing is sometimes a necessity in order to protect and promote the well-being of a society. Nazi doctors believed that the elimination of certain people was a painful but necessary duty, required of them in the service of public health. The presupposition that life is not possible without some kind of killing has a long history. It accepts the idea that death feeds life. Only through this ethical argumentation of killing in the service of life were the Nazi doctors capable of collaborating on such a large scale in the mass murder while still considering themselves inside the ethical framework within which medicine has understood itself since the time of Hippocrates.

In a certain sense, the perpetrators were also victims of the all-powerful Nazi ethic. This can be illustrated with the hyper-ethical decision of Eichmann to withdraw trains from the eastern front at a decisive point of the war in order to use them against the Jews[26].

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[24] P.J. HAAS, *The Killing-Healing Paradox.*

[25] P.J. HAAS, *Auschwitz: Re-envisioning the Role of God, in Contemporary Jewish Religious Responses to the Shoah* (Studies in the Shoah 5), ed. S.L. JACOBS, Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1993, p. 130: "People could devote themselves to this new ethic with good conscience, feeling that they were still fulfilling their moral duty and serving a higher good (…) They were not moral cripples, they were normal, well-intentioned people who could, and did, do their jobs with dedication and return home at night to be average husbands and fathers".

[26] P.J. HAAS, *Morality After Auschwitz,* p. 109.

In the end, it was not the power of argumentation of Western ethics that finally eliminated Nazism, but the contingent military victory of the Allied armies. The internal or external critique of morality was entirely powerless. Only thanks to military intervention was the Nazi ethic ultimately defeated. With his thesis that an ethic depends upon the political exertion of power, Haas comes very close to the interpretation of Rubenstein. In Rubenstein's view, people have no natural rights, they have only the rights that are guaranteed by an organized community that is powerful enough to protect these rights[27]. When Nazism deprived the Jews of their citizenship, it at the same time robbed them of all claims to so-called human rights. Human rights only have meaning when there is a political power that can demand that they be enforced. Stateless people have no rights because there is no institution that can guarantee and enforce them. People without political rights are superfluous, and ultimately expendable. They lose all claim to dignity, human protection, and life.

For Haas, individuals do not act as independent moral agents. They make their ethical decisions within certain preordained ethical frameworks. The origin of the catastrophe of Auschwitz is not to be found in its individual perpetrators, but in the ethical universe in which they lived. As such, we can only formulate an adequate and authentic response to Auschwitz insofar as we come to develop an alternative ethical discourse. While Holocaust theologians are continuing to think, and their theologies can therefore be seen as an internal, rational critique of the inherited ethic of Western thinking, it has been the great merit of Elie Wiesel to develop an entirely new and unusual manner of speaking ethically and theologically[28]. Wiesel no longer believes that truth and morality are automatic products of scientific rationality. In Haas' view, the success of Wiesel is proof that the age-old coalition between Judaism and Enlightenment has come to an end. Wiesel's stories open a new framework in which we can meaningfully situate our own existence, with all

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[27] See R.L. RUBENSTEIN, *The Cunning of History: The Holocaust and the American Future,* 2nd ed., New York, NY, Perennial Library, 1978, p. 91: "We are sadly forced to conclude that we live in a world that is functionally godless and that human rights and dignity depend upon the power of one's community to grant or withhold them from its members".

[28] P.J. HAAS, *Morality After Auschwitz,* pp. 226-229. "After all, he [Wiesel] writes for, and is read by, the same general audience. He needs to hold on to some image of God, as does Berkovits, and he relies heavily on the power of memory, as does Fackenheim. But Wiesel has fused these elements into a new form of discourse that has proved surprisingly powerful", p. 226.

its paradoxes and tensions. The story of Auschwitz is a story of fear and death. By contrast, the stories of Wiesel open perspectives on reconciliation, healing, and respect for human life. In sum, only an alternative narrative can be formulated in light of the Holocaust.

III. A Critique of Peter Haas' Position

How should we evaluate the interpretation propounded by Peter Haas? Explaining the Holocaust as an element of an ethical system is, of course, a precarious enterprise. Haas seeks to make his interpretation acceptable by distinguishing ethic from morality. In this way, he is able to call the Holocaust a component of the Nazi ethic without saying that the Nazi genocide was morally permissible. But it is precisely this distinction in his thought that is, in our analysis, very vulnerable. It is not clear *on what grounds* a certain ethical system can be qualified as moral or immoral in Haas' interpretation. Each and every ethical judgment is determined by the ethical system in which one stands. For Haas, a critique of one ethical system can only be formulated from within another ethical system that has the same formal characteristics (coherence, noncontradiction, intuitive rightness). There is no Archimedean point from which all ethical systems can be evaluated as to their content, using a kind of universal standard. As such, it would be impossible to find in Haas' thinking a real criterion by which to judge that Nazism is immoral, because there is no intra- or trans-ethical touchstone for preferring one ethical system over another.

When Haas defends the stories of Elie Wiesel, and asks that moral duty be discovered within such an alternative ethical structure, the question arises as to *how* one can be sure that this framework is indeed right and humanly authentic. Weren't the Nazis convinced of the rectitude of their ethical thinking, as we are of ours? Were they not able to justify their actions, as we do, in a coherent, logical, and intuitively right way? In short, when the persuasive power of ethical systems depends only on their semantic and syntactic form, we can only conclude that it is impossible to compare and qualify them from a moral point of view.

On this point, the interpretation of Rubenstein, who is one of Haas' sources of inspiration, appears to be more fecund. It is no accident that Rubenstein wrote one of the most favourable reviews of Haas' book[29].

[29] *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60, no. 1 (1992): pp. 158-161.

Rubenstein thinks that after Auschwitz, there is no longer a higher, universal morality by which all peoples and nations can be judged. People only have rights as members of a *polis*. Persons who do not have the power to protect themselves must always be prepared to become the victims of the obscenities of their opponents. What Bauman, in his *Modernity and the Holocaust*[30], has called the spontaneous ethical inclination of human beings is for Rubenstein nothing but the expression of the sentimental, yet completely powerless, desire of human beings to be respected. Thus, moral indignation and justice are only relevant in situations where people understand themselves to be members of the same community. Auschwitz is proof that such considerations become totally senseless in a society where more and more people lose their right to dignity and life. In the ethical system of Nazism, it was an illusion for the victims to think that they lived in the same moral universe as the perpetrators[31]. Moral indignation is only relevant in situations where people are connected in a community that shares the same story about what is decent human behaviour. People have no spontaneous moral orientation, as Bauman suggests, that would regulate their behaviour towards fellow human beings in a natural way. By exterminating the stateless, the Nazis did not violate any law, since these people were not protected by any law. In this way, Rubenstein comes to one of his most paradoxical and controversial, but logical conclusions: not one crime was committed in Auschwitz[32].

What Haas seeks to do is to avoid *in extremis* Rubenstein's ethical relativism by introducing the distinction between ethic and morality. In our view, Rubenstein's theology reveals the real consequences of Haas' interpretation. When the moral quality of an act is justified only from within and by the ethical framework of the (ruling) group, and when the validity of this ethical structure depends only on formal criteria, then there can be no moral story against evil deeds that arise from such stories, except for the story of another ethical system with the same formal characteristics, defended with the same ethical passion and power. Ethics

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[30] Z. BAUMAN, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989.

[31] R.L. RUBENSTEIN – J.K. ROTH, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and Its Legacy*, London, SCM Press, 1987, p. 191: "How shall we understand these men who in their daily lives were not sadistic brutes but respected business leaders of their community during the period of National Socialism and afterwards? (...) It would appear that these men felt no remorse because they regarded their victims as wholly outside of their universe of moral obligations".

[32] *Ibid.,* p. 14.

then becomes a question of the strongest, the most beautiful, the most intelligent, the most influential, the most privileged, the most numerous, etc. Ultimately, the result is power positivism. For Rubenstein, then, the only response of the Jews to the Holocaust would be the establishment of their own community which can enforce their rights politically and militarily. On this point, however, the story of the Holocaust risks becoming an ethical legitimation for new forms of injustice, an ethic can easily become ideology[33].

With this last statement, we come to the heart of our critique. Haas' distinction between ethics and morality can be best substituted by the distinction between ideology and morality (in Haas' sense). The characteristics that Haas uses to describe an ethic, namely coherence, noncontradiction, and intuitive rightness, do not seem to be the essence of moral discourse. In a critical essay, Emil Fackenheim similarly argues against Haas' position, contending that his use of the terminology 'Nazi *ethic*' is inaccurate[34]. The concrete content of Haas' notion of ethic is for Fackenheim closer to the German notion of *Weltanschauung*[35]. A *Weltanschauung* has some formal attributes: cosmic dimensions, internal coherence (*Geschlossenheit*), and unconditional devotion. A *Weltanschauung* provides an all-embracing system of explanation, according to which all natural and historical facts can be interpreted. It is characterised by a self-grounding, closed, and internal coherence. External criteria to evaluate its truth do not exist. A *Weltanschauung* demands total dedication and obedience from its followers. It not only creates a system of values from which one can live, but also values for which one is prepared to die. The devotion of its followers is necessary because a *Weltanschauung* (in contrast to a religion or a metaphysical system) is never true as such,

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[33] For the complex meaning of 'ideology', see the five meanings described in H. SCHNEIDER, *Ideologie,* in *Katholisches Soziallexikon*, ed. A. KLOSE et al., 2nd ed., Innsbruck, Verlag Tyrolia, 1980, pp. 1140-1141: "(a) Ideologie als eine *praxisferne Bewußtseinsorientierung* (...) (b) Ideologie als *falsches Bewußtsein,* d.h. als ganz oder teilweise unwahrer Gedankenbestand, der die Realität einseitig darstellt, entstellt, verhüllt oder verklärt (...) (c) Ideologie als *illegitimer Ersatz* für wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis, etwa als *System scheinbarer Tatsachenaussagen,* die jedoch *Werturteile* enthalten (d) Ideologie als *Komplex von Ideen, Wertvorstellungen, normativ bedeutsamen Überzeugungen,* der praktischem Handeln *Orientierung gibt, Gemeinsamkeit* stiftet u. insbes. politische oder gesellschaftliche *Ziele* definiert (e) Ideologie als *innerweltliche Heilslehre*".

[34] E.L. FACKENHEIM, *Nazi 'Ethic', Nazi Weltanschauung and the Holocaust: A Review Essay*, in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 83 (1992), nos. 1-2, pp. 167-172.

[35] See H. GUNKEL – L. ZSCHAMACK, eds., *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, 6 vols., 2nd ed., Tübingen, Mohr, 1927-32, s.v. "Weltanschauung", vol. 5, pp. 1911-1918.

but always needs to be made true. And this entails a difficult struggle wherein those elements of the *Welt* that do not fit into the *Weltanschauung* are forged in such a way that they fit into it anyway. According to Fackenheim, Nazism was established on such a *Weltanschauung*, formulated by Hitler.

In this interpretation, the Holocaust is not seen as working toward a greater good, but as a component of a coherent system that tried in the first place to establish itself. This *Weltanschauung* gave its followers a closed framework that enabled them to legitimate their actions. As a result, one cannot conclude from the fact that the Nazis legitimated their crimes that they acted out of ethical concerns. Perhaps Haas too easily believes the Nazis' self-presentation. Their so-called ethical language could also be the expression of the need they felt to legitimate themselves in the face of what they recognised as unambiguous evil, and this for themselves as well as for others. The Nazi *Weltanschauung* can be interpreted as the supplier of an arsenal of skilful pretexts and ethical sophisms to do evil (and not good) with a more peaceful (but not good) mind. Here we encounter the phenomenon of self-justification becoming self-deception[36], as we will develop in later chapters on fragmentation[37] and the unforgiveable[38].

It seems to us that to argue that an ethical view can only be asserted within a contingent ethical framework is both unwarranted and even dangerous. While Bauman's theory of the pre-social origin of morality needs to be criticised because it denies the fact that an ethical attitude always originates within a certain intersubjective and narrative context, we must also formulate the opposite critique against Haas. He overemphasises the social origin of morality insofar as he holds that an ethical view can only be argued for from within a contingent ethical framework. But how can one be certain that one's own ethic is not merely an ideology, attempting *in medias res* or *post factum* to give one's crimes an ideological legitimation? For Haas, ethical options are always given within the story in which individuals situate themselves. Is this not a kind of

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[36] S. HAUERWAS – D.B. BURRELL, *Self-Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer's Inside the Third Reich*, in S. HAUERWAS – R. BONDI – D.B. BURRELL (eds.), *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 1977, pp. 82-98.

[37] See Chapter Nine: *Auschwitz or How Good People Can Do Evil.*

[38] See Chapter Ten: *Ethics and the Unforgiveable After Auschwitz.*

ethical determinism[39]? If this were true, then the Nazis, given their ethical framework, could not possibly have made any other choice. Moreover, within Haas' interpretation, it becomes impossible to explain how different individuals coming from the same story can arrive at entirely different ethical attitudes. In the end, one can forget that people always live in different, even contradictory and mutually questioning stories.

When the differentiation between good and evil is only at the disposal of social groups that are capable of controlling social reality, then there is no longer any ground for protesting against the crimes perpetrated against those who are outside this group. If there were no inter- or transnarrative foundation on which the actions of the Nazis can be evaluated, then there would also be no argument against the thesis that their punishment was merely the victors taking revenge on the losers, as Goering claimed about the verdicts of the Nuremberg trials.

In the postscript of her *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil,* Hannah Arendt developed a notion of moral responsibility in which resistance to social forces is possible[40]. Human beings must be capable of distinguishing good from evil, even if they can only rely upon their own judgment, and when this judgment is in conflict with the dominant and univocal opinions of their environment[41]. While Haas sees the Holocaust as proof for the overpowering influence of the ethical framework in which one lives and acts, Arendt's interpretation shows how the normative forces of good and evil can never be finally legitimated by referring to the social forces that call them into life, preserve and sanction them. An action can have moral meaning even if it is condemned by the dominant group, and it can be an immoral act even

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[39] E.L. FACKENHEIM, *Nazi 'Ethic'*, p. 169: "One is tempted to say 'made it necessary'; the word 'inevitable' appears frequently—too frequently—in Haas' account as, somewhat reminiscent of a Greek tragedy, the process which he sees leading to Auschwitz unfolds".

[40] For Haas' critique of the position of Arendt, see P.J. HAAS, *Auschwitz: Re-envisioning the Role of God*, pp. 110-111, and *Morality After Auschwitz,* p. 1: "It seems to me that if the Holocaust does have any lesson to teach, it is precisely because its perpetrators were not banal or unthinking people".

[41] H. ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* pp. 294-295: "What we have demanded in these trials, where the defendants had committed 'legal' crimes, is that human beings be capable of telling right from wrong even when all they have to guide them is their own judgment, which, moreover, happens to be completely at odds with what they must regard as the unanimous opinion of all around them (...) Since the whole of respectable society had in one way or another succumbed to Hitler, the moral maxims which determine social behavior and the religious commandments — *Thou shalt not kill!* — which guide conscience had virtually vanished. Those few who were still able to tell right from wrong went really only by their own judgments, and they did so freely".

if it is accepted by the whole society. Put the other way around, this means that resistance against a dominant immoral social norm can never restrict itself to a reference back to an alternative normative system of another community that one thinks to be better, for example, a system of values that has been abandoned. Ultimately, the social foundation of moral authority is irrelevant.

Bauman argues that the human capacity to distinguish good from evil is ultimately built on something other than the collective conscience of a particular community. Instead, Bauman stresses the role of moral emotions as they emerge from a confrontation with human suffering. Haas, however, does not seem to appreciate the positive meaning of emotions for moral life. In his view, emotions can disturb ethical performance, but they do not play a positive, constitutive role in the genesis of moral choices[42]. Still, one can ask whether the spontaneous emotional disgust of the Nazis for their own crimes should not have had a warning function in their own moral lives. Moreover, it is not clear how the perpetrators could feel that the genocide was intuitively right while shuddering at the consequences of their own jobs. In general, the question remains as to whether Nazi criminals believed their own ethical story.

If their story were to become the final norm for good and evil, and insofar as this story presents genocide as an acceptable means, then we would have to accept that people acted in good conscience when they followed this story. In the end, it would be impossible to distinguish moral from immoral stories, and the possibility of describing the Holocaust as evil would vanish. As Berel Lang has pointed out, when the Holocaust can be seen as working toward a good, it becomes impossible to ground the notions of good and bad. "If we still conclude that the Nazis were only doing what they *thought* to be right we give up all hope of distinguishing morally significant judgment or action from whatever it is that anybody, at any particular moment, *does*. In short, the possibility of evaluation is threatened as it applies to *all* moral action"[43].

The problem with Lang's position is how to discover a foundation for good and evil in a postmodern world where there no longer seems to be any Archimedean point from which to defend such a position. For Haas, ethical values are temporary and fragile preferences of a particular social

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[42] P.J. Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz*, p. 86: "To hear the perpetrators themselves explain their reactions and experiences is to hear how fully the Nazi ethic was allowed to override contradicting feelings and moral concerns".

[43] B. Lang, *The Concept of Genocide,* in *Philosophical Forum* 16 (1984-85), nos. 1-2, p. 16.

group at a certain place and time. Rubenstein is even clearer. For him, there are no longer transcendent values after Auschwitz to do what Berel Lang wants to do, that is, to call the Holocaust an absolute evil, *le mal pour le mal* (Levinas). If there are no transcendent standards (and it matters not whether these be considered divinely ordained or simply natural or fated—the key question is whether they *are* at all!), there are no grounds for saying that what the Nazis did was wrong[44].

This brings us to an exceptionally paradoxical conclusion, namely, that such a terrible evil as the Holocaust, which asks in fact for an immediate and absolute condemnation, simultaneously inspired an academic process of thought that seems to undermine the very foundations of morality. And if there is no longer a foundation for good and evil, why then should not the strongest rule over and even eliminate the weakest[45]? In our view, it is precisely this basic intuition that Emil Fackenheim formulated so acutely in his new moral imperative after Auschwitz: not to grant Hitler posthumous victories[46]. We further develop this position in Chapter Seven.

How ethical relativism also played a role in the foundation of Nazism is illustrated by the thinking of one of the most important Nazi philosophers, Alfred Rosenberg. In his *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* ("The Myth of the 20th Century")[47], of which more than one million copies were sold in 1943, Rosenberg strongly attacked the empty, universal, and logical truth of modern philosophy and argued for a more organic conception of truth, the truth of blood and race. In short, values were not to be discovered in logical analysis, but were to be created by a race. Moreover, no communication between the races was possible. When one detached humanity from its racial origin, it became a senseless notion. For the successful philosopher Rosenberg, truth is always culturally relative and subordinated to the practical purposes of the *Volk*[48].

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[44] W.H. BECKER, *Questions Out of the Fire: Spiritual Implications of the Holocaust,* in *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 10, nos. 1-2 (1982-83) p. 23.

[45] Cf. E. BERKOVITS, *How Can a Jew Speak of Faith Today?,* Philadelphia, PA, Westminster Press, 1969, pp. 33-34: "If there is no transcendent standard of holiness by which all men are bound, then why should the strong not rule and torture and destroy? If God is dead, then, as Ivan Karamazov said, then [sic] all things are possible".

[46] E. FACKENHEIM, *The 614th Commandment,* in *Judaism* 16 (1967) p. 271: "The authentic Jew has the duty not to hand Hitler posthumous victories".

[47] A. ROSENBERG, *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts: eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkdmpfe unserer Zeit,* Munich, Hoheneichen, 1930.

[48] See also J. BERNAUER, *Nazi Ethics: On Heinrich Himmler and the Origins of New Moral Careers*, in *Remembering for the Future: Papers to be Presented at an International Scholars' Conference Held in Oxford, 10—13 July 1988,* ed. Y. BAUER Oxford, Pergamon

In our view, the powerlessness and crisis of objective morality in Auschwitz need not, and should not, lead to ethical relativism and power positivism. Fact and norm should not be confused. Nazism was created in a relativistic and nihilistic spirit, but this does not mean that it illustrates the excellence of this ideology. One needs to distinguish the 'ethical' categories that established Nazism from the conclusions that can be deduced from the study of it. In other words, it is not because there was an Auschwitz that the possibility of authentic moral action is impossible after Auschwitz. As the French ethicist Todorov indicates in his ethical study of the Holocaust, *Face à l'extrême*, factuality and conviction do not coincide[49].

This means that the Nazi ethic should not simply be seen as a reorganisation of the values of Western ethics. It is not a rearrangement of the classic values of our moral tradition, but a *perversion* of its ethical principles. In Nazism's ideological abuse and corruption, the basic inspiration and main concerns of Western values were completely lost. For instance, the ethical paradox of healing by killing is dissociated from the rational principle of proportionalism, the Kantian categorical imperative is dissociated from the principle of autonomy, the Christian idea of ascesis is detached from the desire to be in harmony with what is human[50]. In killing for killing, in obedience for obedience, and in ascesis for ascesis, Nazism cut Western ethics from its source and basic concerns. What was left was only the veneer of an ethic. While sometimes, and mistakenly, the total discontinuity between Western history and the Holocaust is emphasised, Haas too easily stresses the fact that the Nazi genocide was in continuity with our Christian and humanistic civilisation. Nazism, however, is more a manipulation and destruction than a continuation of Western ethics. This can be illustrated with the Nazis' use of the theory of the just war that was developed in the Christian tradition. Historically, the notion of a just war is not so much a strategy to justify war as a theory that was orientated toward the introduction of a certain circumspection, trying to postpone the mortal use of violence as long as possible. It was a theory that, on the one hand, tried to delay the violence

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Press, 1988, pp. 2071-2082; Id**.**, *Beyond Life and Death: On Foucault's Post-Auschwitz Ethic,* in *Philosophy Today* 32 (1988), pp. 128-142; & K. von Lingen, *A Morality of Evil: Nazi Ethics and the Defense Strategies of German Perpetrators*, in N.J.W. Goda, *Rethinking Holocaust Justice: Essays Across Disciplines*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2016, p. 100-125, Chapter 4.
[49] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême*, Paris, Seuil, 1991, p. 227.
[50] P.J. Haas, *The Killing-Healing Paradox.*

of war as long as possible, without, on the other hand, completely delivering the victims of evil to the arbitrariness of tyrants. Because of this reserve about the use of violence, one would better speak of the theory of restrictive or limited war. In the Nazi ethic, however, the notion of just war functioned in an entirely different manner. Hitler thought he had the right to kill the Jews. At the core of his view was no longer the radical imperative of love, an imperative that in exceptional cases asks, in the name of human dignity, to use, with fear and trembling, power and violence, but was instead a misuse of this complex notion of Western history in the name of pure *Wille zur Macht* (will-to-power).

Moreover, a consistent ethical relativism is internally destructive. To say that all ethical argumentation is determined by the story from which one speaks is also a statement coloured by a particular story that is logically and historically relative. The question becomes whether there is no form of ethics that might transcend different stories and with which one can criticise one's own story, escaping ethical relativism. An answer to this question presupposes the identification of a number of values or characteristics that in some way surpass the particularity of different stories or traditions. These values, however, can no longer be thought to be story-independent, story-transcendent characteristics. They will always be expressed in and supported (or not) by particular narrative communities. An essential task of ethics after Auschwitz is to identify ethical-religious and fundamental human experiences in different ethical traditions that transcend their original cultural and historical circumstances, and thereby can have a liberating and humanising meaning in other times and places. Because these kinds of values, traditions, or stories have proven to be transcultural and even transreligious, it is the task of the ethicist to make them understandable and communicable[51]. In this way, characteristics and criteria that enable criticism of ruling cultures, ethics, and religions can emerge.

We can illustrate this with one formal criterion that we find crucial for an authentic ethic: openness to positive alterities. Through such a criterion, Nazism can be rejected from an ethical point of view because it is not characterised by this kind of openness, but by a deadly closedness. Closedness is characteristic of unauthentic ethical systems.

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[51] See also the project of D.J. Fasching, *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1992; and ID., *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1993.

This characteristic can be found by analysing Haas' philosophy of language. The whole production of meaning in the language of Nazism is thought of in Haas' interpretation as an ideal and closed syntactic-semantic design of the Nazis world, which has not produced itself, but has been given in the form of binary opposition prior to all production of meaning. Understood in this way, the production of meaning in the Nazi language is seen as and subordinated to the constant reproductive re-actualisation of this pre-given, indisputable, and self-satisfied ideal structure. As such, there is no room for creative transcendence within a language and within an ethic itself, a creativity that could break open the existing and fixed binary oppositions of the pre-given ethic. In this way, ethical language is simply reduced to nomenclature.

Lacan indicated that language is only possible in confrontation with otherness. Similarly, the precondition for the production of ethical meaning is not a closed and absolute self-satisfied system, but the irremovable difference between the system and the possibility of deviations of meaning. In other words, no system can be closed and definitive, because there are always productions of meaning possible that escape the power and the rules of the system. An authentic ethical discourse differs precisely from a *Weltanschauung* thanks to its principal openness to new meaning, to otherness, to the new, to that which calls the *Geschlossenheit* of the system into question, time and again. While it is true that human morality always takes form within a particular and contingent community, with its own history, language, social structure, and political interests, an ethic can never derive its validity from this community itself. On the contrary, the concrete ethic of a community receives its legitimacy precisely from a point that lies outside its homogeneous structure and can never be captured by it. An ethic becomes immoral when it eliminates or strangles this point of transcendent otherness.

The difference between a society based on biblical-humanitarian values and a society based on totalitarian and racist values is not that the former has ethical and theological concerns, and the latter does not. Nazism also had a conception of goodness ("Good is what is good for the German people") and a conception of God *(Gott mit uns)*. On this point, we agree with Peter Haas. What makes the difference is that the basic structure of the Judeo-Christian (and humanistic) ethic is characterized by an openness *in concreto,* an openness to the vulnerability of the face of the other, which continually and unpredictably calls my

closed system into question, as Levinas says[52], while totalitarian and extreme nationalist discourses are typified by closedness. In biblical ethics, for example, centrality is given to the unpredictable coming of God, always in new, different, and challenging perspectives, so that people and communities might perpetually grow in their humanity. Herein God is not *Gott mit uns*, who can be used for one's own purposes, but the total Other who always represents what is irreducible, what escapes my power and the power of my story, what can never be defined in terms of economic value, gender, national identity, religious belief, or race. It is a God who can never be used in order to legitimise evil in any form. Finally, it is a God who never definitively encloses human beings in their own failures, but who always offers them new chances, if they are prepared to take them. There are numerous examples of life in the camps where the experience of openness within victims could never be entirely extinguished[53]. This will be the topic of the next chapter.

In a totalitarian ethic, on the contrary, priority is given to sameness. Closed totalitarian stories always seek to reduce otherness to sameness, to such a logic, difference is the greatest danger, even a crime. Everything that cannot be assimilated into the beautiful, safe, and closed identity must be excommunicated and even exterminated. All that is unprepared or unable to integrate in the wonderful harmony, thereby questioning the closed system must be destroyed. A closed 'ethic' knows no mercy. Instead it becomes ideology[54] and brings with it a legitimation of all evil, anxiously undertake against the disturbers of the closed order. In such a system, God is not the Other who constantly challenges self-righteousness in the name of more humanity, but a *Gott mit uns,* a pseudo-God who legitimises the closed and murderous order. Such a God does not, indeed cannot, know mercy.

In this sense, Nazism is a politics without an ethic, meaning it had no respect for alterity and it required the eradication of everything that could not be reduced to the closed system. As such, Nazism was an idolatrous effort that radicalised itself and eliminated everything that did

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[52] See Chapter Six: *To Love the Torah More Than God.*
[53] See Chapter Five: *The Banality of the Good.*
[54] See also P. Lacoue-Labarthe and J.-L. Nancy, *Le mythe nazi*, Paris, Editions de l'Aube, 1991, p. 22: "Ce qui nous intéresse et nous retiendra, en d'autres termes, c'est l'idéologie en tant, d'une part, qu'elle se propose toujours comme une explication de *l'histoire* (...) à partir d'un concept unique: le concept de race, par exemple, ou le concept de classe, voire celui d' 'humanité totale'; et en tant, d'autre part, que cette explication ou cette conception du monde (*Weltanschauung:* vision, intuition, saisie compréhensive du monde) se veut une explication ou une conception *totale*".

not conform, in its own name. In idolatry[55], one tries to adapt God to the ideological ends of one's own group. Precisely as a fundamental critique of such an idolatrous use of God, the biblical tradition asks us not to make images of God, or even to pronounce His name. When the Bible says that human beings are created in the image of God, this also means that the essence of being human can never be defined in closed terms. When we try to seize the essence of being human into binary, Manichaean categories, we always risk that we do so according to our own benefit. This is, for us, the primary lesson of the Nazi genocide, but also of other forms of racism and discrimination, such as nationalism, sexism, or religious fundamentalism. Every effort to grasp the essence of being human in closed terms opens the way, mostly in the name of one or another so-called human or pseudo-religious good, to violence against the dignity of men and women, as well as against the dignity of God. In the chapters on Emil Fackenheim and Emmanuel Levinas[56], we develop this idea in a more positive way[57].

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[55] See R. BURGGRAEVE – J. DE TAVERNIER – D. POLLEFEYT – J. HANSSENS (eds.), *Desirable God? Our Fascination with Images, Idols and New Deities* (Cahiers for Theology of Peace, 19), Leuven, Peeters, 2003.

[56] See Chapter Six: *To Love the Torah More Than God;* and Chapter Seven: *The Encounter of Athens and Jerusalem in Auschwitz.*

[57] A previous version was published as D. POLLEFEYT, *The Morality of Auschwitz? A Critical Confrontation with Peter J. Haas' Ethical Interpretation of the Holocaust*, in J. BEMPORAD – J.T. PAWLIKOWSKIT – J. SIEVERS (eds.), *Good and Evil After Auschwitz. Ethical Implications for Today*, New York, NY, KTAV Publishing House, 2001, pp. 119-137.

Section Three

Victims

Chapter Five

The Banality of the Good:
What can we learn from the Victim on the Holocaust?

I. Animals and Heroes

When one looks at the behaviour of the victims during the Nazi genocide, at first sight it seems that all camps reveal a sad truth about humans. A great deal of literature on the extermination camps indicates that every trace of ethical life tends to get lost under extreme circumstances. Life in the camps is often brought forward to prove that man is essentially an animal that is involved in a merciless battle to survive. Stories in which unscrupulous prisoners treat each other with utmost cruelty and inhumanity are used to illustrate this hypothesis. The camps are called the 'high schools' of egocentrism. Every individual was concerned merely with his or her own interests. The law of the camp was "Eat your own bread and—if possible—also that of your neighbour"[1]. In those camps the logic of the *primum vivere, deinde philosophare* became a wry and often deadly reality. Many survivors similarly quote Bertolt Brecht's words: "*Erst kommt das Fressen und dann kommt die Moral*" (eating comes first, then morality)[2].

These facts sometimes lead to a pessimistic conclusion that ethics are merely a superficial convention that is immediately threatened as soon as that thin layer of culture is worn away[3]. The behaviour of the victims is said to reveal the (real nature) of man. Man is by nature involved in a war of all against all, and the basic dynamism of every human being is survival. The camps have shown that in the end humanity respects only the brutal law of the jungle, which is the absence of any law and the rule

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[1] P. LEVI, *Is dit een mens?,* translated from the Italian by F. DE MATTEIS-VOGELS Amsterdam, Meulenhoff, 1987, p. 94; English translation *This Is a Man?,* London, Sphere Books, 1987.

[2] A. HERZBERG, *Tweestromenland. Dagboeken uit Bergen-Belsen,* Amsterdam, Querido, 1978, p. 193; V. VAN RIET, *Wenteltrap Mauthausen*, Antwerp, Brito, 1972, p. 88.

[3] See the work of T. BOROWSKI, *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen,* New York, NY, Penguin Books, 1983.

of the pure *Wille zur Macht.* Morality, in other words, is unnatural: it is imposed by culture but is in fact foreign to human nature.

As a counterargument against this view of the victims, one can say that such pessimistic anthropological convictions did not arise in the Nazi destruction and extermination camps but rather can be traced back to a certain philosophical literature of the last two centuries (Darwin, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche). This literature undoubtedly inspired Nazism and the camps, but this does not mean that it would prove its correctness. A distinction has to be made between the ideas used by Nazism and the ideas that can be deduced from the study of the victims of the camps. Nobody will deny that with very extreme means one can destroy the ethical relationships between human beings completely and can reduce man to a mere bundle of animal impulses. When one refuses to recognise that there is a bottommost limit to ethical life, then one does not do justice to the constitutive meaning of corporeality in ethics (see below). It is questionable whether the cruelty of the victims is sufficient to call ethics merely a superficial convention that loses all its credibility at the first possible occasion. "I do not believe," writes the Italian author Primo Levi, "in the most obvious and easiest conclusions: that man is essentially an egocentric stupid brute and acts accordingly once all varnish of civilisation is peeled off, so that the *Häftling* would be nothing but a human being without restraints"[4].

The facts show that ethics was omnipresent among the victims and could be destroyed only by very extreme and violent means (and never without serious feelings of agony and guilt). When one studies the behaviour of the victims closely, it is obvious that the idea of man being the natural enemy of his fellow man is not that easily confirmed by the facts. Auschwitz has given us an indication that the so-called natural tendency of man toward evil is not so natural and that the situation of 'war of all against all' had to be forced on the victims with violent means. When a Social Darwinist wants to prove himself by referring to the Holocaust, or better, to a selective representation of the victims of that Holocaust, then he wrongfully lifts up a certain factuality of the Holocaust to a moral truth.

Such a representation of immorality among the victims is often connected with the praising of a limited number of heroes who exceptionally

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[4] P. Levi, *Is dit een mens?, p. 99. See also:* S.H. Lee, *Primo Levi's* Gray Zone*: Implications for Post-Holocaust Ethics*, in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 30(2)(2016) pp. 276-297.

have been able to lift themselves up above this bestiality. In this manner the human desire for an unmistakable ethical distinction between 'animals' (diabolisation) and 'heroes' (divinisation) is realised[5]. The hero is described as the one who faces the choice between standing up against and losing his life or losing face and staying alive. Undoubtedly a hero will choose the former alternative, driven by traditional 'heroic virtues' such as courage, perseverance, loyalty, and honesty. The glorification of heroism is based on a Manichaean understanding of the world: us and them, friends and enemies, courage and cowardice, hero and traitor, black and white, absolute good and absolute evil. In heroism it soon becomes unclear what purpose heroic actions are precisely intended to serve: the salvation of real human beings or the heroic action for its own sake. The French anthropologist Tzvetan Todorov has indicated that remaining loyal to an ideal is in heroism sometimes more important than the contents and the ethical implications of the ideal that one defends. The problem with heroes is that they do not necessarily love people, not even themselves[6]. For a hero death can get an absolute value when the Manichaean ideal demands it. The hero is prepared to die in order to live. The 'daily virtues' that I will discuss further on in this chapter are different from the heroic virtues because they allow the individual to enter reality and to do justice to its complexity. Sometimes it is much more difficult and ethically much more challenging when one chooses to stay alive in order to change reality from inside than when one prefers to die. When one sacrifices his life, a lot of courage is put in one moment. In extreme cases—and this was often true in the camps—this can be without any doubt the ultimate expression of human dignity, and it can sometimes even mean salvation for others. The daily virtues, however, require courage and ethical daring every day. In the daily virtues one does as much justice as possible to the complexity of reality in a realistic way and looks for the best or least bad solution for a concrete situation of moral conflict. The daily virtues require again and again that an ethical dilemma is understood as much as possible from inside and that a

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[5] L.L. LANGER, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit,* Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1982, p. 87: "Our perception of that atmosphere, our need to see a shining clarity beyond its ambiguous smoke, may help to explain why some commentators, retreating from the theories of heroic spiritual resistance, adopt an opposite position, much more gloomy but equally comforting — the argument that the Jews were weak and helpless creatures who collaborated in their own extermination".

[6] T. TODOROV, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), Paris Seuil, 1991 (Points, Essais 295) 2d éd., Paris, Seuil, 1994, p. 74; English trans.: *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps,* New York, Henry Holt, 1996.

choice is made between the positive and negative values that are at stake at any moment[7]. The problem with the daily virtues, however, is that it is difficult to retell them in large stories. A pragmatic spirit that tries to fathom a moral conflict concerning its contents does not fit so well in the style of the story. The glorification of the hero often contains a great deal of aesthetical representation. One is morally not less authentic when one dies in a gas chamber with his or her children than when one is killed while creeping up on a bunker of the enemy. The hero must always be asked for whom or for what he is prepared to die: for the welfare of concrete human beings or to act in accordance with a (sometimes cruel) ideological system.

II. Choiceless Choice

In reaction to this Manichaean representation of the victims in terms of 'animals versus heroes', the philosopher Lawrence Langer has indicated that the victims simply were not given an opportunity to choose and did not have an autonomous ethical life because of the extreme circumstances in the camps[8]. In his opinion, the extraordinary situation of the Nazi camps forbids us to pass any moral judgment about the victims whatsoever[9]. In the context of the camp victims, the question of morality is irrelevant because there were usually no meaningful alternatives in the camps. Camp prisoners were seldom given the opportunity to make real ethical decisions for which they could consciously accept the meaning and consequences[10]. The central idea in Langer's thinking is the 'choiceless choice'. In the camps the victim was offered a choice

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[7] In the camps, most young people chose the heroic virtues, while adults were more inspired by daily virtues. Adults mostly were much more oriented toward the concrete love of a partner and the responsibility for their children, as they were in daily life.

[8] L.L. Langer, *Versions of Survival;* L.L. Langer, *The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps*, in *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time,* eds. A. Rosenberg – G. E. Myers, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988, pp. 118-127; L.L. Langer, *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish Victims and the Holocaust*, in *Religious Education* 84 (1989): 48-54; L.L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991.

[9] L.L. Langer, *Versions of Survival,* p. 90: "One cannot repeat too often that the value of a human gesture depends not only on the motive of the gesture, but on the humanity of the world in whose presence it is made".

[10] L.L. Langer, *The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps*, pp. 123-24: "An entire ethical vocabulary, which for generations furnished a sanctuary for motive and character, no matter how terrible the external details, had been corrupted by the facts of this event".

which in fact was not one[11]. According to Langer, camp life was beyond good and bad. He gives the example of the mother who was forced to choose which one of her children would be saved from execution. In such an extreme and imposed situation a moral choice is, according to Langer, no longer possible. Taking such a decision in such a case cannot possibly happen without losing one's own moral dignity. "What are we to learn from this interlude in history, during which moral intuitions so often were useless because physical and psychological constraints like hunger, illness, fear, despair and confusion created an unprecedented non-ethical environment immune to the promptings of those intuitions? (...) History inflicts wounds on individual moral identity that are untraceable to personal choice"[12].

The behaviour of the victims in this vision is understood less in terms of immorality than of amorality. It is the system that is responsible for the misery that the victims caused each other. One of the major aims of the camps was to deprive the victims of their personality and to exterminate them. When prisoners succeeded in surviving the camps, this was not so much a victory as a violation of the basic aim of the camp. Further on, however, I will argue—against Langer—that even in the camps ethical choices remained possible, although in less extreme situations than Langer's examples. Many camp prisoners could not choose the purely good any longer but were still often able to choose between more evil or less evil.

III. Camp Ethics

In her study *Values and Violence in Auschwitz* the Polish sociologist Anna Pawelczynska has shown that both an implicit and an explicit hierarchy of values existed in the camps[13]. So she does not understand the behaviour of the victims in terms of immorality or amorality, but she

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 124: "Once again the choice is not between life and death, resistance and submission, courage and cowardice, but between two forms of humiliation, in this instance each leading to the extinction of a life".

[12] L.L. LANGER, *Versions of Survival*, p. 201.

[13] A. PAWELCZYNSKA, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz: A Sociological Analysis,* Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1980, p. 7: "The value of humanism, which, although they underwent modifications in the clash with camp reality, fundamentally affected prisoners' attitudes, behavior, and forms of adaptation. These values affected the manner of experiencing life and death". See the critical review of her work by A.L. BERGER in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (1982): 483-84.

gives attention to morality that existed among the victims. She points out that most prisoners who arrived in the camps, except for the worst criminals, shared more or less the same moral universe. Despite their ideological, national, social, and religious differences, the victims all shared one central moral conviction: they felt the same about Nazism and the immoral character of the Nazi genocide. Each prisoner had to fight a battle between his or her own values and the evil that ruled those camps. The conviction and hope that human values would eventually overcome the inhuman camp system helped them in that fight. According to Pawelczynska, the moral framework that the victims shared with each other implicitly was the pre-war Western system of values. This does not mean that these ethical values could be experienced in their purest form in the camps. The fundamental principle held by Pawelczynska is that the Western value system was reduced and adapted so that it could function in the camps. She clearly points out how even the victims spontaneously developed proper ethics that were in fact more a reduction than a restructuring of values[14].

If we judge the behaviour of the victims with the strictest criteria of Western morality, then we have to say that all prisoners violated the most elementary ethical rules at certain moments. The prisoners were a strong group under threat that had given up many moral regulations, that systematically refused to respect social habits, used vulgar language, showed at certain moments no respect for the dead, and so on. Only prisoners who received exceptional protection continued to function morally more or less normally. Pawelczynska's analysis also made it clear, that also those prisoners who did not enjoy any privileges handled a system of values that was in line with pre-war European morality. This system was reduced in the camps to a few elementary values. Many values were not appropriate there any longer. So the prisoners did not have to give up on their own system of values but had to review them. Prisoners who did not do this in the context of the reality of the camp and who wanted to realise their values without compromise died immediately. Prisoners who, in their minds, remained faithful to their old values and who had to violate these values continuously in the daily life in the camps were usually burdened down with an unbearable feeling of guilt. The only choice for victims was to reduce their ethical criteria to their most crucial compo-

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[14] On this point the ethics of the survivors differed from the 'ethical' system of the perpetrators. Nazi 'ethics' was not a reduction but a restructuring (and perversion!) of Western morality. See P.J. HAAS, *Morality After Auschwitz: The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1988.

nents in an attempt to avoid the discordance between their behaviour and convictions. The differences between the existing ethical systems became vague because every system was reduced to its nucleus. Different values were given a new interpretation so that their contents and implementation were reduced and standards such as respect for the dead body were eliminated. Survival required an undogmatic and non-Manichaean attitude. One could draw only the least bad conclusions in those very concrete and critical circumstances thanks to a very high flexibility in ethics. Only such an attitude made it possible for ethics to keep any existential relevance in these circumstances. All values of the civilized world were given a new formulation in the camps in one way or another. For example, the commandment 'love your neighbour like yourself' was reduced to 'do not harm your fellow human and save him if possible'. The commandment against stealing also got a new meaning. Depending on the motive and the victim of theft, stealing was considered either a morally praiseworthy or a reprehensible action. Stealing from a living fellow prisoner who was in the same situation as the thief was considered a heavy moral offense for which prisoners sometimes punished each other mercilessly. Stealing possessions from the oppressors, in contrast, was seen as morally laudable, especially when the stolen property was shared with fellow prisoners.

> Every prisoner had his own 'neighbours.' In the midst of the fight against a world of hatred, as a reaction to a degenerate system of terror, a world of friendship came into being. And precisely in this sense, regardless of prisoner conduct that did not harmonize with the standards of free societies, the extermination camp established a basic norm, the observance of which is indispensable everywhere, and it created a new moral value: that bond with the wronged which demanded the greatest renunciation[15].

IV. Everyday Goodness

Following Sartre, Todorov makes a distinction between two kinds of morality: a morality that is aimed at individuals (a concrete morality) and one that is aimed at mankind (an abstract morality)[16]. Todorov

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[15] Pawelczynska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz*, p. 144.

[16] J.-P. Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, Paris, Nagel, 1970, pp. 41-42: "Entre deux types de morales. D'une part, une morale de la sympathie, du dévouement individuel; et d'autre part, une morale plus large, mais d'une efficacité plus contestable".

calls them a *morale de sympathie* and a *morale de principes.* In the for-
mer 'horizontal' morality, 'goodness', is the key issue; in the latter 'ver-
tical' morality, 'the good', is stressed. Todorov also refers to Vasilij
Grossman's novel *Vie et destin* in which the character Ikonnov makes
the difference between *la bonté* (goodness) and *le bien* (the good)[17].
Starting from this difference, this character in Grossman's epic develops
a theory in which he states that all religions and ideologies have tried
to lay down the good *(le bien).* Because everyone claimed to have the
correct definition of the good, many soon felt the urge to impose their
own definition of the good on others[18]. "The notion of the good itself
immediately became a scourge, even worse than evil"[19]. In Chapter
Four, we showed with Haas how Nazism was based on such vertical
and Manichaean ethics[20]. Nazism made it clear how those who wanted
to impose their definition of the absolutely good did evil and how the
(vertical) morality could turn into a cold monster[21]. In Grossman's
opinion, there is fortunately still the goodness of every day (*la petite
bonté*)[22]. This goodness is revealed in the concrete openness of people
to each other. It is a goodness without ideology, without pattern of
thought, without solemn talk, and without impressive ethical legitima-
tion, a goodness that does not ask whether the beneficiary deserves it
and that withdraws discretely when the system tries to possess it.

When we start with the difference between 'the good' (*le bien*) and
'the goodness' (*la bonté*)[23], then the ethics of the camp do not have to

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[17] V. GROSSMAN, *Vie et destin: Roman,* trans. from the Russian by A. BERELOWITCH
– E. ETKIND, Paris, Julliard, 1983, pp. 379-86.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 380: "Ainsi, le bien ayant perdu son universalité, le bien d'une secte, d'une
classe, d'une nation, d'un Etat, pretend à cette universalité pour justifier sa lutte contre
tout ce qui lui apparaît comme étant le mal".

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 380: "La notion même d'un tel bien devenait un fléau, devenait un mal
plus grand que le mal".

[20] P.J. HAAS*, Morality After Auschwitz.*

[21] V. GROSSMAN, *Vie et destin,* p. 382: "Là où se lève l'aube du bien, des enfants et
des vieillards périssent, le sang coule".

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 383: "C'est la bonté d'une vieille qui, sur le bord de la route, donne un
morceau de pain à un bagnard qui passe, c'est la bonté d'un soldat qui tend sa gourde à
un ennemi blessé, la bonté de la jeunesse qui a pitié de la vieillesse, la bonté d'un paysan
qui cache dans sa grange un vieillard juif (...) Cette bonté privée d'un individu à l'égard
d'un autre individu est une bonté sans témoins, une *petite bonté* sans idéologie. On pour-
rait la qualifier de bonté sans pensée. La bonté des hommes hors du bien religieux ou
social".

[23] This does not mean, of course, that a theoretical discourse on the good *(le bien)*
and the practice of goodness *(la bonté)* are diametrically opposed, as less as the gram-
matical rules of a language are opposed to the practice of language.

be understood as a heroic *effort to* realise an abstract idea (*le bien*) but can be seen as the result of the goodness of every day, the 'little', silent goodness of thousands of people without an ideology, without strong convictions, without big slogans or doctrines. Pawelczynska's analysis has indicated that the pre-war ethos was not given up but given a new interpretation. In this respect Todorov shows how the victims developed 'daily virtues' that added an adapted moral structure to the everyday camp life. These virtues were totally different from the 'heroic virtues' of the vertical morality. Starting from the three grammatical persons, Todorov names those virtues: the human dignity (first person: I to I), the interpersonal care (second person: I to You), and the creativity (third person: I to They). They indicate that the basic values of Western civilisation remained intact even during the Holocaust. In the camps people clearly needed not only food and drink, but they also hoped to satisfy needs that seem superfluous at first sight in this environment. Facing deportation, Etty Hillesum wrote in her diary:

> My Lord, give me one single verse every day, and if, because there is no paper or no light anymore, I will not always be able to write it down, then I will whisper it softly to your great heaven at night. But give me one single verse now and then[24].

Many other testimonies indicate that in the end the freedom of choice could never be totally controlled or suppressed by any power. One evening, young Gerhard Durlacher, who would later become the famous Jewish author and who died in 1996, secretly listened to a rehearsal of the Westerbork orchestra. He described it as an overwhelming aesthetic experience that liberated him.

> Like in a dream I look into the enchanted garden of music. The camp has disappeared, I don't feel the hunger anymore and the pain is gone. (...) With my mouth open and with tears in my eyes I listen to the music and I am overjoyed when a part is repeated. (...) The faces radiate peace and calm, which cannot even be disturbed when the baton is tapped during play. Forty free people are sitting on the stage. Their fear has been deferred, just like mine[25].

Daily expressions of human dignity, solidarity, and creativity enabled the victims to remain human beings in the most extreme circumstances.

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[24] E. HILLESUM, *Etty. De nagelaten geschriften van Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943,* ed. K.A.D. SMELIK, 3rd rev. ed., Amsterdam, Balans, 1991, p. 563.

[25] In R. BODELIER, *Ordeverstoringen,* p. 122, in G. DURLACHER, *Requiem, Herdenkingsnummer Nederlands Auschwitzcomité,* January 1988.

At the same time, this also implies criticism of the oppressors as people who were completely determined by the totalitarian system. The victims' attitude showed that determinism of the environment can never be total. Likewise, the Viennese psychiatrist (and survivor of Auschwitz and Dachau) Viktor E. Frankl has pointed out that people could be deprived of everything in the camps, except for the ultimate freedom to adopt a personal attitude toward the circumstances that were imposed on them. Like Frankl and unlike Langer, I believe that even in the camps there must have been 'remaining places of freedom' (*espaces de liberté)* where the daily virtues could be realised. Frankl wrote:

> One constantly had to make choices. Every day, every hour the pris-
> oner was given the opportunity to take a decision, whether or not he
> would submit to the powers that threatened to deprive him of his
> personality and of his inner freedom, powers that determined whether
> he would become the plaything of the circumstances or not, whether
> he would give up his spiritual freedom and his dignity in order to be
> turned into an ordinary camp resident[26].

This decision was very often possible only through subtle, passive, but sometimes extremely dangerous forms of resistance against the ruling order, so-called expressive acts (*Ausdruckhandlungen*)[27]. In that totalitarian system the victims tried to find *espaces de liberté* and to make the most of them. Their attitude illustrates that even Nazism was not able to create a completely isolated system. I use the term 'daily' virtues because they do not require exceptional (heroic) personalities with an extraordinary good character and because they are within the reach of every human being.

In literature on the victims, the 'spectacular' character of the evil that was done by the prisoners to other prisoners is often accentuated. The smaller and the more impressive expressions of 'ordinary' virtues in the extreme circumstances of the camps are much more extraordinary, however. It goes without saying that in those extreme conditions it was possible to almost completely destroy the moral relationships between people. People could be reduced to creatures that could react only as animals. But it is much more 'spectacular' that even there some people sometimes were able to reserve some space in their minds to welcome the other than

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[26] See V. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy,* New York, Pocket Books, 1963, p. 38, and *The Unheard Cry for Meaning,* New York New York, Simon & Schuster, 1978.

[27] R. Ginters, *Die Ausdruckshandlung: Eine Untersuchung ihrer sittlichen Bedeutsamkeit*, Düsseldorf, Patmos, 1976.

itself in the littleness of things (Emmanuel Levinas). They succeeded in keeping their consciences free so as to be continuously stimulated and challenged by the suffering of others. In the presentation of the victims, sometimes a false Manichaean distinction between, on the one hand, a large group of reprobate, selfish 'animals', reduced to their proper 'being', and, on the other hand, a limited group of exceptions who rose above the circumstances in a heroic manner can be sited. There also existed among the victims a so-called grey area (Primo Levi)[28] that simultaneously separates and connects (absolutely) good and (absolutely) evil. In this grey layer we can see many expressions of silent and unpretentious goodness, inspired by the vulnerability of the fellow man.

V. Beyond Self-Preservation

In this context Frankl's views are relevant. His experience in the camps convinced him that people are, even in the most extreme situations, perfectly capable of deciding how they will relate with themselves and with their neighbours, mentally and spiritually. In his opinion, what happened in the camps proves that people are always able to choose between humanity and inhumanity. Many examples led him to believe that it is possible to break through one's indifference to what is happening and suppress aggression even in the most precarious situations. Numerous examples of such courage and martyrdom show the unique human capacity to find and fulfil a sense in life, even *in extremis* and *in ultimis*—in the most extreme circumstances as in Auschwitz and even facing death in the gas chamber[29]. Frankl believes that humans can always maintain a certain form of spiritual independence, inter-human involvement, and creativeness under very heavy mental and physical pressures.

> We, who have lived in the concentration camps, we have not forgotten the prisoners who wandered through the barracks, trying to comfort and console others, who gave their last crust of bread to a fellow prisoner. There probably were not many of them, but these men have given the ultimate proof that there is one thing that cannot be taken away: the very last human freedom—the choice to determine your own attitude and choose your own way in any circumstance"[30].

[28] A. Brown, *Judging 'Privileged' Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representation and 'the Grey Zone'*, New York, Berghahn, 2015, Chapter 1 on Primo Levi's concept of the Grey Zone, pp. 42-75.

[29] V. Frankl, *Unheard Cry for Meaning,* chap. 1, n. 3.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

In Frankl's opinion, nothing can condition people to such an extent that they are deprived of all their freedom. People are capable of good and bad, and which option they choose depends on a personal decision and not on the circumstances. They can remain courageous, dignified, and unselfish or can forget human dignity in the bitter fight for self-preservation and become degraded to the level of animals. One can seize the opportunity offered in a difficult situation and reach a higher moral level, or one can fail to take that opportunity[31].

Frankl indicates that the chances of survival were considerably enhanced by developing the capacity to turn oneself to the other instead of to oneself. While staying in the camp, Frankl discovered that a prisoner's inner resistance could increase through belief in a goal that went beyond immediate self-preservation: making an effort to help someone in the camp but sometimes also thinking ahead to liberation, somebody who was waiting in the world outside the camp, a task to fulfil, and so on. Primo Levi put this idea strongly into words in one of his poems:

> And when I, standing face to face with death, screamed no, that I was
> not ready yet, that there was still so much to do, I screamed because
> I saw you, next to me, like it is happening today, a man and a woman
> in the sun. I have come back because you were there[32].

For example, Frankl noticed how some prisoners, who should already have died, stayed alive. A prisoner who was totally indifferent to his neighbour became numb and soon started decaying both physically and spiritually. By taking care of others, a prisoner not only helped others to survive by giving material help and by recognizing them as real human beings but also increased his own chances of survival. Taking care of other people offers an epiphenomenal advantage. It indirectly creates a goal and a meaning to life other than trying to stay alive. It is a miracle how one finds more and more energy by devoting himself to the others. In other words, taking care is a virtue that carries its own reward: by taking pity on the other, one not only finds dignity and increases resistance in suffering, but also stops focusing all attention on himself[33]. The considerate person is blessed in taking care of others, regardless of all

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[31] *Ibid.*, p. 88.

[32] His poem of February 11,1946, in P. Levi, *Op een onzeker uur. Gedichten,* trans. from Italian by M. Asscher – R. Speelman, Amsterdam, Meulenhoff, 1988, p. 19.

[33] See R. Antèlme, *L'espèce humaine,* 2nd rev. ed., Paris, Gallimard, 1978, p. 221: "Pour tenir, il faut que chacun de nous sorte de lui-même, il faut qu'il se sente responsable de tous" (To stay alive, it is necessary that everyone of us is leaving him/herself, it is necessary that one feels responsible for all).

possible future rewards, because through that care he (re)discovers himself as an ethical creature and at the same time is freed from the oppressive fullness of his own existence and from the suffering in the camps[34].

VI. The Body Matters

I wish, however, to raise a serious objection to Frankl, where he tries to illustrate his views with things that occurred in the Holocaust. That Frankl links physical survival in the camps with a state of mental and ethical health is not unproblematic in the context of the Holocaust. Because Frankl strongly emphasises the link between paying attention to one's neighbour and the chances of survival, his vision is very harsh toward the greater majority who did not succeed in surviving. This vision may also cause a strong feeling of guilt among the victims who were able to survive in a less distinguished manner. Almost every survivor of the camps will have to admit with a bleeding heart at a certain moment that he or she had to renounce the virtues of dignity, care, and creativeness simply to survive. Even today, Frankl's vision sometimes has painful implications for those who are so hurt that they are no longer able to experience their suffering as a challenge of self-realisation and to develop their dignity, their openness toward others, and their creativity. In fact, Frankl's theory places a moral stain on all victims of the Nazi regime who have not chosen for their neighbours and who have not died with their heads held high. I believe that Frankl underestimates how drastically the extremely miserable situation affected most victims of Nazism (hunger, cold, hostility, lack of hygiene, no privacy, hard labour, humiliations, terror, and unreliable fellow prisoners). He does not give enough stress to the unpredictable influence[35] of luck, coincidence, and the continuously changing and varying circumstances that influenced the chances of survival for the victims considerably (the nationality of the victims, their economic situation before the war, their familiarity with manual labour, their intellectual development, their appearance, their

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[34] See Chapter Six: *To Love the Torah More Than God.*

[35] In a footnote in *The Unheard Cry for Meaning,* Frankl once made a correction on his own view which is in the line of my criticism. He argues in the third footnote of Chapter 1 that a sense and a goal to live for constitute a *necessary* but not a *sufficient* cause to survive the camps. It is very typical, however, that he places this critical insight only in a footnote. If this idea had influenced the whole of his work, it would have argued for a fundamental revision of his approach.

profession, their knowledge of foreign languages, their social class, whether they had experienced captivity before the camps, the number of prisoners in their group, the character of their direct superior, the moment of their arrival in the camp, the weather at the moment, the position they had in the camp structure, the kind of work they had to do, and subjective elements such as will to survive, ideology, or religion, personal character, and identification with the executioner)[36]. That sixty thousand people survived Auschwitz is not primarily a subjective victory but is owing to objective circumstances and a complex concurrence of very diverse personal and non-personal elements. It is difficult to isolate one element as the ultimate explanation. The Manichaean distinction made by Frankl between people who became 'saints' in the camps and those who degenerated into 'animals' is much too simple[37]. It is inspired by the fear of a possible moral degeneration in *every* human being and by the desire to discover or add some form of ethical logic in the moral chaos of the Holocaust. Describing the survival of Auschwitz as a form of self-realisation is uncompassionate toward the suffering person who cannot bear the pain. It also means mocking those who did not survive the Holocaust. Such thinking spares the violence used by Nazism against the moral premises that we use to organise our lives and shifts the guilt and responsibility for the cruelties from the criminals to the victims. Langer was right in pointing out that when someone survived in Auschwitz and thereby jeopardised someone else, this was not so much because he or she made a wrong or bad choice but because the camp system was organised in such a way that the 'required' number of dead was there every day. In other words, it must be emphasised that the value of something done by a human being depends not only on the motive of the person doing the action but also on the humanity of the world in which the action was done.

Indeed, it has often been made clear that in the Holocaust a moral fundamental attitude carried no rewards in terms of material benefit or survival but that it often required an extra effort that could be fatal. Langer also indicates that, in contrast with Frankl's views, many moral people died and that survival sometimes meant a victory of evil. "In contradiction to those who argue that the only way of surviving was to cling to the values of civilised living despite the corrupting influence of the

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[36] For the complex factors playing a role in surviving the camp, see further Pawelczynska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz,* pp. 51 -67.

[37] V. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning,* p. 38.

death camps, [the doctor-prisoner and survivor] Lingens-Reiner insists that those who tried to salvage such moral luggage imposed fatal burdens on themselves"[38]. The same idea is evident in Primo Levi's writings:

> Those who saved from the *Lager* were not the best, the ones who were predestined to the good, those who had a message; what I have seen and experienced proved exactly the opposite. Those who stayed alive, were preferably the worst, the selfish, the brutes, the heartless, the collaborators (…), the spies. That was not a general practice (these did not exist and do not exist in human relations), but still a practice[39].

The person who had daily virtues got great satisfaction but was at the same time jeopardised not only materially, but also spiritually because taking up the care of others and failing caused a painful feeling of guilt. Moreover, taking care of others made one extremely vulnerable because the other's death could affect his own resistance seriously. When, on the other hand, one fought heroically for an abstract cause in the camps, the disappearance of a concrete individual could be put in perspective of that ideal. The more one was dedicated to a concrete individual, however, the more vulnerable one became. Although some people in Auschwitz succeeded in finding meaning by taking care of others 'in a spectacular way', we must not forget that Auschwitz also shows us the irrevocable physical limits in the capacity to give sense (dignity, care, and creativity). The Holocaust not only shows that some people were able to keep their capacity to give their freedom an ethical meaning and direction, but also that this capacity to give an ethical dimension is inevitably subject to biological limitations. This idea is probably not very *comforting*, but I believe it shows more courage when one dares to recognise that there is a limit at which giving meaning and commitment to the other is just not possible anymore. Only in this way we can take corporality in ethics really seriously, and we leave behind a dualistic view in which body and spirit are disconnected[40].

Frankl's opinion is based on a dualistic view of man. He believes that human life is lived on three different levels. The first is the biological-physiological level and its chemical processes. The second is the psychological-sociological level. The third level is the spiritual-personal. Although Frankl believes these dimensions are related to each other, he

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[38] L.L. LANGER, *Versions of Survival*, p. 74.

[39] P. LEVI, *De verdronkenen en de geredden,* trans. from Italian by F. DE MATTEIS-VOGELS, Amsterdam, Meulenhoff, 1991, p. 79; English trans. as *The Drowned and the Saved*, New York, NY, Vintage Books, 1989.

[40] V. FRANKL, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*, p. 28.

still considers the spiritual dimension to be an autonomous dimension which is the most essential for human existence (*Trotzmacht des Geistes*). In Frankl's opinion, *man* can rise above the limits of the lower dimensions with this 'power of the mind' and free himself from deterministic influences. But it remains to be seen whether Frankl takes the psychophysical connection of the spiritual life in the context of the Holocaust seriously enough. According to Frankl, "hunger was the same, but the people differed. Truly, calories did not matter" in the camps[41].

Ethical life always arises from a fundamental trust in reality. But extreme forms of cold, hunger, or fear can affect this trust to such an extent that it is impossible for ethics of dignity and taking care of other people to grow. In such extreme cases of fear, we can understand perfectly that people can no longer function ethically and will see their neighbours only as a threat to the further development of their own identity. Auschwitz clearly proves that calories do matter in ethics and that a lack of food often makes it impossible to experience a situation of pain and suffering as a challenge to ethical development. Although the suffering victim also has a fundamental desire for fullness, goodness, and wholeness, in the given situation he may be forced to live within the narrow, closed limits of his tortured body to such an extent that giving in the form of human dignity, taking care of the others, and creativity is no longer possible. According to Stig Dagerman, "Hunger is a form of irresponsibility, not only a physical condition but also a moral one, leaving very little room for long thoughts"[42]. In other words, if some examples of the Holocaust show in a hopeful way what man is capable of in terms of dignity and care in extreme circumstances, they must not make us forget that Auschwitz mainly shows us what man is no longer capable of in certain circumstances. Auschwitz also teaches us that there is not only a moral winner in every human being, but also a very vulnerable being.

Frankl's vision is valuable insofar as it challenges us not to think too quickly that the bottom limit of ethics and giving sense has been reached. In fact, Frankl's view was developed with psychotherapeutic intentions, and that is why it strongly emphasises the human capacities and the importance of choosing freely. In this respect it has great importance for health care. It clearly points out that we must not give up our belief in

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[41] *Ibid.*, p. 38. He also criticizes Bertold Brecht's idea that first comes food and then philosophy *("Erst komt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral")*. See *Ibid.*, p. 24.

[42] S. DAGERMAN, *Duitse herfst. Een naoorlogse reportage,* trans. from Swedish by K. WOUDSTRA, Amsterdam, Meulenhoff, 1985, p. 15.

the suffering man too soon and that we have to stand by him as much as possible, where this is still possible. Man is not necessarily conditioned totally and by circumstances. In my opinion, the problem is that Frankl uses Auschwitz too much to serve his psycho-therapeutic vision, whereas this historical drama should show the limits of his view. A fundamental lesson of the Holocaust is not only that in the end nothing can condition man totally, but how fragile the capacity is to take care of others, how much ethical life depends on corporality, how responsible we are to pay (individual and common) attention to this biological infrastructure of ethics, and how unrewarding ethics often is, at least in terms of being effective and in terms of material welfare.

Little, ordinary good things were not done by most victims as a consequence of making an unambiguous and heroic choice for an abstract ethical ideal. While such a choice for the purely good usually led to severe punishment and sometimes to death, many victims were able to develop themselves in the direction of the good through thousands of small, anonymous, and unpretentious expressions of dignity, care, and creativeness. By doing this, they offered during the Holocaust an existential-ethical answer to the daily vices of the criminals who caused the atrocities they suffered[43]. In this context, by analogy with Hannah Arendt's 'banality of evil' in her study of the perpetrator, we could use the term 'banality of the good'. Auschwitz teaches us that both evil and goodness are ordinary human capacities. In this sense, the Holocaust did not change the nature of good and bad. The difference between the life of the victims in the camps and our daily life is not the respective presence or absence of ethics. The life of the victims is a larger representation of what happens in our daily life. Precisely because of these larger representations we think we can draw generalising ethical conclusions about human nature.

In the camps there was more than just the law of the jungle. An unambiguous option for the good was not always possible. Usually the choice was between more or less evil. And the presence of this choice indicates precisely that ethical life remained possible even in the camps. This conclusion, however, should not make us too optimistic. The good in Auschwitz was possible only in rare cases. Auschwitz must be mainly a warning of the fragility of ethical life. In a context of extreme inhumanity in which one has to choose between the loss of bread (and life)

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[43] For the "daily vices" of the perpetrators, see Chapter Nine: *Auschwitz, or How Good People Can Do Evil.*

and the loss of dignity, passing judgment becomes very difficult. An act
can never be called good or bad in itself; one must bear in mind the
situation at a certain moment and place and the different values at stake.
The 'true' identity of man will not reveal itself in such extreme circum-
stances because man was not created for such situations[44].

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[44] A previous version was published as D. POLLEFEYT, *Victims of Evil or Evil of
Victims?*, in H.J. CARGAS (ED.), *Problems Unique to the Holocaust*, Lexington,
KY, The University Press of Kentucky, 1999, pp. 67-82. SEE ALSO: S. MARQUAERT, *On
the Defensive: Reading the Ethical in Nazi Camp Testimonies* (University of Toronto
Romance Series) Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2015.

Section Four

Jewish Responses: Ethics

Chapter Six

To Love the Torah More Than God.
Emmanuel Levinas' Jewish Thought

I. Levinas and the Holocaust

As one of the basic insights of postmodernity, human thought about God and the world can no longer be understood as a contingent, arbitrary thought experiment that 'falls from heaven'. Rather, it arises from a lived-through interaction with historical and political realities. In this chapter, when we inquire into the lively *experiences préphilosophiques* (J. Wahl) in the thought of the great French-Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas (°1906, Lithuania), we then arrive at the same insight. The thought of Levinas develops not from a noncommittal expatiation on the neutrality of things, but on the contrary proceeds from a concrete, (Jewish) flesh-and-blood experience. Inquiring into the lively, prephilosophical suppositions of Levinas' thought, we naturally come to the traumatic experience which he, as a member of the Jewish people, inevitably shared: the terror of Hitlerism[1]. Even though Levinas does not explicitly make the Holocaust a subject for reflection, we can still understand his thought as a critical, philosophical attempt to confront the fundamental catastrophe that was the Holocaust[2].

In this chapter we attempt to ground this proposition on four basic Levinasian categories[3]. In a first stage, we indicate how Levinas' category of being, *il y a* ('there is'), is based on the traumatic experience of the

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[1] F. POIRIÉ, *Emmanuel Levinas. Qui êtes-vous?*, Lyon, La Manifacture, 1987, p. 83: "Ma vie, se-serait elle passée entre l'hitlérisme incessament pressenti et l'hitlérisme se refusant à tout obli?" For an exhaustive bibliography on Levinas, see R. BURGGRAEVE, *Emmanuel Levinas: une bibliographie primaire er secondaire (1929-1985) avec complément 1985-1989*, Leuven, Peeters, 1990.

[2] See also M. BLANCHOT (a.o.), *Textes pour Emmanuel Levinas*, Paris, Place, 1980, p. 18: "Comment philosopher, comment écrire dans le souvenir d'Auschwitz, de ceux qui nous ont dit, parfois en des notes enterrées pres des crématoires: sachez ce qui s'est passé, n'oubliez pas et en meme temps jamais vous ne saurez. C'est cette pensée que traverse, porte toute la philosophie de Levinas et qu'il nous propose sans la dire, au-dela et avant toute obligation".

[3] For a more narrative elaboration of this hypothesis, see D. POLLEFEYT, *De Holocaust en het denken van E. Levinas. Een poging tot wederzijdse verheldering, in Driemaandelijks tijdschrift van de Auschwitz-Stichting* 23 (1989), Brussels, pp. 35-87.

Holocaust. His whole thought seems to unfold as an inquiry into a liberating solution from the fundamental 'fascism of being'. In a second phase, we describe the event of the *hypostasis* as the (first) human answer to *il y a*. The traumatic experience of the Holocaust teaches Levinas that the identity-acquisition (hypostasis) can only bring about liberation halfway. During World War II, the Jewish people were thrown upon their own identity and were imprisoned within themselves. Moreover, hypostasis leads through the scarcity of means to a relentless *struggle for life* wherein people become 'wolves' (Hobbes) towards each other. Life in the extermination camps demonstrates this in a dramatic way. The question of salvation will therefore have to undergo a transformation to a liberation from oneself. In a third instance, it will be shown how, for Levinas, only dedication to the *face of the other* contains the promise of real liberation. Likewise here, the traumatic experience of the suffering of the other is exceptionally exemplary. It is only within this perspective that, in a fourth instance, we can allow the specific, *ethically qualified*, God-idea of Levinas to come to its rightful fullness[4].

II. *Il y a*: Philosophical Translation of the Holocaust Experience

At the height World War II, while being a prisoner of war of Nazi-Germany[5], Levinas wrote his first work, *De l'existence à l'existant*[6],

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[4] D. Colin, *Traces of War: Interpreting Ethics and Trauma in Twentieth-Century French Writing*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2018, pp. 134-147 (Chapter 7: 'Afterlives: Althusser and Levinas') & pp. 148-162 (Chapter 8: 'Levinas the Novelist').

[5] When the war breaks out in 1939, Levinas is mobilized as a soldier of the French army. He serves his country as an interpreter of Russian-German. With the withdrawing of the tenth regiment, he is taken prisoner by the Germans in Rennes. After some months of internment in France, he is transported to Germany (Hannover). Here, he will be attached to a group with other Jews in a special commando. He is forced to work, apart from the other Frenchmen, in the forest, under supervision of the *Wehrmacht*. Even though Levinas, as a French prisoner of war, could enjoy the protective stipulations of the Geneva Convention for war prisoners, as a member of this special Jewish commando under the supervision of the armed forces that discriminated the Jews, he had experienced even this threatening reversion of the *il y a* in itself. In this workcamp, he encounters the Christian charity in the person of the chaplain of the camp, father Pierre. For Levinas this was an important experience for his (hopeful) view on the relation between Jews and Christians after Auschwitz. See F. Poirié, *Emmanuel Levinas. Qui êtes-vous?,* Lyon, La Manifacture, 1987, p. 121 : "Il y a eu dans l'Eglise devant cette torture, devant cette misère, devant cet abîme de l'hitlérisme, une comprehension, témoignée directement à la population juive. Là commence, à mon avis, une nouvelle période dans les relations judéo-chrétiennes". He further refers to the work of F. Rosenzweig. See also E. Levinas, *Transcendance et Intelligibilité, suivi d'un entretien*, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 1984, pp. 55-56.

[6] Id., *De l'existence à l'existant*, Paris, Fontaine, 1947.

which he completed shortly thereafter. In this study he developed a fundamental category that will become the key with which to understand all of his later thought: *il y a* ('being without being') is the primordial catastrophic situation which threatens to take every concrete being by surprise with its anonymous, all-absorbing presence. It concerns no more than pure and brutal being with its inhuman neutrality. There is no this and there is no that; but there is likewise no nothing[7]. It is just this threatening, formless being that awakens in people an exodus-dynamic, an irrepressible longing for liberation from this fundamental catastrophe. It is this threatening Nothingness that Rubenstein calls the divine, but that is for Levinas exactly the opposite.

This *il y a* is, however, never to be experienced directly because there is no subject which stands over and against an object. There is but this diffused, all-inundated and overwhelming anonymity of being. Only through a sort of mental extrapolation can we therefore arrive at an existential entry point to gain access to this marginal concept.

Since the war experience has been in fact the concrete *Sitz im Leben* wherein Levinas thought out this concept, the war is likewise the appropriate entry point to understand this notion[8]. War is pre-eminently a chaotic experience wherein one can no longer be human[9]. It is overwhelming in the fullness of its emptiness, an anonymity where human-being becomes impossible. Under Hitlerism, the Jewish people have been exposed to this *il y a* in the most explicit way. They have been loaded into trucks—at times sixty to seventy of them packed altogether—and were delivered to the extermination camps. For days on end, they were aimlessly shuffled among themselves, immersed in complete darkness where no one recognised no one: deprived of light and even sanitation. There is only the sweltering heat of being beside and against each other, without ventilation or food. There is only the dark chaos where one is

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[7] For our description of the *il y a* we base ourselves on E. LEVINAS, *Ethique et Infini. Dialogues avec Philippe Nemo*, Paris, Fayard, 1982, pp. 45-51; and R. BURGGRAEVE, *Het gelaat van ale bevrijding*, Tielt, Lannoo, 1986, pp. 15-28. See also the English edition R. BURGGRAEVE, *From Self-Development to Solidarity: an Ethical Reading of Human Desire in its Socio-Political Relevance According to Emmanuel Levinas*, Publications of the Center for Metaphysics and Philosophy of God, Leuven, Peeters, 1985.

[8] See R. BURGGRAEVE, *Mens en medemens. Verantwoordelijkheid en God. De metafysische ethiek van Emmanuel Levinas*, Leuven, Acco, 1986, pp. 162-163: "Het is juist deze ervaring van de reductie van het subject tot het onpersoonlijke zijn-zonder-meer, met zijn drukkend gewicht en verlammende onontkoombaarheid, die de kern uitmaakt van de oorlogservaring, zoals ze door Levinas beschreven wordt".

[9] E. LEVINAS, *Totalité et infini: essay sur l'extériorité* (Phaenomenologica 8), Den Haag, Nijhoff, 3rd ed., 1968), p. X.

no longer human but (still) cannot withdraw from existence[10]. Having arrived in the Nazi camps the Jews were stripped of all that made one a person and were reduced to a state lower than that of objects[11]. Here began a life of total de-subjectivisation[12], of complete reduction to grey uniformity: bald-shaven, disinfected, reduced to numbers without names.

This is the actual meaning of *il y a*, the Levinasian category of being: everything is dissolved and loses it personal contours. In that sense, we could justifiably speak about the *il y a-tic* dimension of the Holocaust.

During the Holocaust there originated a manner of 'person'-hood which was never before seen in human history. Hitlerism created within that chaos the *Muselmänner*: the persons on the way back to the *il y a*. Everyone likened unto each other, being yet without thinking, without reactions, without soul, inescapably submitted to a comfortless anonymity and brutal being. People deteriorated to being 'living dead', wandering corpses whose only task was to await death upon command[13].

The *il y a* is therefore the oppressive fullness of being that swallows humans and makes them no-body, abandoning them to total desolation and indifference. All distinctions disappear: between men and women, adults and children, learned and illiterate, families and relatives, life and death. Everything is put under one denominator. To be *Muselmänner* is to simmer in the *il y a*, to be eaten up by the absolute disconsolateness of simply being: always that numbing sameness, with no workdays nor holidays, with no yesterday and no tomorrow. There is only the desperate now to which there is no escape. Even the most elementary deed of dying loses it personal character: there is no life and there is no death anymore. It is the total loss of power over one's own subjectivity and to be totally submitted to the nothingness of being, without any possibility

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[10] See E. WIESEL, *De Nacht. Met een voorwoord van François Mauriac,* translated from the French by N. BRUNT, Hilversum, Gooi & Sticht, 1986, p. 29ff.

[11] E. LEVINAS, *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme,* Paris, Albin Michel, 1984, p. 25. See also ID., *Het menselijk gelaat. Essays van Emmanuel Levinas*, chosen and introduced by A. PEPERZAK, Baarn, 1984, pp. 35-36: "Onder miljoenen menselijke wezens die toen ellende en dood ondergingen maakten de joden de unieke ervaring door van totale verlatenheid. Zij maakten kennis met een toestand die nog beneden die van de dingen ligt, een ervaring van totale passiviteit".

[12] L. POLIAKOV, *Le brévaire de la haine. Le III° Reich et les Juifs*, préface de F. Mauriac, Brussels, Complexe, 1986, p. 249.

[13] For a description of the *Muselmänner*, see *ibid.*, pp. 254-255. See also E. FACKENHEIM, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought*, New York, NY, Schocken Books, 1982, p. 215.

of resistance[14]. Even suicide loses its meaning as the ultimate act of freedom. When people are lapped up by being, they cannot commit suicide anymore. Suicide presupposes a meaningful subject. In the Holocaust, suicide lost (just as martyrdom) a great deal of its symbolic power and terminated itself in the chaos of the catastrophe. In such a manner did Nazism deliver people to 'fatal immortality'.

The consequence of this total de-subjectivisation is horror (*horreur*). Being weighs upon you as a fatal desperation. As a person, you disappear like an exponent of an anonymous event where you can no longer be a person. Being is a diabolic power which inundates everything. In 1934, Levinas wrote an article about *La philosophie de l'hitlérisme*[15]. One will not come across this often in Levinas' bibliography because he later distanced himself from (the title of) the article. How can you ever call Nazism a system, a philosophy? The diabolic turns around every system to its contrary. Hitlerism is the anti-system, the anti-state par excellence, an *Unwelt*[16] where all things and people are perverted to not-being-anymore. Hence, he writes:

> Between 1934 and 1945 'there is' revealed nothing in itself of the generosity which the corresponding German expression '*es gibt*' seems to contain[17].

The *il y a* was thus prompted to Levinas by the fundamental traumatic experience of the Holocaust[18]. With this approach to being, Levinas' philosophy clearly stands as a reaction to the thought of Heidegger,

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[14] L. POLIAKOV, *Le bréviare de la haine*, pp. 252-253: "Cette valeur de l'exemple, cette vertu cristallisatrice qu'il possède dans les collectivités humaines, se trouvaient dans les camps réduites à néant. Un Gandhi y serait devenu l'objet de la risée générale. C'est la passivité généralisée des détenus qui frappe surtout. (...) Cette obéissance atteignait une véritable automatization".

[15] E. LEVINAS, *Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme*, Esprit 2, 1934, pp. 199-208.

[16] E. FACKENHEIM, *The Jewish Return into History: Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem*, New York, NY, Schocken Books, 1978, p. 259.

[17] Citation from the Dutch version of *Signature* in E. LEVINAS, *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1976, pp. 373-379, which appeared under the new title *Handschrift* (Dutch translation by O. DE NOBEL – A. PEPERPZAK) in C. SCHAVENMAKER – W.H.M. WILLEMSEN (eds.), *Over het weten van de mens* (Symposium: teksten voor het filosofie-onderwijs), Alphen aan den Rijn/Brussels, Samson Uitgeverij, 1986, pp. 133-142.

[18] About his own experience in the camp, LEVINAS writes: "Nous n'étions qu'une quasi-humanité, une bande de singes. Force et misère de persécutés, un pauvre murmure intérieur nous rappleait notre essence raisonable, mais nous n'étions plus au monde. (...) Etres enfermés dans leur espèce, malgré tout leur vocabulaire, êtres sans langage": See E. LEVINAS, *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1976, p. 201.

which readily plays on the philosophical theme of the wonderful 'lightness of being' (the *es gibt*)[19]. During his camp imprisonment in the forest, Levinas fought just as much against the depersonalising powers of being. He has not become a nature lover, but a city dweller. Nature is rather the formless confusion and the adamant 'struggle for life' than a fascinating painting whereby one can dwell at length in full wonderment, free of any obligations.

The starting point of Levinas' thought is therefore not (as people have so often assumed) 'God' or 'the face', but this traumatic experience of the radical negation of the face wherein God speaks. This also explains Levinas' aversion to sacred divinities. In the enthusiasm of religious ecstasy, the subject is destroyed and one is brought into the fascination of the divine, a non-biblical anonymous, fascist power, plain and simple.

The question now is: how do I evade from the *il y a* which time and again forms a threat. Already before the war (1935), Levinas posed the question in *De l'évasion*, the evasion from the imminent premonition (which also was already present in the thought of Rosenzweig[20]) of *les angoisses de la guerre qui approchait*[21]. With the actual apocalyptic revolution of Nazism in the years that followed, the question has become even more stringent still.

III. The Unbearable Weight of Human Hypostasis

The human subject does not want to be reduced to no-thing or no-one. The massive, overwhelming being-as-such can only be conquered if, within being, a being from within its very self emerges, that would open the fullness of being by means of appropriating for itself being so much so that it can exist separately. This is the involutional movement *de l'existance à l'existant* (from being to being). With this dynamic of

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[19] For Levinas' attitude towards the work of V. Farias on 'Heidegger and Nazism', see E. LEVINAS, *La mémoire d'un passé non révolu. Entretien avec Foulek Ringelheim,* in *Revue de l'universiré de Bruxelles* 1-2 (1987), pp. 11-20, p. 19-20.

[20] D. POLLEFEYT – L. ANCKAERT, *Tussen verwondering en trauma. Rosenzweig, Levinas en Fackenheim: een joods-filosofisch perspectief,* in B. RAYMAEKERS (ed), *Gehelen en fragmenten. De vele gezichten van de filosofie* (Acta van de 14° filosofendag Leuven) Leuven, Peeters, 1993, pp. 159-164. For an exhaustive bibliography of F. ROSENZWEIG, see L. ANCKAERT – B. CASPER, *Franz Rosenzweig. A Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (Instrumenta Theologica 7) Leuven, Bibliotheek van de Faculteit Godgeleerdheid, 1990.

[21] F. POIRIÉ, *Emmanuel Levinas. Qui êtes-vous?*, Lyon, La Manifacture, 1987, p. 82.

becoming-a-subject, by the appropriation-of-being, we arrive at a second basic Levinasian category: hypostasis.

'Hypostasis' is becoming born to oneself by conquering being. A point suddenly emerges when one tears loose from the *il y a* and one contracts within oneself. Once again it is remarkable how the traumatic experience of Hitlerism forms the very vivid background of this concept. In an interview with Poirié, Levinas relates how the experience of hypostasis came his way during his imprisonment. With the group of Jewish prisoners among whom he dwelled, they had taken care of a little dog which greeted the commando every evening with its barking[22]. To be no longer called by that general, damning name *Juden*, but to be recognised as self-possessed (human) beings within being, that is the joy of hypostasis. When the *Wehrmacht* understood how this little dog contributed to that, the poor animal was mercilessly slain.

The different uprisings which took place in the camps could also be described as a refusal of the *il y a*. Hypostasis is wrenching oneself away from murderous being and taking up arms for oneself. Hypostasis as *être pour soi* is the refusal of the depersonalising, numinous powers of fascist being. It is an atheistic, 'manly' deed, the first instance of freedom: not by withdrawing from oneself (*Dasein*), but by establishing oneself as the origin (*archê*) against all anarchy.

The identity which is conquered in hypostasis is, however, no harmless, light-hearted relationship with oneself. It immediately turns dialectically towards a full reversion upon oneself. *Être pour soi* likewise means *être avec soi*. Sovereignty also implies being fettered to oneself. How being 'clings on' to the subject is again very well manifested in the anti-Semitic persecutions. Regarding this, Levinas writes:

> Indeed, this [antisemitism] is an absolute persecution, because its intention paralyses every form of escape, makes every reform impossible from the very start, forbids every devotion or apostasy—in the etymological sense of the term—and hereby touches the creature precisely in its innocence, this creature which is called back to its deepest identity[23].

The Jew of the twentieth century has felt more than anyone else the fatality of hypostasis. In an anti-Semitic environment, what stands

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[22] *Ibid.*, p. 74: "Dans ce coin d'Allemagne ou, en traversant le village, nous étions regardés par les habitant comme *Juden*, ce chien nous prenant évidemment pour des hommes".

[23] E. LEVINAS, *Het menselijk gelaat. Essays van Emmanuel Levinas,* chosen and introduced by A. PEPERZAK, Baarn, Ambo, 1984, p. 36.

central for the Jew is not the fear of being (Heidegger), but the fear of having to be there. Anne Frank can indeed go into hiding but she cannot efface herself or transform into an immaterial, intangible substance. Being-human (hypostasis) is to be affixed to oneself. Human identity contains an aspect of definitiveness which is inescapable.

Under Hitlerism, the Jew did not have to do something in order to be punished; *being* a Jew was already sufficient ground for punishment[24]. Under Nazism, a whole people was found guilty, not by their deeds, but by their very existence. Being-Jew became the prototype of the traumatic enchainment to oneself. There is no escape from one's own identity. Here, the original merit of hypostasis dialectically turns itself into the hindrance of oneself by oneself.

At this point we come across in Levinas a description of the nausea (*la nausée*). I am I and I can be nobody else. The nausea is the revulsion with one's own being. It is the experience of standing against the wall of one's own being whereby every evasion is sheer illusion. The nausea for one's own being was manifested in an unparalleled way during the Second World War in the actuality of the suffering of the Jewish people. Suffering is that vicious being thrown back upon one's identity without doors nor windows. It is the dreadful, carnal manner of being-with-yourself. Suffering makes the will ridiculous: there is no possibility for rationalisation or taking distance. In the Holocaust, we reached the zenith of all such extreme human suffering[25].

Here, we also trace the link between suffering and death. Death means deliverance from suffering. In this sense suffering is in fact a greater evil than death. Here the question of liberation takes a new turn: salvation for me now becomes a question of salvation from myself, without however being destroyed by death. Only now does on externalising

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[24] See also E. FACKENHEIM, *La présence de Dieu dans l'histoire: affirmations juives et réflexions philosophiques aprés Auschwitz*, translated from the English by M. DELMOTTE — B. DUPUY, Paris, Verdier Albertville, 1980, p. 124.

[25] E. LEVINAS, *Le scandale du mal. Catastrophes naturelles et crimes de l'homme* (contribution to a discussion organised as hommage to Emmanuel Levinas by *Les nouveaux cahiers at L'école Normale Israélite Orientale*, 2 February 1986 with interventions of P. RICŒUR — B. DUPUY – E. LEVINAS), *Les nouveaux cahiers* 22:85, 1986, pp. 15-17, p. 15: "Déchirement du vécu, empêché de se rassembler en sens, de se faire pensé de (...) et de sortir de soi. Sensibilité aussi vouée à elle-même – ma douleur, en moi, dans mon corps". E. LEVINAS, *Difficile liberté*. Essais sur le judaïsme (Paris, Albin Michel, 1976), pp. 173-174: "(...) ne peut pas détourner les yeux d'une souffrance, vécue dans l'abandon de tout et de tous, d'une souffrance à la limite de toutes souffrances le mal a atteint, dans 'la solution finale', enterprise par le national-socialisme, son point extreme".

movement take place in the person. One becomes a question asking for an alterity that can liberate one from oneself without destroying oneself.

This promise, according to Levinas, cannot be realised in a working association with the world. Work is directed to the persistence of the I. The world is reduced to an extension of one's own survival. Thus, the enchainment to oneself is not broken. On the contrary, it is even magnified because the I is now not only burdened with itself but also with the world. Behind the inscription of Auschwitz '*Arbeit macht Frei*' lies the motto of Buchenwald: '*Vernichting durch Arbeit*'.

Consequently, if the person wants to be liberated from oneself, then one should encounter an alterity so radically different that one could not reduce such alterity to oneself. Only then will one be finally redeemed from oneself and not be restrained from existing. But does such an alterity exist after the Auschwitz trauma?

IV. The Power of Powerlessness

The weight of being is not even the most painful consequence of *hypostasis.* The definitive binding of hypostasis compels the person in the end to become a creature of *Wille zur Macht*. One of the most painful aspects of the Holocaust is indeed the pent-up 'struggle for life' which rules over the prisoners. The horrors to which they were exposed made them, at times, wolves (Hobbes) towards each other[26]. Levinas' thought does not pass over this egocentrism as a creaturely constitutive element of human personality. Hypostasis compels the person to be oriented towards reality in a reductionistic and self-interested manner. The ultimate cruelty of fascism is the fundamental revelation and glorification of this degenerate *Wille zur Macht* which revolves around itself. Here, we reach the core of Levinas' description of Hitlerism. Nazism reduces all others to the same. It is politics without ethics which destroys all that does not comply with it. It is that attempt of being which radically universalises itself and reduces on its own accord every non-conforming 'other'.

What can we learn from this according to Levinas? In Auschwitz it became extremely clear how the other can be lethally destroyed. Here we arrive at a crucial turning point in Levinas' thought: the vulnerability of the other. The appearance of the other creates the possibility for murder

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[26] See Chapter Five: *The Banality of the Good.*

and manslaughter. We often shun away from the documents of the exter-
mination camps because it reveals to what extent the person can be
capable of. But the very examination of such documents reveals to me
that that which is possible, is not allowed, or that which I can, I may
not. Put in broader terms: in the traumatic experience the reflecting
consciousness discovers itself immediately as a *moral* consciousness. To
escape from this is impossible. Only 'revisionism' in the name of 'aca-
demic freedom' or 'free speech' can go out of its way to avoid the trau-
matic events of the twentieth century[27].

The traumatic experience of the suffering of the other indeed evokes
such paradoxical emotions because the discovery of (my) power cannot
be divorced from the fact that this appropriated power is wrongful[28]. The
other who appears causes a trauma in my very nature: all my heroic
efforts at self-unfolding are radically thrown into confusion. The face, as
the incarnated vulnerability of the other, thwarts in effect not only my
'fascist' imperialism, but likewise questions this self-interestedness in
principle. Auschwitz, where this 'face' was incarnated six million-fold,
poses to us as well this one fundamental question: are we wolves towards
each other (Hobbes) or are we each other's keepers (Cain)[29]?

For Levinas, real human liberation, even in Auschwitz, lies in this: the
safeguarding of the conscience, being provoked and challenged by the
suffering of the other. In such manner have the young supported the old
during the 'death marches'; fathers saving the scarcest of food from their
very mouths in order to give it to their sons; women having decided in
the hell of Auschwitz to give the unborn life a chance and brought chil-
dren into the world; men defending the rights of pregnant women;
women standing up for their and their children's right to food. Authen-
tic existence is thus for Levinas understandably no *Sein zum Tode*
(Heidegger). My death becomes relativised in the light of the suffering
and the death of the other. The rights of the person are originally the

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[27] About revisionism, Levinas writes: "Il est extrémement important de s'opposer aux
tentatives des révisionistes qui profitent de l'oubli, il est important de maintenir le
pur souvenir des faits pour la vérité de la shoah. Mais l'essentiel est de trouver
toujours l'actualité des enseignements de la shoah à partir de nos experiences nouvelles".
E. LEVINAS, *La mémoire d 'un passé non révolu. Entrerien avec Foulek Ringelheim,* in *Revue
de l'université de Bruxelles* 1-2 (1987), pp. 11-20, p. 14.

[28] I. ANDERSON, *Ethics and Suffering since the Holocaust: Making Ethics "First Phi-
losophy" in Levinas, Wiesel and Rubenstein*, New York, Routledge, 2016, esp. pp. 53-87
on Levinas ('The Call of the Other: Levinas Ethics').

[29] R. BURGGRAEVE, *Van zelfontplooiing naar solidariteit. Een ethische lezing van het
verlangen: ontmoeting tussen psychoanalyse en Levinas*, Leuven, Acco, 1981, p. 65.

rights of the other person[30]. In the responsibility lies the promise of liberation from a suffocating entanglement within myself. Here, a fundamental human possibility likewise reveals itself: holiness. Evil is possible, yet so is holiness as well!

In this holiness lies a real promise of salvation from the oppressive weight of existence. The other descends upon my existence, comes from absolutely elsewhere and becomes precisely the refusal to be reduced to a function of my own self[31]. In my responsibility, I am called to protect and to promote the other in its alterity. This is precisely what we described with V. Frankl in the previous chapter.

With the creative realisation of this responsibility, I need not deny nor suppress my I. My own self-unfolding is—within my responsibility—my one and only investment[32]. My (originally self-interested) energy must not be eclipsed but transformed, re-directed towards availability for the other. With Levinas we reach a definitive track towards liberation. In order to withdraw from the terror of *il y a*, the I had to inevitably postulate itself: this is the burdensome and often aggressive act of hypostasis. Only though de-postulating oneself via the dis-inter-ested relationship with the other, does the I become liberated from itself and yet not killed. The face of the other is the face of liberation[33].

V. Trauma and God

The person is thus the *possibility* to go into a full consideration of the original language of the face. This also implies that the person does *not necessarily* function at the level of responsibility. Nazism is the prototype

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[30] E. Levinas, *Autremen que savoir. Les entretiens du centre Sèvres*, Paris, Osiris, 1988, pp. 60-61 about conatus essendi, rights of the person and the egoism of nationalist-socialism.

[31] J. Watson, *Levinas' Philosophy of Response, Remembering for the Future*, (Papers to be presented at an international scholars' conference to be held in Oxford, 10-13 July, 1988) *Theme II: The Impact of the Holocaust on the Contemporary World*, Oxford/New York/Beijing/Frankfurt/Sao Paulo/Sidney/Tokyo/Toronto, Pergamon Press, 1988, pp. 1956-1964, p. 1959: "The face signifies itself, manifests the Other, and calls in question the ego. In question I cannot reduce the face to its skin".

[32] On the other side, this means that when a human being can scarcely keep himself in his own being, an important condition is lacking to come to an ethical relation to someone else. It is therefore incorrect to accuse victims for their mutual cruelty without looking under which conditions these cruelties took place. The responsibility for such cruelties has to be found by those who created the context wherein such inhumanities were possible. See also my critique on V. Frankl in Chapter Five.

[33] Thus the title of the book R. Burggraeve, *Het gelaat van de bevrijding* [the face of liberation], *een heilsdenken in het spoor van Emmanuel Levinas*, Tielt, Lannoo, 1986.

of this refusal of responsibility. This 'aversion' of the ethical precept of the face is what Levinas calls (the real possibility of) evil.

At this juncture one must not expect that Levinas will conjure 'God' from his philosophical crystal ball. If the person refuses one's sacred responsibility, then there is no God, says Levinas, who comes in his omnipotence to straighten out our crooked lines. Responsibility is therefore (literally) dead-serious and irreversible. It is not in omnipotence that God's self-revelation originally takes place[34]. I am absolutely responsible and the first one who is responsible. Levinas borrows the saying from Dostoevsky: 'Each of us is indebted to the other, and I more than all others'[35]. An intervention from God would not take seriously this human responsibility.

Neither does Levinas wish to employ a God who promises eternal (heavenly) happiness. Such divine promise can offer no consolation for those who are *now* the victims of the irresponsible actions of others.

This rejection of every *deus ex machina* belongs to Levinas' broader rejection of every post-Holocaust theodicy. The theodicy-project attempts precisely to save God's omnipotence and love over and against human suffering. In Auschwitz, however, heaven has shown itself more than ever to be empty. Since then it is no longer possible to justify or to exonerate God[36].

Once again, Israel found itself in the heart of the religious history of the world, in that it brought about the explosion of the perspectives within which the established religions confined themselves[37].

The suffering in Auschwitz is a suffering for nothing. It makes every talk and thought in terms of 'punishment for sin', for example, not only impossible but also arrogant. Auschwitz reveals the non- and never justifiable character of the suffering of the other person. Since then, in view of the gas chambers and the cremation ovens, it has been extremely problematic, even 'blasphemous', to think of the sinfulness of Israel or of the heavenly promise which God has prepared in order to cover up

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[34] E. LEVINAS, *La mémoire d'un passé non révolu. Entretien avec Foulek Ringelheim,* in *Revue de l'université de Bruxelles* 1-2 (1987), pp. 11-20, p. 17.

[35] ID., *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1974, p. 186. Quoted in R. BURGGRAEVE, *Van zelfontplooiing naar solidariteit. Een ethische lezing van het verlangen: een ontmoeting tussen psychoanalyse en Levinas*, Leuven, Acco, 1981, p. 70.

[36] E. LEVINAS, Le *614° commandement*, in *Arche* 291, 1981, pp. 55-57, p. 55.

[37] ID., *Het menselijk gelaat. Essays van Emmanuel Levinas*, chosen and introduced by A. PEPERZAK, Baarn, Ambo, 1984, p. 36.

for this suffering. What a fundamental disproportion between the theological answer on the one hand and evil on the other[38]!

The possibility of Auschwitz has therefore made Levinas radically question the centuries old tradition of theodicy. In the camps, Nietzsche's words 'God is dead' received a quasi-empirical meaning[39]. If 'the burning children of Auschwitz' is to be the criterion for actual theology (as Greenberg states) then every exoneration of God in the form of theodicy has become impossible for all time.

The Holocaust therefore means a rupture in the history of salvation: the person, for Levinas, must pursue this history in 'a faith without theodicy'. Auschwitz reveals, with a clarity that strains the eye, the radical discrepancy between the whole Western theological thought project and the concrete forms of suffering of the Holocaust (*les cris d'Auschwitz qui retentiront jusqu'à la fin des temps*[40]). Even the so-called secularised theodicies of the human, socio-economic eschatology of history must give way for the (real) possibility of the end of the world: the universal Holocaust[41].

Process philosophy has turned around this category of divine omnipotence, and in the light of Auschwitz affirmed God's powerlessness[42]. God becomes the compassionate friend who indeed understands the suffering one, but who cannot do anything about it. Even this compassion-ate God cannot be for Levinas the final word. A God who merely suffers with us, still leaves the final and definitive word to evil and suffering. It becomes unclear to what extent, how and especially whether God remains a liberating and saving God. Then it is not the biblical God, but evil which is definitively omnipotent[43].

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[38] Id., "Le 614° commandement," *Arche* 291 (1981), pp. 55-57, p. 56; Id., *La souffrance inutile*, in J. Rolland (ed.), *Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 335.

[39] Even though, according to Levinas, Hitler was inspired by Nietzsche, Auschwitz was brought about, he says, by idealist transcendental philosophy. Nietzsche was himself desperate and his work but indicated a period wherein all human values were in danger of being lost. A few decades later was this nonetheless realized. See F. Poirié, *Emmanuel Levinas. Qui êtes-vous?*, p. 84.

[40] E. Levinas, *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2° ed., 1976, p. 176.

[41] D.J. Fasching, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Apocalypse or Utopia?*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993.

[42] See A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: an Essay in Cosmology*, New York, NY, Free Press, 1957.

[43] This idea is borrowed from E. Schillebeeckx in Id. – L. Apostel, *(A)theïstische Spiritualiteit,* in *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk Leven* extra edition (1984), pp. 41-56, p. 45.

Even in Levinas' view, God will associate himself with the humble, but then not as a powerless, emphatic God who resigns himself comfortingly to the existing situation of injustice. On the contrary, God will present himself as the One who—through the horror on the face of the other—unconditionally demands from me to do something to help the situation.

Responsibility is thus the very place where God comes to the fore as the idea of the Good, and inspires me as the Spirit of the Good in me. God radically associates himself with the humanism of the other. Religion is therefore not to be divorced from ethical praxis. The more I grow in responsibility, the closer I come to God. The question therefore is not how ethics is possible without God, but rather, how God is possible without ethics[44]. The theodicy-project that attempts to justify the pain of the neighbour is not only a source of immorality, but is even godless. The God-relationship is for Levinas always and from the very beginning ethical. It is in this sense that we must understand the expression 'to love more the Torah, than God'[45]. To be directed towards God is to be directed towards the other and the latter can only be achieved by following the Torah. One cannot serve God without serving the other.

God himself therefore touches us and inspires us in the dis-interested commitment to the other. This is to be understood from what has previously been discussed. The other is in fact no reissue of the I: in its capacity as other he/she situates him/herself in a dimension of loftiness, of ideality, of the divine. Thus I stand in relation with God by my relation with the other. To know God is to know what one must do. As the Spirit of the Good in me, He breaks through my complacent attachment to myself, so much so that I come loose from myself in an outward movement towards the Other. I have never to return to the starting point of a self-interested attempt at being anymore.

In this way, an *autrement qu'être*, an *au-delà de l'être* breaks through in the self-interested *il y a-tic* act of Being. For Levinas, God does not —as in Rubenstein—show himself in the fearsome, numinous powers of nature. In the philosophy of Levinas, God is an 'opposite' who provokes me to make use of my freedom in the service of the other. God needs my yes-word in order to break through the overwhelming and alienating

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[44] R. Burggraeve, *Van zelfontplooiing naar solidariteit. Een ethische lezing van het verlangen: ontmoeting tussen psychoanalyse en Levinas*, Leuven, Acco, 1981, p. 97.

[45] E. Levinas, *La mémoire d'un passé non révolu. Entrerien avec Foulek Ringelheim*, in *Revue de l'université de Bruxelles* 1-2, 1987, pp. 11-20, p. 14.

closeness of *il y a* and to establish a reign of justice and peace[46]. This concerns a fundamentally other God than the Nazist *Gott mit uns* which inflames the person into a blind, pathetic but completely irrational enthusiasm, where the charisma of the *Führer* becomes more important than the content of the message and where God is put at the service of the (*il y a-tic*) *Wille zur Macht* of the leaders. In relation to such sacred godheads, Judaism for Levinas is nothing else than atheism[47]:

> Der andere Gott dagegen (!) ist ein Protest gegen Auschwitz. Und dieser Gott erscheint im Antlitz des Anderen. In diesem Sinn fällt Gott ins Denken ein, aber in ein streng phänomenologisch verfaßtes Denken. Und das ist Ethik[48].

Finally, in this light, Messianism receives a new meaning with Levinas. Messianism proceeds from the surety that Someone shall come who will end and complete history. Now we know that history can go awry. Thus Wiesel suggests in *The Gates of the Forest*[49] that the Messiah who did not come in Auschwitz, will never come anymore. We must not preach about Messianism. Levinas speaks of '*une religion sans promesse*'[50], a religion that promises nothing: if the person fails in one's responsibility, the whole of history goes up in smoke. History does not necessarily have a happy ending[51]. In contrast with Rubenstein, for whom death is the only Messiah, in Levinas Messianism receives a new, ethical content:

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[46] R. BURGGRAEVE, *Het gelaat van de bevrijding. Een heilsdenken in het spoor van Emmanuel Levinas*, Tielt, Lannoo, 1986, p. 217.

[47] Therefore Levinas says: "de houding van een mensheid die het risico van het atheïsme aandurft: een risico dat de mens moet lopen maar ook te boven komen, en dat is de prijs voor de volwassenheid". See E. LEVINAS, *Het menselijk gelaat. Essays van Emmanuel Levinas* chosen and introduced by A. PEPERZAK, Baarn, Ambo, 1984, p. 41. On the 'atheism of the I', see also R. BURGGRAEVE, *Van zelfontplooiing naar solidariteit*, p. 99.

[48] E. LEVINAS, *Antlitz und erste Gewalt. Ein gespräch über Phänomenologie and Ethik*, in *Spuren in Kunst und Gesellschaft* 20 (1987), pp. 29-34, p. 31. See also: I. ANDERSON, *Ethics and Suffering since the Holocaust: Making Ethics "First Philosophy" in Levinas, Wiesel and Rubenstein,* New York, Routledge, 2016, esp. pp. 53-87 on Levinas ('The Call of the Other: Levinas Ethics').

[49] E. WIESEL, *The Gates of the Forest*, translated out of French by P. FRESNAYE, New York, NY, Avon, 1967, p. 225: "The Messiah who can come, but at Auschwitz did not come, has lost his meaning".

[50] F. POIRIÉ, *Emmanuel Levinas. Qui êtes-vous?*, p. 130.

[51] E. LEVINAS, *Le scandale du mal*, p. 34: "Ja, aber das Messianismus is für mich durch Auschwitz in Frage gestellt. Das muß ich einfach und ganz persönlich sagen. Man den Sinn der Erlösung eben anders denken. Dan nannte ich die Devotion ohne Versprechen. Die Liebe zu Gott is die Liebe zur Thora. Das heißt, die Anerkennung der Güte ist wichtiger als die Liebe zu Gott".

'the Messiah, that I am'. To be I is to be Messiah[52]. The Messiah is the just one who suffers and the one who takes upon himself the suffering of the other.

Such is the personal responsibility which the one person has towards the other that even God cannot dispense with it. Here we come to a final aspect of Levinas' God understanding. Evil is in his philosophy no mystical principle; it is the concrete insult that the one person does to the other. He points to the full autonomy of the insulted person and to the full responsibility of the one who touches a person. Sin cannot be erased by any rite, since no one, not even God, can take the place of the victim. We arrive at this point at one of the most provoking consequences of the Holocaust: in Levinas' philosophy, after Auschwitz religion has become an (exclusively) ethical matter. Human responsibility is such a serious matter that neither God's omnipotence, nor God's mercy dismisses the person (not even post-factum) from the seriousness of one's 'task outside one's own skin'[53]. "A world wherein forgiveness becomes omnipotent, becomes inhuman"[54]. Humanity after Auschwitz will have to make Holy History go further without theodicy-faith. More than ever, a plea shall be made for the Messianic possibilities of the I in each of us, inspired by the vulnerability of the other[55]. In Section Six of this book, we will confront this view with a Catholic understanding of a forgiving God[56].

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[52] R. Burggraeve, *Van zelfontplooiing naar solidariteit. Een ethische lezing van het verlangen: ontmoeting tussen psychoanalyse en Levinas,* Leuven, Acco, 1981, p. 72.

[53] In 1987 Levinas was interviewed concerning his attitude towards the Nazi-criminal Barbie. He was very clear: "Je vous dirais que 1'homme Barbie disparaît finalement derrière ce qu'il a fait et derriére ce à quoi il a été associé. Il n'y a aucune sanction possible contre lui: on n'a pas de sanction pour les crimes au-dessus de tout humain. Comme s'il y avait de l'humain jusque dans le crime!" F. Poirié, *Crime et humanité'. Interview avec Emmanuel Levinas*, in *Les dossiers de globe* 1 (1987), p. 21.

[54] E. Levinas, *Het menselijk gelaat. Essays van Emmanuel Levinas*, chosen and introduced by A. Peperzak, Baarn, Ambo, 1984, p. 46.

[55] Fortin develops in this context a 'Christology of grace' explicitly centered on the vulnerability of Christ. See: J.-P. Fortin, *Grace in Auschwitz: a Holocaust Christology,* Augsburg, Fortress Press, 2016, esp. Part II, Chapter 3: 'Kenotic Christ: Salvation in Weakness', pp. 125-190.

[56] A previous version published as D. Pollefeyt, *The Trauma of the Holocaust as a Central Challenge of Levinas' Ethical and Theological Thought,* in M.L. Littell – E. Geldbach – G.J. Colijn (eds.), *The Holocaust: Remembering for the Future II* on CD-ROM, Stamford, CT, Vista InterMedia, 1996.

Chapter Seven

The Encounter of Athens and Jerusalem in Auschwitz
Emil L. Fackenheim's Jewish Thought

Emil L. Fackenheim[1] is without any doubt one of the greatest Jewish thinkers of the last century and regarding Jewish reflection on the Holocaust he is unanimously recognised as one of the most eminent authors. His extensive *oeuvre*[2] constitutes a powerful and reasoned appeal for thinking about the reconstruction of a post-war philosophy—one that does not shun Auschwitz in order to sustain the fixedness of the philisophical status quo, whilst refusing at the same time to succumb to sheer despair when it comes to the possibility of philosophising after Auschwitz.

As a thinker, Fackenheim is a unique hybrid: his work brings together three heterogeneous perspectives. First of all Fackenheim has an authoritative knowledge of Western philosophy[3]. His meticulous philosophical exegesis of the work of, among others, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Heidegger intends to establish a critical dialogue with modern rationality

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[1] Emil Fackenheim was born in 1916 in the German industrial town of Halle. He grows up in a liberal and anti-Zionist environment. He studies at the *Hochschule für Wissenschafte des Judentums* in Berlin until he is arrested by the Nazi and transported to the concentration camp Sachsenhausen on the 10th of November 1938, after *Kristallnacht*. He is released after three months of internment. He leaves Germany immediately and arrives eventually in Canada after passing through England and Scotland. He finishes his education at the university of Toronto by achieving a doctorate in philosophy. He becomes a rabbi and in 1948 he starts lecturing at the university of Toronto. He marries in 1957, and becomes professor in 1961. From the sixties on, he devotes himself to the study of the Holocaust and visits the state of Israel for the first time in 1970. Upon receiving emeritus status, he settles down definitely in Israel with his family in 1983 where he lectures at the Hebrew university of Jerusalem until his passing in 2003.

[2] See, (among others), E. FACKENHEIM, *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections*, New York, NY, New York University Press, 1st ed., 1970; 2nd ed., 1972 [abbreviated to *Presence*]; ID., *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy. A Preface to Future Jewish Thought*, New York, Basic Books Inc., 1st ed., 1973; 2nd ed., 1980 [abbreviated to *Encounters*]; ID., *The Jewish Return into History. Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem*, New York, NY, Schocken, 1978 [abbreviated to *Return*]; ID., *To Mend the World. Foundations of Future Jewish Thought*, New York, NY, Schocken, 1982 [abbreviated to *Mend*]; ID., *The Jewish Bible after the Holocaust: a Re-reading*, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1991.

[3] See, among others, his famous work ID., *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought*, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1967.

and the shortcomings Auschwitz ultimately exposes therein. This is what we would like to call the universal dimension of his thought. Secondly, Jewish philosophy, according to Fackenheim, should gain in-depth knowledge in traditional Jewish sources: the bible as much as reflection on the bible, in particular the Talmud and the Midrash. In this way, Fackenheim's thought is *particular*, calling upon biblical exegesis, rabbinical deliberations, and medieval mystics as well as modern Jewish philosophy and theology (Buber, Rosenzweig, Strauss, Cohen). In this 'encounter' between Athens (universality of reason) and Jerusalem (particularity of tradition), Fackenheim draws a number of conclusions about mankind, the world and God. However, the specificity of Fackenheim's thought consists in the fact that this affair between philosophy and Judaism takes place not on neutral ground. Rather, it consists of a very *singular* perspective: the culmination of modern European history—thrown into total-debate—upon the evil of Auschwitz. Fackenheim is not only a survivor of this historic event[4], but is also particularly well acquainted with the scientific study of it. In his books, he frequently refers to the works of authorities such as Hannah Arendt, Raoul Hilberg, Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, and Jean Améry, but also to literature such as by the hand of Peter Haas and Zygmunt Bauman.

Those three perspectives intertwine in Fackenheim's thought. He moves with equal ease through the worlds of the Midrash and the *univers concentrationnaire* (Rousset) as within the more pure, eidetic enterprise of philosophy. What is more, these three perspectives continuously alternate, as if the play of colours in a kaleidoscope. That is why his thought can best be described as a philosophical meditation (universality) about the religious-ethical significance in Jewish perspective (particularity) of a unique historical event (singularity). Formulated in a more plastic way: the encounter of Athens and Jerusalem in Auschwitz. A greater challenge for thought is hardly imaginable.

Throughout these intersections Fackenheim hopes to find the categories and the foundation through which thought and life after Auschwitz can continue. This experiment in thought ranges over a period of more than forty years and contains about ten books and more than hundred

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[4] Cfr *supra*. Fackenheim is confined by the Nazi in the concentration camp *Sachsenhausen* from 9th of November 1938 until 8th of February 1939. See his E. Fackenheim, *Sachsenhausen 1938*: *Groundwork for Auschwitz*, in *Mid-stream: an Oecumenical Journal* 21 (1975) p. 27.

articles[5]. In this chapter we aim to concisely sketch the outlines of his thought. From this sketch it will appear that Jewish philosophy does not so much issue out of wonder (Plato), but rather finds its point of departure in a traumatic confrontation with evil as a historical reality[6].

I. Totalitarian Thought Under Critique

At the moment Jewish philosophy took the trauma of the Holocaust as its object of reflection (from the sixties on), two opposite tendencies quickly became apparent. On the one hand, some radical voices (in the spirit of Nietzsche) declared God dead and history meaningless[7]. On the other hand, some more 'conservative' voices (in the spirit of Leibniz) maintained that Auschwitz posed nothing new by way of a philosophical problem. The Holocaust can be entirely integrated in a rational-cosmic model of theodicy. It is thus that Maybaum developed the thesis of 'vicarious suffering' by the Jews at Auschwitz, at the hands of 'God's servant', Hitler[8].

The (provocative) point of departure of Fackenheim's approach consists precisely of the fact he refuses to get stuck in one or the other way of thinking. The first view (God is dead) constitutes slander towards God whereas the second view (God is the author of Auschwitz) is an insult for the victims of Nazism. According to Fackenheim, it remains the task of Jewish philosophy, also after Auschwitz, to think both God and mankind together[9]. The task that Hegel took as his was precisely to give to the true content of Christian faith the true form of speculative

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[5] The best bibliography is found in M.L. Morgan, *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim. A Reader*, Detroit, MI, Wayne State University Press, 1987. See also more recently: D. Rynhold, *Covenant, History and the Holocaust: Revisiting Emil Fackenheim's Jewish Philosophy*, in *Harvard Theological Review* 109 (2016) pp. 129-143.

[6] The same finding can be said about the Jewish thought of Rosenzweig and Levinas. See our contribution D. Pollefeyt – L. Anckaert, *Tussen verwondering en trauma. Rosenzweig, Levinas en Fackenheim: een joods-filosofisch perspectief*, in B. Raymaekers (red.), *Gehelen en fragmenten. De vele gezichten van de filosofie* (Acta of the 14th philosopher's day Leuven) Leuven, Peeters, 1993, pp. 159-164.

[7] R. Rubenstein, *De God van de joden na Auschwitz*, translated from English into Dutch by P. Telder, Utrecht, Ambo Boeken, 1968.

[8] I. Maybaum, *The Face of God after Auschwitz*, Polak & Van Gennep, New York, NY, 1965.

[9] E. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought*, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1967, pp. 160-222 ('The transfiguration of faith into philosophy').

thinking[10]. Fackenheim praises Hegel, not only because he has challenged the opposition between secular and religious thought and not only because of the historicity of this thought, but mainly because Hegel is the philosopher who has understood the real foundation of Jewishness, namely the absoluteness of at least two distinctions: that between God and man and that between the real God and the false idols[11]. It is precisely this contrast between the finite and the infinite, and between the particular and the universal that Hegel's philosophy intends to overcome. The central Hegelian category is 'mediation'. In a divine-human all-encompassing mediation process the infinite Divine self-concretises in the finite human existence, whereas, at the same time, and as part of this same mediation the particular and the finite are raised and transformed into Infinity. In this all-embracing mediation process reason permeates reality and employs this reality as resource for its own historical unfolding[12]. All that resists this permeation by reason is rejected as a negation and separation. The culmination point of reason's development is the moment where the alterity of God is conceived as the divine self-alterity of man. This implies that human autonomy is understood as more-than-human and the identity of the divine with the human has been achieved[13].

Jewishness, too, characterised by its absolute distinction between God and man, does not escape from this dialectic mediation, but becomes a moment in the unfolding process of reason, a moment that ultimately will be exceeded by the incarnation of God in Christ and in Hegel's own philosophy[14]. Jewishness thus needs to be understood within the evolution of a kind of universally valid philosophy, and what remains of Judaism at the end would be nothing other than a strange sort of specificity. Insofar as Jewishness resists this kind of view, it has become, according to Fackenheim, a 'problem' in Hegel's thought[15].

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[10] For this reason, Fackenheim saw profound engagement with the Hegelian system as the duty of any important (modern) attempt to relate God and man. In his authoritative book *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought* he considers Hegel as the greatest modern philosopher, though he feels obliged to ultimately reject the Hegelian system.

[11] R.L. RUBENSTEIN, *Emil Fackenheim's Radical Monotheism. A Review Essay*, in *Soundings*, Summer 1974, pp. 236-251, pp. 239-240.

[12] C. CHALIER, *Après la catastrophe. La pensée d'Emil Fackenheim*, in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 3 (1985) 342-361, p. 345.

[13] E. FACKENHEIM, *Presence*, p. 30.

[14] ID., *Encounters*, p. 88 (from the chapter '*Moses and the Hegelians. Jewish Existence in the Modern World*').

[15] See *Left-wing Hegelianism and the Jewish Problem*, in *Ibid.*, pp. 134-152.

The fundamental thesis in Fackenheim's *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought* now is that within the latter approach there is no place left for any such thing as revelation. Hegel lets religion be devoured by sheer human, speculative thought[16]. God has become the result of a human thought process, and even more so, he is that very thought process. Thinking is in fact an infinite activity, and an infinite activity is an activity of the infinite (which is God). The religious human being thinks God as he participates through thought, in the infinite divine activity.

In this way, according to Fackenheim, the biblical God, who wishes to be essentially different than the human being, is internalised[17]. Within Hegel's thought the vivid confrontation between the finite human existence and the Infinite is replaced by a concept[18] of Infinity that is understood as the immanent evolution of all-penetrating ideas in the direction of pure rationality[19]. And it is precisely in this process that Fackenheim sees the lurking danger of idolatry[20]. Analogous with the primitive human being, modern man attributes infinite power to something that is in reality just finite. Yet while the primitive human being attributes power to an external object (a stone, an animal), the modern god is 'internal' to man (in for example the idealistic belief in a higher Self, the humanistic hope for mankind that is potentially infinite in her possibilities for perfection, the Nietzschean or Marxist dream of a superior Man or Community, etc.).

However, this process of internalisation becomes dangerous when it is ideologically perverted, in other words, when it gets seized by an idolatrous desire to *literally* identify finiteness and infinity, as much in the individual as in the collective atmosphere. Numerous modern philosophers have met with the same fate of this ideological perversion. Fackenheim discusses[21] the example of the (fascist) perversion of Fichte's balanced propositions into rough and over-simplified Teutonic nationalism, whereby 'goodness' is no longer normative for 'true Germany', but conversely, where 'true Germany' becomes the only standard of 'the good'. All these ideologies have in common that they miss honest rationality, and therefore should no longer be considered as philosophies, but as idolatries.

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[16] Q. Lauer, *Emil Fackenheim's The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought*, in Id., *Essays in Hegelian Dialectic*, New York, Fordham University Press, 1977, p. 112.

[17] E. Fackenheim, *Encounters*, p. 188.

[18] M.A. Meyer, *Judaism after Auschwitz. The Religious Thought of Emil Fackenheim*, in *Commentary* 53 (1972) 55-62, p. 62.

[19] E. Fackenheim, *Quest for Past and Future. Essays in Jewish Theology*, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1968, p. 60.

[20] Id., *Encounters*, Chapter 4: *'Idolatry as modern possibility'*, pp. 176-198.

[21] Id., *Encounters*, p. 191.

Nazism realises for the first time the incredible progression from sheer ideology to meticulous and bureaucratic exertion. Hitler transforms his idolatrous phantasies into reality. The 'strange internal God' becomes an independent destructive power when idolatrous passions and phantasies take control over the faculties of reason and of the will. Only in this way is Nazism able to completely and effectively execute the 'modern' identification of the finite and the infinite. The *Führer* is no longer an external God, as is the case with the primitive human being, but an incarnation of the Nation. The Nation, in its turn, is then no longer a worshipping community, but realises instead her own essence as a completely identifying blind obedience and a total selflessness[22] towards the *Führer*, who is an incarnation of this community. Nazism locks up Germany (and the world!) in a demonic and idolatrous circle between the Nation and the *Führer*. The soil for this infinite circularity is the mortal fear of 'difference', the finite, the particular, the disturbing, that what cannot be integrated. This exclusive bond of mutual self-realisation is at the expense of every form of alterity. Both the (ethical) God of Jewishness and the (non-Aryan) human being are coerced to give up their alterity. And insofar as the other refuses to give up his fundamental and untouchable difference, the passion turns into grimness and aggression and incites to eliminate the other. This results in a world beyond good and evil in which there is no longer any place for the Jewish human being and for his/her ethical God. This is a world in which *Gott* is utterly and always *mit uns*. In other words, this God is no longer a critical 'opposite', but a numinous power that on the one hand stirs up the human being into a fascinating, blind, pathetic, and entirely irrational enthusiasm; but on the other hand through the numinous terror He/It scatters, every personal, responsible initiative is radically enfeebled. The outcome of totalitarian thought and totalitarian action is thus racism: the glorification of the same through the exclusion of strangeness.

II. A Philosophy of Difference

In the first paragraph we discussed how Fackenheim explicitly turns his back on every religious idealism in which the tension between the finite and the infinite is cancelled out and in which the divine is completely recuperated by the human. Upon deluding this tension, every

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[22] H. ARENDT, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York, Meridian, 1958, pp. 413-425.

form of alterity is destroyed, religion is perverted into idolatry, and the way is paved for the (theoretical and practical) idolatrous identification of God and mankind, at the expense of every form of heteronomy. Fackenheim considers the Holocaust as the ultimate expression and transcendence of the modern, noetic totalitarian thought. His critique of Western philosophy does not take place from a perspective that is *voraussetzungslos* or transcendental. His philosophy is instead characterised by a *parti pris* or an *expérience préphilosophique* (Wahl), namely the biggest Jewish trauma of the 20th century. Fackenheim argues in favour of the necessity of a kind of thought originating from particularity, such being the counterpart of a universally valid rational religion. From the perspective of Jewish thought, Fackenheim believes that authentic religion does not come about through a fusion of, but through a confrontation between the finite human being and the infinite God. Jewishness is the history of the relation between the universal God and a particular religious family, without both melting together (in contrast with the blend of the Nation and the *Führer*). Within Jewishness, there is no Hegelian mediation between finiteness and infinity. The Jew encounters a universal God, who is precisely God insofar as He irreducibly exceeds all finiteness and particularity.

This is why Fackenheim set out searching for a model in which the relation between God and man is no longer defined in terms of identification, but in the form of an encounter. It is in Martin Buber's philosophy that he has found such a philosophical (personalist, intersubjective) framework[23]. Fackenheim starts from Buber's insights about the *Ich-Du* relation and re-uses it to develop his own thinking about revelation. In Buber's philosophy God is not conceived of and experienced as a fascinating and horrifying power in which we participate and submerge. We encounter Him, by contrast, as a *Du*, a personal Identity who pays attention to me, and *vis-à-vis* Whom I can be an *Ich* and remain being an *Ich*. However much I confide in Him, I can never separate Him from his alterity or holiness. And however much I engage myself in this relationship, I'll never be degraded to an anonymous particle whose only fate is to submerge in totality. Through revelation, distance remains safeguarded. The paradox in revelation lies in the fact that on the emerging

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[23] See among others E. FACKENHEIM, *Martin Buber's Concept of Revelation*, in P.A. SCHILPP – M. FRIEDMAN, *The Philosophy of Martin Buber* (The library of living philosophers 12) Chicago, IL, Open Court, 1967, pp. 278-283.

of the infinite in history, the temporary and the eternal do not merge or destroy each other, but remain both intact.

The present of the Infinite in history is testified to in a dual manner: in 'fundamental experiences' (*root experiences*) and in 'pioneering experiences' (*epoch-making events*)[24]. Root experiences are religious experiences which form the basis of a new kind of faith. They indicate creative, extraordinary and historical experiences that are decisive and formative for Jewishness. Epoch-making events, by contrast, critically and constructively test the fundaments of Jewish belief. This renders faith vulnerable for history. In this way, the Enlightenment engendered a fruitful and engaging conversation with secularisation and required a new form of Jewish thought. It assessed the Jewish fundamental experiences by means of modern bible criticism and empirical philosophy[25]. Against Rosenzweig, Fackenheim asserts that something radically new can break into history in between Sinai and the days that the Messiah returns[26]. The traditional hermeneutical framework for the root experiences has till now testified of sufficient elasticity and absorption capacity in order to survive all the threats to her fundamental structure. Epoch-making events like the end of biblical prophecy, the revolt of the Maccabees, the destruction of the Second Temple, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, the Enlightenment and the foundation of the state of Israel make new demands upon Jewish religion, but they do not constitute the source of new faith. The old faith, by contrast, gets the opportunity to reformulate itself in the light of contemporaneous experiences.

III. Philosophy and Trauma

The ultimate touchstone today for this vulnerable position is for Fackenheim the massive Jewish drama of the 20th century: the extermination of six million Jews in the very heart of Christian and modern Europe. This event is often immediately—and in ways that are rather reductionist—recuperated in philosophical reflection as a paradigm of excessive evil. The (armchair) philosopher questions this symbol of evil with his *a priori* categories of thought, as if it were an abstract, massive and

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[24] Id., *Presence*, pp. 37-40. See also our contribution of B. Dupuy, *Un théologien juif de l'holocauste. Emil Fackenheim*, in *Foi et vie* 73 (1974) 11-21, p. 6.

[25] M.A. Meyer, *Judaism after Auschwitz. The Religious Thought of Emil Fackenheim*, in *Commentary* 53 (1972) 55-62, p. 61.

[26] E. Fackenheim, *Return*, pp. xi-xii.

a-historical givenness without any specific historical materiality. Ulti-mately, nothing much is left other than a stripped, dead term that has completely lost touch with the event itself.

In reflecting upon the Holocaust, according to Fackenheim, the phi-losopher has to do justice to the experience of both victims and survi-vors. But, as is precisely quintessential for philosophy, it must conduct such reflections in a distanced way. And in this reflection the peculiarity of the experience escapes. Talking about 'the' Holocaust and 'the' six million Jewish victims is in fact already obliterating the outrageous indi-vidual suffering of so many, rendering neither significance nor any kind of rationality. Such philosophical language use strips off the horrible character of the Holocaust and flees into abstractions and empty univer-sal substitutions for what in fact are an infinite number of particular events, each of them being an inexhaustible mystery of evil and human suffering. It is precisely this 'scandal of particularity' of Auschwitz that people tend to shun. German people connect it with Dresden, Ameri-cans with Hiroshima. Christians regret antisemitism in general, whereas communists establish memorials for victims of fascism in general, all while stripping the Jewish identity of the dead in death itself[27]. At this point enters the slippery slope of trivialising generalisations and 'obscene', usurping comparisons between, for example, a Nazi and an Israeli soldier. According to Fackenheim, the denial of the judeocide follows naturally from these.

The failure of the philosophical discourse in confrontation with Aus-chwitz neatly goes together with Fackenheim's critique of the kind of rationality that has nourished Western thought for centuries and that has gone from bad to worse in the 20th century through contact with the ideological-idolatrous unity of Nazism. Philosophy thus needs to ques-tion if it is at all possible to keep the very peculiar character of the Holocaust intact. Philosophy should resist every temptation to surpass the limited perspectives of survivors by means of the concept. One only has to read the testimonies of Wiesel, Levi, Améry or Kaplan to realise that the attempt to exceed the testimony only shows that one has never really profoundly understood it. "Where the holocaust is, there is no overcoming; and where is an overcoming, the holocaust is not"[28]. Philosophy after Auschwitz has to resist every desire for totalising

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[27] ID., *De laatste twintig jaar*, in *Wijsgerig perspectief op maatschappij en wetenschap* 18 (1977-1978) 62-69, p. 68.
[28] ID., *Mend*, p. 135.

identification of an 'ultimate whole of wholes' (which is in Hegel a divine monster). The Holocaust is, by contrast, 'a whole of outrageous horror' that renders every transcendent understanding impossible. The understanding of the particular in terms of the universal would only be possible through the previous resolution (*Endlösung*) of this terrible event.

The trauma of Auschwitz renders philosophy's pretentions to integrate history in a system radically ridiculous. Hegel's philosophical thought, in which the trials of history are subsumed in the progress from conscience towards freedom, is radically enforced, in this century, by the evident disproportion between evil and progress, to relinquish its pretentions, to accept its failure, and to acknowledge the danger of its own enterprise. Does one not rip man from his conscience by letting him forget that the judgement of history does not need to be reserved for the end of times, but that this judgement, by contrast, falls to exertion of conscience here and now, i.e. in the presence of actual evil that does not mediate anything?

It is at this point that we can demonstrate the connection Fackenheim sees between the Holocaust and postmodernity[29]. Auschwitz signifies the complete and irreversible failure of the spiritual hegemony of modern, totalizing rationalism. As certainty of reconciliation between reality and spirit is lost, and as the weight of this dark phase in history is no longer bearable, many people choose, along the lines of postmodernity, to withdraw into private religion, in which the real contact with history is lost. The failure of modern thought in the light of Auschwitz, has compelled the postmodern human being into a flight out of the obscure, fragmented and contaminated (historical, social and political) reality, in hopes to save unity and purity within oneself. Fackenheim recalls how, after the destruction of the Second Temple and the transformation of Jerusalem into a pagan city, Neo-Platonist, individualist, gnostic and apocalyptic tendencies have developed which also abstracted themselves entirely from history and from the world.

To the extent in which this postmodern religiosity strives for the direct and unmediated unity between finiteness and infinity, it resorts under Fackenheim's description of idolatry. It is in this sense that Fackenheim's plea in favour of a 'return to history'[30] needs to be understood. He thereby shows how reality's brokenness can be expressed without a

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[29] Id., *Mend*, p. 346.
[30] Id., *Return*, 1978.

recourse to modern rationalisation or to a postmodern escape from the world. The appropriate means is instead the Jewish Midrash, which is not a sort of insufficient demythologised philosophy that, by lack of concepts tries to resolve problems with stories and to solve paradoxes. Midrash is by contrast the story that always remains story, because it refers to the lived life itself and gives vent to its problems. All contradictions are endured without attempt of escape in one or the other spiritual world. It thus safeguards the contact with reality. The contradiction of reality are expressed in an open and honest way, without resolving them (*endlösen*). Fackenheim sees in the world of Elie Wiesel a new version of the fundamental dynamics of the Midrash.

The current philosophical methods, by contrast, are not able to maintain the peculiarity of the traumatic experience within the boundaries of their reflection. The Holocaust has radically and irreversibly broken open the pretentions of 'total' human thought. Yet, despite of the impossibility of bridging the gap breached within rationality, despite the nihilistic deceptions which come to gain sway over language itself, Fackenheim takes on again the task of thought. He does this as a *philosopher* in order to communicate the event to the universality of people. But he remains explicitly a *Jewish* philosopher at the same time in order to be able to confront words and concepts with a particular, i.e. situated human existence. Fackenheim opts for a sober, controlled, but intransigent description of concrete traumatic cases that are paradigmatic, and hence not to be rejected as exceptions, as they manifest evil in its totality. In other words, a philosophical discourse about Auschwitz is inevitably narrative.

In Fackenheim's narrative representation of the Holocaust, two constants are thus distinguishable: the 'logic of destruction' and the 'resistance'. The Holocaust is dominated by its own, unique logic: the physical and moral destruction of all that is not to be absorbed in the immanent, totalizing circle of *Volk* and *Führer*. The most characteristic product of this logic was a new kind of human being: the *Musselman*, the man who is already dead while he is still alive. The practice of Auschwitz reduced the Semite to a wandering corpse, covered with its own dirt. De-subjectivity constitutes the philosophical in-depth structure of the logic of destruction. On arrival in the camp, the human being is stripped of all that makes him into a person, and falls into a state that is even lower than the one of objects: shaved, disinfected, reduced to a number without a name. Everything lost its personal contours. The 'other' is downscaled to the grey uniformity of the 'same'. The *Musselman* was the most explicit exponent hereof. All are equal to all, yet without

thought, without reactions, without soul. All distinctions were obliterated in the camps: between men and women, adults and children, scholars and illiterates, between nuclear and larger families. All were categorised under one common denominator, living dead, walking corpses, vermin to be exterminated. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger saw the dying of one's own death as a fundamental part of one's own freedom. This freedom could only be lost accidentally. In Auschwitz, by contrast, the loss of this freedom was an essential givenness and surviving was only an accidental fact. In Auschwitz, it was no longer an individual who dies, but a *specimen*. This process of depersonalisation concentrated in the first instance only on Jews, but its consequences mark the whole human condition. Philosophy needs to expose itself to this new aporia, which raises from the necessity to listen to the *Musselman*. His death forever affects the death of those who have (accidentally) escaped from this procedure. And all of us have actually escaped from it[31].

Yet, according to Fackenheim the question is not why it is possible that so many became *Musselmänner*, but why some did *not* become *Musselmänner*[32]. There were indeed some individuals in the camps who resisted, thanks to an unknown will to live, and against every force to moral self-destruction, and who fought for living and even dying in a self-conscious way. Even though there were only a few who resisted in this way, and even though this resistance was only possible for a very short time, it does show that life—in opposition to philosophy—has not been entirely paralysed. Resistance is in fact the rupture of the closed immanent circularity between finiteness and infinity. It is the refusal to be stripped from one's alterity. It is also the fundamental aversion to the deathly game that compels me to reduce the other to an exponent of an anonymous system. When there is an attempt to reduce death to something banal, life no longer has any need of sanctification. It simply *is* sacred. This fact is in itself surprising and it is of decisive importance for Fackenheim's thought. These forms of resistance do not result from speculative thought, but they constitute the existential flesh-and-blood answers of ordinary people. And these existential answers—arising not from philosophy but from life itself—need to be interrogated regarding their universal significance. The 'paralysis of the metaphysical capacity'[33]

[31] ID., *The Holocaust and Philosophy*, in *The Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985) 505-515, p. 511.

[32] ID., *Mend*, pp. 201-225.

[33] See also T. ADORNO, *Negative Dialektik*, Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main, 1966, pp. 335 & 354.

of the human being constituted a *novum* in history. But the central fact is now that there is also a *novum* to be found in the resistance of the most isolated victims. Philosophy thus needs to learn from life and adopt the form of resistance by which this life held out. From an epistemological viewpoint, a resistance, in the form of thought, will be, according to Fackenheim, the only way in which we can think authentically about the Shoah.

IV. God and Ethics

How can thought again take form after Auschwitz? On reflecting on the drama of Auschwitz we find that this historic event has been a reality, albeit one that should not have been. For thought, Auschwitz means it should have been resisting[34]. In this way, through this traumatic event, philosophy is deprived of its serenity and incited to bear witness to the irreparable. The call to communicate what is non-communicable becomes a new requirement directed at philosophy—to formulate an answer to the indifferent frivolity of anonymous violence. If we want to safeguard what remains of the humanity within us, then we need to dwell, according to Fackenheim, within the realm of thought, in spite of the slur that mars its foundations. If we, by contrast, relinquish the demands of thought, we legitimate nihilism and resign to a sort of faith or confidence that backs out of every form of questioning, and we refuse to hear the cries of the victims of Auschwitz. The negative testimony against this Nazi idolatry is for Fackenheim *ipso facto* a positive testimony in favour of being human.

Fackenheim notices the emergence of this testimony in the actual Jewish life. Jews today adhere to Jewish identity and live as Jews. They subscribe to the Jewish hope and are optimistic with regard to human goodness (or at least, the human capacity thereto). In the light of Auschwitz, this is not evident in the least. Why did the survivor of Auschwitz not commit suicide but did he or she choose to have children? According to Fackenheim, this irreducible resistance is bearer of sense. It is not philosophy, but Jewish life itself that has given an answer (and not a philosophical declaration) to Auschwitz. The uncompromising

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[34] R. Munk, *Authentiek denken vanuit de openbaring. Een introductie tot het denken van Emil L. Fackenheim*, in H.J. Heering (ed.). *Vier joodse denkers in de twintigste eeuw. Rosenzweig Benjamin Levinas Fackenheim*, Kampen, Kok Kampen, 1987, 70-97, p. 82.

decision to survive needs to be understood as an answer to an obligation that itself it not to be compromised. In other words, only an unconditional (categorical) imperative force can clarify the absolute character of this new Jewish life. And in Fackenheim's opinion, absolute imperatives in Judaism arise only from absolute sources. In Judaism there is only one such source: the living, historical God who spoke from Mount Sinai and still appeals to us. At first Fackenheim called this divine imperative 'the 614th commandment'. Presumably not any written passage of a contemporaneous Jewish thinker is as famous as the 614th commandment[35]:

> We are, first, commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. We are commanded, secondly, to remember in our very guts and bones the martyrs of the Holocaust, lest their memory perish. We are forbidden, thirdly, to deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with him or with belief in him, lest Judaism perish. We are forbidden, finally, to despair of the world as the place which is to become the kingdom of God, lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is dead or irrelevant and everything is permitted. To abandon any of these imperatives, in response to Hitler's victory at Auschwitz, would be to hand him yet other, posthumous victories[36].

This passage has had an enormous influence on the Jewish religious confession as well as on every political and social level of Jewish society. In *La souffrance inutile*, Levinas writes, clearly under the influence of Fackenheim, that:

> To renounce after Auschwitz this God absent from Auschwitz—no longer to assure the continuation of Israel— would amount to finishing the criminal enterprise of National Socialism, which aimed at the annihilation of Israel and the forgetting of the ethical message of the Bible, which Judaism bears, and whose multi-millennial history is concretely prolonged by Israel's existence as a people (...) The Jew, after Auschwitz, is pledged to his faithfulness to Judaism and to the material and even political conditions of its existence[37].

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[35] E. FACKENHEIM, *Return*, pp. 23-24.

[36] Quoted in ID., *The 614th Commandment*, in J.K. ROTH – M. BERENBAUM (eds.), *Holocaust. Religious and Philosophical Implications*, New York, Paragon House, 1989, 291-295, p. 295.

[37] E. LEVINAS, *Entre-Nous: Thinking-of-the-other*, trans. M.B. Smith – B. HARSHAV, New York, NY, Continuum, p. 85. Originally published ID., *La souffrance inutile*, in J. ROLLAND (red.), *Emmanuel Levinas (Les cahiers de la nuit surveillée 3)* Paris, Lagrasse, 1984, p. 336. See also about Fackenheim: E. LEVINAS, *Le 614° commandement*, in *Arche* 291 (1981) pp. 55-57.

In later works Fackenheim uses the term *Commanding Voice of Auschwitz* to take the imperative from the strictly religious sphere and give it a broader philosophical base. This 'commanding voice of Auschwitz' requires that Jews, above all, do not provide Hitler with posthumous victories through assisting him in realising his goal, namely the negation of the Jewish God, the destruction of Jewish ethics and the extermination of the Jewish people. Not any Jew should do today what Hitler has not been able to realise. In a paradoxical sense, Hitler has made a necessity of Judaism after Auschwitz. In Fackenheim's view, every Jew who has stayed Jewish since 1945, has reacted affirmatively to this commanding Voice. Since the Voice has spoken, there has come an end to the distinction between secularised (or cultural) Jews and believing Jews. The secularised Jew hears this commandment also. The believing one hardly hears more. He perceives the Commander (*metzoveh*) through the commandment (*mitzvah*). Again, the Jew is a witness of God in the world. Through his survival he has transformed his being a victim into a testimony against the demonic forces of Auschwitz, wherever in the world. The Nazis stripped off the Jews from their humanity and denied them every right to exist. By their refusal to be destroyed by this logic, the Jews represent humanity. The Jews are one with humanity in and through their particularity and it is only from this stance that they can talk about Hiroshima, My Lai or Cambodia. This is their testimony *against* the idolatry and *in favour of* the true ethical God. While the fundamental experience of God's saving presence in history has not been able to resist the demanding critique of the Holocaust as an *epoch-making* event, Fackenheim has, in the light of the contemporaneous experience in Auschwitz, yet formulated faith anew in the ethical presence of God in history. God Himself reveals himself in the midst of the catastrophe as an absolute protest against the idolatrous identification of finiteness and infinity. By the claiming attitude of the dialogical (*Ich-Du*) distance between God and man (cfr. *supra*), the revealing God unmasks the Nazist *Gott mit uns* as a scandalous and literally life-threatening lie. The God of Israel constitutes, through His irreducible alterity, the radical refusal to be mastered by any human striving for divinisation whatsoever. Even more so, as non-reducible alterity, He is in the midst of ultimate evil, a (literally) revealing unconditional claim to respect the other in his alterity. In Fackenheim's view, God reveals, in the midst of the most radical degradation that man is made in His inalienable image. To deny this divine revelation, is to hand the world over to the demonic urge to identify the finite with the infinite. A world in which the finite human

being is convinced of having the infinite entirely on his side, is a world in which everything is permitted. Only a Voice coming from somewhere completely else, is able to breach and disrupt the closed circularity of endless sameness. According to Fackenheim, Auschwitz is hence the re-actualisation of the Jewish *root experience* of God's ethical presence in history.

The question remains on which grounds the 614th commandment can be observed. Fackenheim uses the Heideggerian ontic-ontological circle to found the 614th commandment as ontological possibility[38]. This happens by giving it a foundation (*Boden*) in the (ontic) reality of Auschwitz itself. The resistance of the victims testifies to the possibility of thinking authentically *during* the Holocaust. That is why such authentic thought is for us still possible, *after* Auschwitz (and insofar as it is possible, it is obligatory as well)[39]. The 614th commandment receives thus a foundation in the very event itself, namely, in the resistant attitude by those who are victims of the logic of destruction. Their unique way of acting does not only constitute the base of their resistance, but already forms part of it. The resistance of the victims was an (ontic) *way of being* for them. Resistance should thus become for our thought an ultimate, ontological category. And the kind of philosophical thought that has defined and defended this *category* of resistance as *ontological*, is in fact compelled to become *deontological*, which means as much as that it results in an imperative. The Idea of humanity *can* be destroyed, but as the humanity has been restored by some, the Idea of humanity *can* and *should* be restored[40]. In other words, it is precisely through the awareness that the horrible inhumanity *may not* get any chance, that the difference is shown: not everything is evil!

According to Fackenheim the state of Israel is the practical, paradigmatic post-Holocaust expression of Jewish militancy. It is the symbol of the hope that there should not, cannot and will not be a second Auschwitz. The whole Israeli nation represents on a collective level what every survivor is on an individual level: a living testimony in favour of humanity against the demons of the false, totalitarian infinity[41]. The state of Israel is the most far-reaching collective Jewish enterprise to

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[38] E. FACKENHEIM, *Mend*, pp. 160-165.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 249.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 276.
[41] ID., *The Holocaust and the State of Israel: Their Relation*, in E. FLEISCHNER (ed.), *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, New York, KTAV, 1977, 205-215, p. 211.

vanquish the Holocaust, not in theory or through the return to an inse-
cure existence in the Christian world, but through the creation of the
biological and spiritual conditions by which the Jewish people is again
able, after two thousand years, to take the responsibility for the future
into their own hands. After Auschwitz the mission of the Jewish people
is, in other words, no longer the proclamation of God's saving presence
in the world, but the announcement of the ethical God of history. In
this way, Fackenheim has essentially brought back religion to an ethical
religion, in the same way as Levinas did.

V. The Terror of Ethics?

In Fackenheim's theology, it becomes clear that it is impossible to
affirm God's wholesome, saving presence in history without at the same
time affirming the rootedness in speaking ethically about God. Every
spiritualising or ontologising speech about the mercy/grace of God with-
out ethical foundation is dangerous and dehumanising. In Fackenheim's
view, speaking about God's salvation can never be loosened from the
ethical. The unmasking of evil as evil itself is at the same time the rev-
elation of our (active) connection with and of our (passive) being ani-
mated by the absolute good, which is the good that we no longer dare
to name. Auschwitz brings proof that the unmasking of evil certainly
does not necessarily realise the eschatology of the good: once in the gas
chamber, one is inevitably slaughtered. And yet, the naïve, ridiculed and
idiotic resistance to the last moment against evil is not without sense.
Powerlessness and senselessness do not coincide. In the moment of resist-
ance, however weak and fleeting it may be, there is an awakening of faith
that believes it is not yet a lost cause, that Someone vouches for this
resistance. In other words, salvation can be found in ethics according to
Fackenheim. Only in the unmasking resistance is there *almost* an awak-
ening of God. The absolute protest in Auschwitz is the only locus where
I can be touched by the saving intervention and presence of God and
where the idea can be opened up that there is something, in this absolute
absurdity, which can render death more bearable—not in a promised
eschaton, but in the actual response to the commanding Voice itself.
We already indicated how Fackenheim's supra-naturalistic, ethical and
historical concept of God can be understood as a critique of the imma-
nent concept of God of the Nazis. In the Nazi *Gott mit uns,* every criti-
cal, ethical 'Beyond' is absent. Religion is entirely recuperated for the

glorification of sameness. In our postmodern epoch we notice however how the immanence and the nearness of the divine is precisely emphasised again in the religious experience. God is again experienced through feeling or in nature, rather than in ethics, in history or in transcendence. The divine is in many cases no longer thought of or experienced as a supernatural moral reality, but rather as a numinous, impersonal and a-historical Power. Fackenheim's vision allows us to formulate an unambiguous and legitimate ethical critique of those new experiences, to the extent to which they obviously demonstrate similarities with the impersonal and unethical Nazi concept of God. One could even go so far as arguing that the postmodern life style broke through/emerged so late in the rest of the 20th century precisely because of the fear for such a critique in which the similarities of the postmodern pagan religiosity with the numinous, mythological and particularistic character of Nazism are emphasised[42].

Fackenheim's thought can be questioned in the following sense: does it not ignore, by strictly emphasising 'the distinction' or 'the difference' between God and human being, the valuable elements that can be discovered and safeguarded in postmodern religious movements, like their emphasis on the sensational, spiritual and the pastoral-healing, or their attention for ecological matters. Fackenheim talks about religion in almost exclusively ethical terms, which is, in terms of doing the good all by neglecting/obliterating other elements of religion such as comfort/consolation, charity, and hope. What happens however if the human being voluntarily fails and falls short, or is confronted with the limits of his own being or his own capacities in such an ethical religion? An ethical God only judges and condemns. Thus arises the potential danger of an 'ethical terror'. In Chapter Four of this book, we demonstrated with Haas[43] that Nazism can be understood as a closed, almost puritan ethical code, that however new it may have been in the history of Western morality, is nonetheless derived from material on hand, such as the idea of legal self-defence, the theory of the justified war, the emphasis on obedience, duty and ascesis, the glorification of patriotism etc. According

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[42] The Leuven philosopher Frans De Wachter shows that the resemblance between postmodernity and Nazism is the reason why the breakthrough of postmodernity has been so long in coming. See F. De Wachter, *Ethiek in de postmoderne cultuur*, in Id. (ed.), *Over nut en nadeel van het postmodernisme voor het leven*, Kapellen, Uitgeverij Pelckmans, 1993, 165-181, p. 169.

[43] P. Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz: the Radical Challenge of Nazi Ethic*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1992.

to Haas, ruthlessness in ethical perspective is a fundamental characteristic of Nazism. The one who did not or could not observe the ethical prescription of Nazism, had to be punished unrelentingly or even eliminated. It should not be surprising that Fackenheim has voiced destructive criticism of Haas' interpretation on this point[44]. Fackenheim legitimately points out that Haas confuses the concept 'ethics' with the concept '*Weltanschauung*'[45].

In conclusion, the question could be raised whether Fackenheim's thought complies with its central criterion itself unto the end (and not grant Hitler post-humous victories), particularly regarding its political consequences. It is true that the notion of the 'holiness of Jewish life' after Auschwitz can be easily abused in order to carry out a rigid and blind nationalistic policy. The state of Israel[46] is still exposed to the risk of succumbing to a policy in which (the) difference is excluded. It struck us that in the entire work of Fackenheim, this critical note on the potential violence of one's own story could not at any place be traced back. In Fackenheim's work, the idea is nowhere to be found that the Jew, as well has the duty to see the difference in the Palestinian as a divine challenge to exceed the own closed, nationalistic *Weltanschauung*. Of course we are thoroughly conscious of the tragic complexity in which the Jewish-Palestine question is to be found. The Palestine represents 'the difference' in Israel, but Israel represents 'the difference' in the Arabic world, that is partly Islamic, partly Christian. In the Middle East Jews and Palestinians are always at the same time autochthon and stranger, as we will discuss in a later chapter. Fackenheim's thought would attest to even more honesty and humanity if it in its own account too would struggle with this complex and difficult relation between the same and the other—a struggle which the state of Israel is intensely going through today and in which it meets all difficulties and oppositions related to it. That is presumably the only true way for the ethical message of Auschwitz to fully take shape [47].

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[44] E. Fackenheim, *Nazi Ethic, Nazi Weltanschauung and the Holocaust. A Review Essay*, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 83 (1-2) (1992) pp. 167-192.

[45] See Chapter Four: *The Morality of Auschwitz?*

[46] See Chapter Twenty: *Politics and Ethics in the Land of Israel.*

[47] A previous version published as D. Pollefeyt, *Das jüdische Denken Emil L. Fackenheims oder die Begegnung von Athen und Jerusalem in Auschwitz*, in J. Valentin – S. Wendel (ed.), *Jüdische Traditionen in der Philosophie des 20*, Jahrhunderts, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000, pp. 196-213.

Section Five

Sociological and Anthropological Responses

Chapter Eight

Is Modernity To Blame for the Holocaust?

In this book, the Holocaust is not only approached as a challenge to Christianity, but to the modern world as well. Within the insightful and authoritative[1] work, *Modernity and the Holocaust*[2], Zygmunt Bauman[3] proposes "to treat the Holocaust as a rare, yet significant and reliable test of the hidden possibilities of modern society"[4]. Herein the Holocaust reveals the possibilities of modern life itself in a paradigmatic way. In his view, the Holocaust was more than a mere cultural deviation from the otherwise uninterrupted route of modern development, more than a cancerous swelling on the otherwise healthy body of civilised modern society. The Holocaust was not simply an antithesis of modernity and

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[1] See the reviews of his book in important journals, such as *Times Literary Supplement* 4542 (1990), p. 423 (D. Cesarini); *Journal of Historical Geography* 18(4) (1992), pp. 464-469 (A. Charlesworth); *Patterns of Prejudice* 24 (1990), pp. 52-55 (P.S. Cohen); *The New York Review of Books* 28.9.1989, pp. 63-72 (I. Deak); *New Oxford Review* 51 (1990), pp. 28-31 (J.B. Elshtain); *Partisan Review* 58 (1991), pp. 68-77 (E. Kurzweil); *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 3(5) (1990), pp. 337-342 (A. Milchman – A. Rosenberg); *American Journal of Sociology* 97(5) (-1992), pp. 1521-1523 (M. Postone); *Australian Historical Studies* 25(98) (1992), pp. 161-162 (W.D. Rubinstein); *Economic and Political Weekly* 27(9)(1992), pp. 459 (S. Seidman); *Sociology* 26(3) (1992), pp. 507-508 (B.S. Turner); *Praxis International* 12(4) (1993), pp. 371-386 (A.J. Vetlesen); *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 27(3) (1991), pp. 429-433 [G. Wickman].

[2] Z. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989.

[3] Zygmunt Bauman was born in Poland in 1925 and died January 9, 2017 in England. He was married (1948) and father of three children. He received his doctoral degree in Sociology in 1956 at the University of Warsaw. Bauman taught at this University until 1968 and published in many languages. From 1968 to 1974, he taught at the University of Tel-Aviv. In 1974, he became head of the Department of Social Studies of the University of Leeds (England). From 1990 until his passing, he was professor emeritus at the same University. He has published *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (1987), *Postmodernism* (1988), *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1992) and *Postmodern Ethics* (1993). See further in P. Platt (ed.), *The Academic Who's Who 1973-1974. University Teachers in the British Isles in Arts, Education and Social Studies*, London, Adam & Charles Black, 1973, p. 29.

[4] Z. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 12.

all it stands for, but ultimately an expression of it. The processes of extermination

> did not betray the spirit of modernity (...), did not (...) depart from the main track of the civilizing process. They were the most consistent (...) expressions of that spirit. (...) They showed what the rationalizing, designing, controlling dreams and efforts of modern civilization are able to accomplish if not mitigated, curbed or counteracted[5].

The Holocaust was the consequence of the moral 'sleeping pills' that were carefully administered by modern technique and its bureaucracy, the typical 'value-free' products of modern rationality.

After reading Bauman's work, it becomes impossible to strategically evade Auschwitz by considering it a relapse into old barbarity. Bauman's questions are acutely disturbing since *our* culture and *our* society would be essentially no different than the culture and society that produced Auschwitz.

> The conditions propitious to the preparation of genocide are thus special, yet not at all exceptional. Rare, but not unique. Not being an immanent attribute of modern society, they are not an alien phenomenon either. As far as modernity goes, genocide is neither abnormal nor a case of malfunction[6].

For Bauman, then, genocidal evil is not merely the consequence of a sudden outburst of evil tendencies that are normally asleep in the depths of the human soul. Even if the personal hostility between Jews and non-Jews was at times very strong, the Holocaust only became possible when a modern machine of murder was completely isolated from the inter-individual sphere wherein morality finds its origin. By understanding the Holocaust as a diabolic manifestation of premodern, uncivilised society, modern society attempts to avoid Bauman's challenging claims. For this reason, Bauman is rather pessimistic about the possibility of escaping another Holocaust in the future. Quoting Weizenbaum, he concurs that:

> The same logic, the same cold and ruthless application of calculating reason, slaughtered at least as many people during the next twenty years as had fallen victim to the technicians of the thousand-year Reich. We have learned nothing. Civilization is as imperilled today as it was then[7].

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[5] Z. BAUMAN, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 93.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[7] J. WEIZENBAUM, *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation*, San Francisco, Freeman, 1976, p. 256. Quoted in BAUMAN, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 115.

One crucial aspect of Bauman's theory that warrants more in-depth discussion is his view on the pre-societal origin of morality. Bauman argues against the prevailing sociological idea of society as an immense factory that produces morality. He distrusts the common thesis that social life is automatically a respectable and humanising factor for ethics. He instead contends that human conscience is "ready formed"[8] before the process of socialisation begins. Human conscience is a given for the collective body, just as the biological is for the constitution of an individual. In short, ethical possibilities are not invented by the process of socialisation; socialisation merely manipulates this ethical capacity. As such, the Holocaust is a typical example of the evil manipulation (in fact, neutralisation) of humanity's inherent moral capacity. At the same time, this 'ready formed' capacity also made it possible for some human beings to resist the forces of the Nazi society.

> The few who stood up against cruelty did not have norms or social sanctions to support them and reassure. They were loners, who in justification of their fight against evil could not quote one of their distinguished ancestors: *Ich kann nicht anders*[9].

The possibility of resisting socialisation indicates that the moral distinction between good and evil cannot be legitimised by referring to the social forces that reward or punish good and evil.

But how then do humans develop this capacity of ethical resistance, if it is not the result of social forces? For Bauman, "responsibility, this building block of all moral behaviour, arises out of the proximity of the other (...). Proximity means responsibility, and responsibility is proximity"[10]. At this point, Bauman makes use of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, who describes how ethical responsibility is born in the concrete meeting with the vulnerability of the face of the other. It is this intersubjective *face à face* context that is threatened and sometimes even destroyed by modernity, as became exceptionally clear in the Holocaust. The problem is, however, that Levinas' philosophy is no great help in answering the question of *how* this capacity to be touched ethically by the other is developed. Insofar as he analyses the ethical structure of the subject, Levinas' philosophy could be characterised as a "transcendental philosophy of ethics". For him, ethics is a fundamental basic possibility wherein humans discover themselves as being situated, even

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[8] Z. BAUMAN, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 178.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 111.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 184.

before they consciously choose to be ethical. Although Levinas does not speak about the way this ethical possibility develops psychologically, socially or historically, ethics is surely not to be understood as a mechanical principle of 'cause-effect', as in physics.

Moreover, the encounter with the proximate other never occurs in an empty social place. From their birth, individuals are under the influence of social forces; there is no single point in human life where one can completely withdraw from the formative influences of social forces. Already etymologically, the concept of *con-scientia* displays the social character of every ethics: it is a 'knowing together' or possibly a 'knowing in confrontation with others'. Conscience is likewise characterised by historicity. Only step-by-step can human beings become conscious of their responsibility. While a child remains largely dependent upon the rules of his/her immediate social context, the adolescent will develop an ethical attitude out of his/her own autonomy but always in dialogue with others. It is consequently difficult to separate social from more fundamental, anthropological elements in ethical formation.

Bauman does not deny the influence of social forces in the development of moral capacity. He does, however, make an important distinction between the inter-individual ('social') and the structural ('societal') realm.

> The factors responsible for the presence of moral capacity must be sought in the social, but not in the *societal* sphere. Moral behaviour is conceivable only in the context of coexistence, of 'being with others', that is, a social context[11].

The fundamental difference between these spheres is the proximity or distance between individuals in the same physical space. Responsibility depends upon proximity. When physical barriers are set up between people, the force of the face of the other is weakened, as was the case in the Holocaust and is also demonstrated by the experiments of Milgram[12].

By situating the origin of morality in the physical proximity and even visibility of the other, Bauman uses a common but in our view fundamentally mistaken interpretation of Levinas' thought, in which the face of the other is reduced to the physical *visage* of the other. Even if Levinas' philosophy of the face begins phenomenologically with the material and corporal proximity of the other, the face is precisely what never can be

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 179.
[12] S. MILGRAM, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, New York, Harper Colophon Books, 1975.

reduced to its physical appearance. The other is infinitely more and different than the material representation I have of him/her. The other can never be reduced to his/her 'plastic' form. For Levinas, we are responsible for the other who appears to us as a non-localisable and non-tangible identity. If the face is only meaningful to me in so far as the other is psychically close and visible to me, then I would only be responsible when the other appears to me here and now. But this is precisely the central point of Levinas: we are first of all responsible for the one who has no face (*le dévisage*)[13]. If I reduce the other to his physical visage, then I am already killing the other. The reduction of the face of the other to the physical visage is already an inhuman act since the other is irreducible to his/her physical appearance. As such, I am (transphenomenologically) responsible for the non-appearing other and for the all others (the universality of the face). This means that morality for Levinas is not to be reduced to a kind of automatic answer to the physical proximity of the other in the social, pre-societal sphere.

In the same line, the philosopher Arne Vetlesen asks the question why physical proximity would make any moral difference[14], as Bauman contends. Vetlesen argues that proximity also contains a non-physical dimension. When we say someone is close to us, we express a form of human commitment that cannot be qualified in term of physical distance or proximity. According to Bauman's position on the relation between moral responsibility and proximity, it would have been a great difference in the Milgram experiments if the experimental subjects were told that the screaming person behind the screen was someone they knew. In other words, knowing or not-knowing interferes with the spatial dimension of proximity. This means that someone we do not see can touch us morally more deeply than someone we see at that same moment. Our moral attitude depends upon the meaning a person has for us. The spacial component can be overcome by social factors, such as knowing or not-knowing the other, or all kinds of ruling social stereotypes. As a result, it is difficult to establish a direct connection between human proximity and moral responsibility. Human proximity or distance is in itself not a sufficient explanation for moral or immoral actions. My

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[13] E. Levinas, *Antlitz und erste Gewalt. Ein Gespräch über Phänomenologie und Ethik. Interview with M.J. Lenger*, in *Spuren in Kunst und Gesellschaft* 20 (1987), pp. 29-34.

[14] A.J. Vetlesen, *Why Does Proximity Make a Moral Difference? Coming to Terms with a Lesson Learned from the Holocaust*, in *Praxis International* 12(4) (1993), pp. 371-386. See also his *Perception, Empathy and Judgement. An Inquiry into the Preconditions of Moral Performance*, Pennsylvania, Penn State University, 1993, pp. 92-138.

ethical commitment can grow when my physical distance to the other becomes smaller, but it should not be so. The known, absent other can touch me more than the unknown, present other.

Living together is always a social enterprise. Being together is always a 'we'-experience, never only an 'I'-experience. It is in this context that the individual is socialized. For Bauman, this social context is pre-societal. Vetlesen, however, asks what the specificity of this pre-societal context is, when even the mutual proximity cannot be seen as distinctively characteristic with the social sphere. Vetlesen proposes a new distinction, between the small-scale and the large-scale context of acting[15]. For participants in the moral realm, this distinction makes the real moral difference. The small-scale context is characterised by proximity and moral commitment wherein relations are approached in terms of *face à face* encounters between significant, concrete others, who have personal, emotional connections. The large-scale context is characterised by distance and moral neutrality wherein relations are seen in terms of physical absence. Since encounters occur only indirectly through media, the other is a general and anonymous other with who I have no personal, emotional connections.

This distinction rightly recognises Bauman's important insight that physical distance implies moral indifference, but does not require understanding the moral capacity of the individual as an asocial, 'ready formed' possibility. The moral capacity is developed in the small-scale social environment (family, church, school, youth movement, etc.), or is not developed adequately at all, because there is no full and integral replacement for the small-scale institutions of socialisation. It is only in the microsphere that one can learn respect, compassion, care and empathy for the other. The basic moral attitude is not 'pregiven', but is created in the concrete small-scale living together with others. Therefore, what the Nazi's had to do (and effectively did) was not simply to place the Jew out of sight, but—much more fundamentally—to entirely eliminate him/her from the small-scale environment. Through the processes of bureaucratic definition and concentration of the victims, the Nazi's destroyed the social conditions through which a moral attitude can above all be developed and remain in existence as a relational, human event.

Thanks to the distinction between large-scale and small-scale (Vetlesen), we can retain the insight that ethics cannot develop if the other is absent, invisible, unknown or not immediately accessible. The

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[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 381-382.

invisible other remains in this interpretation a morally lost other. But the view of Vetlesen is also somewhat problematic. Vetlesen, like Bauman, creates a very sharp contrast between the life in the small, non-technical, concrete, local communities, on the one hand, and the modern, calculated, rigid and universal monstrous social institutions, on the other hand. In such a presentation, social ethics is reduced to an ethic of 'small goodness'. The modern world becomes a world without neighbour, an inhuman world, full of abstract and anonymous relations of great distances. The theme of the proximity can become the basis for a radical anti-modern attitude. In the name of Auschwitz, then, we come to a radical renunciation of the modern world, which is seen as a terrible combination of industrial monsters, military machines, formalised and corrupted structures (church, army, justice, politics), political scandals, as well as old and new forms of concentration camps. The dream of a new community, or theologically the dream of the ultimate Reign of God, can only happen in the margin of this contaminated history, in the escape into a small, warm, close, particular and emotional narrative community of salvation, with gnostic allures, looking down on the godless and self-destructive world, disapprovingly shaking one's head.

As a critique of this picture of the modern world, the French philosopher Paul Ricœur writes: "If I reduce the theology of the neighbour to a theology of encounter, then I repudiate the fundamental meaning of God's Reign over history"[16]. For Ricœur, the antithesis between personal and institutional relations is only one moment in his thought. He tries to think together the love for neighbour (small-scale) and the love for fellow humans (large-scale) as two dimensions of the same human history, as two faces of the same human love. The goal of administrative organisation and societal structures is precisely to give a collective dimension to righteousness, through which the invisible other can come to his/her rights. In this sense, the bureaucracy of the Holocaust was more a perversion than the real ultimate consequence of modernity and its structures. Accordingly, we can see the concrete commitment to our own children and our (financial) commitment to children in the Third World as two sides of the same ethical engagement. The first love is intimate, subjective and exclusive, the second love is abstract but can include more

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[16] P. Ricœur, *Histoire et vérité* (Collections Esprit), Paris, Seuil, 3rd ed., 1955, pp. 99-110 ('Le socius et le prochain'), p. 105: "Dès que je réduis la théologie du prochain à une théologie de la rencontre, je manque la signification fondamentale de la Seigneurie de Dieu sur l'histoire".

people. But both perspectives need not exclude each other. Even if I love my own children intensely, when the children of the neighbourhood come to play, I will fill the glasses of lemonade all the same. I do not love these children as personally as my own children, but in another, more universal way.

Already in Aristotle's *Politica* we find that politics and ethics do fully coincide. The community is orientated towards the well-being (*eu zèn*) of its members[17]. In every community, there is something that is good for its members, even though or despite the malevolence of its individual leaders. Political, religious and bureaucratic structures are something that are good *an sich*, but that can be corrupted by abuse of power. Every growth of an institution is also a growth of power and thus of the danger of tyranny. The constitutions of Germany and the Soviet Union, for example, were used as pretexts for abolishing democracy. Nazism did not cancel the constitution, but through a cunning manipulation of mandates, accumulation of functions and exceptional laws, the constitution itself became a lawful means for tyranny.

It is our contention that Bauman's analysis underestimates the role of the ideological manipulators of the bureaucratic machinery of the Holocaust by making use of the functionalistic hypothesis[18], as if the Nazi bureaucracy were a completely self-regulating system that could function without any ideological-political input. Instead, we contend that the modern bureaucracy only provided the means for the genocide. If we were only to see the explanation of the Holocaust as modern bureaucracy, we would risk falling into technological determinism. The technical mentality that was necessary for the genocide of so many people is sometimes misunderstood as an attitude that motivated the genocide, whereas its role was mostly limited to making the genocide *easier*. In other words, modern technique *simplified* the realisation of the Holocaust,

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[17] See ARISTOTLE, *De politica*, 125 1a (Book 1, Chapter 1), in H. RACKHAM (ed.), *Aristotle in Twenty-Three Volumes*, volume XXI Politics, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1972, p. 3: "Every state is as we see a sort of partnership formed with a view to some good (since all the actions of all mankind are done with a view to what they think to be good). It is therefore evident that, while all partnerships aim at some good, the partnership that is the most supreme of all and includes all the others does so most of all, and aims at the most supreme of all goods; and this is the partnership entitled the state, the political association".

[18] Z. BAUMAN, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 105: "Historical scholarship ever more convincingly supports the functionalist view. Whatever the ultimate outcome of the debate, however, there is hardly any doubt that the space extending between the idea and its execution was filled wall-to-wall with bureaucratic action".

but is not thereby the reason for it. Whereas the modern (technical, rational) attitude was one of the conditions for the destruction of the victims, it alone cannot explain the genocide. As necessary as modern technique and bureaucracy might have been, they are not a sufficient answer to the question of why the Nazi's destroyed Jews and other victims for more than a decade. Moreover, even if Nazism has important modern characteristics, the content of its *Weltanschauung* was not an exponent of reason and Enlightenment, but was based more on a pantheistic mysticism and on a return to the clarity of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Even if Nazism did develop within a modern context, it immediately and fundamentally turned against the ideal of the Enlightenment.

Because the modern state, and its specific influence on human life, can become the source of great evil, we would like to argue in favour of a greater, *critical* rationality as a precondition for preventing, as much as possible, the abuse of power by the state. Bauman's pessimism about the future of western civilisation is partly the result of a rather bipolar representation of ethics and rationality, where a society based on rationality is a society in which morality is automatically in danger. We consider this is a rather one-sided view of rationality[19], and think it better to distinguish two forms of rationality: instrumental and critical rationality. Pure instrumental rationality is only one product of modern civilisation. While it is true that instrumental rationality does not leave much room open for the alterity of the other, modernity has also produced a critical form of rationality with a real ethical potential.

As such, it would seem very important not to stress a radical opposition between the ethical individual and an ethically neutral collectivity. The bipolarity between social and societal, between concrete neighbour and abstract fellow human, between small scale and large scale needs to be broken free. The role of the social midfield is crucial here. Insofar as it would be correct to say that a moral attitude is never realised through

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[19] For a similar critique on the reduction of rationality to instrumental rationality (Weber), see H. MARCUSE, *Einige gesellschaftliche Folgen moderner Technologie*, in *Aufsätze aus der Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung 1934-1941* (Herbert Marcuse Schriften 3), Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1979, pp. 286-319, p. 298: "Die ursprünglich identische und "homogene" Wahrheit ist anscheinend gespalten in zwei verschiedene Bereiche von Warhheitswerten und zwei verschiedene Grundmuster des Verhaltens: eines dem Apparat angepaßt, das andere diesem gegenüber antagonistisch; das eine bildet die herrschende technologische Rationalität und regelt das von ihr verlangte Verhalten, das andere hält an der kritischen Rationalität fest, deren Wertvorstellungen nur verwirklicht werden können, wenn sie selbst alle persönlichen und gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse gestaltet hat".

massive political structures, one should never delegate everything to the community or the state. Moral sensibility is not realised from above, but in the field. The ethical validity of a community depends, in great part, on this social midfield that is responsible for an ascendant mediation between particularity and universality, between individual responsibility and structural solidarity, between ethical sensibility and organised welfare, between the social and societal. Moreover, it becomes dangerous when the community or state sees itself as the ultimate outcome of this process. Finally, the structural results of this process should always be transcended by ethically sensible people and groups. It is a special function of the modern state to create the basic conditions so that the social midfield can operate. In Nazism, it was precisely this social stratification that was systematically destroyed. The reduction of the social midfield to an exponent of an all-regulating, ideological system made it possible that the Nazi state imposed its own "ethic" (Haas), or better *Weltanschauung*, upon its citizens.

After analysing for a long time the Holocaust as a critique of modernity, through the eyes of postmodern authors such as Bauman, in our view, the time now has also come to look to the *Shoah* as a critique of postmodern culture, with its accent on particularity, its ethical relativism, its pseudo-religiosity, its gnostic allures. Postmodernity broke through so late in Western culture because of its deep affinity with the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. Holocaust studies should take seriously the principle of re-contextualisation. Today, Holocaust studies should not only focus on modernity and the Holocaust, but more and more on postmodernity and the Holocaust[20].

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[20] A previous version published as D. Pollefeyt, *How Modern is the Holocaust? A Critical Confrontation with the Interpretation of the Holocaust of Zygmunt Bauman*, in M.F. Nefsky (ed.), *The Pall of the Past: The Holocaust, Genocide and the 21st Century* (Selected Papers from the 28th International Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches, February 28-March, 3, 1998, University of Washington, Seattle, WA), Merion Station, PA, Merion Westfield Press International, 2000, p. 101-112.

Chapter Nine

Auschwitz or How Good People can do Evil: An Ethical Interpretation of the Perpetrators and the Victims of the Holocaust in light of the French Thinker Tzvetan Todorov

I. Introduction

In this chapter we explore further the question of what Auschwitz can teach us about the origins of human evil. Through this quest, it will become clear how we always implicitly use a particular anthropology, a specific portrayal of humanity. Are we human beings fundamentally unethical beings whose egocentric dynamic should be under the strict supervision of a rigorous ethics? Is not every one of us being directed towards evil, and is not each of us potentially capable of inhumanity and racism? Or are we humans essentially orientated towards the good, and is it this human goodness that can disappear under the fragments of our own fears and brokenness, our socio-historical conditions and the finitude of our own lives? Furthermore, is it possible to reconstruct an ethics for a humanity that has been so deeply undermined by its own destructive potential? Should such ethics be built on a moralising struggle against evil? Or should it first of all be orientated towards an honest application of human creativity in the good?

This chapter will critically examine the answers to these questions as found in the French anthropologist and ethicist Todorov[1], especially as

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[1] Tzvetan Todorov was born in Sofia (Bulgaria) in March 1939. He studied at the universities of Sofia and Paris and became Doctor in Language and Literature. He was a Director of Research of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique of France (Paris). He died on February 7, 2017. Some of his most important works are *Introduction à la litérature fantastique*, Paris, Seuil, 1970; *Littérature et signification*, Paris, Larousse, 1977; *Théories du symbole*, Paris, Seuil, 1977; *Les morales de l'histoire*, Paris, Seuil, 1991; *La conquête de l'Amérique: la question de l'autre*, Paris, Seuil, 1991; *Nous et les autres: la réflexion française sur la diversité humaine*, Paris, Seuil, 1992; *Au nom du peuple: témoignages sur les camps communistes*, Paris, Editions de l'Aube, 1992; *Une tragédie française: été*

he has developed them in his insightful ethical study on Nazi genocide, *Face à l'extreme* (Paris, 1991, 2° revised ed.,1994), and secondarily in his *Au nom du peuple: temoignages sur les camps communistes* (Paris, 1992), *Une tragédie française: ete 44: scenes de guerre civiles. Suivi de souvenirs d'un maire* (Paris, 1994) and *Les abus de la mémoire* (Paris, 1995). In answering these questions we will distinguish two different perspectives: that of the perpetrators and that of the victims. In the first part of this chapter, we ask ourselves the question of whether the perpetrators of such evil should be seen as moral monsters or as human beings. We argue with Todorov in favour of the humanity of the perpetrator and ask how human beings like you and I can become such terrible criminals?

In the second part we pose the even more difficult question of whether human beings who have lost, or been stripped of, the thin cloak of civilisation display their 'real' identity by becoming 'wolves' (Hobbes) to each other? With Todorov we demonstrate that the victims of the camps were not only misled by the 'law of the jungle', but that even "*face à l'extrême*" the human concern for what is good, true and beautiful could never be completely destroyed. Finally, based on this double perspective, we attempt to summarise our answers to the anthropological and ethical questions in the conclusion of this chapter.

II. Human or Inhuman Character of the Perpetrators?

1. *The Perpetrator as Moral Monster*

When people describe the Nazi perpetrator, we mostly get an extremely moralising and diabolical representation. Morally considered, Nazis were completely perverted beings; they were moral monsters, sadists or barbarians[2]. Yet according to Todorov, this interpretation is founded on a

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44: scènes de guerre civiles. Suivi de souvenirs d'un maire, Paris, Seuil, 1994; *La vie commune. Essai d'anthropologie générale* (La couleur des idées), Paris, Seuil, 1995). First published in 1991 (Seuil, Collection La couleur des idées), his work on the Nazi genocide *Face à l'extrême* was revised in 1994 (Seuil, Collection Points 295). In this chapter references to *Face à l'extrême* refer to this new edition. There is also a German translation of this work: *Angesichts des Äussersten*, Munich, Fink, 1993 and in 1997 appeared the First American Edition *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*, New York, Henry Holt, 1997.

[2] For a more philosophic foundation of this view, see, for example, G. Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes towards the Re-definition of Culture*, London, Faber & Faber, 1971, p. 111.

pessimistic anthropology[3]: in each of us sleeps a dangerous, unethical beast that awakes when the cloak of civilisation becomes threadbare. The Nazi is paradigmatic of this ethically derailed human. In this popular point of view, the Holocaust is not a result of our modern culture, but a regressive moment or an *accident de route* in the line of our civilisation and is apart from the ascending of humanity. Herein Nazis appear as moral savages, beasts who strive after evil for evil's sake[4]. In this commonly held point of view, the Nazi is sometimes called the incarnation of evil or the modern embodiment of the devil. An argument for this interpretation is sometimes based on the *Kristallnacht* (1938) when the whole German population seems to have been in the spell of a 'spontaneous' surge of anti-Judaic hatred, and the beast rose to the surface.

There are, however, some very convincing arguments against this dehumanising interpretation of the perpetrators[5]. The testimonies of most of the survivors indicate that only a minority of the perpetrators can be considered as sadistic or monstrous[6]. Instead of diabolic personalities, most of the perpetrators appear in this literature as very average and even petty officials. Furthermore, the proposition of the monstrousness of the perpetrators is incapable of explaining how thousands of simple and even well-educated people (such as doctors, industrials, educators, lawyers, philosophers, etc.) could collaborate in the destruction of the Jewish people for more than a decennium without stopping to see themselves as ethical human beings. Nor can it explain how the executioners once again became 'decent' and well-functioning citizens after the war. There were undoubtedly monsters among the Nazis, but they were not enough in number to be really dangerous by themselves.

[3] T. TODOROV, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), (Points, Essais 295) 2d éd., Paris, Seuil, 1994, pp. 37-39, 133.

[4] See the view of B. LANG, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 32: "(...) the Nazis implemented the policy of genocide at least in part because it was wrong: wrongdoing has assumed for them the status of a principle".

[5] T. TODOROV, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 149-170.

[6] E. LINGENS-REINER cited by G.M. KREN – L. RAPPOPORT, *The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behaviour*, New York, Holmes & Meier, 1980, p. 100 (footnote 33) from B. NAUMANN, *Auschwitz: A Report on the Proceedings Against Robert Karl Ludwig Mufka and Others before the Court of Frankfürt*, London, Pall Mall Press, 1966, p. 91: "I know of almost no SS man who could not claim to have saved someone's life. There were few sadists. Not more than 5 or 10 percent were pathological criminals in the clinical sense. The others were all perfectly normal men who knew the difference between right and wrong".

One of the basic points in this chapter will be that in circumstances such as the Holocaust, the greatest danger actually arises from normal people like you and me[7]. *Kristallnacht* cannot be used as an argument to prove the monstrosity of the Nazis. If the murder of the Jewish people were carried out at the rate of the *Kristallnacht* (i.e. 100 murders per day), then the Nazis would have needed 140 years, instead of five years, to kill as many Jews as they did. Hate per se is a very inefficient means for the successful completion of such large-scale enterprise[8]. Nor should we forget that the Nazis did not violate the ruling social contract of their time by killing the Jews; by their participation in this genocide, Germans did not break the law of their country, but on the contrary were obedient to it. From this, we can see that people who apply the law can be more dangerous than people who disobey it. Perhaps the perpetrators had better followed more their human intuitions and less the prevailing decrees[9]. Finally, we can learn from psychology that there is a physical boundary to the amount of people one can kill out of hate, fanaticism or sadism[10]. These critics on the monstrousness of the perpetrators form an invitation to search for other explanations of human evil, especially in its genocidal form.

2. *The Perpetrator as Victim of the Political System*

In the beginning of the 1960s the Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote a book on the trial against Adolf Eichmann under the subtitle *The Banality of Evil*[11]. Through her analysis it became clear that although the evil he did was undoubtedly horrible, the Nazi Eichmann was not a sadistic monster, but an ordinary bureaucrat. In this Jerusalem trial, the opposition between the banality of the criminal and the evil for which

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[7] W.K. THOMPSON, *Ethics, Evil and the Final Solution*, in A. ROSENBERG – G.E. MYERS (eds.), *Echoes from the Holocaust, Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time*, Philadelphia, Temple University, 1988, pp. 181-197, p. 184: "ordinary people can commit demonic acts".

[8] S. SABINI – M. SILVER, *Destroying the Innocent with a Clear Conscience: a Sociopsychology of the Holocaust*, in J.E. DIMSDALE (ed.), *Survivors, Victims and Perpetrators. Essays on the Nazi Holocaust*, New York, Hemisphere, 1980, pp. 329-358, pp. 329-330.

[9] T. TODOROV, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), p. 133.

[10] H. ASKENASY, *Sind wir alle Nazis? Zum Potential der Unmenschlichkeit*, Frankfurt – New York, Campus Verlag, 1979, pp. 35-36.

[11] H. ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York, Viking Press 1st ed., 1963; new edition, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1984.

he was responsible became clear. In Arendt's view, Eichmann was not a perverted being[12], but "terribly normal".

Moreover, in Arendt's view, the evil of Auschwitz was not a consequence of the violation of the law, but rather a result of the total obedience to it. The Holocaust, then, was possible because people complied with bureaucratic prescriptions and rules without thinking any further. According to Todorov, this interpretation is founded on a more optimistic anthropology[13]: the evil of Auschwitz is not the result of giving free rein to a monstrous desire for evil, but stems from a restriction of human commitment towards the good[14]. Auschwitz is neither a tragic *accident de route* nor an unexpected moment of regression, but a logical consequence of our modern civilisation with its anonymous, bureaucratic structures[15]. To understand this restriction of human involvement towards the good, in the view of Todorov[16], we should not look at the (monstrous) character of individuals, but at the political and social influences that made the transformation of human beings into criminals possible[17], especially the totalitarian system that ruled in Germany and influenced the moral behaviour of its citizens in three very typical ways[18].

First of all, totalitarian systems are always Manichaeistic[19]: they split human beings in two radically different categories (based, for example, on race or class). In such dualistic interpretations, the world is unambiguously divided into (wholly) good people and (wholly) evil people. Herein, every action undertaken against evil people is morally acceptable

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[12] See the view of G. Hausner, *Eichmann and His Trial. The Full Story of the Nazi Who Murdered Six Million Jews. How the Gruesome Evidence Was Collected Against Him and How He Was Convinced*, in *Saturday Evening Post*, November 3, 11, and 17, 1962 and more extensive in G. Hausner, *Justice in Jerusalem. The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, London – Beccles, William Clowes & Sons, 1966.

[13] For a discussion between optimistic and pessimistic anthropologies, see T. Todorov, *La vie commune. Essai d'anthropologie générale* (La couleur des idées), Paris, Seuil, 1995.

[14] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), p. 135.

[15] The same idea can be found in Z. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989.

[16] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 134-142.

[17] See also the thesis of F.E. Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil: A Report on the Beguilings of Evil*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1993.

[18] See also H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism. New Edition with Added Prefaces* (Harvest book 224), New York, Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, 5th ed., 1993.

[19] For a description of 'Manichaeism': R.M. Wilson, *Mani and Manichaeism*, in P. Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York, Macmillan, 1967, 8 volumes, volume 5, pp. 149-150, p. 149: "Evil stands as a completely independent principle against Good, and redemption from the power of Evil is to be achieved by recognizing this dualism and following the appropriate rules of life".

and even praiseworthy[20]. Moreover, a totalitarian state always tries to replace human conscience by appointing itself as the ultimate source and measure of good and evil. Consequently, in such regimes an individual can concentrate on the means and no longer needs to ask difficult questions about the (un)ethical goals or consequences of social life. A totalitarian system can ask its citizens even to realise unethical, instrumental tasks without affecting the private moral infrastructure of the individual. Even in the camps the perpetrators were able to distinguish good from evil. The Nazis, however, believed that the cruelties against the Jews were necessary because the State was commanding these things of them. The perpetrators, then were not stripped of every ethical concern, but had a new kind of (professional) ethics. Finally, a totalitarian system controls the totality of society; the entire social midfield (trade unions, youth movements, etc.) is destroyed. Because every individual is isolated, effective ethical protest becomes impossible or involves great risk of life.

These characteristics show how an important cause of the evil of Auschwitz cannot be found primarily in individuals, but in the reigning political system. An important part of the population risks becoming an accessory to such crimes once such a system becomes almighty. For Todorov, Auschwitz reveals that involvement in crimes is very easy and that even ordinary persons can become perpetrators.

It is of course much more comfortable to think that the evil of Auschwitz is something outside ourselves, that we have nothing in common with these inhuman 'monsters of Auschwitz'. If we choose to forget Auschwitz, it is usually out of fear of the fact that Auschwitz is not something strange to humanity. For the most part, choice for the thesis of the monstrosity of the perpetrators is inspired by the fear of a confrontation with ourselves[21]. The dividing line between good and evil, however, is not running between non-Nazis and Nazis, between 'we' and 'they', but through the heart of every human being. People very easily choose for the monstrous interpretation of evil because this is very comforting, especially in the context of the Nazi genocide. The idea that human

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[20] H. KAPLAN, *Conscience and Memory: Meditations in a Museum of the Holocaust*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 49: "Declare that you have an enemy and he will become the enemy. Declare a people to be of inferior race and you will soon write the scenarios that will fulfil your theory. This was Hitler's effort and his success. He defined Jews and made them become, through methodic abuse and torment, the proof of his definition".

[21] H. OFSTAD, *Our Contempt for Weakness: Nazi Norms and Values and Our Own*, trans. from the Norwegian original by C. VON SYDOW, Gothenburg, Almquist & Wiksell, 1991, p. 75.

beings who murder every day are not fundamentally different from us, is very threatening for our own identity. It is very comforting if we can say that such criminals are sick, extremely racist, sadistic or possessed by the devil. In this way, we very carefully locate evil outside ourselves, thereby enabling us to condemn it in a moralistic manner in the other. If we have no resemblance to the monstrous image of evil, then we need not ask ourselves difficult questions about our own ethical functioning and we can confront ourselves with the Nazi genocide, full of indignation, but with a quiet conscience[22].

Therefore, we often find the belief that such Nazi genocide is a "typically German" phenomenon. Evil then becomes the guilt of the negative Other, the immoral individual, the extreme anti-Semite, the supreme antagonist. The negative Other is doing evil for evil's sake, whereas we know ourselves by experience: we long for goodness, integrity and authenticity. We can thus so aestheticise perpetrators in their inhumanity that we create a safe Manichaeistic distance between ourselves and them. In this way we can strategically absolve ourselves of every possible evil and reorganise our own identity without blemish in confrontation with Auschwitz.

A final argument against the monstrousness of the perpetrators is that this presentation bears a remarkable resemblance with the demonisation that the Nazis themselves used; with the diabolisation of the perpetrators, we risk reproducing the Nazi *Weltanschauung* itself. The Nazis attributed precisely those characteristics to the Jews that they feared most in themselves: the Jews were the incarnation of the devil, sexually perverse, avaricious, bloodsuckers, unreliable, murderers of God, etc.[23]. Every form of racism is in fact a cowardly way to deal with one's own fears. When we externalise evil in the demonically dangerous Nazi, we risk falling into the same dualistic scheme. By combatting evil only in the other, we risk rendering evil permanent in ourselves. Instead of fighting evil, we unconsciously imitate it. If we do not want to give the perpetrators a 'posthumous victory' (Fackenheim) by becoming like them, we must be careful not to internalise evil. One of the problems of humanity has always been that it only tries to eliminate evil in the other. Using the Manichaeistic categories of good and evil, Germans and Jews,

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[22] A. Herzberg, *Eichmann in Jeruzalem*, Den Haag, Bert Bakker, 1962, pp. 14-15.
[23] Hitler in *Mein Kampf* in L. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975, p. 21: "Two worlds face one another," said Hitler, "the men of god and men of Satan! The Jew is the anti-man, the creature of another god. He must have come from another root of the human race. I set the Aryan and the Jew over and against each other".

Übermenschen and *Untermenschen*, the Nazis did likewise; the Jew was the incarnation of absolute evil and as such was unforgiveable[24]. And the only solution for radical evil, is a final solution, an *Endlösung*.

3. *Evil as a Universal "Daily Vice"*

An honest confrontation with the evil of Auschwitz demands that we unmask the Manichaeistic, 'Nazistic' mechanisms of defence that we spontaneously develop in confrontation with evil and which consists in our seeing evil only in the other. Perhaps we should be most careful when indignant about the moral offense of others. The acceptance of evil as a possibility in each one of us would seem to be the first, very difficult but crucial step in the development of an authentic understanding of evil. Without being beasts or monsters, we all possess some universal characteristics to do evil. It is only when we recognise this potential for evil in ourselves that we can also effectively understand and combat evil. The Dutch Jewess Etty Hillesum has shown us from her experience in the camp of Westerbork that one of the biggest problems of humanity consists in that people always want to destroy in the other, precisely what they dare not recognize first of all in themselves[25].

With Todorov, we introduce here the idea of evil as "daily vice" (*vice quotidien*), as the human capacity that is not born out of an unambiguous choice of evil for evil's sake, but that arises in a silent and subtle way, step by step, in the 'little wickedness' of the everyday[26]. We will examine three 'daily vices': fragmentation, depersonalisation and enjoyment of power. We do so because they were basic conditions that undergird the realisation of Auschwitz, but yet are general human attributes that can be found on a smaller scale in our own social life as well[27]. Our plea to understand evil as a universal human possibility does not, of course,

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[24] See, for example, these two citations of Hitler in E. Jäckel, *Hitler idéologue*, trans. from the German original (Hitlers Weltanschauung: Entwurf einer Herrschaft) by J. Chavy, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1973, p. 71: "Il n'y a aucun pacte possible avec les Juifs, mais seulement l'implacable eux ou nous," and p. 72: "Je crois donc aujourd'hui agir selon l'esprit du Créateur tout-puissant: en me défendant des Juifs, je combats pour l'oeuvre du Seigneur".

[25] E. Hillesum, *Etty. De nagelaten geschriften van Etty Hillesum (1941-1943)*, ed. K.A.D. Smelik, Amsterdam, Balans, 3rd revised ed., 1986, p. 254.

[26] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 165-170.

[27] The difference between 'une usage littérale' and 'une usage exemplaire' of the Shoah is carefully analysed in T. Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire* (Collection Violet), Paris, Arléa, 1995, pp. 28-33, p. 31.

mean that we no longer distinguish wrongdoers from the wronged, perpetrators from innocent victims. One must, however, distinguish between the capacity to act and the act itself, lest we mistake anthropology (human nature) for jurisprudence (human acts).

a) *Fragmentation*

The behaviour of most of the Nazi perpetrators looks very incoherent; both humane feelings and cruelty can easily be found in one and the same person[28]. The commandant Kramer of Bergen-Belsen, for example, wept with emotion listening to his favourite music, but could mercilessly kill a Jew who did not obey his orders. Kramer declared in his trial that "he did not feel emotions during these crimes[29]. This disunity or "doubling" (Lifton)[30] in the lives of most of the perpetrators points to a radical discontinuity in their inner lives between the public and the private. During the day in the camps they did the cruellest of things, but in the evening in their rooms they wrote very romantic letters to their spouses. Their minds seem to have been compartmentalised like the waterproof bulkheads of a submarine. On Christmas night 1943 the *Einsatzkommando IIb* received an order to kill 3000 Jews and Gypsies in Russia. The order was executed doubly quick in order to enable the soldiers to go to Midnight Mass[31]. During the Nuremberg trials, the Nazi criminal Speer declared that "on the affective level he only had sentimental reactions, but on the level of decisions only rational principles count for much"[32]. Such fragmentation is the creation of a difference in the inner life between various spheres of life, so that human compassion can no longer interfere with public work (genocide), while the private life remains intact. On the basis of fragmentation it becomes clear how normal human beings can become mass-murderers and how a member of a totalitarian system can (try to) reconcile his submission to immoral orders with the preservation of his private moral self-respect.

[28] T. TODOROV, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 170-189.

[29] Cited in G. TILLION, *Ravensbrück*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1988, 3rd ed., Part II, p. 209: "Je n'ai ressenti aucune émotion en accomplissant ces actes".

[30] R.J. LIFTON, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, New York, Basic Books, 1986, p. 418: "the psychological principle I call 'doubling:' the division of the self into two functioning wholes, so that a part-self acts as an entire self".

[31] T. TODOROV, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 180.

[32] M.K. BILLSON, *Inside Albert Speer: Secrets of Moral Evasion*, in *The Antioch Review* 37 (1979), pp. 460-474, p. 473.

This fragmentation is not 'typically German', as is sometimes argued referring to the specifically Lutheran distinction between the rational, public life on the one hand, and the private, religious life on the other. This Manichaeistic and defensive reasoning tries to escape from the idea that fragmentation is in fact a common and widespread modern phenomenon[33]. Due to the growing complexity of professional tasks, modern society is characterised by an increasing specialisation. In modern society people are forced to restrict themselves to very specific and highly technical duties, while losing sight of the totality of the process of production. Eichmann himself had a purely technical view of his job. Wiesenthal once stated that if Eichmann would have been ordered to kill all people whose name began with a 'P', he would have performed this task just as zealously and accurately[34]. In the Jerusalem trial, Eichmann declared that he had nothing to do with the executions of the Jews: "I did not kill one Jew"[35]. He merely saw himself as one link in a complex process and tried to avoid conflicts with other departments. The result of such fragmentation was that ultimately no one feels responsible for the whole. In short, fragmentation leads to the shutdown of conscience. Since in Auschwitz only the *Sonderkommando* and some Nazis effectively saw the extermination, responsibility could always be attributed to another (unseen) link in the process of destruction, while in the meantime the crimes could occur more readily.

Fragmentation, then, is the preservation of an inner disunity to maintain essential moral principles in some spheres of life, while at the same time one does evil in other spheres. In this fragmentation one becomes a 'double' with a 'double-conscience'. This phenomenon is not restricted to Germans; indeed, we all need a certain degree of fragmentation in order to survive psychologically in the modern world. Everyone has his or her limits. Fragmentation makes the emergence of evil easier, but is not evil in itself. Sometimes fragmentation is the only possibility to maintain oneself (e.g., soldiers, priests, policemen, doctors, etc.). In a similar sense where a fever is not only a part of the illness, but already a defence against the illness, fragmentation is not only part of evil, but in fact also already a defence against evil. Fragmentation becomes a part of

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[33] *Ibid.*, p. 427.

[34] A citation from H. ASKENASY, *Sind wir alle Nazis?*, p. 24.

[35] In an interview with Captain Avner Less in 1961: P. JOFFROY – A. LESS (eds.), *Eichmann par Eichmann*, Paris, Grasset, 1970, pp. 339-340.

evil, however, just as the fever becomes a part of the illness[36]. The question then arises: at what point does fragmentation become criminal?

b) *Depersonalisation*

For totalitarian ideologies human beings are never considered as goals in themselves (philosophically) nor as images of God (theologically). Individuals are always thought in terms of a bigger cosmic project (such as Hitler's thousand-year Reich) in which they themselves are of no importance. For Todorov, one of the goals of totalitarianism is depersonalisation[37]: the reduction of individuals to merely ingredients of an enormous project that completely transcends them[38]. The camps were the first and foremost place to experiment with this process of depersonalisation[39].

Yet the transformation of human beings to non-humans is not immediately evident, requiring the overcoming of a great deal of inner moral resistances. Therefore the Nazis used (modern) technics to neutralise the "appeal of the face of the other" (Levinas)[40] thereby wiping out the humanity of the other[41]. These techniques might be illustrated with some examples that make clear how the evil of Auschwitz was more the result of depersonalisation than of sadistic monstrosity[42]. "The road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved with indifference" (Littell)[43]. A first technique was the deprivation of victims of their clothing just prior to killing them. Normally we do not see naked people in groups. Since clothing is an expression of humanity, by stripping victims of their clothes, it became much easier to consider them non-human. This tech-

[36] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), p. 187.

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 190-211.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 191.

[39] H. Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and the Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust*, New York, Free Press, 1979, p. 8: "But leaders could not have chosen annihilation (rejecting assimilation) had not the victims been previously defined as basically of a different species, outside of the common conscience, and beyond the universe of obligation, this was the precondition".

[40] See Chapter Six: *To Love the Torah More Than God*; & D. Patterson, *Subjectivity and Responsibility: Wiesel per Levinas*, in *Cahiers Roumains d'études littéraires* 4 (1987) 130-144.

[41] H.C. Kelman, *Violence without Moral Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanization of Victims and Victimizers*, in *Journal of Social Issues* 29(4) (1973), pp. 25-61.

[42] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 190-201.

[43] F.H. Littell, *The Credibility Crisis of Modern University*, in H. Friedlander – L. Milton, *The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy and Genocide* (The San Jose Papers), New York, Kraus International Publications, 1980, p. 274.

nique made it more difficult for the perpetrators to identify with the victims and easier for them to kill with a clear conscience. Another technique was to make people live in their own waste without food or sanitation, so that they became completely unrecognisable and, like animals, preoccupied only with food. After the war, the journalist Sereny asked commandant Stangl why it was necessary to humiliate people so much when they would only be killed afterwards. Stangl answered her: "to make the work of the executers easier"[44]. A third technique consisted in the reduction of persons to numbers tattooed on their arms[45]. In this way, a person loses his or her name, the first indication of his or her being human. One could give many other similar examples of this depersonalising use of language by the Nazis[46]. A fourth technique was the continuous use of large quantities. It is more difficult to kill two persons than to kill two thousand. A last technique was the avoidance of direct confrontation with the victims. It is well-known that Himmler became sick during his two visits to Auschwitz. Precisely to avoid this kind of 'moral nausea', the gas chambers were created so that the machine could take over the human work and that every personal contact with victims could become superfluous. Once again, this depersonalisation is not 'typically German', but a feature of modernity and modern war. It has become psychologically much easier to drop a bomb on a city that kills 20,000 people than to shoot one child who stands before you.

Totalitarian systems are reducing every human being to an element of a larger cosmic project. Because the perpetrators renounced their free will, they might also in some way be seen as victims of this system[47]. They, for the most part, were not aware that their obedience to the immoral rules of the regime also meant their own depersonalisation[48]. In fact they accepted becoming means and no longer ends in themselves. It is not surprising that after the war for a lot of them obedience (*Befehl*

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[44] See G. SERENY, *Into That Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder*, London, Deutsch, 1974, and New York, Random House, 1983, p. 101.

[45] P. LEVI, *Is dit een mens*? A translation from the Italian original by F. DE MATTEIS-VOGELS, Amsterdam, Meulenhoff, 1987, pp. 31-32.

[46] D. LE BRETON, *L'homme défiguré. Essai sur la sacralité du visage*, in *Les temps modernes* 44 (510) (1989) pp. 99-112, p. 100: "Si le visage est le signe de l'être de l'homme, la négation de l'homme passe par celle de son visage".

[47] T. TODOROV, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 197-201.

[48] E. FACKENHEIM, *To Mend the World. Foundations of Future Jewish Thought*, New York, Schocken Books, 1982, p. 237: "As for the Third Reich, its heart and soul was the aim to destroy just this principle—by no means only in the case of Jews (...) but also, and perhaps above all, in the case of the 'master race' itself".

ist Befehl) was a real excuse. "We only obeyed" as if this would dismiss people from their responsibility. In Jerusalem Eichmann declared: "my guilt was my obedience"[49].

Eichmann referred to the categorical imperative of Kant that requires one to do one's duty. Perhaps it was not very efficient of the prosecuting attorneys to try to prove that the SS were working on their own initiative. Blind obedience is clearly an important feature of totalitarian regimes. As we have already pointed out, depersonalization is not 'typically German', but a characteristic of modern life. The extreme circumstances of the camps only brings to light the worst consequences of this general human phenomenon. Today, our way of life is full of moments of depersonalisation.

c) *Enjoyment of Power*

A third characteristic of the anthropology of the perpetrator is the enjoyment of the exercise of power (*Schadenfreude*)[50]. This is a kind of depersonalisation in which the other is reduced to only a means, while the power-holder remains an end[51]. This enjoyment of power was already known by Freud as *Bemachtigungstrieb* or *libido dominandi*[52]: to enjoy the submission of the other to one's own arbitrariness. Of course, one can also enjoy making someone else happy. There is, however, an asymmetry between the effects of making someone else happy and unhappy. By making someone else unhappy, one receives a much stronger proof of one's power over that person. But when one makes someone else happy, one can never be sure that this person's happiness is not also thanks to his or her own will. When one makes someone else unhappy, one can be more certain about the effectiveness of one's power, because normally no one wants to be unhappy[53]. Killing the other is the absolute proof of my power over that person (but at the same time the absolute

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[49] H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 179.

[50] P. Levi, *De verdronkenen en de geredden. Essays*, trans. from the Italian original by F. De Matteis-Vogels, Amsterdam, Meulenhoff, 1991, p. 104.

[51] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 212-227.

[52] S. Freud, *Gesammelte Werke: Chronologisch Geordnet*, Frankfurt, Fischer, 5th ed., 1972, part V (*Werke aus den Jahren* 1904-1905), pp. 93-94 (or *Drie Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, pp. 29-145): "Die gründliche psychologische Analyse dieses Triebes ist bekanntlich noch nicht geglückt; wir dürfen annehmen, daß die grausame Regung vom Bemächtigungstrieb herstammt und zu einer Zeit im Sexualleben außritt, da die Genitalien noch nicht ihre spätere Rolle aufgenommen haben".

[53] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), p. 213.

limit of my power). Yet it is not the suffering of the other itself that causes my enjoyment, as in sadism, but the consciousness of having had power over the other[54]. Instead of sadism, then, it was the enjoyment of power that was the central passion behind the evil of Auschwitz. There are not many proofs for this claim in the biographies of perpetrators because most of these were written with apologetic purposes[55]. We can nonetheless see that perpetrators in camps became angry when, for example, an order was not executed quickly or the victim risked to look into the eyes of the executioner[56]. What was new for the camps was that this enjoyment of power was no longer limited by any legal or moral boundary. The only boundary left was the death of the other person[57]. The desire to exercise such power over the victim was for the most part the consequence of the perpetrator's own restriction of freedom within the system. Many perpetrators within the totalitarian system were tyrants to those below because they were slaves to those above[58].

Enjoyment of power is not a phenomenon restricted to Nazis. Todorov refers to the story of the president of the Jewish Council in Lotz, Chaim Rumkowski, who behaved as master and king of the ghetto during the war[59]. Due to his tyrannical attitude he implicitly created within the ghetto a mini-totalitarian state on the Nazi model. But then neither is the enjoyment of power 'typically Jewish'. In all social relations, people like to enjoy of the power they possess over others (policemen, teachers, parents, children, etc.).

[54] See J. Laplanche – J.B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse*, Paris, P.U.F., 11th ed., 1992, pp. 364-367; "Pulsion d'emprise", p. 364: "une pulsion d'emprise qui n'aurait pas originellement pour but la souffrance d'autrui, mais simplement n'en tiendrait pas compte (phase antérieure aussi bien à la pitié qu'au sadisme); elle serait indépendante de la sexualité".

[55] K. von Lingen, *A Morality of Evil: Nazi Ethics and the Defense Strategies of German Perpetrators*, in N.J.W. Goda, *Rethinking Holocaust Justice: Essays Across Disciplines*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2016, p. 100-125, Chapter 4.

[56] See, for example, E.A. Cohen, *Human Behavior in the Concentration Camp. With a New Preface by the Author and a Foreword of Dinora Pines*, trans. from the Dutch original by H.M. Braaksma, New York, 1st ed., 1954; London, Free Association Books, 1988, pp. 246-253 and A. Herzberg, *Amor fati. De aanhandelijkheid aan het lot. Zeven opstellen over Bergen-Belsen*, Amsterdam, Querido, 1977, pp. 11-12.

[57] A. Pawelczynska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz: A Sociological Analysis*. A translation from the Polish original by C.S. Leach, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979, p. 19.

[58] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), p. 215.

[59] See the story in P. Levi, *De verdronkenen en de geredden*, pp. 62-65; & K. von Lingen, *A Morality of Evil*, pp. 100-125.

d) *Fragmentation as Self-Deception*

The most significant daily vice is fragmentation. This fragmentation could be used to exonerate the perpetrators of every guilt. In some cases, deculpabilisation on psychological and social grounds might be appropriate, but not always. Fragmentation always happens as a kind of protection against evil. Yet there are always gaps in the bulkheads of fragmentation so that there always remains a certain level of consciousness of one's own fragmentation[60]. Fragmentation is always characterised by self-deception[61]. This idea, however, is missing in the thought of Todorov[62].

Generally, people do not explicitly choose evil for evil's sake, but do evil while deceiving themselves. In self-deception the evildoer is simultaneously deceiver (active) and deceived (passive), perpetrator and victim[63]. The self-deceiver knows that he or she does wrong, but tries to convince him or herself with (pseudo-)ethical arguments that this is not the case. For the most part, perpetrators are not 'adherents of evil'; they are not conducting a crusade against the good. Each human being —including the perpetrator—tries to remain an ethical being, even when doing evil. Even in the most extreme forms of evil, a person does not abandon his or her engagement towards the good. On the contrary, in such situations the attempts to avoid guilt and shame become even greater[64]. A normally socialised moral person feels very uncomfortable

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[60] A good illustration is this citation from A. Speer, *Inside the Third Reich. Memoirs*, trans. from the German original by Weidenfeld – Nicolson, London, R. & C. Winston, 1970), pp. 112-113: "Hitler's hatred for the Jews seemed to me so much a matter of course that I gave it no serious thought. I felt myself to be Hitler's architect. Political events did not concern me (...). Today it seems to me that I was trying to compartmentalize my mind (...). It is (...) true that the habit of thinking within the limits of my own field provided me, both as architect and as Armaments Minister, with many opportunities for evasion (...). But in the final analysis I myself determined the degree of my isolation, the extremity of my evasions, and the extent of my ignorance".

[61] S. Hauerwas – D.B. Burrell, *Self-Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer's Inside the Third Reich*, in S. Hauerwas – R. Bondi – D.B. Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1977, pp. 82-98.

[62] An extraordinary elaborated alternative is D.J. Fasching, *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz. From Alienation to Ethics*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1992, pp. 97-105. See also his monumental *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Apocalypse or Utopia?*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993.

[63] J.-P. Sartre, *L'être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1949, 25th ed, pp. 85-111 (Chapter 2: "La mauvaise foi"), pp. 87-88.

[64] J. Enxing – K. Peetz (eds.), *Contritio. Annäherungen an Schuld, Scham und Reue* (Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau 114) Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017.

when continuously violating his or her own moral principles[65]. The human desire to be good and consistent is very strong. Selfcontradiction, inner conflict and ambivalence are sources of pain and fear. It is the anxiety of disintegration in the light of the immoral character of one's existence that makes one cling to self-deceptive strategies[66]. In other words, every human being has an "inhuman" desire for self-justification. One will think oneself good, even if one does evil. One can reach this state by psychologically manipulating one's inner and outer reality. Is it remarkable, then, that human beings can (mis)use ethics? Ethics can become a means by which human beings try to justify themselves.

The "Nazi ethic"[67] (Haas) was such a closed 'ethical' system with very clear descriptions of good and evil. The Nazi very rigorously and anxiously obeyed these rules out of fear that his protest might cause total rejection by others and by him or herself. Anxiety was thus the foundation of this Nazi 'ethic'. Everything that called into question the safe and closed system, especially the stranger, could only be seen as a threat. Out of fear of real ethical provocation, people closed themselves off from everything that might call into question their secure and unquestionable 'ethical' existence[68]. It is anxiety that causes self-deception, and through self-deception perpetrators create a *Weltanschauung* (Fackenheim)[69] that closes them off from the ethical appeal of the vulnerable and suffering victims of evil.

III. Are We Wolves to Each Other (Hobbes) or Are We Each Other's Keepers (Genesis)? About the Victims of the Holocaust

Now we concentrate on the victims of the Nazi genocide. The camps reveal a very hard reality, namely that in extreme circumstances every trace of ethical life disappears, and human beings become beasts in a

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[65] S. Callahan, *In Good Conscience: Reason and Emotion in Moral Decision Making*, San Francisco, CA, Harper & Row, 1991, pp. 143-170 (Chapter 6: "Moral Failure and Self Deception").

[66] See Chapter Twelve: *Eclipsing God*.

[67] See Chapter Four: *The Morality of Auschwitz?*; & P.J. Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz: The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1988, 1st ed., 2nd ed., 1991.

[68] T. Todorov, *Au nom du peuple: témoignages sur les camps communistes*, trans. from the Bulgarian original by M. Vrinat, Paris, Editions de l'Aube, 1992, p. 18.

[69] E. Fackenheim, *Nazi "Ethic," Nazi Weltanschauung and the Holocaust. A Review Essay*, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 83 (1-2) (1992), pp. 167-172.

merciless struggle for life[70]. In a certain ideological literature, the camps are sometimes used to demonstrate that in humanity 'the law of the jungle' ultimately reigns, that every ethical law crumbles and brute power rules. To substantiate this, we can find illustrations in some testimonies of survivors about the terrible indifference that victims had for the suffering of their co-prisoners.

Todorov demonstrates that in the camps there were many matters of conscience among the victims, indicating the elementary possibility of free choice and therefore of moral life[71]. For example, Ella Lingens-Reiner, a physician in Auschwitz, had the choice of using a single medicine for one very ill person or for several less ill persons. Should the newborn babies in the camps be killed in order to increase the chance of survival of their mothers or not? There are many similar examples that demonstrate how camp life was not only ruled by 'the law of the jungle'.

The notion of 'war of all against all' is not specific to camp life, but can also be found in a certain philosophical literature of the two latest centuries, for example, in the work of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. While the camps may have been created in a Nietzschean spirit, this does not mean that they demonstrate the perfection of this ideology. One should distinguish the philosophy that was the basis of the camps and the philosophy that one can deduce from a study of their victims. It is evident that with very extreme means one can destroy the ethical attitudes that exist between people and reduce human beings to a bundle of animal instincts. But this does not mean that morality is only a superficial convention that loses its truth very quickly under unfavourable circumstances. For Todorov, Auschwitz teaches us that morality is always present and can only be destroyed by very extreme and violent means. Auschwitz is not simply a proof for animality as the ultimate truth of human nature. The so-called natural inclination of human beings for immorality is not so natural. The 'war of all against all' has to be imposed through very violent means. When social Darwinists use Auschwitz to prove the correctness of their pessimistic ideology, are they not raising the factuality of Nazi ideology to a moral truth?

For Todorov, the difference between camp life and normal life is not the respective absence and presence of moral life. In daily life we do not notice the contrasts between morality and immorality so easily since egocentrism is usually better camouflaged. In the camps one sometimes had

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[70] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 37-50.
[71] *Ibid.*

to choose between losing one's bread or losing one's human dignity. For victims, then, the camps sometimes became a purification of their conscience, sometimes a total destruction of it, but for the most part were something in between. The direction of this ethical evolution was mostly dependent upon the moral starting point victims had before the war. The camps project on large scale what is mostly hidden from view in daily life. Precisely because of this, one thinks one can draw general lessons of immorality from the camps, while egoism reigns unnoticed in daily life.

Goodness as a Universal "Daily Virtue"

It would seem that the most important lesson to be learned from the study of the victims of the Holocaust is that although evil was inevitable in these circumstances, goodness was not completely absent. And even if there are only a few testimonies illustrating this insight, they still show how human beings *can* be stronger than the tragic destiny imposed upon them. Sometimes evil among the victims is seen as the most relevant and sensational aspect of the life in the camps. Yet it was the moments where victims developed "daily virtues" (*virtus quotidiennes*) in these extreme situations that were in fact much more spectacular. With Todorov, we base this claim on the analysis of three important ethical attitudes, attitudes which could be seen at work in the life of the victims in the camps and which each of us—without being superhumans—can develop in our lives today: dignity, care and creativity.

a) *Dignity*

Dignity is understood by Todorov as the capacity to act through one's own will[72]. In difficult situations, one is dignified insofar as one tries to influence one's environment through one's own initiative. In extreme situations this can be by transforming a deterministic situation into a reality of freedom. In the camps one sees that this final freedom could never be completely suppressed. At times, however, dignity was only possible at great risk of life. In Ravensbrück, for example, Milena Jesenska systematically refused to line up correctly in rows of four. She never hurried carrying out an order. She sometimes sang a melody, which not only roused the anger of her supervisors, but also of the co-prisoners who

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[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 66-77.

had completely internalised the ruling order[73]. Dignity depends on such little actions with no apparent effect, but that nonetheless keep the human spirit alive.

At times, in the extreme circumstances of the camps, this affirmation of human dignity could only exist in the following of an order 'as if' with one's own free will. Gradowski, a member of a *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz-Birkenau, tells in a manuscript, buried next to the crematoria, how victims walked with pride (and dignity) to the gaschambers 'as if' they walked to life[74]. In such extreme situations, even suicide can be a final expression of one's dignity. Olga Lengyel always carried poison with her and declared after the war that being the ultimate master of her own life represented her last freedom[75]. The perpetrators knew that for the victims the choice of the moment and manner of their own death was a final affirmation of their own freedom while the camps aimed at the destruction of this freedom. In the camp suicide was therefore 'forbidden'. When Mala Zimetbaum tried to commit suicide just before her execution in Auschwitz, the SS who discovered her, was furious; killing was *their* job. Todorov gives the example of a hunger strike that broke out among the prisoners of a Russian concentration camp where the guards forced the victims to eat, even though their death was otherwise of no importance. Within the limits of their situation, these people tried to use their freedom as optimally as possible. They chose to have hunger, rather than undergo hunger passively. They knew that even worse than death was a total alienation from their own will[76]. With this dignity they implicitly reacted against the process of fragmentation they saw at work in the perpetrators, as they became unfree by following the inhuman ideology of their superiors.

Another attempt at saving one's dignity was trying to keep oneself clean, even in miserable circumstances of the camps. By so keeping their self-respect, victims would sometimes even raise their chances for

[73] See F. Kafka, *Brieven aan Milena*, trans. from the German original by W. Haas, Amsterdam, Querido, 1974, 2nd ed.; M. Buber-Neumann, *Milena* (Points. Actuels 95), trans. A. Brossat, Paris, Seuil, l 990).

[74] P. Müller, *Eyewitness to Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers*, New York, Stein & Day, 1979, p. 46 and D.G. Roskies (ed.), *The Literature of Destruction*, Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society, 1989, p. 557.

[75] O. Lengyel, *Souvenirs de l'au-delà* (Climats), trans. from the Hungarian original by G. Ladislas, Paris, Editions du bateau, 1946, p. 40: "La certitude qu'en dernier ressort on est maître de sa propre vie représénte la dernière liberte".

[76] Based on I. Ratouchinskaïa, *Grise est la couleur de l'espoir*, Paris, Pion, 1989, p. 128.

survival[77]. Other victims systematically refused to follow a logic of pure self-interest and immediate self-profit. Some of them tried to be interested in others, not humiliating them in confrontation with their superiors. They sometimes refused a favour they did not deserve. Dignity does not always serve the struggle for survival! Others enjoyed the work they did, not because it was ordered, but out of professional love. It was precisely because of this that the Nazis imposed so many meaningless tasks, work one could never do without losing one's self respect.

Acts of dignity, however, can never be automatically called moral acts[78]. We also need to consider the function and the ethical or unethical consequences of these actions for others. Even for the professional builder, constructing a good wall around a concentration camp cannot be considered a moral good[79]. Indeed, were there not also Nazis who knew love for their work? Rudolf Hoess, long-serving commandant of Auschwitz, called himself obsessed by his work. The subordination of other human beings to the perfection of one's own work is immoral. Neither is cleanliness always moral. Were not Nazis also obsessed by neatness? We can, indeed should, distinguish moral from immoral self-respect. Dignity alone does not suffice. We must always consider whether the well-being of our fellow human being is not violated through the manifestation of our dignity. This brings us to a second daily virtue: care.

b) *Care*

Every survivor of the Holocaust will remember how he or she was once helped, saved or encouraged by a co-prisoner[80]. So also mothers soothed their children by singing songs or caressing them, to the very doors of the gas chambers. Mala Zimetbaum became a very strong symbol of this helping human hand in Auschwitz. She used her privileged position as interpreter to establish contact between families, to smuggle medicine, to change working lists, etc.[81]

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[77] P. Levi, *Is dit een mens?*, pp. 44-45.

[78] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 75-77.

[79] P. Levi, *De verdronkenen en de geredden*, pp. 119-120.

[80] A. Pawelczynska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz*, p. 121; T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), (Points, Essais 295) 2d éd., Paris, Seuil, 1994, pp. 78-98.

[81] See I. Gutman, *Zimetbaum, Mala (1922-1945)* in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, New York, Macmillan, 1990, 4 volumes, p. 1735.

Todorov, however, distinguishes care from certain forms of solidarity that exist among people of the same group[82]. In such kinds of solidarity one always automatically helps those who are in one's own group, but does not feel responsible in the same way for those who arc outsiders. This kind of solidarity is for Todorov merely a quantitative extension of the principle of self-interest.

Egoism is then replaced by 'nosism' (egoism of the *nous*, us). This form of solidarity excludes the outsider; the stranger cannot but be the victim of such 'nosism'. In the camps, for example, newcomers were frequently the victims of the solidarity of the group that was already formed and that feared losing its privileges. Solidarity with one group in this case sometimes means the death of the others. In caring one is not acting automatically on the basis of the other's nationality, language, job, etc., but only on the basis of the other's humanity. Solidarity can nevertheless function as a kind of school for learning more universal care. Yet care also differs from a charity that excludes no one[83]. A typical example of charity is the giving of alms to an anonymous beggar. Such charity always happens within an asymmetric relation and can thus be very humiliating for the person who undergoes it. Care, for its part, engenders care again (i.e., children-parents, parents-children). Care is likewise different from self-sacrifice[84]. In care one is not losing time and money, but one is devoting oneself to the other and draws intrinsic happiness out of that. In care one is never poorer but ultimately richer. In the offer of charity and self-sacrifice one is sometimes frustrated because one is not rewarded for the effort; care, however, hears its reward in itself[85].

The famous Jewish psychiatrist and camp survivor Viktor Frankl claimed that caring for the well-being of others was an important factor for survival in the camps[86]. Of course, care for the other also carries risks: one becomes more vulnerable because in addition to one's own suffering, one is also bearing the suffering of the other. In this sense one is better protected when fighting for an idea because the suffering and death of an individual can be relativised in the light of one's ideal.

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[82] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 89-92.

[83] *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

[84] *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

[85] T. Todorov, *Une tragédie française: été 44: scènes de guerre civiles. Suivi de souvenirs d'un maire* (Histoire immédiate), Paris, Seuil, 1994, pp. 155-156.

[86] V.E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: an Introduction to Logotherapy*, New York, Pocket Books, 1963. See Chapter Five: *The Banality of the Good.*

Care stands opposed to the daily vice of depersonalisation, just as dignity stands opposed to fragmentation. In care, the other person is an end in him or herself, while in depersonalisation the other is reduced to a means. Care likewise stands opposed to the daily vice of enjoyment of power. In the care I am a means and the other is the end; in the enjoyment of power the other is a means and I am the end.

c) *Creativity*

A further possibility for retaining their integrity in the camps was the human capacity to be creative[87]. Creativity is related to experiences of truth and beauty. In one of his works Viktor Frankl tells how a sunset in the camp brought him an extraordinary aesthetic experience[88]. In such experiences one leaves one's direct preoccupation with survival and contemplates what is true and beautiful. The experience of creativity can also take the form of reading books, reciting poems, exchanging ideas, writing stories, drawing, making music, dancing, praying, etc.[89]. And in this search for meaning barbarity is combatted[90].

Creativity, however, does not automatically generate goodness. Sometimes aesthetics and crimes coincide. Some Nazis, for example, read poetry after their duty. We should always ask ourselves what are the consequences of our creative activities. Creativity can be perverted! The famous violist Alma Rose, who was the *Kapellmeister* of the women's orchestra of Auschwitz, was prepared to 'offer up' some of her musicians to improve the quality of her orchestra's music[91]. When creativity and care are in conflict, care should always take precedence. No matter how impressive human creativity might be, it should never foster the depersonalisation of the persons who surround the artist or scholar.

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[87] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 99-126.

[88] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

[89] I.J. Rosenbaum, *The Holocaust and Halakhah*, (The Library of Jewish Law and Ethics), New York, Ktav, 1976, pp. 47-59 (Chapter 3: "Prayer, Study, and Martyrdom"), and G. Greenberg, *Foundations for Orthodox Jewish Theological Response to the Holocaust: 1936-1939*, in A.L. Eckardt, *Burning Memory. Times of Testing and Reckoning* (Holocaust series), Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1993, pp. 71-94.

[90] See, for example, E. Wiesel, *Night*, trans. from the French original by S. Rodway, New York, Avon Books, 1969, pp. 107-108; and P. Yancey, *Concentration Camps part II. One Lesson Stands Out: Justice Must Come from the Outside*, in *Christianity Today* 23 (5) (1979), pp. 26-30.

[91] F. Fenélon, *Sursis pour l'orchestre*, Paris, Stock, 1976, pp. 172-188.

IV. Conclusion

Our analysis has shown how, for self-protective reasons, people in confrontation with extreme forms of evil very easily choose strategies of diabolisation. They look to Auschwitz as into an aquarium, i.e. as into a very well-delineated and fascinating world populated with beings who are completely different from themselves. In the approach we developed here, Auschwitz is not presented in a comforting way as an extra-human reality. With the notion of daily vices, we have tried to hold Auschwitz up as a mirror in which we can see the features of our own faces. The daily vices of fragmentation, depersonalisation and enjoyment of power demonstrate how the evil of Auschwitz was not a demonic reality, but an extremely enlarged version of a universal human possibility which finds a very receptive ground in modernity. The daily vices combined with the notion of self-deception reveal how 'good' people can do evil without stopping to see themselves as ethical beings.

The study of the daily vices can save us from a contra-productive discourse about evil and destructiveness. These vices teach us that we should not fixate ourselves only on (or better: not let ourselves be dazzled by) the excessive apex of human destructiveness, as the camps were, but that we should also and especially concentrate on the first steps, the little, daily processes that lead us to that point. Such an approach is no longer comforting because it confronts us with our modern way of life and our subtle and daily manipulations of good and evil.

We also showed how even in extremely violent circumstances human commitment to the good can never be completely destroyed. This is indeed a very hopeful perspective: in every system there always remains *espaces de liberté* (Falise) which can be sought and broadened by ethically sensitive human beings. The choice for the good in the camps mostly happened in neither a very noisy nor heroic embrace of "the Good"[92], but rather in thousands of little and unseen daily virtues. We have analysed with Todorov three of these daily virtues based on the so-called "structure of intersubjectivity"[93]. Human dignity is based on the relation of the subject with itself (the first person: I to I); interpersonal care is orientated by the relation of the subject with the other (the second

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[92] For the difference between 'une éthique de responsabilite' and 'une éthique de conviction' see T. Todorov, *Une tragédie française*, p. 149 and also J.-P. Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, Paris, Nagel, 1970, pp. 41-42.

[93] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (La couleur des idées), pp. 110-111.

person: I to You); creativity is always developed in relation with more people, here and elsewhere, today and tomorrow (the third person: I to They). With the development of the daily virtues in the midst of the Holocaust, the victims already formulated an implicit answer to the daily vices they saw at work among the perpetrators. With human dignity they criticised the processes of fragmentation; with human care they condemned the depersonalisation of victims; with their constructive creativity they resisted the misuse of art by the perpetrators. In short, their choice for the good *in* Auschwitz is the foundation for our possibility of the good *after* Auschwitz. We refer here also to the previous chapters on Emmanuel Levinas and Emil Fackenheim[94].

In spite of and in the vulnerability of their existence in the camps they carried this very rich treasure through this dark period in history, a treasure they offer us as a valuable legacy and of which we unfortunately do not always realise the worth and the fragility. In this sense we cannot only speak about the 'banality of evil' (Arendt), but also about the 'banality of good' that is, about goodness as a universal and daily human possibility, also today. This conclusion is not simply optimistic. We need only to recall[95] that in Auschwitz many very ethical victims did not survive[96].

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[94] See Section Four: *Jewish Responses: Ethics.*

[95] See the important critic of Frankl: L.L. LANGER, *Versions of Survival: the Holocaust and the Human Spirit*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1982, p. 74: "In contradiction to those who argue that the only way of surviving was to cling to the values of civilized living despite the corrupting influence of the deathcamps, Lingens-Reiner insists that those who tried to salvage such moral luggage imposed fatal burdens on themselves".

[96] A previous version published as D. POLLEFEYT, *Auschwitz or How Good People Can Do Evil?: An Ethical Interpretation of the Perpetrators and the Victims of the Holocaust in Light of the French Thinker Tzvetan Todorov*, in G.J. COLIJN – M.S. LITTLE (eds.), *Confronting the Holocaust: A Mandate for the 21st Century* (Studies in the Shoah, Volume XIX), New York, NY, University Press of America, 1997, pp. 91-118.

Section Six

Christian Responses:
Forgiveness and Reconciliation?

Chapter Ten

Ethics and the Unforgivable After Auschwitz

In his book '*The Sunflower*', the Jewish 'Nazi-hunter' Wiesenthal tells of a poignant encounter he had as a prisoner in a extermination camp during the Second World War. We take this incident as a starting point of this chapter, both because it explicitly raises the question of evil, ethics and forgiveness and because, as a story, it claims and mobilises a view of the entire man. As a camp prisoner, Wiesenthal was brought unexpectedly to a mortally wounded, young SS-soldier by a German nurse. The dying young man told him his story and, also, of his participation in the murder of a group of Jews. "I know that what I have told you, is horrible," says the German. "During the long nights that I had to lie waiting for my death to come, I have increasingly longed to talk about it with a Jew and ask him for forgiveness," says the German. "However, I did not know whether there were still any Jews left." A frightening silence followed. "I took my decision," Wiesenthal writes, "and without saying anything I left the room"[1]. His description of this overwhelming experience ends with an open question: "Could or should I have forgiven the dying Nazi?"

The meeting between this Jewish victim and a dying criminal reveals an issue that reaches far beyond the limitation of this historical case, and raises the general question of the tension, even the contradiction between the desire and the duty to punish the criminal on the one hand and to give him a new chance on the other. In this case there is a very violent clash between two commandments, namely that of justice asking for a relentless judgement, and that of love asking with as much insistence to give people a new future. Although both commandments together seem impossible, each in themselves they are very legitimate[2]. A merciful attitude can degenerate however into an easy tolerance, out of weakness or

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[1] S. Wiesenthal, *De zonnebloem*, Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1969, p. 66. English edition: *The Sunflower*, New York, Schocken Books, 1977. See also S. Wiesenthal – H.J. Cargas, *The Sunflower: On the Possibility and Limits of Forgiveness*, New York, NY, Schocken Books, 1997. See also the recent critical work: P. Banki, *The Forgiveness to Come: the Holocaust and the Hyper-Ethical*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2018, pp. 20-48 (Chapter 1: 'The Survival of the Question: Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower*').

[2] E. Schillebeeckx, *Glaube und Moral*, in D. Mieth – F. Compagnoni (eds.), *Ethik im Kontext des Glaubens: Probleme, Grundsatze und Methoden*, Freiburg, Universitäts-verlag, 1978, pp. 17-45.

false pity, that becomes an accomplice in evil. Forgiveness without justice trivialises responsibility and is possibly guilty of a repetition of the crime. Exercising the human freedom is a serious matter, sometimes literally a deadly serious one, because from the start it implies the weight of responsibility. "Making forgiveness almighty is creating an inhuman world", Levinas says[3]. On the other hand, justice without a merciful attitude can turn easily into a vain and revengeful display of power, reducing the other to one moment of his existence. When people fail in their responsibility, they often pray for forgiveness so that they will not have to put up with their guilt once and for all. Ethics cannot give an answer to this plea without the risk of undermining itself. Here, ethics is confronted with its own mercilessness.

In this chapter we examine the tension between ethics and forgiveness mentioned above, particularly by taking a closer look at the excessive evil of the Nazi 'crimes against humanity'[4]. These crimes have disgraced humanness to such a terrible extent, that it looks like we are confronted here with an unambiguous form of 'unforgivable' evil[5]. For theologians, the Nazi crimes are often the reason why they put forward the ethical dimension of the Jewish and Christian religion and even reduce religion to ethics[6].

In this context, forgiveness becomes extremely problematic, even outside the context of the Nazi genocide. Can this reduction of religion to ethics in the light of extreme evil be justified? Has the human responsibility since Auschwitz become so sacred that, 'in the name of Auschwitz',

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[3] E. Levinas, *Het menselijk gelaat. Essays van Emmanuel Levinas*, Baarn, Ten Have, 1984), p. 46.

[4] M. Mushkat, *Crimes against Humanity*, in Y. Gutman (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, New York, NY, Macmillan, 1990, 1, pp. 320-323; & A. Finkielkraut, *La mémoire vaine. Du crime contre l'humanité*, Paris, Gallimard, 1989.

[5] L. Thomas, *Forgiving the Unforgivable?*, in E. Garrard – G. Scarre, *Moral Philosophy and the Holocaust*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2003, pp. 201-230, Chapter 12 & E. Garrard, *Forgiveness and the Holocaust*, in E. Garrard – G. Scarre, *Moral Philosophy and the Holocaust*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2003, pp. 231-247, Chapter 13. See also the essay of J. Derrida, *On Forgiveness*, in Id., *On Cosmopolitainism and Forgiveness*, New York, Routledge, 2001, pp. 27-60 and the analysis of E. Verdeja, *Derrida and the Impossibility of Forgiveness*, in *Contemporary Political Theory* 3(2004) pp. 23-47.

[6] J.F. Moore, *Christian Theology after the Shoah*, Lanham, University Press of America, 1993), p. 140. In Jewish thought, the accent on ethics is even greater. For the Jewish thinker Levinas every mercy without ethics is cheap grace that asks nothing from men and that neglect their dignity as free and responsible beings. For the Jewish philosopher Jankélévitch, Auschwitz is a situation in which our feeling for the acceptable is so profoundly hurted, that we are simply not capable to forgive. See V. Jankélévitch, *L'impréscriptible. Pardonner? Dans l'horreur et la dignité*, Paris, Seuil, 1986.

we have to refuse to forgive on principle when man fails consciously in this context? Is forgiveness today still possible and desirable?

The strong belief that our approach to forgiveness is determined by our view of evil is the basis of this chapter. Different ethical views on evil imply different views on the possibilities and limits of forgiveness after Auschwitz. We deal with three prevailing 'paradigms' of evil, developed in the context of the Holocaust, and examine their implications when we speak about forgiveness and the impossibility to forgive. 'Paradigms' are different, often conflicting interpretations, constructions or readings of the reality of the Holocaust, based on different historical, anthropological, psychological and philosophical presuppositions. First, there is the case where the criminal is turned into a diabolical creature; secondly, we will deal with the case in which evil is minimised to a banal thing; and thirdly, there is the view where the evildoer is considered from an ethical point of view. In this context, we will respectively deal with the return of vengeance; with the view where evil is withdrawn from the realm of guilt; and finally with the view where evil is excused. Starting from our criticism of each of these models, we develop our view on evil in order to formulate a new interpretation of the impossibility to forgive as a conception. A final note: our development of three different paradigms (diabolisation, banalisation, and ethicisation)—in which the immoral, the amoral and the moral character of the malefactor is dealt with— is an ideal and typical construction. The different paradigms are often applicable together. Thus the first paradigm will be linked with the camp guards, the second paradigm with the Nazi bureaucrats and the third paradigm with the by-standers.

I. First Paradigm: Diabolisation
The Evildoer As Diabolical Figure, and the Return of Vengeance

People are not indifferent to good and evil. Being confronted with extreme evil is usually a shocking experience that affects them thoroughly. Thus, when people are persecuted on racist grounds, this is in such direct conflict with our involvement with good and bad that we feel the need to express our rejection immediately and strongly. We are angry with evil. In venting our moral indignation, we become aware—in an almost physical manner—of our sensitivity of, or better, our capacity to be touched by the good and by the bad. The experience of an ethical contrast expresses a clash between what is (evil) and what should be

(good). People spontaneously depart with the idea that reality is compre-hensible and reliable. In their righteous anger, they express the pain that arises from the traumatic confrontation of evil as a fundamental confi-dence in the good. In their moral indignation, they formulate an uncon-ditional 'no' to the attractive and misleading appearance that evil often maintains, proclaiming without any excuses the unacceptable character of evil ('We have had enough of this!').

However, this sincerely experienced indignation holds one risk. It may happen that we have been inadequately informed about the complexity or contextuality of a situation and that, because of this, we feel outraged in a premature, one-sided or even unfair manner. On the basis of this indignation, the desire to fight evil—regardless of the best intentions—in a thoughtless manner, we may take incorrect actions and even create new evil. The righteous fury does not automatically guarantee that we will deal correctly with unfair situations and can even blind us to a high degree.

That is how people, for example, in the fight against fascism, can themselves become fascist—and exceedingly so. The reason for this is that the individual, shocked, hurt and with a strong moral upheaval, can hold on to certain apparently self-evident schema for interpreting evil in an impulsive and uncritical way. One of those schematics that people fall back on very often on the basis of a thoughtless righteous anger can be called 'diabolisation'.

In the idea of diabolisation, one is overwhelmed and insulted by evil to such an extent that one is no longer capable of looking at the evildoer from a perspective other than in the light of his crime. Being horrified by evil, one considers the evildoer as a non-human, as a wholly perverted creature, possessed by evil or even as the embodiment of the devil. This process of diabolisation, in which the criminal is completely enclosed within the wickedness of his crime, can commonly be illustrated through reference to the Nazi, although this process is certainly not limited to Nazism. Even in our own life, we can consider people, who have failed in one way or another or whom we suspect of not meaning us well, as demons.

In a certain literature, the Nazi is often characterised in terms of moral monstrosity (as an excessive sadist, as a barbaric, ethically corrupt crea-ture, as a moral beast, as the incarnation of Satan)[7]. He is stripped of his

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[7] G. STEINER, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes towards the Re-definition of Culture*, London, Faber & Faber, 1971. See also his *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*, London, Faber & Faber, 1981.

human characteristics and he is reduced to a non-human with almost satanic features. That is why lead Nazi Adolf Eichmann was called the "arch monster" and "the strongest personification of satanic principles"[8] by the public prosecutor Hausner during Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1962. In his closing speech Hausner condensed the evil of the Nazi genocide into one spectacular image. Subsequently this image was linked with the perverted intention of one single monster, disregarding the socio-historical and everyday context of his action.

In this presentation a pessimistic anthropology is at work: in every human being there is a violent beast that can be woken up at any moment, whenever the delicate coat of cultural varnish is worn away. The essence of man is malicious and ethics, in this line, is an unnatural power imposed by culture on man. Besides, the diabolisation is supported by a Manichaean or dualistic representation in which the distinction between 'good' and 'evil' is extrapolated to the maximum and explained to an absolute difference. Just like in the historical Manichaeism two contrary powers are at work here, that cannot be reduced to each other: the 'absolutely good' and the 'absolutely evil'. The public prosecutor saw the Eichmann trial as a confrontation between 'two worlds': the world of the light and humanity and the counter world of darkness. In Hausner's opinion Eichmann acted from a "sadistic desire to drive out two thousand years of 'Jewish' civilisation and 'rationalism', and *to return to* a humanity that is led by instincts"[9]. In this vision a popular civilisation myth is brought up. Auschwitz is not a logical end of the evolution of our modern civilisation, but rather a tragic ('typically German'[10]) relapse into barbarism, a pitiful deflection of the otherwise rising line of civilisation. Auschwitz does not force us to question our modern way of life. On the contrary, our civilisation is on the right track, there is only a need of even more of that modern civilisation.

Why does diabolisation have so much support, in and outside the context of the Holocaust? The polarisation of good and bad does not only allow the wounded victim and the indignant spectator to express evil strongly, but is also interesting from the aesthetic point of view. The human complexity in doing good and bad things is reduced to the brushed up and fascinating confrontation between 'the Beauty' and 'the

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[8] G. HAUSNER, *Justice in Jerusalem. The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, London, William Clowes & Sons, 1966, p. 13.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[10] See also D. GOLDHAGEN, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, New York, NY, Knopf, 1996.

Beast'. Such an orderly, dualistic view of good and bad is very comforting. The idea that people, who do extreme evil, are not fundamentally different from us, is extremely threatening to our own identity. That is why people easily choose for a demonic presentation of the Nazi, because in the context of the Holocaust, this is very reassuring. We do not want to have anything in common with the 'monsters' who do evil. After all we know ourselves. We are directed towards the good. We are in pursuit of the truth. The malefactor is someone else! In this way, we situate evil outside ourselves (in the Nazi, but also in the stranger, the foreign worker, the homosexual, the psychiatric patient, the Jew, the gipsy, the unemployed, the unbeliever, et cetera) and then we can condemn the evil in the other in a moralising way. If I don't look like the brushed up version of the evildoer, then I don't have to worry about whether I myself function unethically. The ethical dualism creates a radical difference between good ('me') and bad ('the other'). Through that, evil is completely situated in the other and every personal identification with evil is strategically prevented. Consequently one can reorganise one's own identity perfectly and limit oneself to a moralising attitude.

People are soon inclined to agree with extrapolating representations of 'good' and 'bad' and they sincerely think that they will never become like Eichmann. However, descriptions in which the malefactor is represented as a diabolical creature obscure the problem because only two extremes are left of what is in fact a continuity and because they ignore all those gradations in-between, that both separate and link good and evil. When good and bad are dealt with in a dualistic way, the moral indignation makes people sacrifice all historical, psychological and ethical nuances to a single and extreme representation. In doing so, the ethical dualism meets a fundamental and very old human need to separate mankind in good and bad, in 'us' and 'them', in black and white ('Athenians and Spartans', 'Hutus and Tutsis', 'Serbs and Croats', 'indigenous and strangers', 'men and women', et cetera)[11].

When one asks the question of forgiveness, what does diabolisation imply then? We believe that diabolisation provides, politically as well as individually, the basis of the logic of revenge, a logic which is difficult to break through. Indeed, when someone is totally perverted by evil, then he does not deserve any moral credit or perspective to grow.

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[11] To express the notion of human averageness in criminality the Italian essayist and survivor PRIMO LEVI developed the category of 'grey layer'. P. LEVI, *De verdronkenen en de geredden. Essays*, Amsterdam, Meulenhoff, 1991, pp. 33-38.

Diabolisation makes forgiveness superfluous. The only thing that we can do in the confrontation with a person who is ethically totally perverted, is the merciless condemnation of him. In such a case forgiveness can be refused in principle 'in the name of the good'. One does not come to a compromise with the devil! Diabolisation can even provide an ethical frame in which the feelings of hatred can be legitimised.

There is a danger in diabolisation, as well as in the fundamental impossibility of forgiveness that results from it. It is possible that we restrict our recognition and opposition to the evil outside of ourselves, to that of the other. It is precisely then that we ourselves become cruel and malicious. The separation between good ('me') and bad ('the other') may lead to a better overview, but not necessarily to a reliable one[12]. We survey the map of human action and we think that where the land of the evil enemy ends, our own good kingdom begins. However, we forget that evil may also spread its poison like an underground river into our own farmland. And this kind of forgetting is 'a dangerous kind of forgetting', because we tend to start hating—exclusively—the evil in the other, while we ourselves are mostly convinced that we have the good on our side. The attempt to persecute evil (only) in the other deprives us of the chance to analyse evil as a universal human possibility. Instead of examining those human characteristics that can provide a favourable breeding ground for evil, we only accuse the others (e.g. the Nazis, the Germans, etc.). By clearing myself of any evil in advance, in that hatred evil threatens to be made permanent in myself. And when everyone makes use of this logic, and nobody questions the evil in himself, evil can reproduce itself easily and we end up in a downward spiral of revenge and retaliation. Indeed most evil arises exactly from hating the evil in the other one.

Diabolisation—and this may sound paradoxical—increases the likelihood of succumbing to and maintaining evil *through its desire to oppose it*. In this way the diabolisation of Nazism runs the risk of imitating the structure of Nazi demonology, and this through inversion of sign. The Nazi anti-Semites accused the Jews of characteristics that they feared and despised most in themselves: the Jew is responsible for the mixture of races; an unreliable, sexually perverted creature; and a murderer of God. Once 'the' Jew was described in such diabolical terms, one could persecute and even exterminate him in the name of ethics. Exactly like in Hausner's discourse, there was in Nazism no room for making subtle

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[12] J. ISARIN, *Het kwaad en de gedachteloosheid. Een beschouwing over de Holocaust*, Baarn, Ambo, 1994, p. 12.

distinctions or doubts, no reason for weighing the pros and cons patiently. There was only the unmistakable, well-localised polarity of good and bad, God and the Devil. This polarisation enabled the German *Übermenschen* to fight the ultimate evil (the *Untermenschen*) with a good conscience: "*Wer kennt den Jude, kennt den Teufel*" (Hitler). Hitler could not accept "any pact with the Jews, there was only the unrelenting them and us"[13]. So, the paradox of the diabolisation is in fact nothing else but an imitation of the logic of evil, against which it intended to be an ethical reaction. In the vengeance that can arise from this attitude, one is eaten up with what one most detests himself. When we start to externalise evil in the Nazi as a satanically dangerous man, then we risk using the same kind of ethical framework as the Nazi used towards the Jew. By fighting evil only in the other, we risk simultaneously recapitulating that evil in ourselves. Instead of utterly eradicating evil, we only imitate the dynamism of that evil. The problem of mankind is that we always want to accuse and fight evil in others. The Nazis too thought that they would fight and wipe out evil in the other. For them the Jew was the absolute evil. Being a Jew was *l'impardonnable* (unforgivable). And as one could not escape the Jewish identity according to the racist Nazi ideology, extermination was the only and 'ultimate solution' for the Jewish issue.

Of course, this does not mean that in this interpretation, ethical dualists become *equal* to the Nazis. First of all, the people whom the Nazis condemned as unforgivable monsters (Jews, Gypsies, etc.) were innocent; but condemning the Nazis as unforgivable monsters is condemning guilty people, which is quite different from what the Nazis did. Second, refusing to forgive Nazis is still a far cry from torturing them physically or exterminating them. However, in diabolisation, one becomes vulnerable to the same Manichaean *approach* or *logic* as the Nazis used and, eventually, to the same condemning consequences as well. This does not mean that it is no longer possible to separate the use of a wrong logic from immoral actions. One should distinguish between the potentiality to act and the act itself, otherwise we mistake anthropology (on human capacities) for jurisprudence (on human acts).

Moral indignation does not only hold the potential or real danger that we keep evil too far away from ourselves and that our moral attention is exclusively directed towards the other, but also that we imitate and (in so doing also) maintain the diabolisation logic that is at the basis of evil.

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[13] Citations in L. Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews 1933-1945*, London, Weidenfeld, 1975, p. 19 & E. Jäckel, *Hitler ideologue*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1973, p. 71.

The 'prophets' of our time will very likely be those people who manage to penetrate into the reproduction mechanisms of evil and who dare to criticise them in public—if necessary, at the risk of their own life[14]. They refuse to hate in the other what they have not dared to face up to in themselves. In the following part of this chapter, we will show how this is the only way to break through a situation where people are so blinded that they see each other as demons and end up in a destructive spiral of violence and vengeance. It is only in the way of such 'prophets' that people and communities can be brought together in a constructive spirit. The de-diabolisation is the condition to speak of forgiveness *überhaupt*. More simply, the recognition of the desire for the good in the other (and not only the evil) forms the *conditio sine qua non* in order to come to real peace and forgiveness. But does this de-diabolisation of the Nazis not lead to the banalisation of their crimes?

II. Second Paradigm: Banalisation
The Evildoer Trivialised and the Inculpability of Evil

As discussed in Chapter Three, Hannah Arendt was the first to criticise the hypothesis of diabolisation systematically in the context of the Nazi genocide[15]. She started from the idea that the ethical dualism could not explain how thousands of people co-operated with the genocide during more than a decade without stopping to consider themselves as ethical creatures for one single moment. According to Arendt, there must have been monsters among the Nazis, but they were not numerous enough to be really dangerous. It seems that ordinary people are more likely to be the most dangerous in such extreme circumstances. In Jerusalem, Arendt was struck by the contrast between Eichmann as a person and the manner in which Hausner represented him. Eichmann did not turn out to be a perverted 'arch monster', but an 'awfully normal' bureaucrat. For Arendt, the idea of ethical dualism was simply insufficient to explain the decade-long, mass co-operation in the genocide by the German people. That is why she spoke of the 'banality of evil', and how it was precisely Eichmann's mediocrity that made him extremely suitable

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[14] See e.g. E. HILLESUM, *Etty. De nagelaten geschriften van Etty Hillesum (1941-1943)*, Amsterdam, Balans, 1986, p. 254.

[15] H. ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1984.

for his task. His evil was not the consequence of a devilish breach of the law, but of his blind obedience to it.

Already from the moment that Arendt's provocative study was published it has become the main issue of a violent dispute as to the interpretation of evil[16]. Her notion of 'banality' was offensive to some because it criticised an ancient tradition going back many centuries that had invariably understood evil as envy, hatred, seduction and pure maliciousness. Arendt believed that evil in the modern (totalitarian) state has lost those characteristics by which people have always recognised it[17].

The question is no longer how people can do evil, but rather how they—in an evil situation—can rid themselves of the involvement that almost every human being experiences when facing human suffering. In general, in this second paradigm, evil is not the consequence of following an excessive desire for evil, but the result of a restriction of the human involvement with the good—as discussed, a kind of optimistic anthropology, at the same time fuelled by techniques of depersonalisation[18].

And with this, the second paradigm questions the civilisation myth of the first paradigm: Auschwitz is not just a deviation of our Western society, but the logical end of it. In this context the true face of the modern world with its manipulating rationality reveals itself[19]. Arendt's analysis for example forces us to ask painful questions about *our* (modern) way of life and about *our* Western civilisation. With this it breaks through the comforting dualist distinction between 'us' (the good) and 'them' (the bad). This second paradigm reveals an understanding that diabolisation tries painstakingly to avoid, namely the potentiality of evil in our present day existence. This view makes it clear that the distinction between good and bad is not the distinction between Germans ('them') and non-Germans ('us'), or between 'then' and 'now', but runs through the heart of every human being and of mankind in its totality.

While Arendt blamed Hausner for adapting the figure of Eichmann to the enormity of his crimes, she was blamed in her turn for having adapted the enormity of crime to the banality of the man. In my opinion this criticism does not seem correct. Arendt wanted to point out that

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[16] M. WEYEMBERGH, *Hannah Arendts levensweg*, in J. DE VISSCHER – M. VAN DEN BOSSCHE – M. WEYEMBERGH, *Hannah Arendt en de moderniteit*, Kampen, Kok, 1992, pp. 11-22.
[17] H. ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, pp. 156-157.
[18] See Chapter Three: *The Perpetrator: Devil, Machine or Idealist?*
[19] Z. BAUMAN, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989.

evil, exactly because it happens in such a banal way and does not require any exceptional human characteristics, can never be trivialised, but must be taken seriously as a universal human capacity. 'Banality of evil' however was not an ideal expression, because evil and the evildoer are mixed up in it. Arendt's intention was not to call evil banal, but to expose the banality of the one commits evil crimes.

What does this interpretation of evil imply for the examination of forgiveness? While the first paradigm emphasised the free choice of evil—despite the psycho-social and historical background of the culprit— the banality especially stresses a number of determining factors that explain evil and the move toward deculpabilisation. In the long run, because of the depersonalisation the criminal did not know what he was doing. He was a 'thoughtless' creature. In this context it is often pointed out that the totalitarian regime did not only depersonalise the victim but also the perpetrator, by not seeing him as a human person either, but merely as the one who was carrying out orders from above, as an element of a project that goes beyond him infinitely.

Indeed, the Nazi too accepts himself as a means, and not an end-in-itself any longer, rendering himself also a kind of victim. It was often only after the war had come to an end that the Nazi realised that his submission to the totalitarian orders meant his own depersonalisation, then resorting to the principle of obedience to make his excuses for his crimes.

In the current jurisdiction we see how the perpetrator is completely or partly relieved of all guilt on the basis of all kinds of genetic, psychological and/or socio-political indications. Here it becomes clear that evil can never be something that man chooses on his own and unambiguously. That deculpabilisation is based on fate as a dimension of the human existence is not without merit. Here, the behavioural scientist points out circumstances to the ethicist in which individuals or groups must not be declared legally accountable. When we refuse this understanding in principle, guilt is moved forward with such totality that we risk asking too much of man, that we risk no longer having an eye for the 'innocence in his guilt'.

However, deculpabilisation holds the danger that we slip into determinism. In practice the tragic dimension of evil is made use of so quickly that it soon threatens to turn into a cowardly excuse for committed crimes. Today, one easily calls upon the supremacy of human nature or upon circumstance in order to clear the evildoer of every guilt. Decul-

pabilisation turns into de-ethicising: responsibility becomes unthinkable and man becomes the plaything of a number of super-human forces[20]. In our era, evil is 'psychologised' and 'sociologised'. The criminal who had a difficult youth or who has ended up in a marginal social position is not a perpetrator but a victim. This understanding has led to a humanisation of jurisdiction, but at the same time makes it increasingly more difficult to call human failure 'evil'. The failing man is a tragic figure, who calls upon our mercy, instead of our critical moral attitude—a pattern of thoughts that is given even more weight by the increasing technological character of our modern world.

Where in the first paradigm the evil nature of the evildoer threatens to be overestimated, the second paradigm risks underestimating that character of the evildoer on the basis of excuse. In fact there is an error in reasoning in de-ethicising: the 'necessary condition of possibility' of culpability is conflated with 'sufficient reason'[21]. It is not because evil could stem from psycho-social conditions, that it can be explained from those conditions alone ('enough reason') or can be reduced to them totally. In such argumentation one is guilty of reductionism. Here, one restricts oneself to the study of necessary conditions— namely the psycho-social and historical foundations of the ethical life, as if all reality of evil could be explained on the basis of that. In such a reductionist approach the moment of ethical choice is skipped over, or reduced to the lower levels of human organisation or to the ruling socio-cultural and historical context that are the foundation of ethical life.

'Ignoring' the independence of ethical life is not only a theoretical mistake, but also a fundamental misunderstanding of a typical human characteristic that is celebrated very much nowadays: freedom. Without ethics and thus without the possibility of deliberate human failure, man would merely be a perfected chimpanzee, one that is perfectly capable of reacting to all kinds of stimuli, but whose freedom is only an illusion. The possibility of evil is the condition of the affirmation of the human freedom. In short, there is no freedom without the possibility of the human failure. If we do not want to reduce man to a pitiful creature, then we will have to affirm him, in the name of human dignity, not only as a victim but as a perpetrator as well. The '*Wir haben es nicht gewußt*' must not be

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[20] This criticism cannot be directed to Hannah Arendt who thought of Eichmann as personally responsible for the loss of his ability to think. See H. ARENDT, *The Life of the Mind*, pp. 187-216.

[21] J. DE VISSCHER, *De immorele mens. Een ethicologie van het kwaad*, Bilthoven, Ambo, 1975, pp. 45-46.

used too quickly as a justification. People like to hide behind their duty and behind the system so that they will not have to face their own immorality and that they can go on with it. Some forms of evil seem thoughtless from the outside, but are driven by another dynamism from the inside.

This does not mean that we can lose sight of the necessary psycho-sociological conditions, on the contrary. There is a need of an interpretation in which in evil the dimension of guilt is done justice to, as well as the dimension of fate, and in which the evildoer is not only considered as a perpetrator, but also as a victim.

III. Third Paradigm: Ethicisation
The Evildoer Ethicised and the Apology of Evil

With the concept of obedience the second paradigm cannot explain how people can often be extremely creative in situations of evil. As noted in Chapter Three, the historian Hilberg has pointed out that the Nazi orders that came from Berlin were often not very clear and were ignorant of the difficulties that often arose with the realisation of those orders[22]. While it objectively seems that the Nazi official was only doing his duty, subjectively he did a lot more. On closer investigation Eichmann was more than a cool machine, who had become the major responsible of the Nazi genocide 'against his own impulses'. He was a dedicated functionary who passionately and painstakingly realised the mission that had been given to him. Although the element 'duty' has undoubtedly played a part in the apparatus of extermination, it can hardly be considered as the motive of the genocide. We must ask the question why people sometimes obey with such fanaticism. According to the third paradigm, the commitment in evil is often motivated by the desire to be a good member of his people and to act according to the ruling 'ethics,' as is made clear in Chapter Three of this book[23].

The number of crimes in history that have been committed because of personal motives is probably much smaller than those terrible crimes that were committed because of altruistic motives, such as faith in a

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[22] R. HILBERG, *La bureaucratie de la solution finale*, in F. FURET (ed.), *L'allemagne Nazie et le génocide juif*, Paris, Gallimard, 1985, pp. 219-235, p. 220.

[23] See also P. HAAS, *Morality After Auschwitz: the Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992. See the important criticism of R. RUBENSTEIN, Review of *Morality After Auschwitz*, in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60 (1992), pp. 158-161; & E. FACKENHEIM, *Nazi 'Ethic', Nazi Weltanschauung and the Holocaust. A Review Essay*, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 83, 1992, pp. 167-172.

higher moral or political principle, faithfulness to a country or to an intolerant God. In his *Tischgespräche* Hitler stated that "only the German race has made the moral law its leading principle of action"[24]. Hitler believed that the decline of Germany was the consequence of immorality and the German race could only be saved from ruin with a 'moral rearmament'. Nazism gave the impression that it stood behind the morals of the citizens by upgrading a number of its values (obedience, sense of public responsibility, ascesis, idealism, sense of duty, labour ethos).

The central idea in this third paradigm is that people who are full of 'good' intentions, mercilessly take part in evil practices at a large scale when this evil is presented as being done with good reasons. According to this version, most people who were involved in the Nazi genocide were gentle people and ethically motivated. They did not suddenly become 'savages' in 1941 and returned to humanity in 1945 just like that. Throughout the whole period of war, they remained the same people who did their duty with dedication, who took care of their families and who functioned normally in their society. According to the third paradigm they did not act out of hatred (Paradigm 1) or thoughtlessness (Paradigm 2), but out of what they considered as the achievement of an alternative utopia both for themselves and for their country, a promising 'golden century' (the expansion of the German *Lebensraum* or the renaissance of the German economy and culture) with which they co-operated with the very best intentions. The Nazi-cruelties were not committed out of purely immoral motives or out of moral indifference, but precisely because the Germans were ethically approachable.

The question in this respect is no longer why the Nazis committed evil, but why they no longer recognised evil as evil. The answer to this question is, in this paradigm, that 'good' and 'evil' had been given a new interpretation in Germany, one so fascinating that millions of Germans (and non-Germans!) were no longer capable of seeing evil as evil. The Germans did not lose their ethical faculties, but evaluated things in another way. For them, that manner was neither less consistent nor intuitively correct. They were well aware of what was happening to the so-called 'enemies of the people'; they simply found the facts within this story morally acceptable and acted consciously and enthusiastically in accordance with this new moral interpretation. The 'morality' of this Nazi logic can explain

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[24] H.R. TREVOR-ROPER (ed.), *Hitler's Secret Conversations 1941-1944*, New York, NY, New American Library of World Literature, 1961, p. 6.

how the Holocaust was maintained for years on end without any mean-
ingful opposition of political, juridical, medical or religious leaders.

Instead of condemning Nazism in its entirety, one looks here for its
internal dynamics. One finds that Nazism was a new 'ethical' construc-
tion, although it was built up with materials of the history of our West-
ern ethics. That is why this new construction was so recognisable and
even acceptable, both for those who carried it out and for those who
watched it happen. Nazism combined moral schematics that had been
there for years and that were acceptable, or at least debatable—such as
the idea of the just war, patriotism, the ethics of duty, the ethics of
labour or nationalism. In this 'ethical' construction one also called upon
the widely spread, deeply rooted religious anti-Semitism, in which the
Jews were identified as the ultimate evil. These concepts were founded
with 'scientific' arguments from the racial theories dating back to the
nineteenth century. Once the Jew was presented as a lethal threat of the
German culture, the ethics of the lawful self-defence could be put for-
ward in order to account for the genocide.

With this, the third paradigm runs counter to the thought of aberra-
tion where the Holocaust is presented as a sudden, formal breaking with
the ideas of the last centuries. On the contrary: the Holocaust was only
possible because it was morally acceptable in the light of our European
history. This continuity made it possible for the Germans to accept the
Nazi genocide for more than twelve years and still consider themselves
as ethical creatures. Even more, Nazi ethics mobilised the best ones
among its supporters in order to contribute enthusiastically to the expan-
sion of the 'new order'.

In this respect one cannot speak of an intention of doing evil as evil,
but rather to achieve the good of the Nazi story. How one dealt with the
cruelties in the camps is not explained out of a sadistic hunger for evil
(paradigm 1) or by means of the depersonalisation that covered up these
atrocities (paradigm 2), but as the 'necessary price' that had to be paid
if one wanted to contribute to a higher Nazi goal. The fact is that all
ethics ask people at certain moments to give up human feelings. That is
why Nazi ethics praised mercilessness as a moral virtue.

What does this third paradigm mean for our problem of guilt and
forgiveness? In fact the ethicising leads directly to an apology of evil. The
question about evil, guilt and forgiveness is not asked any longer, because
the evildoers were in fact striving for the good. The only thing that one
can blame them for is that they have misjudged the ethically good (which
again leads to the reduction of the factor of guilt), even if we see how

many Nazis held on to their 'ethical' schematics even after the war had ended.

It remains to be seen whether the (Nazi-)criminal believed in his own 'ethical' story. In many cases, giving evil an 'ethical' frame only happened during or after the crime, so that one's own act could be justified during or after it. If it becomes impossible to make a distinction between ethics and the ideological misuse of ethics as an apology of evil, then this leads to a totally ethical relativisation. And if everyone has his own story, even the Nazi, then it is useless and even ridiculous to ask the question for ethics and forgiveness.

Nazism has not meant a rearrangement of the classic values of our modern tradition, but rather a corruption of these fundamental ethical principles. Nazism is an example of an ideological seizure of ethics. Nazi ethics have violated the fundamental concern of Western ethics, namely the respect of the dignity of every human being 'as an image of God' or as 'an end-in-itself'. While in the theory of diabolisation, the discontinuity between the Western history and the Holocaust has been emphasised too much without any doubt, the ethicising accepts too easily that the Nazi genocide followed naturally from Christian and humanistic civilisation. Nazism is rather a manipulation than a continuation of Western ethics. The question is: which 'ethics' the Nazis followed? Shouldn't ethics be seen as something else than a means to legitimise the evil in one's own story? What is the difference between ethics and ideology? Is there a point against which our ethical choices can be tested?

IV. Beyond Horror and Excuse: The Evildoer as Self-Deceiver and the Meaning of Forgiveness

The crucial question is how we can develop a vision on evil in which the evildoer is both considered as a perpetrator and a victim. How can we condemn evil without turning the evildoer into a devil? And how can we understand the evildoer without sympathising with the evil that he commits? Or more technically, how can we escape both from the ethical Manichaeism of the first paradigm and the ethical relativisation of the third paradigm? Or more specifically, how can we explain that a *good* human being can do *evil*? A suitable starting-point seems to us the thesis that evil is not linked with a certain kind of people, but becomes possible through a number of ordinary, universal human characteristics (like depersonalisation) that are at work at a very large scale in genocides.

Fragmentation is an important 'daily vice' (Todorov)[25], in which man builds an inner barrier between the evil that he commits or sees on the one hand and his private life on the other hand. We live in many worlds and often take up many social roles. By fragmenting, it is possible for us to keep evil outside that sphere that we value most (family, nation, church).

By day the guards were involved in the utmost cruelties in the camps and in the evening they sent romantic letters home. They handled two 'ethics', one of labour and one of the family, and did not allow these ethics to interfere with each other. Through this, the spontaneous involvement, which is typical of the private ethics, no longer crossed over into 'work' (Nazi ethics) and the personal existence (with its pre-war Christian or humanistic ethics) could remain intact. Fragmentation is sometimes called 'typically German', referring to the influence of the Protestant distinction between religious and practical life. This defensive way of thinking denies that fragmentation is a characteristic of our modern society today, from which, it seems, nobody can escape. Fragmentation can facilitate the origin of evil, but is not yet in-itself evil. Sometimes fragmentation is even necessary, in order not to be crushed by responsibility and guilt and in order to be able to survive (and do good).

In fragmentation a remarkable mechanism is at work. When I face evil, I fragment myself, precisely because I don't want to be infected by evil. In order to save my moral self-respect, I draw a very sharp line between me and evil, although paradoxically by doing just so, evil gets an open field. This process is no evil, but a defence against evil. One can only pretend as if one has not seen something evil, if one knows better and if one has seen. Thus, having knowledge of the involvement in evil is the condition of the origin and the maintenance of the fragmentation itself. Only because there is first an awareness of evil, man feels the need to pull up a screen between him and evil. Thus the knowledge of good and evil is presupposed when the doubling is brought about. Every form of doubling is characterised by self-deception[26]. More expressively, the screen of fragmentation is never fully waterproof. There are always links

[25] T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême*, Paris, 2nd ed., 1994, pp. 171-189; R.J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, New York, NY, Basic Books, 1986, pp. 220-245.

[26] H. Fingarette, *Self-Deception*, London, Routledge & Kegan, 1969; S. Callahan, *In Good Conscience: Reason and Emotion in Moral Decision Making*, San Francisco, CA, Harper & Row, 1991, pp. 143-170.

between private and public life which always makes fragmentation fail partly.

Often self-deception is seen as a paradoxical, 'impossible' idea. Just as I can only deceive another person because I know the truth and intentionally hide it from the other, so I can only deceive myself if I know the truth and intentionally hide it from myself. This latter condition implies the paradox that I both know the truth and don't know it. This could look like a very frustrating explanation of evil, because it is not evident how this paradox is possible, even thinkable. How are we doing evil and at the same time hide that fact from ourselves? Moral philosophers and theologians have searched into the possibilities of this paradox[27].

In his classical study on *Self-Deception*[28], Herbert Fingarette illustrates this paradoxical character of self-deception by referring to the paradox of the act of laying down to sleep. When we are going to sleep, to a certain degree, we *do* something, but we are unable to think about what we are doing, because the process of thinking about the action of going to sleep precisely would prevent sleeping itself. When we are going to sleep, we do a purposive action, but a part of that act includes not thinking on the purpose of that action. *Mutatis mutandis*, self-deception is only possible when we alienate ourselves of our own evil and no longer think of it in an explicit way. According to Fingarette, self-deception uses these inevitable 'black holes' in how we process information. In her analysis of self-deception, Sidney Callahan argues in the same line on these pre- and unconscious and manipulative aspects of self-deception.

> Our wide-awake, attentive, focused consciousness is only one of our personal modes of operation. Our inner stream of consciousness flows through time with many different thoughts, images, and emotions, and many different states of arousal, alertness, and focus. Undergirding the conscious flow are many nonconscious and preconscious informational processes filtering and selecting what will emerge into perceived consciousness. A person's stream of consciousness is the product of much preconscious selection from the overwhelming amount of stimuli that bombards the conscious mind from within and without[29].

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[27] B.S. Alton, *The Morality of Self-Deception*, in A.B. Anderson, *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Vancouver, Georgetown University Press, 1986, pp. 123-155; M.W. Martin, *Self-Deception and Morality*, Lawrence, KS, University Press of Kansas, 1986.

[28] H. Fingarette, *Self-Deception*, pp. 99-100.

[29] S. Callahan, *In Good Conscience: Reason and Emotion in Moral Decision Making*, San Francisco, CA, Harper & Row, 1991, p. 156.

Whereas Fingarette minimises the intentionality in self-deception, Sartre, in his analysis of bad faith (*la mauvaise foi*), points out[30] that in a situation of self-deception, there always has to be knowledge of the evil that one commits in one way or another. However subtle and trivial a manner evil arises, it can never be something innocent or banal. In every evil situation man tries to cut himself off from his evil practices and deceives himself this way. In such situations the truth and personal integrity is somehow violated. In self-deception one is aware that one is involved in evil, but through all kinds of subtle, ordinary and seemingly 'banal' processes, evil does not seem 'really' evil any more.

In self-deception man manipulates the ethical dialogue that he has with himself, which allows him to do evil with a 'clear' conscience. In the self-deceiving immorality evil is not the consequence of the unambiguous desire for evil as a kind of external reality. The self-deceiving immorality does not acquire any control of man at the moment that he explicitly wants to do evil as evil. On the contrary, in the self-deception the individual distances himself from the evil character of his evil actions in the name of some (false) 'good'. As the theologian Fasching indicates in his studies of the Holocaust, evil is here a secondary, parasitical action that depends on a preceding lack of moral self-knowledge[31]. What makes evil possible in self-deception is not so much something that is done (*commissio*), but rather something that remains undone (*omissio*)[32]. This seems obvious when one reads the following quote of a Nazi: "How can I be responsible? I have not done anything".

While, according to the first paradigm, the evildoer strives for evil and, according to the third paradigm, the malefactor is guided by good, evil can only start growing in the dynamics of self-deception when the evildoer deceives himself with all kinds of 'good' reasons concerning the immoral character of his actions. In self-deception one refuses to acknowledge that by doing evil one acts contrary to one's moral principles and this is precisely how evil can take place. That's why the neoplatonic understanding of evil as the absence of good (*privatio boni*) is not such a bad way of thinking as one generally and far too easily has

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[30] J.-P. Sartre, *L'être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1949, pp. 85-111.

[31] S. Callahan, *In Good Conscience*, p. 145.

[32] See the brilliant work of D.J. Fasching, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Apocalypse or Utopia?*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 91.

thought in the ethical reflection of the Nazi-genocide[33]. This view does not deny the reality of evil at all, but only points out that evil is always parasitical. It always depends on a preceding, greater or more fundamental reality which is good. This also goes for self-deception, as Fasching shows[34]. We can illustrate this with the 'two selves' (Lifton) that are at work in the self-deceiving doubling. The second self always depends on a first self that is fundamentally aimed at the true and the good. The second self does not have these virtuous characteristics, but accepts this lack by means of the self-deception that makes up all kinds of 'good' reasons. The immoral self-deception takes advantage of the virtuous aspects of the first self and by doing so maintains its own positive self-image. At the same time the first self rejects the second self as something which is not there in reality. The self-deception is a kind of 'cosmetic' means to hide the absence of good. Evil can strike exactly in those areas where the good will remains absent.

Just as the figure of Eichmann is often used in the second paradigm to argue the banality of the Nazi criminal, the figure of Albert Speer can be utilised to give empirical support for the claim that Nazi evil was of the self-deceived type[35]. Implicitly, Speer was referring to self-deception when he accepted his personal responsibility for Auschwitz. During the war, his friend, Karl Hanke, had warned him never to visit Auschwitz. Consciously, Speer never asked him 'why', neither did he demand the truth later from Hitler or Himmler, as it would have been simple to do. In his autobiography, Speer writes:

> For I did not want to know what was happening there. During those few seconds, while Hanke was warning me, the whole responsibility had become a reality again. (...) For from that moment on, I was inescapably contaminated morally; from fear of discovering something which might have made me turn from my course. I had closed my eyes. This deliberate blindness outweighs whatever good I may have done or tried to do in the last period of the war. Those activities shrink to nothing in the face of it. Because I failed at that time, I still

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[33] A.A. Cohen, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust*, New York, NY, Crossroad, 1981, pp. 27-58 (Chapter 2: *The Tremendum as Caesura. A Phenomenological Comment on the Holocaust*).

[34] D.J. Fasching, *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz. From Alienation to Ethics*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1992, pp. 97-105; Id., *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Apocalypse or Utopia?*, p. 91.

[35] S. Hauerwas – D.B. Burrell, *Self-Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer's Inside the Third Reich*, in S. Hauerwas – R. Bondi – D.B. Burrell (eds.), *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 1977, pp. 82-98.

feel to this day responsible for Auschwitz in the wholly personal sense[36].

By avoiding for himself difficult and painful questions, Speer tried to safeguard his comfortable place in the totalitarian system. "I have always thought it was a most valuable trait to recognise reality and not to pursue delusions. But when I now think over my life up to and including the years of imprisonment, there was no period in which I was free of delusory notions"[37]. However, Speer knew very well that he was not only the product, but also the producer of his own fragmentation and self-deception:

> Hitler's hatred for the Jews seemed to me so much a matter of course that I gave it no serious thought. (...) Today it seems to me that I was trying to compartmentalise my mind. (...) It is (...) true that the habit of thinking within the limits of my own field provided me, both as architect and as Armaments Minister, with many opportunities for evasion. (...) But in the final analysis I myself determined the degree of my isolation, the extremity of my evasions, and the extent of my ignorance[38].

In the light of Auschwitz, the activity of evil does not have to be explained out of a metaphysical source. Auschwitz is the work of human hands. Evil can take root in the vacuum (*omissio*) that is created by self-deception. So in self-deception the existence of evil depends on the good, while it swallows and corrupts this good at the same time. Evil can only take shape and expand by feeding on the human like a parasite, more specifically, by generating a 'second self' that is inhuman and that deceives and corrupts humanity, on which the first itself lives. However, because the two selves are never completely separated and because —within the self-deception—they are only different expressions of the one, undivided self, evil always remains (to a lesser or larger degree) the responsibility of man, who prefers the path of self-deception to the road of moral self-knowledge and human integrity[39].

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[36] A. Speer, *Inside the Third Reich. Memoirs*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970, p. 376.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 379.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 112-113.

[39] This interpretation can open also new perspectives in the debate on the unicity of the Holocaust. One can speak of different degrees of *omissio* and thus of different degrees of evil. The mother who deceives herself on the good behavior of her criminal son realises in moral perspective a lesser *omissio* then the Nazi-bureaucrat who does not ask himself questions on the reality that is behind the traintables he is organising. In this

Self-deception is such a peculiar phenomenon because man deceives himself exactly because of his concern with the truth and with ethics. If man were not essentially devoted to the good, he would not feel the need to deceive himself in evil either. Thus self-deception holds good as well as bad. This notion also shows that man in a situation of evil is always traitor (actively) and the one who is deceived (passively) at the same time[40]. Interpreting evil as self-deception makes it possible to look at responsibility in a differentiated way and does justice to the grey shades between good and bad. To the extent that every human being in an evil situation is always partly a perpetrator, we can hold him responsible. The evil that arises from the doubling is certainly evil. It is 'guilty ignorance'. To the extent that man is also a victim in a situation of evil, and so never totally corrupted by evil, one always feels it necessary to look at the perpetrator as less guilty.

Even in the most extreme forms of evil, most common people don't give up their commitment for the good cause. Even the Nazi wanted to remain an ethical being in the extreme evil in which he was involved. In such circumstances the efforts to avoid feelings of guilt and shame become even greater. The reason for this is that a normal socialised moral person feels threatened when he violates his moral principles constantly. The human desire to be good, consistent and honest is extremely strong[41]. Self-contradictions and inner ambivalences are often very painful for man.

The feeling of a threatening moral disintegration adds a considerable existential fear to the painful shame and guilt. Man can escape from this pain by manipulating reality psychologically through self-deception. So the human desire for a consistent justification of oneself is at the basis of self-deception. Man needs a defendable structure that will give unity to his life and will provide a fundamental meaning to the many sides of his existence. Sometimes it is necessary not to develop certain sides of the existence, because they are contradictory to the synthesis of commitments that the individual has. At that moment man starts to fragment and to deceive himself, precisely in order to avoid the inner pain that

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very specific sense, the evil of Auschwitz can be called a 'greater' ('more unique') evil then e.g. the evil of a theft.

[40] D.J. FASCHING, *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz. From Alienation to Ethics*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1992, pp. 97-105.

[41] P. MOYAERT, *De mens en zijn onmenselijke drang naar zelfrechtvaardiging*, in G. KONGS (ed.), *Psychiatrie tussen mode en model: liber amicorum professor G. Buyse*, Leuven, Peeters, 1989, pp. 77-100.

would be caused when being confronted with the truth. In self-deception, we deceive ourselves in order to maintain the story that is the fundament of our identity. A criminal who deceives himself is not so much a person without honest, moral principles but someone who does not have the courage to face the reality of his actions and the limits when he tries to justify himself. For fear that he will disintegrate in the light of the truth of his existence, man increasingly holds on to mechanisms that are self-deceiving. The fear of being rejected by both the others and oneself is in fact the basis of every self-deception.

In self-deception the vulnerability of ethics is obvious. Those who deceive themselves misuse ethical argumentations in order to provide themselves with a clear conscience in evil situations. These arguments of apology are mostly not 'superdemonic', but ordinary and (apparently) banal. In this way one does not have to stop considering oneself as an ethical and social human being despite being involved in evil, while one is all too conscious that one is deceiving oneself and doing evil. Because we have cut ourselves off from our ethical essence with arguments, evil can take place in the meantime (be it at the cost of our integrity!). And the more one feels criticised for one's unethical behaviour by diabolising defenders of morality, the stronger the desire to explain it with even 'better' arguments of apology.

The compulsion to obscure the evil in ourselves painstakingly is helped a great deal by all kinds of comforting black-white representations where evil in the other one is pointed at. Evil is localised in the other and can even be avenged. Because there are no nuances between good and bad, there is no need for weighing up or for a careful and critical questioning of the proper self-deceiving use of those nuances. As there is no evil in the good ('me'), there is not any good in evil ('the other') either, that may possibly deserve a chance to grow. In a rigid and closed ('Nazistic') ethical schema, also forgiveness is superfluous. And in such a representation the suffering stranger will only be considered as someone who disturbs the peace of the system in which one has safely locked himself up in a self-deceiving manner and that one tries to defend with ethical arguments. Indeed, the openness for the ethical appeal might require a dangerous revision of my comfortable existence and the self-deceiving legitimisation of that existence.

What does this view on evil as self-deceit mean for our question for forgiveness? In this respect there is a distinction between speaking of forgiveness *a priori* and *a posteriori*. If we see evil as self-deception, then it seems precarious to us to reduce religion to ethics by seeing forgiveness

as problematical in principle (*a priori*). If forgiveness does not exist as an option, then we act like Nazism and turn ethics into a merciless, closed system in which people will scrupulously try to side with the good, if necessary in a self-deceiving way. When confronted with his evil deeds, man is forced in such a system to fragmentation and self-deception and thus to a continuation of evil. In such a rigid, merciless ethical discourse, reform is existentially impossible because the confession of evil becomes solely the anticipation of the total condemnation of the malefactor. When we only speak a rigorous and moralising language, without forgiveness as a prospect, then all we do is increase the fear among people of being rejected and we force them to bring their evil deeds into conformity with their fundamental connection with the good in a self-deceiving way. Man will only be capable to reform, this means to let go the self-deception in evil and open his mind to the ethical appeal (Levinas), when at least a prospect of forgiveness remains possible. When forgiveness is ruled out *a priori*, the criminal knows when he commits his crime that, in the case of a possible reform, he will only be confirmed in his criminality and with his 'confession' he will not be granted a chance of reorientation. In that case it is safer not to admit the evil in oneself, as the Nazi did, not to respond to any ethical appeal and blame the evil on someone else. Because the process of self-deception was one of the conditions that made the Holocaust possible, it does not seem justifiable to us at all, certainly not in 'every day situations', to see, in the name of Auschwitz, the *potential* forgiveness as problematical. The exclusion of forgiveness from the ethical and theological discourse would be offering Hitler a new, posthumous victory.

However, when we are confronted *a posteriori* with the irrevocable fact that human evil did indeed take place, it becomes immediately clear that forgiveness is not a 'remedy' that can be given just like that. Forgiveness is not a magical ritual of purification, where forgiveness is automatically given and in which the perpetrator does not have to commit himself any further. This would be a forgiveness that cleanses the criminal from outside as it were, without the necessity to change internally. Such an extrinsic forgiveness, that does not require any reconsideration of the psycho-social and ethical functioning of the offender, must be rejected as voluntaristic, both from an anthropological and theological viewpoint. Authentic forgiveness as something gratuitous is totally different from human or divine arbitrariness. Speaking of forgiveness with a certain ethical quality always expects from the culprit (and from the victim) a

moment (or a process) of reform[42]. We understand 'reform' as breaking through the self-deception which is at the basis of evil. When evil is openly confessed, against all self-defensive closedness, the conditions that are usually linked with forgiveness will be realised. Because reform breaks open the closed compartments of his existence, man can find a new starting-point in his most fundamental connection with the good. And when the fundamental ethical dynamics of his existence are set free, he will want and be willing to agree with and fulfil the essential conditions in order to come to an authentic forgiveness: the sincere repentance, the willingness to repair (if possible) the damage as much as possible (restitution) and to undergo a (constructive!) punishment, the intention not to relapse into the same fault and keeping the memory of what has happened alive (*Erinnerungsarbeit*) (Mitscherlich).

V. A Post-Holocaust Interpretation of the Conception 'Unforgivable'

In the case of crimes against humanity there is, however, still another further reaching question, namely whether in such cases our sense of what can be allowed has not been hurt so deeply that we—even after the reform of the perpetrator(s)— still feel incapable of forgiving[43]. The Nazi genocide is often seen as an outstanding example of disgrace against mankind on such an enormous level that it can no longer be undone, a shameful act that does not allow any form of relativisation and that brings us face to face with the essential impossibility of forgiveness.

Defending such a conception of '*l'impardonnable*' (Jankélévitch) often refers back to the presuppositions of diabolisation[44]. In this approach the evildoer is considered as being so corrupted by evil, that not only his

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[42] For a Jewish perspective on this, see: C.K.M. Chung, *Repentance for the Holocaust: Lessons from Jewish Thought for Confronting the German Past*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2017.

[43] P. de Saint-Cheron, *Le pardon et l'impardonnable*, in, Id. & X. De Chalendar & N. Mahfouz, *Le pardon. Trois voix monothéistes*, Paris, Centurion, 1992, pp. 19-62; & A. Abécassis, *L'acte de mémoire*, in O. Abel (ed.), *Le pardon. Briser la dette et l'oubli*, Paris, Autrement, 1991, pp. 137-155; & P. Banki, *The Forgiveness to Come: the Holocaust and the Hyper-Ethical*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2018, pp. 83-102 (Chapter 4: 'Hyper-Ethics of Irreconcilable Contradictions: Vladimir Jankélévitch').

[44] See e.g. B. Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 1990, pp. 58-70.

acts, but his entire person has to be definitively condemned. When the Nazi is the incarnation of evil, then one cannot expect anything good from him—he cannot possibly reform and he and his actions definitively have to be seen as unforgivable. Using the idea of *l'impardonnable* follows naturally from the Nazi logics. It becomes an element of a closed, self-defensive and merciless ethical system. Even more, it becomes the pinnacle and the conclusion of this closedness. It functions as an instrument, like in Nazism itself, to place people in dualistic categories and to maintain on that basis an ethical system of terror and fear. In this way *l'impardonnable* is not a means to fight the Nazi *Weltanschauung*, but it becomes in fact an imitation of its dualistic ethical character and, in doing so, leads to a continuation of evil. It becomes an instrument to do the same as what the Nazis have done to their victims, namely locking them up in an image of pure malice.

This attitude holds a contradiction. On the one hand one wants to accuse the criminal because he has acted wrongly, but on the other hand, one renounces in principle offering forgiveness, exactly because one wants to confirm him in his criminality. In other words the perpetrator not only is a criminal, he must be a criminal[45]. However, there is still the question whether one can speak of evil as a reality that can be qualified morally, if the person who does this act of crime is not able to do good at the same time.

The idea *l'impardonnable* itself is problematic too. The term 'the unforgivable' suggests that the question of forgiveness as a possibility concerns evil as such. However, evil is in itself never the subject of forgiveness. The question of forgiveness does not concern the evildoer as a person either, but the condition that the malefactor is in. In contrast with diabolisation the perpetrator does always remain forgivable because he always remains connected with the good, even in evil (which is apparent *e contrario* from self-deception). The idea *l'impardonnable* does not refer to the crime in itself either. What has happened, has happened and cannot be undone by anyone. In this sense every crime is unforgivable because it is irreversibly situated in time and place.

In fragmentation and in self-deception man cuts himself off, which makes paying attention to the other impossible, the human growth towards more and more humanity is stopped and evil can freely go its way. Now we understand the idea of the impossibility to forgive as the

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[45] J. DE VISSCHER, *Over het vergeven van het nooit te rechtvaardigen kwaad*, in *Wijsgerig perspectief op mens en maatschappij* 33, 1992-1993, p. 116.

conclusion of the actual ethical closedness in which the self-deceiving subject finds himself here and now. The *impardonnable* is the actual situation in which the closedness has been stronger than the principal existential dynamism, namely the human openness for the other than himself. The *impardonnable* refers for us to the actual human impenetrability, which makes it impossible for the orientation towards the other one to break through. Because the evildoer is closed, we can say that he is in a situation where forgiveness is impossible. This is a situation in which the malefactor cannot possibly be forgiven, because being granted forgiveness already is allowing a positive attitude towards the other to come in. The situation is (and remains) unforgivable as long as the evildoer remains closed. The *impardonnable* is not so much meant for the malefactor, nor for the evil in itself, but for the situation in which he finds himself. The evildoer always remains virtually 'forgivable' because there is always still the fundamental possibility to be open for the other. The unforgivable is a situation in which people don't allow being forgiven because they are not open enough. It is a painful diagnose, in which the prognosis must always be put between brackets because it is vague and unclear. The *impardonnable* rather says something about the present than about the future. The dramatic conclusion of *l'impardonnable* is never an *a priori*, but always a provisional, *a posteriori* statement, namely the conclusion that a particular situation is impenetrable here and now. Only the death of the perpetrator can, in this existence[46], be the definite end of this situation of impenetrability, ethical closedness and thus impossibility of being forgiven.

In this chapter we endorse the characterisation of the Nazi-crimes as *impardonnable*, but not, like what usually happens, on the basis of the totally corrupted character of the criminals, but on the basis of the situation of closedness in which they then found themselves, and sometimes still do up to this day. In the end, it was not through self-criticism or mutual argumentation that the Nazis have come themselves to the conclusion that their criminal activities had to come to an end. Their crime was only stopped by a violent, but legitimate military counter-offensive of the Allied Forces. Even after the war, most people who had been involved, had no feelings of guilt whatsoever or did not ask for forgiveness.

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[46] In this chapter, we restrict ourselves to the actual situation in which we don't see any hope any more. For religious believers ethics is situated in an eschatological perspective of liberation and mercy. See the final chapter of this book.

The Mitscherlichs, who were both psychoanalysts, pointed out that the incapacity to reform is connected with the incapacity of post-war Germany to mourn[47]. For them, the process of mourning is a very drastic process of the slow internalisation of the loss of something or someone (like the *Führer*) in order to be able to re-establish a normal contact with the present. So, without openness for the personal story, mourning is impossible. After the collapse of the Third Reich all kinds of defensive processes were developed, such as fragmentation, denial and projection in order to avoid feelings of guilt, shame and even responsibility, processes that also made Nazi evil itself possible. Even after the war the deepest motive for these defensive mechanisms was the fear that one would lose identity in the frightening light of the past that questions everything. This is how one could escape the question of why one tolerated Hitler's cruel racism at the time and co-operated actively or passively with the self-deceiving change of conscience. By taking such a defensive attitude it becomes difficult to grow towards more humanity after such a catastrophe. Some German people held off the mourning by throwing themselves fanatically into the rebuilding of Germany. Now that this has been completed, a fear comes up again. Today the migrants who were necessary to rebuild the country are no longer necessary and we see how today (in almost all European countries) a new, heartless and closed dualism in the form of an almost uncontrollable anti-migration policy to a certain degree replaces anti-Semitism.

Because the lack of openness is situated where incapacity and unwillingness meet, the idea of *impardonnable* also always implies a commitment from the person who uses this label. The *impardonnable* may never become an *Endlösung* for the perpetrator, because then we get the repetition of what one wanted to fight. In a certain sense, the situation where something is unforgivable is also always a fault of the society that has brought forth those people (groups of people) who have themselves run aground. In our view *l'impardonnable* is not a means to classify people definitively in dualistic schematics. Rather, it implies exactly the opposite, namely a claim to the judging authorities to lead the person (or group) concerned out of his closedness or to give him a chance to grow, wherever this can still be achieved[48]. It is not only necessary for us to be

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[47] A. Mitscherlich – M. Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu Trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens*, Stuttgart, Deutscher Bücherbund, 1967.

[48] R. Burggraeve, *Une éthique de miséricorde*, in *Lumen vitae. Revue international de catechèse et de pastorale* 49 (1994), pp. 281-296.

very attentive to the closedness and to protect ourselves against it with all legal means possible; we must also challenge the closedness and create the pre-conditions within which the perpetrators can break open their closedness with the help of others. So, it is not enough for us to always keep open the possibility of reform. We also have to stimulate this possibility actively. This does not mean that evil can be approved; on the contrary, evil must be condemned very strongly, but we may never at the same time totally reject those who did evil. For a good post-Holocaust anthropology, the distinction between evil and evildoer is crucial.

On the basis of this analysis, I think it does not make any sense whatsoever to present ethics only in its tough and judging form. Such ethics only drive a wedge between people in a dualistic way: the 'bad ones' who are forced to persuade themselves of a good conscience and the 'good ones' who are forced to mask their bad conscience by projecting it onto others. Instead of taking up a rigid and normative ethical attitude, ethics after Auschwitz should aim toward the vulnerable and broken man, heeding the call to life and authenticity which heals and sets free. Ethics should not be oppressively directed towards a law that moralises, but towards the human desire for fullness and depth, which is something totally different from the post-modern idolising of superficial and narcissistic emotions. The mission of ethics after Auschwitz is not in the first place the elaboration of a strict morality of the law, but the revelation of the deeply human desire for fullness, to healing and redemption, of which the law is only a deduced, second, instrumental expression.

Ethicists after Auschwitz should not be a kind of moral crusaders in the first place, but people who criticise the daily vices that are hiding behind the hypocritical façades of our time and that usually cause so much damage 'in the name of the good' in a subtle or manifesting way. They should ask to set the outcasts of our time free from the closed normative ethical systems that does nothing else but oppress them and to deliver them from the situation in which they find themselves. The great Idea of Humanity developed by Plato is not the issue here, but the concrete, daily goodness for people who were discriminated, marginalised and even excommunicated.

Every fragmentation in evil is always characterised to a certain degree by self-deception and thus is always doomed to fail partly. Because self-deception is that odd mixture of closedness and openness, the possibility always remains that the openness will be the stronger one in the future. The *impardonnable* can never be determined without any doubt. Other-

wise we would give up all hope for growth and renewal. Here we will use *l'impardonnable* as an instrument to doubt, as a way to look for cores of *l'impardonnable* that still exist, precisely in order to prevent *l'impardonnable* (as much as possible), to make it 'forgivable' and to make it disappear. This conception can function as a tool to question certain closed situations patiently and to break them open if necessary. This is why this notion should in fact never be written without a question-mark ('*impardonnable?*') in the sense of: 'Is this really unforgivable?' In this way this notion can become a detection instrument that will protect us from using dualistic categories too quickly. It is a kind of negative utopia, in the double sense of the word. The *impardonnable* is on the one hand a 'bad' (because closed, violent) place and on the other hand a quasi-impossibility of which we can only think with fear, because it is in fact that which should remain 'without a place'.

When one applies this category too fast, one risks being closed oneself. In the closedness of a situation or a person one must always look for *espaces de liberté* and try to broaden these as much as possible. The category of *l'impardonnable* is a marginal category, that nevertheless must be considered *a posteriori* as real in certain situations. In principle it is never an end point, although it can *de facto* become a dramatic one in the history of people (groups of people).

Even when the perpetrator who reforms can receive forgiveness, even then it is still possible that the factual situation of *l'impardonnable* remains. Forgiveness is by definition something that happens in relationships. In this sense, it is possible that not only the death of the perpetrator, but also the death of the victim can mean the partly, tragic conclusion of a situation of the unforgivable among people. When the victim has been murdered, then we get a situation of *l'impardonnable*, because, seen from the interpersonal point of view, nobody is able to grant forgiveness for the victim. When two children are killed by a drunk driver e.g., neither the mother of these children, nor anyone else can forgive him in the name of these children. At the death of a victim the fundamental question for forgiveness is passed on to those who are affected by the committed crime (*in extenso* all humanity). Thus the mother of the dead children can forgive the driver for the pain that he caused her through his fault, although the perpetrator will have to live with the experience of something that is irrevocable and unforgivable.

When the victim is still alive and the perpetrator has reformed, even then it is possible that the situation of *l'impardonnable* is maintained because the victim herself *cannot* forgive. At that moment, the inability

to forgive the other transgressions becomes a problem for the person who cannot or who is reluctant to give forgiveness as well. The victim may have suffered so much that forgiveness becomes impossible. Her fundamental trust may have been so hurt by evil that—in order to protect herself from the ethical dualism of which she has been the victim—she creates an ethical dualism herself in order to be able to survive. Forgiveness is sometimes just too difficult for people who have been hurt. In fact this is a human tragedy too. By not being able to forgive the perpetrator the victim gives evil the final word and she allows the memory of it to dominate her whole life in a negative way.

However, academics have to remain conscious of the 'blessed' position of the non-victim, upon whom they develop theories about forgiveness. When the victim is not able to deal with her own ethical dualism, then usually enough psycho-social reasons can be put forward to help her feel less guilty about that incapacity. Still the victims have to be called on *and supported* to break through their own closedness, in order to conquer in themselves the diabolisation of which they have become the victim and to give their fundamental trust a chance to heal. Forgiveness is: not giving the last word to the wounds that are at the basis of evil and that are caused by evil, because one is convinced that man has not been created to be hurt, but to be loved, healed and completed. Reconciliation is actively giving the wounds of perpetrators and victims the chance to heal by means of symbols and rituals, so that both parties can find their humanity back together and share it with each other.

VI. Conclusion

Finally we return briefly to the story with which we started this chapter. Should Wiesenthal have forgiven the SS-soldier? If he had reasoned in terms of diabolisation, then the soldier would have been the embodiment of all evil that Wiesenthal experienced at that moment. Dealing with such evil, only total rejection would have been appropriate. However, Wiesenthal does not say one word of blame and leaves the room in silence[49]. With this attitude he does not situate himself in a banalisation

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[49] After the war, it became clear that Wiesenthal did not use diabolisation in prosecuting ex-Nazis. See the title of his book "Not revenge, but justice": S. WIESENTHAL, *Geen wraak maar gerechtigheid: herinneringen van Simon Wiesenthal*, Haarlem, Becht, 1988. This is also evident through the fact that the story of the dying soldier is questioning him long after the war.

paradigm either. Although he has information about the background of this man, he does not use any terms of apology that reason away evil. His silence creates the space in which the full weight of evil becomes clear. Finally the story cannot be situated within the third paradigm. The SS-soldier does not hold on to apologising Nazi rhetoric any longer. He has broken through his self-deception. He is fully aware of his evil. This is reform, even though the results of this (like *Erinnerungsarbeit*) have not come into development here. Perhaps the soldier should first have called his colleagues to his deathbed in order to convince them of the immorality of the genocide. Wiesenthal's silence shows at least his incapacity to grant forgiveness. On the one hand he cannot forgive in the name of million victims. In the evil caused by the young man there is the tragic element of the factual inability to forgive. The dead cannot return anymore. On the other hand, Wiesenthal has been hurt so much that he probably is (or was) unable to himself forgive either. In this sense his silence is complex, but can be explained from two viewpoints. When Wiesenthal was confronted with this German soldier who showed remorse, the most he *could* have done was make an elementary gesture that—without breaking the meaningful silence—could have made clear that he remained connected with the indestructible human part of this dying criminal, even in the tragic impossibility of forgiveness. But for man even this is usually an 'impossible option' when he faces the trauma of truly terrible evil[50].

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[50] A previous version of this chapter was originally published D. POLLEFEYT, *Vergeving na misdaden tegen de mensheid? Een christelijke antropologie van kwaad en vergeving*, in *Tijdschrift voor theologie* 36(2)(1996), pp. 155-178.

Chapter Eleven

Forgiveness after the Holocaust

In his *Christian Theology after the Shoah*, James Moore writes, "The question becomes for Christians, can we talk about forgiveness in the same way *even in everyday situations* now that we see how forgiveness can crumble in the face of enormous atrocity? (...) At least, the shadow of Auschwitz looms over this central Christian theological category"[1]. Moore's inquiry puts the following question on the table: Isn't evil such a serious thing that every tendency to put the evildoer in another perspective becomes an inhuman act because it does not take human responsibility seriously enough? Even more concretely, isn't it possible that human beings—take the Nazis, for example—have destroyed their own humanity so fundamentally that every restoration through (human or divine) forgiveness becomes impossible? This chapter focuses not so much on the question of forgiveness *for* Auschwitz—as did the previous chapter—as on the possibility that forgiveness has been so compromised that it is no longer authentically conceivable *after* Auschwitz.

I. The Problem of Giving Forgiveness

At the outset, consider Emmanuel Levinas' warning: "A world where forgiveness is almighty becomes inhuman"[2]. Easy and omnipresent forgiveness destroys human responsibility and opens the way for new injustice. Especially for Christians, it is a touchy matter to speak about forgiveness after Auschwitz. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer correctly argued, Christianity has often advanced a discourse of 'cheap grace', which especially ignores the victims of atrocity[3]. Cheap grace permits perpetrators to continue their evildoing or to leave the scene of their

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[1] J.F. MOORE, *Christian Theology after the Shoah*, Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1993, p. 140. The italics are mine.

[2] E. LEVINAS, *Difficile liberté: Essais sur le judaïsme*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1963, p. 37. The translation is mine.

[3] See D. BONHOEFFER, *The Cost of Discipleship*, New York, NY, Macmillan, 1995, pp. 43-47.

crimes without moral anguish. Even during the Holocaust, perpetrators could and did participate in rituals of reconciliation (rituals that stressed forgiveness for sexual sins at the expense of attention to political evil). After the Holocaust, the Roman Catholic Church's document "We Remember" (1998) asked forgiveness for the sins of "her sons and daughters" in regard to the Shoah. However, by locating the roots of Nazi anti-Semitism outside of Christianity, the Catholic Church has failed to make an unqualified confession of its particular guilt.

II. The Problem of Refusing Forgiveness

After Auschwitz, not only giving forgiveness but also resisting or rejecting forgiveness has become problematic. Without the possibility of forgiveness, one easily becomes merciless. Persons and communities get locked up in their personal and collective evil; there is no possibility for them to escape that fate or to transcend that identity. Refusing to grant or to receive forgiveness also obscures the potentiality and reality of evil in oneself and one's communities.

An ethical system without forgiveness becomes Manichaean. It rigidly separates good and evil in ways that often prove to be heartless. Nazism can be understood along these lines; it was a dualistic worldview in which forgiveness was rejected because supposedly everything was determined by clear categories of good and evil, light and darkness. To be a prostitute or a homosexual, for example, was unforgivable, and the ensuing persecution was ruthless. *Rücksichtslose Härte* (relentless hardness) was a Nazi virtue. By rejecting forgiveness after Auschwitz, one could create a universe with remarkable analogies to the Third Reich's dualistic and pitiless rule. From this perspective, Emil Fackenheim's imperative against granting Hitler "posthumous victories" could also mean to reinterpret the concept of forgiveness as a post-Holocaust category.

III. Moral Anger and Justice as Appropriate Reactions to Evil

No human being is merciful by nature, especially when he or she is a victim of or witness to acts of evil. In confronting extreme forms of evil, such as those embodied by the Holocaust, the first human reactions nearly always involve strong feelings of disgust, anger, rage, and hatred. Rarely are forgiveness and reconciliation the immediate responses. The

most common first feelings, such as disgust and anger, reflect not only evil's devastation but also our human desire for goodness. They even open a way to meet God, who, as Levinas aptly urges, may be revealed in the midst of evil as protest against evil.

Turning our thinking to Jean Améry (who committed suicide in 1978) shows how useless experiences 'conspires' against post-Holocaust forgiveness. In my view, the case of Améry, who was a victim of brutal Nazi torture, is an illustration of how useless experience can become (understandably) not the basis for forgiveness but for its opposite: a legitimation of resentment and even revenge. In *At the Mind's Limits*, Améry calls himself a "self-confessed man of resentments" who "supposedly live[s] in the bloody illusion that I can be compensated for my suffering through the freedom granted me by society to inflict injury in return"[4]. He describes the goal of his work as follows: "My personal task is to justify a psychic condition that has been condemned by moralists and psychologists alike. The former regard it as a taint, the latter as a kind of sickness"[5].

I believe that Améry's complex self-appraisal must be taken seriously. It is dangerous to make a philosophy out of resentment and revenge. In my view, Améry's theory of resentment and revenge, understandable though it may be, cannot be the final foundation for moral reflection after Auschwitz, and especially not for thinking about forgiveness after the Holocaust. There are many counterexamples from the Nazi period in which useless experience did not lead to Améry's conclusions. One thinks of the approaches of Albert Camus, Etty Hillesum, and Simon Wiesenthal in this regard. My point is not that Améry's position has no value in the discussion about forgiveness. "My resentments," he emphasises, "are there in order that the crime become a moral reality for the criminal, in order that he be swept into the truth of his atrocity"[6]. Améry's position is a strong warning against 'cheap grace'. It also makes us understand that people can be damaged so profoundly that forgiveness becomes impossible.

Any religion that asks people to overcome their immediate feelings because they are inhuman or un-Christian risks facilitating moral

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[4] J. AMÉRY, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 2009, p. 69.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

indifference. As the Dutch Jew Etty Hillesum wrote in the diaries she kept in the Nazi camp at Westerbork, moral anger is a necessary

> protection against evil. The soul stands up and resists evil with deep indignation. (...) If we had no longer been capable of being angry, we would have become like 'moral cows' in our ponderous easiness. (...) If there is an undertone of moral outrage, but not of personal resentment, in the anger, then this anger is good, valuable, and healthy[7].

Even a person who forgives may not deny moral anger. In forgiveness the victim is not denying moral anger in confronting the evildoer but at a certain point decides to transcend his or her personal resentment. Hence, forgiveness takes time—sometimes a whole life or even generations[8]. Forgiveness always remains unpredictable, whereas moral anger is expected and logical, for the first and most appropriate response to moral evil is neither forgiveness nor hate but a demand for justice. As the philosopher Albert Camus said at the end of World War II, "Tomorrow, the most difficult victory that we need to gain over our enemies will have to take place in ourselves, in this superior effort to transform hate into a desire for justice"[9].

Justice entails public recognition of the evil done to the victims and their descendants. It requires efforts to restore their dignity and also identification of the perpetrators. Forgiveness presupposes justice. Therefore, the victim does not abandon punishment even as hate, resentment, and revenge are set aside in forgiveness. At least in some cases, punishment can lead to restitution of damages done to the victims and also, eventually, to the restoration of the perpetrators self-respect. The problem with justice, however, is that it is intrinsically limited. Even if a perpetrator is caught and punished, the punishment is unlikely to satisfy the victim, who will witness it as disproportionate to his or her irreparable suffering. What punishment, for instance, can provide complete satisfaction to parents whose child has been brutally murdered? Important aspects of a victim's pain and suffering can never be compensated for through justice because the tragic, irreversible nature of moral evil is simply more than the inherent limitations of justice can bear. Victims can ask forever more severe punishment of the perpetrators, but none will be completely satisfactory. Punished perpetrators may even become convinced that they

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[7] E. HILLESUM, *Etty: De nagelaten geschriften van Etty Hillesum 1941-1943*, Amsterdam, Balans, 1991, p. 417. The translation is mine.

[8] C.K. MARTIN KUNG, *Repentance for the Holocaust: Lessons from Jewish Thought for Confronting the German Past*, Cornell, Cornell University Press, 2017.

[9] A. CAMUS, *Combat*, Sept. 1945.

have become victims, a dangerous outcome, since the perpetrators may find ways to transfer their victimisation again to others.

VI. Victimism

At least in part, the administration of criminal justice governs the roles of perpetrator and victim. In this context, the perpetrator will reconstruct his or her (hi)story of evil in such a way that it becomes a form of self-justification. This predictable approach blocks the possibility of forgiveness because forgiveness requires the recognition of guilt. In struggling with the perpetrator and with themselves, victims will also reconstruct history. It is crucial to listen to the accounts of the victims. Hearing a victim's lived story is a public and official event, which is important in doing justice to his or her suffering. Nevertheless, memory is never a pure reproduction of historical facts but always also a reconstruction, one determined not only by *what* is remembered but also by *who* remembers and for what *reason*, in the present or the future. Remembrance usually has a clear goal, namely, that what happened must never happen again. Those who remember always have a history *after* the immediate trauma of evil. This history colours memory.

Memory's selectivity means that not only the perpetrator's story but also the victim's story can become egocentric and ideological. What I call *victimism* may result: the victim chooses (mostly unconsciously) to stay in his or her role as victim because that identity sometimes opens an almost inexhaustible "credit line" of sympathy from others.

Even if the reconstruction of history contains few errors, some pre-suppositions that are not guided by the facts but by the victim's trauma can enter the reconstruction. One result is called in previous chapters *diabolisation*: a victim can be so overwhelmed by evil that he or she identifies the evildoer solely by his or her evil acts, disconnecting the perpetrator from his or her psychological and sociohistorical contexts. The space between act and actor disappears[10]. This identification can even take on a collective dimension: for example, every person who shares the perpetrator's nationality may be seen as guilty.

Recognition of the space between an evil act and the person who commits it, and between a perpetrator and his or her descendants or

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[10] See Chapter Three: *The Perpetrator: Devil, Machine or Idealist?*

community, is an essential condition for forgiveness. If a person can be completely identified by his or her evil act, which entails that 'good' and 'evil' persons can be clearly identified, or if the views and deeds of the descendants of perpetrators coincide totally with those of their ancestors, then forgiveness is scarcely possible.

In victimism, the victim receives his or her identity solely through victimhood. Thus, it can happen that the victim is not prepared to accept any form of excuse, reparation, or restitution. He or she may have problems connecting his or her unique suffering with that of others, especially the suffering of others that may be caused by his or her own (actual) position. In this situation, the idea can easily grow that to forgive is the same as to forget, and victims do not want to forgive because they do not want to forget. Victimism gives the perpetrator no exit; he or she is forever and completely identified with evil acts and thus the perpetrator is forced into a defensive position characterised by self-righteousness. But victimism also gives the victim no exit; the victim's life becomes totally determined and ruled by the endured evil. The determination not to grant the perpetrator a "posthumous victory" may even become the victim's primary reason for living. Such victims invest all their energies in the everlasting story of their victimhood instead of working on their traumas. The ironic result is that the perpetrator gains immense and lasting control over the victim. Through forgiveness the victim can make himself or herself independent of the perpetrator.

Most victimism—individual or collective—does not happen consciously. It should not be the object of moral condemnation. In the long run, the victim suffers the most under it. The greatest harm produced by victimism is that it destroys the inner freedom of the victim. The victim links his or her future to that of the perpetrator and becomes dependent on the perpetrator's whim—for example, to repent or to make restitution. Victimism is the impossibility of accepting an interaction between the past event and the future, between the victim's own suffering and the suffering of others, between uniqueness and universality. The present is dominated by the past. Through forgiveness, the victim can be freed from the crushing link with the past and from his or her dependence on the perpetrator. But a key question remains: Does this release mean that forgiveness implies forgetting?[11]

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[11] A. Baer, *Memory and Forgetting in the Post-Holocaust Era: the Ethics of Never Again*, London – New York, Routlegde, 2017, Chapter 5: 'Beyond Antigone and Amalek: Toward a Memory of Hope'.

V. Remembering for the Future

There is a crucial distinction between remembrance and repetition or recital of the past. Remembering is not the same as an endless repetition or recital of the past; instead it is opening the past in the direction of the future. In this way, the universal value of a memory—how particular it is—stands revealed. Remembrance is thus not an eternal emphasising of victimhood, but a "memory of a promise," a memory for the future[12]. Therefore, a victim needs what Paul Ricœur calls "labour of remembrance" (forming an identity by storytelling) and "labour of mourning" (establishing distance from the facts without denying them and without blocking the future)[13]. At its best, remembering is a creative process in which negative emotional energy is transformed into positive energy that opens up the future[14]. Processes of involvement and detachment interact intensely to produce an interpretation that is not reproductive, but productive.

This process can advance when forgiveness is granted. Forgiveness is the opposite of an escape into forgetting. The relationship is not one of 'forgiving and forgetting'. One can only forgive things that cannot be forgotten. "Forgetting," as Levinas says, "cancels the relations with the past, while forgiving shifts the past into a purified present"[15]. Human forgiveness is necessary because some things absolutely cannot be forgotten. Forgiveness, moreover, does not concern evil itself; evil's trace remains even after forgiveness is granted. Forgiveness has to do with the evildoer's *guilt*. Giving or receiving forgiveness releases neither the perpetrator nor the victim from remembrance. The victim is not released from memory but from the weight of resentment and hate. The victim's wound, however, remains as an everlasting scar.

Ricœur speaks of the healing power of forgiveness, not only for victims but also for perpetrators. The perpetrator is freed neither from

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[12] O. Abel, *Tables du pardon*, in *Le pardon: Briser la dette et l'oubli*, Paris, Autrement, 1998, 208-233, especially p. 219.

[13] P. Ricœur, *Can Forgiveness Heal?*, in H.J. Opdebeeck, (ed.), *The Foundation and Application of Moral Philosophy: Ricœur's Ethical Order*, Leuven, Peeters, 2000, pp. 31-36; & D.B. Klein, *Survivor Transitional Narratives of Nazi-Era Destruction: the Second Liberation*, London – New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018, Chapter 5, pp. 117-148 ('Critical Forgiveness').

[14] P. Gobodo-Madikizela – C. Van Der Merwe (eds.), *Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness. Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009.

[15] E. Levinas, *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*, The Hague, Nijhoff, 1992, p. 316. The translation is mine.

remembrance nor from responsibility but from the overwhelming weight of guilt. He or she receives a future because the victim recognises the space between the evildoer and his or her evil act. In forgiveness the victim says to the perpetrator, 'You are more than your evil act'. In this sense, forgiveness is radically different from amnesty, which seeks to erase not only the burden of guilt but the facts themselves, in an attempt to continue life as though nothing had happened. In forgiveness and through the remembrance it entails, the burden of guilt is transformed into responsibility for the future.

VI. Forgiveness as a Free Act

The perpetrator's readiness to submit to a (constructive) punishment should be seen as one of the conditions for forgiveness. However, forgiveness can never be earned, not even by accepting punishment. The perpetrator can never demand forgiveness from the victim; he or she can only ask for it, and the victim can legitimately refuse the request. As Ricœur puts it, "Pardon demandé n'est pas pardon dû"[16] ("Forgiveness asked is not [automatically] forgiveness given") . Like love, forgiveness must be given freely; otherwise it cannot be real. Nobody who is unwilling or unable to forgive can be dismissed, because forgiveness is not a (moral) duty but a trans-moral act of love. A situation where forgiveness is not granted cannot be condemned from a moral point of view, even if such a situation can in many cases be seen as detrimental for both perpetrator and victim. The only thing a perpetrator can do is create the preconditions for receiving forgiveness—admission of guilt, repentance, acceptance of punishment, restitution, remembering. But forgiveness itself is a gift; it is given (or not) by the victim. On the other hand, the victim is not allowed to impose his or her arbitrary preconditions on the perpetrator, since forgiveness could then be distorted by feelings of revenge, malicious delight, narcissism, or economic self- interest. Other conditions hold as well: A victim can be willing to forgive a perpetrator, but the perpetrator may be unwilling or unable to receive forgiveness—for example, because he or she has not repented. Or a perpetrator may have grown to confront his or her crime so that a readiness for forgiveness exists, but the victim may be unable or unwilling to grant forgiveness.

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[16] P. Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 2000, p. 626.

VII. The Unforgiveable

Forgiveness is a relational event that presupposes the perpetrator's movement away from moral self-justification and toward repentance and the victim's movement away from diabolisation of the perpetrator. When this process fails, the 'unforgivable' results. I use in this book the unforgivable as an *a posteriori* category. After careful analysis, we see the tragic impossibility of forgiveness in some cases—cases in which the evildoer is unwilling or unable to distance himself or herself from the evil done and/or the victim, because of the depth of his or her trauma, is unwilling or unable to see the space between the evildoer and the evil act.

Typically, however, the unforgivable is seen as an *a priori* category. Some acts—genocide, for example—are considered to be so evil that the space between the evil act and the evildoer disappears forever and completely. I reject the *a priori* category of the unforgivable, because it is based on a diabolising view that presumes to define a person's identity forever and without any doubt. Furthermore, the *a priori* category of the unforgivable contains a contradiction. On the one hand, this view condemns the perpetrator because he or she has acted wrongly, but on the other, it refuses forgiveness because it insists on confirming the perpetrator in his or her criminality. But can a person be blamed morally for evildoing if he or she is not capable of also doing good and thus being capable of change that could become at least a precondition for forgiveness?

VIII. Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Thus far, I have not distinguished forgiveness from reconciliation, but they are not the same. Forgiveness is a healing act centred in the heart of a victim who grants forgiveness to a perpetrator who is ready for it. After forgiveness, victim and perpetrator can go their own ways. Reconciliation, however, goes a step further. It aims at an integral transformation of the relation between victim and perpetrator. Jean Monbourquette argues, correctly I believe, that forgiveness should not automatically imply reconciliation[17]. If reconciliation is presented as the necessary final point of forgiveness, victims can be blocked in their efforts to forgive. There are cases in which forgiveness should not be

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[17] J. MONBOURQUETTE, *Comment pardonner? Pardonner pour guérir. Guérir pour pardoner*, Ottawa, Novalis, 1992.

followed automatically by reconciliation—for example, after sexual abuse between (former) partners. If we do not separate forgiveness and reconciliation clearly enough, even while suggesting that forgiveness also implies readiness to transform the relation, the blurring can be a barrier that prevents the victim's granting of forgiveness. Even if forgiveness is incomplete without reconciliation, forgiveness has value in itself quite apart from reconciliation. Forgiveness is possible without reconciliation. Reconciliation, however, is not possible without forgiveness. A relation that is transformed, but in which the evildoer is not forgiven, cannot be called a relation in the fullest sense of the word.

IX. To Forgive Oneself

An important starting point for forgiveness is found when perpetrator and victim are able to forgive themselves. If a perpetrator gives up self-justification, confronts his or her evildoing, and acknowledges that evil-doing as an aspect of his or her existence, then the perpetrator also needs to learn to accept himself or herself as a person who can be forgiven and loved. In this sense, the perpetrator has to forgive himself or herself. In some ways, the victim also has to forgive himself or herself. The victim has to see not only the good in himself or herself and the evil in the other, but also the potential for and reality of evil in himself or herself and the desire for good in the other. This recognition often includes the painful experience of shame as the victim discovers similarities between himself or herself and the perpetrator and identifies wounds that can only be healed if he or she accepts forgiveness of himself or herself. A victim is sometimes also confronted with feelings of guilt, which may be experienced because he or she failed to avoid violence, or was (in)voluntarily at the origin of violence, or was directly involved in violence. In these cases, for the victim, to forgive oneself means to understand one's own history and to accept one's own emotional injuries and give them a non-destructive place in one's life.

X. Substitutive Forgiveness

Special difficulties arise when the victim is no longer alive and hence unable to grant forgiveness to the perpetrator. Is it possible for there to be substitutive forgiveness—forgiveness given in the name of someone

else? In the context of the Holocaust, one often hears that no one can forgive in the name of the victims. In this case, the unforgivable is not the consequence of the unwillingness but of the inability of the victims' descendants to forgive in the name of the victims. Indeed, when the victim is dead, we must speak of a factual (*a posteriori*) situation regarding the unforgivable. Therefore, the question of forgiveness *for* the Holocaust is absurd. Only the question of forgiveness *after* the Holocaust is relevant now. Forgiveness can only take place between the living. For that reason, the Holocaust itself is factually 'unforgivable'. One cannot reconcile with the dead.

One more point is worth making in this context. Sometimes the descendants of victims say that they cannot forgive in the name of the victims, but their meaning may really be that they *refuse* to forgive in the name of the victims. I believe, however, that it is as illogical to *refuse* forgiveness in the name of the victims as it is to *grant* forgiveness in their name. Refusing to grant forgiveness is also a way of speaking in the name of the victims. Such acts are inappropriate attempts to 'manage' history[18].

XI. Intergenerational Bonds and Loyalty

What, then, is forgiveness *after* the Holocaust? Forgiveness only pertains to the living. Hence, the question of forgiveness shifts to the relations between those who are touched today by evil: descendants, friends, communities of perpetrators and victims, and, finally, the totality of humanity, since every evil touches and endangers the network of humanity itself.

This shift presupposes a form of intergenerational (collective) guilt. For a long time, I rejected the idea of collective guilt as a dangerous concept, even a Nazi one. When Jews escaped from extermination and death camps, the Nazis often responded to this 'crime' by randomly selecting other Jews and murdering them. The 'guilt' of one Jew was transferred to all Jews. Nevertheless, I believe today that there is a form of transpersonal and intergenerational guilt, which concerns groups of people and their history even if not every individual *as individual* bears the totality of that guilt. This idea came to me as I reflected on "We Remember," the Roman Catholic Church's post-Holocaust document,

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[18] On this point, see J. DE VISSCHER, *Over het vergeven van het nooit te rechtvaardigen kwaad*, in *Wijsgerig perspectief op mens en maatschappij* 33 (1992-93), pp. 113-117.

in which a distinction is drawn between the Church and the "sons and daughters of the Church", whose "errors and failures" are deeply regretted. I believe that in the document, the (all-too-)clear distinction between the Church and its members is made in an oversimplified and apologetic way. The relation between an institution or community and its members is much more complex than the document allows. The Church cannot hide behind the acts of some of its members; nor can its members hide behind the Church as an institution.

Sometimes my Jewish friends and partners in Jewish-Christian dialogue say that I am not guilty of the Holocaust because I was born after World War II and I am consciously a post-Shoah Catholic. This assurance is generous of them, but, with due respect, it seems akin to saying, "You are a Jew born after the Shoah, and so you have nothing to do with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust and their suffering". As a loyal Catholic, I *participate* in a Church community which bears as an institution and a community some degree of guilt for what happened during the Holocaust. It is not abnormal that the victims of this history (and their descendants) see the descendants of the perpetrators as the representatives of that past. In the same way, Christians today participate in the guilt of the Church *vis-à-vis* the Jewish people.

As a Christian, I always have to remember that my identity has been built on centuries of supersession. Even today, the glass windows in the church where I pray are filled with portrayals of the alleged Jewish desecration of the Eucharistic host. The Holy Scripture I read today has anti-Jewish passages such as John 8[19]. The Catholic university where I teach has almost no Jewish professors. I can never disconnect myself from this history, just as I cannot ask a contemporary Jew to disconnect himself or herself from the collective and intergenerational pain of the Holocaust. As he or she suffers when confronted with the catastrophe that struck the Jewish people during the Holocaust, I see my Catholic students suffering when they learn about these dark pages of Christian history. I believe that it is extremely dangerous when Jews neither acknowledge that suffering, even though it is not proportional to Jewish suffering, nor recognise contemporary Christian efforts to confess, repent, and remember.

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[19] R. BIERINGER – D. POLLEFEYT – F. VANDECASTEELE-VANNEUVILLE, *Wrestling with Johannine Anti-Judaism: A Hermeneutical Framework for the Analysis of the Current Debate*, in R. BIERINGER – D. POLLEFEYT – F. VANDECASTEELE-VANNEUVILLE, (eds.), *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel: Papers of the Leuven Colloquium 2000*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 2001, pp. 3-44.

Of course, this does not mean that as a member of a 'guilty community', I—as an individual—bear personally the full burden of guilt for all evil done. The problem is not with 'collective guilt', but the (mis)use of the concept to persecute and punish at random each individual member of that community, even of future generations, for the full amount of the collective guilt. So, collective guilt cannot be equalised with individual guilt, or be transferred completely onto each individual of that community. For an individual, the collective guilt of the past implies individual responsibility for the future, and not (as was a Nazi reasoning) the conflation of collective guilt with that of the individual.

From my Christian perspective, this situation reflects the theological concept of original sin. Original sin is not just a theoretical idea referring to a mythological past but is the fact that, as an individual, I am immediately and inevitably contaminated by evil—not by evil *in abstracto*, but by very concrete forms of evil, both on an interpersonal level (as in the case of an unfair inheritance in my family) and on a collective level (as in the case of the racist policies of my country). The state of original sin is not due to my intentional faults but to my concrete existence.

Of course, my personal guilt for this evil is rather small. Sometimes it is a 'complicity after the fact', as, for instance, in the case of a (Catholic) professor of medicine doing research on the tissue of an aborted human fetus. This professor discovers himself to be placed in a world where even contributing to good can for him no longer be separated from the evil that it presupposes. It is not very pleasant to recognize this contamination by evil. Nevertheless, it is crucial to see that one is involved in the history of evil; the integration of this idea into ones existence is equally crucial for taking responsibility for the future. In this connection, we see how Jewish-Christian dialogue has grown immensely from the moment that Christians recognised their guilt for the Holocaust.

For processes of reconciliation it is important that people (both perpetrators and victims) first recognise this contamination of our personal existence by concrete forms of evil. For me as a Christian, that evil is Auschwitz; as a Belgian, it is colonisation, environmental pollution, and so on; as a male, it is discrimination against women; as a white person, it is racism. If we start with just the idea of 'personal innocence', then the question of forgiveness and reconciliation between the heirs of perpetrators and victims has no *raison d'être*.

Of course, the past is irreversible. But if forgiveness and reconciliation would require undoing the past, then they are indeed and forever impossible. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same as removing the evil events of the past. On the contrary, their traces should be kept and remembered. Forgiveness and reconciliation have to do with the way perpetrators and victims, as well as their heirs, *relate* to the evil events of the past and to each other. If forgiveness and reconciliation are expected to reverse history, which is impossible, one should not be surprised that people dare not look back, because they are afraid they will turn into pillars of salt.

There are different ways to relate to evil events, even as descendants of perpetrators. Inherited guilt is not the same as innate guilt. Original sin is not a *fatum* but a human condition that must be dealt with creatively and responsibly. Forgiveness and reconciliation are means of dealing with history in a way that does not paralyse us. Forgiveness and reconciliation happen when the victims and their heirs give the perpetrators and their heirs the room to deal in a constructive way with their crimes, and when the perpetrators and their heirs have a positive and constructive attitude toward the victim and confess their complicity in the evil. Forgiveness and reconciliation refuse the dilemma created by the irreversibility of evil. They affirm that evil cannot be reversed, but the contamination by evil of relations and attitudes can—not by escaping or forgetting the facts, but by transcending them: beyond Auschwitz, but not without Auschwitz. In this way, forgiveness and reconciliation create a space where it becomes possible for young Germans or young Catholics to move freely toward the future without escaping the past.

The victim must not be absent in our description of the preconditions of reconciliation. If the perpetrators or their heirs give up their innocence and make themselves vulnerable for their evil history, the victims should be willing to take the hands of the perpetrators and their heirs. From that perspective, even if reconciliation is an anthropological category, it cannot be understood outside a transcendent background. When, after terrible events, people extend a hand to each other and thus open a space for the future, this cannot be understood in terms of biological, psychological, or social interaction. It is no more and no less than a miracle.

XII. Forgiveness Between Already and Not Yet

What is new after the Holocaust is that Auschwitz forces Christians to accept the factual limitations of forgiveness in the contemporary

world. The Jewish philosopher Emil Fackenheim once asked whether, in Auschwitz, Good Friday had not overwhelmed Easter: "Is the Good News of the Overcoming [of evil in Christ] not itself overcome?"[20]. For me, as a post-Holocaust Christian, Auschwitz shows that even after Christ came and showed Christians the way to redemption through forgiveness and reconciliation, the world is still unredeemed. Christ's resurrection is not yet the resurrection of this broken world. There is unredeemed suffering, and it will remain unredeemed in this world. The Holocaust means the end of triumphalism in Christian theologies of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Christians live in the tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet', between redemption and its absence, between forgiveness and the unforgivable. This tension should not lead to paralysis or pessimism. Instead it can and should stimulate Christians to work for redemption and reconciliation—first by converting and asking forgiveness themselves.

Christianity's self-definition needs radical change. As a post-Holocaust Christian theologian who is committed to this work, I understand any impatience and disappointment regarding this analysis. The building of a post-Holocaust Church is a complex and sometimes painful process. It takes time. Nevertheless, it is as important for Jews to recognise the progress that Christian churches are making as it is for them to criticise (legitimately) the delays and obstacles in that process. So, in particular, I want to invite Jews and Jewish communities to consider how they could respond adequately—from within their own traditions—to the penitential historical and theological turn that is under way in the Roman Catholic Church. I believe that these processes of conversion and reconciliation can only continue to go well if they take place through dialogical relationships. If there are never replies (including positive ones) to efforts made or progress achieved—even if this Christian progress is often halting and problematic—momentum will be lost, or, even worse, Christian resentment may arise, bringing repetitions of anti-Judaism in its wake[21].

As the Holocaust recedes into the past, the chances for a fundamental transformation of Christianity in response to its anti-Jewish tendencies may become less and less likely. Therefore, it is important for Jews and Judaism to keep in close contact—critically and constructively—with

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[20] E. FACKENHEIM, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought*, New York, NY, Schocken Books, 1982, p. 286.

[21] On these points, see I. BOSZORMENYI-NAGY – B. R. KRASNER, *Between Give and Take: Clinical Guide to Contextual Therapy*, New York, NY, Brunner/Mazel, 1986.

Christian efforts to bring about the needed changes. The "Dabru Emet" document of 2000 is very important in this regard, because it is a unique attempt by post-Holocaust Jewish communities to respond positively to Christian efforts to repudiate and atone for Christianity's anti-Judaic past. This statement recognises that Christianity's relation to Judaism has changed dramatically in the post-Holocaust decades. Without exonerating Christianity for what has happened in the past, "Dabru Emet" acknowledges the efforts of contemporary Christians and Christian churches to correct their age-old anti-Judaism.

When the document states that Nazism was not "an inevitable outcome of Christianity", it indicates that Christianity is *more* that its anti-Jewish history. In that way, it gives Christians the possibility to be(come) Christian in a post-Shoah way. For me, forgiveness is no more and no less than that—the ability to recognise the space between what someone is and what he or she can be and between persons and their history, and to open for them a space, a future, not *in spite* of their history of evil but *beyond* that history.

Michael Signer, one of the authors of "Dabru Emet", has said that he "would not use the term forgiveness, but reconciliation. In order to reconcile, Christians have to do an accounting of what they have done wrong. (...) Only God can forgive the sins of the past"[22]. As I have argued, however, reconciliation is not possible without forgiveness, and relations between Christians and Jews are no exception to this rule. "Dabru Emet" offers a key opportunity to encourage *actual* Jews and Christians to move toward forgiveness and reconciliation as I define those terms in this chapter. "Dabru Emet" gives a future to Christianity by transforming Christian guilt for the past into responsibility for the future. I agree with Signer that forgiveness for the "sins [and the sinners] of the past" is something that God and only God can grant. There is a big difference between speaking about forgiveness and reconciliation between contemporary Jews and Christians and between God and the (dead) perpetrators.

However, "Dabru Emet" remains an exception. When and where Christian behaviour warrants them, more Jewish responses of that kind are needed to keep Christian communities moving in the right direction. As the Holocaust disappears into the past, too many Christian theologians would like to revert to business as usual. To the extent that this trend dominates, Christian theology that is self-consciously post-Holocaust

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[22] Quoted in V. BARNETT, *Provocative Reconciliation: A Jewish Statement on Christianity*, in *The Christian Century* (Sept. 27 – Oct. 4, 2000).

theology will be marginalised as an outdated twentieth-century scholarly activity. An indifferent, lukewarm, badly informed, or exclusively negative Jewish reaction to the struggle of the Roman Catholic Church with the Shoah will only encourage this marginalisation and the return to business as usual that will accompany it. If the work for forgiveness and reconciliation becomes a monologue, it will finally come to an end, because people will start to believe that progress is no longer possible and that energies can be better invested elsewhere. Remembrance's greatest enemy is not (actively) forgetting, but (passively) allowing time's passing to carry evil away. Tendencies of the latter kind will relegate the Holocaust to the footnotes of (Christian) history[23]. As this chapter argues, reconciliation forms the (only) alternative: it opposes forgetting and indifference by turning the history of Christian evil into remembering for a new future that Jews and Christians can share.

XIII. Forgiveness and Reconciliation as Eschatological Restitution

There is, at the same time, an eschatological dimension to forgiveness and reconciliation. At the end of time, will God forgive the perpetrator and realise the reconciliation that human beings in this world—even after Easter—cannot achieve? A classic dilemma thereby arises that confronts theology: How are God's justice and mercy related? Justice without mercy easily leads to the (hard) concept of a cruel and vengeful God; mercy without justice easily leads to the (soft) concept of a God who becomes an accomplice of evil and injustice. My position is that it is impossible for human beings to resolve the dilemma of which is stronger, God's love or God's justice, because we do not have a divine perspective.

Favouring one side of the dilemma over the other creates more problems than solutions. Therein lies the danger, and the warning against the heresy of *apokatastasis panton* (universal restoration), a view in which God's love is seen as so perfect and victorious that it will finally win out in every single person's life (see Acts 3:21). Origen thought that "the goodness of God, through the mediation of Christ, will bring all creatures to one and the same end"[24]. In opposition to Origen, then, we are

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[23] See V. Jankélévitch, *Le, pardon*, Paris, Aubier, 1967. Also: R. Ford, *The Problem of Forgiveness: Jankélévitch, Deleuze, and Spinoza*, in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 31(3)(2017), pp. 409-421.

[24] See P. Koetschau (ed.), *Origenes Werke, vol. 5, De Principiis*, Leipzig, J.C. Hinrichssche Buchhandlung, 1913, p. 79. See specifically *De principiis I, vi, 2*: "In unum

reminded that if we take God's love to be too strong, we compromise God's justice and tumble into heresy.

God's love can never be separated from God's justice, thereby opening a new dangerous possibility—running the risk of divorcing them. If we take God's justice to be too strong, then we compromise God's love. One result is a tendency toward what the Christian tradition calls Manichaeism, a view that recognises an eternal principle of evil next to God and is likewise condemned by the Church as a heresy. When God's justice prevails over God's love, hell becomes the place where unredeemed people will be intensely and eternally tortured without hope of relief. But how could an all-good God accept or allow such a hell? People would fear, but never love or worship, such a cruel God.

My analysis instead discusses both sides of the eschatological dilemma regarding God's love and God's justice. Today especially, the danger of religious Manichaeism is much greater than that of religious *apokatastasis*. In the world's contemporary 'holy wars', for example, the conflicting groups all tend to see themselves as 'children of light' who can justifiably condemn (eternally) those they allege to be 'children of darkness'. Nazism was also Manichaean. Its ideology had little, if any, place for forgiveness because it divided people definitively in two (ethical) categories: 'us' (*Übermenschen*) and 'them' (*Untermenschen*). Not mercy but infinite condemnation and extermination were what the Nazis' *Gott mit uns* (God with us) required for the 'evil' Jewish 'race'. After the Holocaust, a merciless God would ensure a "posthumous victory for Hitler"[25] as much as a God who dispenses "cheap grace." After Auschwitz, the theological task is to avoid both *apokatastasis* and Manichaeism; it is to keep God's justice and mercy in tension, to experience and think about them together.

For some people, their historical time is too limited, too short, for repentance or forgiveness to be possible within it. From a theological perspective, should what we might call time-trapped perpetrators be condemned eternally? Should time-trapped victims—let alone God—be eternally bereft of the possibility of forgiving? Who would benefit from that?

This line of inquiry can lead to the possibility that God's forgiveness may be extended to perpetrators who repent after death. The traditional image

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sane finem putamus quod bonitas dei per Christum suum universam revocet creaturam, subactis ac subditis etiam inimicis".

[25] See E.L. FACKENHEIM, *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections*, Northvale, NJ, Jason Aronson, 1997, p. 84.

of purgatory is a strong one that can help us envision such a process of conversion beyond the grave. Meanwhile, even after death, repentance is surely not an idea that depends on infinite time. Instead, it is precisely an experience of ultimate interruption. Repentance and forgiveness—within history or after death—interrupt the logic of this world, where revenge, retaliation, and merciless justice are dominant and even exclusive yearnings. Forgiveness and reconciliation are the interrupting presence of God's dynamic love in the lives of people and communities and in history itself. By contrast, eternal punishment and condemnation would be the 'infinitisation' of the merciless and Nazistic logic of this world.

XIV. Theological Paradox

From a Christian perspective, it is often asked whether God should forgive the perpetrator if the perpetrator has not been forgiven by the victim. From a human perspective, it is not possible to answer this question, because one cannot put oneself in the divine point of view. The question poses a theological paradox. One can imagine that if perpetrators are confronted by the love of God, they will experience the terrible pain of their guilt. Beyond every form of self-righteousness, they will see how they have betrayed the image of God in the other and in themselves. It is not God who will punish them, but they who will punish themselves when they confront the love of God. But will God ultimately forgive them? If the answer were 'yes', then we would not be taking human freedom seriously enough, for it entails the human possibility to say 'no' definitively, even to the love of God, and to remain forever unredeemed.

If the answer were 'no', then we would not be taking the power of God's love seriously enough. Instead we would be affirming that there are people who are so evil that even God's love cannot lure and transform them. Then there would remain forever unredeemed evil. This does not in itself mean that, next to God, there should exist eternal evil (Manichaeism) because such evil, as pure negativity, in fact destroys itself and becomes 'nothing'. Human beings—whether victims or perpetrators—are neither allowed nor able to resolve this dilemma between forgiveness and the unforgiveable. That task belongs to God[26].

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[26] A previous version published as D. POLLEFEYT, *Forgiveness after the Holocaust*, in D. PATTERSON – J. ROTH (eds.) *After-Words. Post-Holocaust Struggles with Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Justice*, Seattle, WA, University of Washington Press, 2004, pp. 55-72.

Section Seven

God

Chapter Twelve:

Eclipsing God

I. Religion Without Theodicy

The question concerning the relation between God and evil is not new to the Holocaust, even if the magnitude of the Holocaust puts this question through the most severe test. For many centuries, theologians and philosophers have tried to understand the relation between God's almightiness and God's goodness in the light of human suffering. Next to declaring God dead, three major theologies have been developed to understand God in relation to evil in the world: (a) situating evil *within* God, (b) situating evil *outside* of God and (c) seeing an asymmetry between God and evil by presenting evil as an absence of (the) Go(o)d. All these theologies have been tested to the extreme by the reality of the Holocaust. In the view of Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust brings to light the radical discrepancy between these Western theological responses to evil and the concrete forms of extreme suffering of the victims during the Holocaust. The Holocaust represents a rupture in the history of salvation: humanity has to continue its journey with a 'religion without theodicy'. It is just impossible to justify God in the face of Auschwitz. "Once again, Israel found itself in the heart of the religious history of the world, in that it brought the explosion of the perspectives within which the established religions confined themselves"[1]. Nevertheless, also in confrontation with the Holocaust, the traditional theological perspectives have been reformulated (and criticised). Next to the idea of the death of God (Richard Rubenstein)[2], (a) God has been called an 'abusing God' (David Blumenthal)[3], a 'co-suffering God' (Jürgen

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[1] E. LEVINAS, *Het menselijk gelaat. Essays van Emmanuel Levinas*, chosen and introduced by A. PEPERZAK, Baarn, Ambo, 1984, p. 36.

[2] R. RUBENSTEIN, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology and Contemporary Judaism*, second edition, Baltimore, MD, The John Hopkins University Press, 1992.

[3] D.R. BLUMENTHAL, *Facing the Abusing God: a Theology of Protest*, Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.

Moltmann)[4] or the '*author intellectualis*' of the Holocaust (Ignace Maybaum)[5], and (b) God has been understood as in radical opposition with evil (Emmanuel Levinas, Emil Fackenheim)[6]. It is remarkable that a third theological perspective, (c) the idea of evil as the absence of (the) Go(o)d (*privatio boni*), remained until now underexposed in post-Holocaust theology, even if this is in the light of the theological tradition one of the very strong lines of interpretation to deal with the relation between God and evil, both in Judaism (Maimonides) and Christianity (Thomas Aquinas). In this chapter, we show what the re-interpretation of the traditional idea of evil as the absence of (the) Go(o)d (in the tradition called: the theory of, or evil as, *privatio boni*) could mean in wrestling with the evil of the Holocaust.

II. Manichaeism versus Monotheism

The reason why the *privatio boni* approach to the evil of the Holocaust has been neglected and almost excluded from post-Holocaust theology can be found in the seriousness and the magnitude of the evil of the Holocaust itself. As Berkovits argued already forty-five years ago, "the evil that created the ghettos and the death camps and ruled them with an iron fist was *no mere* absence of the good. It was real, potent, absolute"[7]. In other words, in the light of the cruelties of the Holocaust, the *privatio boni* theory appears to be too weak to express the magnitude of the individual and collective evil of Nazism. For the theologian Cohen, in and after Auschwitz, the power of evil has become even more real, more direct and more familiar than God himself. He inverts the quest for God and evil: the question is not how God allows evil in the world, but how can God be affirmed meaningfully in a world where evil enjoys such dominion[8]. After Auschwitz, the understanding of evil as an

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[4] J. Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott: das Kreuz Christi als Grund und kritik christelicher Theologie*, München, Kaiser, 1976.

[5] I. Maybaum, *The Face of God after Auschwitz*, Amsterdam, Polak & Van Gennep, 1965.

[6] E. Levinas, *Le 614° commandement*, in *Arche* 291(1981), pp. 55-57 ; Id., *La souffrance inutile*, in J. Roland (ed.), *Emmanuel Levinas: l'éthique comme philosophie première*, Paris, Cerf, 1993, p. 335.

[7] E. Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, New York, NY, Ktav, 1973, p. 89 [our italics].

[8] A.A.Cohen, *The Tremendum: a Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust*, New York, NY, Crossroad, 1981, p. 34.

absence of (the) Go(o)d seems only to be a theological play of words. Jacobs ironically says that "a victim tortured by the Gestapo suffered no less if his pain was attributed not to positive evil but to the absence of the good"[9].

For this reason, in presenting the Holocaust from a moral point of view, preference has been given to approaches that can underline better the reality and the power of evil. Manichaean presentations of evil have been especially successful. Here 'good' and 'evil' are two clearly separated and independent forces in the universe that are involved in an eternal war: an 'axis of good' and an 'axis of evil'. Both refer to a different God: a good God and an evil God. This (popular) representation, used also in presenting (the perpetrators of) the Holocaust, has enormous power in terms of moral sensitisation and education. Good and evil are seen as two clear and separated options people have. In this view, it is quite possible to intentionally choose 'evil' as the goal of one's action, making moral responsibility necessary for making the right choices for the good. Auschwitz is then seen as the most excessive outcome of choices for the axis of evil, against the axis of good, and thus the extreme revelation of the *demonic tremendum*[10]. On 'planet Auschwitz', perpetrators intentionally chose 'evil' as the object of their intentions, evil for evil's sake. In this way, the perpetrators become the incarnations of the principle of evil ('evil men', 'devils', etc.). From a theological point of view, this representation is interesting because evil can be attributed to an evil God, a mythological evil principle or an alternative ontological reality alongside God, and in this way, evil no longer poses a problem for understanding the existence of an opposite, other, true God. Moral responsibility then becomes the instrument to fight the evil God (or the devil), and ethics is structured around dual, secular ('reward' and 'punishment') or religious ('heaven' and 'hell') categories for all eternity. The ideal here is the final destruction of evil (often by destroying people connected with that evil) and the definitive triumph of goodness.

However, giving evil an ontological status and extra-human power is not without problems, neither from an ethical nor a theological point of view. From a moral point of view, if people choose evil for evil's sake, evil as an external, ontological reality, then they are no longer only persons doing *evil acts*, but they become themselves immoral, *evil persons*,

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[9] L. Jacobs, *Faith*, New York, NY, Arno Press, 1968, p. 115.
[10] D.J. Fasching, *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz: from Alienation to Ethics*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1992, p. 129.

for whom the difference between good and evil itself becomes perverted. In *Siegfried*, Harry Mulish let one of the characters in his novel, the seven year old boy Marnix, reflect on the figure of Hitler: "Hitler is in hell. But because he loves naughty things, it is for him heaven. In heaven, all Jewish people are sitting there, thus this is for him hell. In fact, for his punishment, he should sit in heaven"[11]. A person who does evil for evil's sake becomes incomprehensible and even 'un-punishable'. Moreover, this interpretation of good and evil comes very close to the Nazi demonology. During a speech in 1923, Hitler said that "The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but not human. They cannot be human in the sense of being an image of God, the Eternal. The Jews are an image of the devil. Jewry means the racial tuberculosis of the nations"[12]. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler wrote: "Two worlds face one another: the men of God and men of Satan! He must have come from another root of the human race. I set the Aryan and the Jew over and against each other"[13]. Evil loses its connection with human freedom, and becomes an external reality, incarnated in and identifiable with a dangerous group of people. Evil exercises an almost fatalistic influence on human reality, comparable with diseases like tuberculosis, cancer, etc. The only 'final solution' is destroying evil 'in God's name' by destroying things and people incarnating that evil.

From a theological point of view, this Manichaean view is extremely problematic for monotheistic religions. In Judaism and Christianity, there is only one God, Creator of all things. He is the only source and real power in creation. One can say that only within a monotheistic framework, the relation between God and evil becomes really a problem, since only then the question raises how the belief in one-good-God, creator of all things, can go together with the presence of evil in the world. If there is no God, it makes no sense to ask this question, because the question of God and evil can only be asked to God Himself. And if there is more than one God, evil can be attributed to one of these Gods. But what if there is only one-good-God through who all things exists (creation theology)? Of old, Jewish and Christian theology has fought against a Manichaean myth of evil in which the activity of two Gods is recognised. In Isaiah, we read the following words ascribed to God: "I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I gird

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[11] H. MULISCH, *Siegfried. Een zwarte idylle*, Amsterdam, De Bezige Bij, 2003, p. 35.

[12] Quoted from H. FEIN, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and the Jewish Victims during the Holocaust*, New York, NY, Free Press, 1979, p. 20.

[13] Quoted from L. DAWIDOWICZ, *The War against the Jews. 1933-45*, London, Weidenfeld, 1975, p. 21.

you, though you do not know me, that men may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe"[14]. These words attributed to God can be read as a critique *vis-à-vis* every Manichaean dualism that divides the world in two eternal principles: light and darkness, good and evil. In a Manichaean understanding, God can only be saved from evil by making of God a kind of half-God. In the quotation from Isaiah, we see another solution of the problem in evil in which the goodness of God is put into perspective by seeing also evil in His nature[15] (to be compared to—or a projection of?—the evil of an abusing father *vis-à-vis* his children). Here, evil becomes an aspect of God's acting in the world. In trying to escape this last alternative, which locates monstrous aspects *in* God himself, Jewish and Christian theology appealed to neo-platonic philosophy, in which evil is not seen as an active, ontological reality, but as an absence, as a *privatio* of the good. This theological option has the advantage of not immediate attributing evil to one or more Gods. Evil has the meaning of a failure of a creature, a failing in one's willing and doing of the good.

III. Evil as Privatio Boni

In 325 CE, in the Nicene Creed, the Church declared—against the Manichaeans—that "the Father, the Almighty, [is] the maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen"[16], thus also of the devil. Of old, the Christian tradition indicates in this way that the devil is not an independent, competitive God, but a fallen creature, something that was originally good, but that became corrupted by evil. In this way, evil can never be made something non-human, disconnected from human responsibility. Only human beings can do evil things. Nevertheless, also in the presentation of the Holocaust, the image of the devil was used to de-humanise the perpetrators and to situate the origin of evil outside of men: evil as an attractive, independent reality. Perpetrators then chose evil for evil's sake as a kind of external object of their desire and action, as a way of accepting the invitation of the devil. Thomas Aquinas has

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[14] Isa. 46,6-7, NRSV.
[15] D.R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: a Theology of Protest*, Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.
[16] ELLC Translation.

criticised this presentation of evil severely in his *De malo* ('On evil') where he argues that evil cannot be intended as such[17]. Thomas' point of view should be understood in the context of his ideas on the finality of the creation. Whereas for a Manichaean point of view, there is an ongoing battle between good and evil; for Thomas, every creation is characterised by a deficiency and orientated towards a necessary good goal: the end of the deficiency and the completion of its essence. For Aquinas, no creature can be intrinsically evil, since this would make the functioning of things incomprehensible. The pursuit of something evil would be for Aquinas directed towards something that is at the same time both good and evil. For an evil creature, evil is something good, as also the quotation of Mulish showed us. For an evil creature, evil is something good, because it is worth to pursuit and it belongs to him, and good something evil, because it rejects the good as something that is in contradiction with him/herself. For Aquinas (as for Mulish) such an aspiration of an evil creature is in contraction with itself. For this reason, for Aquinas, evil can only be desired under the pretext of some-thing good (*non potest esse volitum nisi sub ratione boni*[18]). Evil is parasitic on the good. Even in the biggest sin of a human being, there is always something good, even if this particular good is an illusion. This poor and illusive good illustrates for Aquinas that God created man for the Good. However deep man can fall into evil, he can never be completely evil. Evil can never corrupt the Good completely, because otherwise the good would disappear as the cause of evil.

From this perspective, the question is not 'how evil people can do evil things', but 'how good people can do evil things'. Aquinas' answer is that people can withdraw from their original orientation towards the good. At the moment and place where they withdraw from the good, evil can take place, as the absence of the good. In this way, evil is not a mysteri-ous, ontological force outside of man, it is rather what happens when man does not take up his human freedom morally. Evil becomes in this view demythologised and de-substantiated. Whereas Manichaean systems develop a symmetric view on good and evil, Aquinas sees an asymmetry between good and evil. Evil is the dark backside of good, intrinsically connected with the good, but with no substance. This can be compared with the shadow of a person, which is also intrinsically connected with him or her, but has no substance. Evil can be seen as the

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[17] T. AQUINAS, *Quaestiones disputatae de malo*, Rome, Commissio Leonina, 1982.
[18] Ibid., qu. 1, a. 1, ad. 12.

shadow of the good (and is in this sense not destroyable). In the line of this understanding of evil, in *Siegfried*, Harry Mulish calls Adolf Hitler 'pure negativity'. Paradoxically, the absence of a 'real face' was his real face, Mulish writes. "Who looked in his eyes, underwent the *horror vacui*"[19].

Evil has no longer to be explained here by referring to a second (evil) God, as in Manichaean systems, but is connected to human freedom not responding to the call of the Good. In this way, the question of the relation between God and evil, becomes the question of the relation between man and evil, at the moment that (the) Go(o)d becomes or is made absent[20]. And the biggest theological 'punishment' is no longer to put someone eternally in hell, but to say that his life disappears into nothingness. So, Aquinas does not deny that evil happens in the world. What he denies is that the affirmation of the existence of evil necessarily imply the affirmation of a positive reality of evil as an ontological category. One can refer here to the distinction made by Vladimir Jankélévitch between 'wishing [the] evil' (*vouloir le mal*) and 'evil wishing' (*mal vouloir*)[21]. Moral evil does not exist in wanting 'the' evil, but in a wrong wanting. The stress is not on the direct object, the thing (*res*), but on the adverb that qualifies the verb and the action. This does not deny the appearance of evil in the concrete human reality. At this point, the distinction made by Cohen is interesting. He stresses how evil is a powerful reality. For him, Auschwitz teaches that evil is part of human nature as much as goodness. Evil is as 'ontic' as the good. Evil is real, but its reality is not substantially incorporated in the essential structure of reality ('ontological'), but appears in reality at the level of the contingency of human existence ('ontic').

In the context of Holocaust studies, the idea of *privatio boni* has been first used by Hannah Arendt, not referring to Aquinas, but to Plato (who also inspired Aquinas on this point). For Arendt, evil has to be excluded by definition from the thinking concern, "although they may occasionally return up as deficiencies, as lack of beauty, injustice, and evil (*kakai*)

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[19] H. MULISCH, *Siegfried. Een zwarte idylle*, p. 97.

[20] A. CASTALDINI, *Il Dio Nascosto e la Possibilita di Auschwitz. Prospettive filosofiche e teologiche sull'Olocausto* (The Hidden God and the Possibility of Auschwitz. Philosophical and Theological Perspectives on the Holocaust), Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Academy, The Center for Transylvanian Studies, 2016. See also the review of A. GUGA, *The Light Beyond the Clouds*, in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 16(47)2017)110-114.

[21] V. JANKÉLÉVITCH, *Le mal*, Grenoble, Arthaud, 1947, pp. 84-85.

as lack of good"[22]. This means that also for Arendt evil has no root of its own, no essence of which thought and action could get hold. Nevertheless, it is not because nobody can do freely evil as such, that we can conclude for Arendt that everyone is wanting or doing what is good. Most evil is perpetrated for her by people who never think about good and evil. Arendt applied her theory on the trial and the person of Adolf Eichmann (1961-1962). This ended up in her controversial theory on the 'banality of evil'[23]. Hannah Arendt criticised the paradox in which the trial of Eichmann was trapped. On the one hand, Eichmann was given many supra-human evil characteristics and on the other hand Eichmann was put on trial as a human being. The approach of Arendt ended up to be misunderstood completely because in fact, she did not spoke about the 'banality of evil', but of the 'banality of the evildoer'. Her analysis was oriented towards a demystification of the Nazi evil and a reorientation of the discussion towards the human character of evil-doers, and thus towards their human responsibility.

IV. Evil as Perversio Boni

The theory of *privatio boni* has been applied to the understanding of the perpetrators of the Holocaust by the protestant theologian Darrell J. Fasching[24]. Fasching starts from the analysis of Nazi doctors by Robert J. Lifton[25], who explained the psychological processes that allowed doctors during the Holocaust to commit acts of exceptional evil. The main process, termed 'doubling' by Lifton, can be described as the creation of two aspects of the self, often one professional, and one personal, which are normally connected, but became, by institutional pressure, disconnected, so that the second, criminal self, does no longer share responsibility or inhibitions with the first, moral self. In the process of 'doubling', Lifton sees a division of the self into two functioning wholes, so that a part-self acts as an entire self. What happens in doubling is that one part

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[22] H. ARENDT, *Denken. Deel I van het leven van de geest*, translated from English by T. GRAFTDIJK, Amsterdam, Arbeiderspers, 1982, p. 437.

[23] H. ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1976.

[24] D.J. FASCHING, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Apocalypse or Utopia?*, New York, NY, State University Press, 1993, p. 91.

[25] R.J. LIFTON, *Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, New York, NY, Basic Books, 1986.

of the individual rebels against the central moral commitment of the core self *vis-à-vis* the good. I am committed to the good, but another part of me impedes the good act, or does something else that I as my most completely appropriated self know is wrong. At that moment I 'separate' myself and I as a moral self become 'absent' in the morally rebelling part. Precisely at that moment, evil as an ontic reality can find its way through my existence[26].

However, this second self never becomes nor can become an independent, ontological reality. The second self always remains dependent upon a primary, more fundamental self that is orientated towards the truth and the good. We can see this with Fasching as a reinterpretation of Aquinas' view on evil. In this view, evil is always parasitical. It is always dependent upon a previous, greater, and more fundamental reality that is good. The same happens in doubling. The second immoral self parasitises on the good characteristics of the first self and maintains its positive self-image. At the same time, the first self rejects the second self as what it is not. At the place were goodness is absent, evil can do its work. Even in confrontation with Auschwitz, the power of evil should not be explained in this paradigm on the basis of a metaphysical source. Auschwitz is the work of human beings. It is in the vacuum that is created by individual and collective processes of doubling that evil can grow. Auschwitz is a unique expression of this *horror vacui*.

Evil can only expand when it feeds itself parasitically on human goodness, by creating a second self that is inhuman and that at the same time deceives the first self. The interpretation that doubling presupposes self-deception was developed by Hauerwas and Burrell[27] in their moral analysis of the autobiography of Hitler's architect Albert Speer[28]. Self-deception is a kind of cosmetic to hide the absence of the good in a certain action or domain of life. In self-deception, evil depends on the good, but

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[26] See also the concept of 'fragmentation' by Todorov in Chapter Nine: *Auschwitz or How Good People can do Evil*.

[27] S. HAUERWAS – D.B. BURRELL, *Self-Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer's Inside the Third Reich*, in S. HAUERWAS – R. BONDI – D.B. BURRELL, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 1977, pp. 82-98.

[28] A. SPEER, *Inside the Third Reich. Memoirs*, translated from German by R. WINSTON, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970, p. 379: "I have always thought it was a most valuable trait to recognize reality and not to pursue delusions. But when I now think over my life up to and including the years of imprisonment, there was no period in which I was free of delusory notions", quoted in S. HAUERWAS – D.B. BURRELL, *Self-Deception and Autobiography*, p. 88.

at the same time, it also manipulates and perverts the good. Self-deception shows that evil is more than the absence (*privatio*) of the good. Here, evil is also a perversion of the good. In self-deception, the first self knows and rejects actively what the second self is doing[29]. The two selves are never separated completely. In the context of self-deception, both selves are only the expression of the one, undivided self. In this way, explaining evil by referring to the doubling of the professional and the private sphere is not the solution to understand evil, because doubling always presupposes self-deception. Ultimately, there is only one person, and for this person, one is responsible willy-nilly. In self-deception, even when one remains connected with the good, one knows that this connectedness to the good does no longer apply for certain aspects of life.

The idea of doubling as self-deception brings us from evil as *privatio boni* (in doubling) to evil as *perversio boni* (in self-deception). In doing evil, the good is not only absent, but also manipulated, deceived and perverted. Evil still happens when the good withdraws from certain domains of life, but this withdrawal happens in a self-deceptive way. Also this understanding rejects the possibility of choosing evil for evil's sake, because this would contradict the general human desire for the good and would suppose an ontological understanding of evil. As in doubling, in self-deception evil is always parasitic on good, but now rather through perversion than through failure or absence. Evil misuses the good. The perversion of the good that happens in self-deception has both an active and a passive part. This enables a complex and nuanced concept of responsibility for evil acts. A person deceives himself (active), and a person is deceived by himself (passive). He is always for some degree responsible (perpetrator) and for some degree not responsible (victim). In doing evil, people need self-deception precisely because they are unable to choose evil for evil's sake. In Chapter Ten, we compared self-deception with the act of going to sleep. In falling asleep, I am at the same time active and passive. I 'go' to bed, but I am unable to choose my sleep, because trying to choose my sleep would prevent me from sleeping. At the same time, I am 'active' in delivering me to the sleep. In the same way, trying to choose evil would prevent me from doing evil, because inner dissenting voices would start discussing with me, preventing me to

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[29] S. CALLAHAN, *In Good Conscience: Reason and Emotion in Moral Decision Making*, San Francisco, CA, Harper & Row, 1991, pp. 143-170 (Chapter 6: 'Moral Failure and Self-Deception'); H. FINGARETTE, *Self-Deception*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969.

do evil. Evil needs a pretext of something good, while at the same time a person doing an evil thing also delivers himself actively to the possibility of evil. In this way, Eichmann was not only a victim of the Nazi system, he also chose at a certain point to become an accomplice of the system. Evil happens when the Nazi retreats from his moral center and delivers himself to the Nazi 'ethic'[30]. From this perspective, Nazi 'ethic' is the constellation of all good reasons Nazism invented to help perpetrators and bystanders to deceive themselves as consistently as possible. The absence of the good was camouflaged and compensated with the help of self-deception. In self-deception, the virtuousness of the original self is claimed and, notwithstanding the involvement in evil, presented as the total moral identity of the individual.

V. Perversio Dei

What does this mean for our view on the relation between God and evil? Our understanding of evil ends up in an asymmetry between good and evil. Evil is the shadow side of the good, a permanent, and indestructible negative possibility of being human. It is not something that can be fought against only *outside* myself, because evil is not 'something' (ontological) outside, but a negative possibility, connected to my being human and to every human being and society. For this reason, we don't need to create a second evil God to understand evil, or to situate evil in God himself (which would only be a projection of our human condition). Nor do we need to declare God dead on the basis of the ontic reality of evil, because moral evil is a consequence of the exercise of our moral freedom, not an expression of the will of (an unacceptable) God or a punishment for our sins. God and evil are absolute asymmetrical. For believers, only God is real in the ontological sense of the word, as are all good things created by Him. Evil is often the consequence of men who are making of evil an ontological reality. We see how the Nazis have made of the Jews an ontological evil reality. Also in the fight against evil, even the evil of Nazism, one can become extremely evil.

On the basis of this analysis, one can say from a theological point of view that God was absent in Auschwitz, at least in the lives of the perpetrators, or better, God was made absent, or even more precise, an

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[30] P.J. Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz: the Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1988.

effort was made to make God absent in Auschwitz. But even for the perpetrators, the voice of (the) Go(o)d could not be silenced completely, since the perpetrators needed self-deception to continue their crimes, which is a proof *e contrario* of the indestructible presence of (the) Go(o)d, also in Auschwitz. The eclipse of God was not total, not even for the perpetrators, and not even while they were helped by modern technology to 'eclipse God'. In this self-deception, not only the good, but also God became perverted. The Nazi 'God with us' (*Gott mit uns*) is a clear example of this *perversio dei*. Not only goodness, but also God Himself became an instrument of evil.

VI. Otherwise Than Being

What is characteristic for the biblical concept of God is that He always resists such efforts to define and to pervert good and evil. God is to be understood as *autrement qu'être* (Levinas)[31]: He is always the Other, the One who escapes our efforts to define and to capture good and evil in a system and to act inhumanly in the name of such system. The history of humanity, also the history of the bible, is the history of people wrestling with the question of good and evil, the drama of their trials and errors to realise the good (and doing effectively evil). In this process, God comes to us—in the first place in the Torah and prophets—in criticising this endless series of failures, in the face of the vulnerable other: the victim of our efforts to define good and evil as symmetrical or binary categories. As Peter Haas showed us, even Nazism can be understood as a (perverted) effort to define and to capture good and evil in a closed system ('Nazi ethic'). The greatest event of history and of the history of salvation is the continuous breakthrough of the 'other than being' (*autrement qu'être*) in the persistence of closed systems of good and evil. This goodness always remains possible so that fatalism is excluded. Also the Nazi 'ethic' didn't work perfectly, neither in the perpetrators or bystanders nor in the victims. God is always greater then evil. He is the fire we experience in the ashes of Auschwitz. Of course, this is not the basis for a kind of naïve optimism concerning the good end of history. After Auschwitz, it is our human responsibility to learn not to depend our moral life upon the historical prospects of an intervention or salvation by God. Auschwitz invites us to think our ethics and human history

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[31] E. LEVINAS, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, La Haye, Nijhoff, 1978.

independent of a happy end or an ultimate divine guarantee. It is not because we can no longer call upon God after Auschwitz to save us in His almightiness from evil, that we should give up the God of Sinai. He spoke to us through the Ten Commandments and He continues to do so, also in and after Auschwitz. We have to continue now without being rewarded for our goodness and without knowing for sure that history will have a happy end. We have not to give up to fulfil the call for goodness because God was silent, or somehow silenced in Auschwitz. It is not because Auschwitz was there, that we should do the opposite of what the Torah asks us and become murders, thieves, liars, racists, etc. Goodness keeps its meaning, even without the almightiness of God. In this sense, we can say[32] that after Auschwitz, we should love more the Torah than God[33].

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[32] F.J. VAN BEECK, *Loving the Torah more than God? Toward a Catholic Appreciation of Judaism*, Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1989, p. 43-47.

[33] A previous version published as D. POLLEFEYT, *Horror Vacui. God and Evil in/after Auschwitz*, in M.M. LINTNER (ed.), *God in Question. Religious and Secular Languages*, Vienna, Verlag A. Weger, 2014, pp. 293-303.

Section Eight

Christ

Chapter Thirteen

Christology after Auschwitz

It can be called an irony of history that Jesus, who symbolises the bond of unity between Jews and Christians, has all too often become the sign and the origin of dissension and even violence between the two faith communities. Jesus of Nazareth embodies the paradox of uniting Jews with Christians and of separating Jews from Christians. What makes the encounter between Judaism and Christianity so important as well as difficult is the fact that the major differences between the two religions show up in their radically different interpretations of just those matters that unite them. None is more crucial than their understanding of Jesus of Nazareth. In short, between the church and the synagogue stands the crucified Christ. He divides Jews and Christians.

I. Jews, Christians, and the Crucified Christ

Historically speaking, Christians could only interpret the Jewish 'No' to Jesus as an absolute mockery of their own Christian identity. In the ongoing existence of Judaism as a living religion, they saw and sometimes still see the threat of Christianity's exposure as a doubtful and perhaps even deceitful religion. Therefore, Christians could not tolerate the survival of Judaism alongside themselves. About this, Karl Barth writes: "The existence of the Synagogue side by side with the church is an ontological impossibility, a wound, a gaping hole in the body of Christ, something which is quite intolerable"[1].

1. *Israel, the Church, and Theology of Substitution*

In 1933, Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber gave a sermon in which he said that after the death of Christ, Israel was dismissed from the service of revelation.

> She [Israel] did not know the time of her invitation. She had repudiated and rejected the Lord's Anointed, had driven Him to the Cross.

[1] K. BARTH, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Zürich, Theologischer Verlag, 1960-75, 4-1:671.

> The Daughters of Sion received the bill of divorce and from that time
> forth [the Jews] wander, forever restless, over the face of the earth[2].

According to this perspective, the covenant with Judaism was abrogated with the appearance of Christ. In history, Christians have often inquired whether Israel was still the people of God, whether the church has replaced Israel. An affirmative answer to the latter inquiry is often described as the 'theology of substitution', or 'displacement theology', or 'supersessionist theology'[3]. Christians assumed that, thanks to their belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the election of the Jewish people had been transferred definitively and exclusively to them. The church had taken the place of Judaism for all time and completely. The implication of this theology is that there is no longer any place for Israel in God's plan of salvation. Israel no longer has a role to play in the history of revelation and redemption. The Jewish 'No' to Jesus, the Messiah, meant the end of God's involvement with Israel. The new chosen people, the true, spiritual Israel, under the new covenant, now occupies centre stage and assumes the rights and privileges of the nation that has been rejected.

Accordingly, Christian exegesis, Christian liturgy, and Christian catechesis represented the relationship between the first and the second testament in terms of 'promise and fulfilment', 'old and new', 'temporary and definitive', 'shadow and reality'. The ultimate consequence of these supersessionist expressions is that, while Israel was the beloved of God at one time, after she missed her invitation, she lost her election and thus her right to existence—she is a cursed nation or, at best, an anachronistic one. Many Christians still share the view that the death and resurrection of Christ have rendered the 'old' covenant obsolete.

This theology of substitution came to prominence so early in Christian thought that it is hardly surprising that it was for centuries an uncontested element of Christian faith and teaching in the churches of the West and the East. Already in the second century, Tertullian (c. 160-225) speaks about the "disinheritance of the Jewish covenant and the Jewish election

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[2] A. Davies, *Anti-Semitism and the Christian Mind: The Crisis of Conscience after Auschwitz*, New York, NY, Herder and Herder, 1969, p. 70, & J. Marcus, *Jesus and the Holocaust. Reflections on Suffering and Hope*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997.

[3] D. Pollefeyt, *In Search of an Alternative for the Theology of Substitution*, in D. Pollefeyt (ed.), *Jews and Christians: Rivals or Partners for the Kingdom of God?* in *Search of an Alternative for the Christian Theology of Substitution*, (Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs), Leuven, Peeters, 1998, pp. 1-9.

in favour of the Christians"[4]. This supersessionist construction was even grounded in the gospels, especially in the passion narratives, which portrayed the Jews as the enemies of Christ and responsible for his death, and so no longer the people of God. The events of Good Friday mark the end of Jewish history. The continuing existence of the Jews was primarily thought of in terms of divine rejection and retribution, because they are not only regarded as those who killed Christ, but also as those whose hearts were so hardened that they continued to reject him.

A consequence of this theology of substitution is a moralistic, apologetic and intolerant Christian attitude toward the Jewish people: if your understanding about the things concerning Jesus of Nazareth is not identical with ours, then you are the enemy of the truth arid fit only to be cast aside. In this way, the theology that with the coming of the church of Christ the historical vocation of Israel is fulfilled, that her role in sacred history was ended at that time and place, became the cornerstone of theological anti-Judaism.

Judaism in itself is not accorded any continuing and definitive salvific value, but has value only insofar as it contributed to the history of Christianity.

2. *Christologies of Discontinuity*

Christology played a decisive role in the legitimation of the age-long history of calamity that was the result of this theological anti-Judaism. Ruether even calls anti-Judaism "the left hand of Christology"[5]. With McGarry and Eckardt, we like to call these kinds of Christologies, in the light of the substitutive relationship between Judaism and Christianity, "Christologies of discontinuity"[6]. Christian protagonists of these Christologies of discontinuity declare the brokenness of original Israel's election. Christianity is the successor of Judaism, is the 'faithful remnant' that truly carries forward the sacred role of Israel. Common among the Christologies of discontinuity is an emphasis on the unique and universal

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[4] F. GLEISS, *Von der Göttesmordlüge zum Völkermord, von der Feindschaft zur Versöhnung: kirchliche Antijudaismus durch Zwei Jahrtausende und seine Über-winding*, Horb am Neckar, Geiger, 1995, pp. 17-19.

[5] R.R. RUETHER, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*, New York, NY, Seabury Press, 1979, p. 88.

[6] M.B. MCGARRY, *Christology after Auschwitz*, New York, NY, Paulist Press, 1977, pp. 62-92; A.R. ECKARDT, *Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians*, New York, NY, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967, pp. 50-55.

saving efficacy of Christ. Each of these Christologies understands Jesus of Nazareth as the perfect fulfilment of all Old Testament messianic prophecies. In Christ, Israel's election found its fulfilment and new embodiment—Christ is the new elect of God, and his church, his body, is the new people of God. The Christology of discontinuity thus stresses the uniqueness and finality of Christ; the universality of Christ as the sole mediator of salvation; Christ as the fulfilment of Jewish hopes and prophecies; Christ as the leader and embodiment of the New Israel, successor to Judaism; Christ as Messiah; and the necessity of preaching Christ to the Jewish people. The position of sharp discontinuity almost seems to say that Jesus was the Christ *in spite of* the fact he was a Jew rather than *because* he was a Jew. Theologians with this Christological position are not interested in a Jewish-Christian dialogue. The Jews are not a special category of non-Christians in the universal mission of the church. The contemporary existence of the people Israel does not imply specific questions for their own theological position.

The Christology of discontinuity declares that evil was conquered once and for all by the Christ event. The history of humankind upon the coming of Christ is regarded as a period of unredeemedness. Belief in Jesus as the Christ allows humankind to enter the new messianic time. In her famous study, *Faith and Fratricide*[7], Rosemary Ruether shows how Christians could have understood Jesus only as fulfilling the prophecies by a twofold process of historicising the eschatological (primarily Luke, who, in the absence of Christ's return, interpreted the church as the beginning of the Kingdom's establishment, superseding the old chosen people) and spiritualising the eschatological (primarily John and Paul, who made the eschatological events of the messianic era a matter of internal, undetectable transformations rather than observable events in an undefined future). The consequence of this process has been a spiritual, political, and ecclesiastical triumphalism of the church and of Christians, which made them blind to concrete evil, especially evil that is in and is caused by their own Christian story. For Paul Van Buren, the irony of the classical Christological tradition is that it made of the designation Son of God—a Jewish term of service, intimacy, fidelity and humility—a title of power, dominion, and assertion[8].

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[7] R.R. RUETHER, *Faith and Fratricide*, pp. 65, 72, 112, 116, 160.
[8] P. VAN BUREN, *A Theology of Jewish-Christian Reality. 3. Christ in Context*, Washington, DC, University Press of America, 1995, p. 292.

3. *Christologies of Discontinuity and Typology*

A specific exegetical consequence of these Christologies of discontinuity is that the Jews are considered to be blind to the deeper theological and spiritual meaning of their own Scriptures, whose only proper understanding is a Christological one. Christologies of discontinuity will recommend 'typology' as the exegetical method to approach the Hebrew Bible. Typology is a way of reading the Bible where events of the New Testament are presented as the fulfilment of events in the Hebrew Bible[9]. So, in Christian liturgies, the Hebrew Bible is often reduced to an allegorical significance. A typological approach allowed Christians to interpret Hebrew scriptural characters and events as 'types' or 'figures' that proleptically prefigured characters and events in the New Testament. Typology can best be summarised with the well-known adage of Augustine in *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*: "The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New".

Typology in itself is not wrong. It can be a fruitful exegetical method that was, in fact, already applied in the Hebrew Bible and that also belongs to the New Testament, as I will indicate later. Historically speaking, though, the consequences of a typological exegesis are almost always negative and injurious toward Judaism. Typology became an instrument of Christologies of discontinuity. The covenant between God and Israel is often seen as only a preparatory phase in salvation history, without any intrinsic value, having a meaning only in relation to the coming of Christ. This kind of typology then becomes an apologetic instrument, which, as in the ancient church literature against the Jews (*Adversus judaeos*), is employed to challenge the intrinsic value of Judaism. In the hands of Christian interpreters, Cain is typologically the murderous elder brother (i.e., the Jews) who kills his younger brother (i.e., Christ). Cain is then forced to flee, the prototype of the 'wandering Jew', and carries with him a mark distinguishing him from others (i.e., circumcision). Hence, typology allows Christians to read the 'Old' Testament with Christian eyes. And because the Jews did not (do not) have this sight, they saw (see) only the literal meaning of the texts and were (are) blind to its deeper meaning.

In typology, the Old Testament becomes a temporary truth that can only be replaced with the coming of Christ, as a shadow replaced by the light, as the old replaced by the new. This way of presenting the coming of Christ makes the history that preceded him in itself empty

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[9] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, London, Chapman, 1994, p. 34.

and senseless. It leads to the opposition of two images of God (justice or love), of cult (ritualistic or spiritual), of salvation history (announcement or realization), of morality (imperfect or perfect), and of life (under the influence of fear or of love).

4. *Christologies of Discontinuity and Religious Intolerance*

Christologies of discontinuity do not automatically imply religious intolerance. Theologians who hold this Christological position today will accompany their theories with exhortations to Christian respect for people of all religions. Israel is still the object of God's love but, with the coming of the Messiah, Israel has ceased to have positive meaning in salvation history.

The history of Christian anti-Judaism is dramatic proof, however, of the violent potential that is implicit in this Christian theology and Christology of substitution. When Cardinal von Faulhaber spoke in that symbolic year 1933, the year in which Hitler came into power in Germany, in his sermon about the "bill of divorce" the Jews had paid, he did not know that the Jewish people had yet to pay the biggest price for their being Jewish. Holocaust scholars often have recognised a parallel between the Nazi "final solution" (*Endlösung*) and much in the traditional attitude and practice of Christians and their churches. However fundamentally different Christian moral presuppositions may have been from those of the Nazis, the Hitler program can be seen as a radical application of the Christian world's age-old warning: "Beware of the Jews!" And a major reason why the Nazis could go as far as they did was that Western culture had been steeped so thoroughly in a very negative Christian theological understanding of the Jewish people[10].

Gregory Baum is very sharp in his articulation of this insight: "The Holocaust acted out the church's fantasy that the Jews were a non-people, that they had no place before God and that they should have disappeared long ago by accepting Christ"[11]. And Baum concludes: "The church is now summoned to a radical reformulation of its faith, free of ideological deformation, making God's act in Christ fully and without reserve a message for life rather than death"[12].

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[10] D. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, New York, NY, Knopf, 1996.

[11] G. Baum, *Catholic Dogma after Auschwitz*, in *Anti-Semitism and the Foundation of Christianity*, A.T. Davies (ed.), New York, NY, Paulist Press, 1979, 137-150, p. 142.

[12] *Ibid.*

II. Auschwitz as the End of Christological Triumphalism

Auschwitz means the definitive end of Christological salvation trium-phalism. Emil Fackenheim asks if Good Friday has not again over-whelmed Easter. "Is the Good News of the Overcoming [of evil in Christ] not itself overcome?"[13]. For the Jewish Fackenheim, after the Holocaust there can be no radical wonder or Good News that is not threatened by radical horror. It is not surprising to Fackenheim that to protect the wonder most Christian theologians today ignore the horror of the Holocaust, minimise it, flatten it out into a universalised horror that is at the same time everything and nothing.

We can say, however, that Vatican II was a theological answer to the Holocaust and meant a new start in Jewish-Christian relationships, even if the overwhelming hermeneutical principle at work in the Vatican II documents in general with regard to the Old Testament is to see it still primarily as a preparation for the Christian belief in Christ as the fulfil-ment of prophecy and the finality of revelation.

The conciliar declaration regarding the Roman Catholic Church's atti-tude to the non-Christian religions, *Nostra Aetate* (1965), speaks another language, however. It dedicates its fourth paragraph completely to the relationship between the church and Judaism and contains the challeng-ing statement that "the Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the Holy Scriptures"[14]. Pope John Paul II has made the Jewish-Christian encounter one of the priorities of his pontificate. On October 31, 1998, the Holy Father received the scholars attending the Vatican symposium on "Roots of Anti-Judaism in the Christian Milieu". In a speech referring to Vatican II, he said that the Jewish people "perseveres in spite of everything because they are the people of the Covenant, and despite human infi-delities, the Lord is faithful to his Covenant. To ignore this primary fact is to embark on the way of a Marcionism against which the church immediately and vigorously reacted". Further, John Paul II criticised theologians "who regard the fact that Jesus was a Jew and that his milieu was the Jewish world as mere cultural accidents, for which one could substitute another religious tradition from which the Lord's person could

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[13] E. FACKENHEIM, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought*, New York, NY, Schocken Books, 1982, p. 286.

[14] "*Declaration on the Relationships of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*," in *The Documents of Vatican II, with Notes and Comments by Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Authorities*, W.M. ABBOTT – J. GALLAGHER (eds.), New York, NY, Guild, 1966, p. 666.

be separated without losing its identity", as "not only [ignoring] the meaning of salvation history, but more radically [challenging] the very truth of the Incarnation"[15].

Recognising the continuing validity of Judaism and accepting the fact that Jesus was born a Jew is crucial to his identity and to the faith of the Church, has important Christological implications. In dialogue with the Jewish faith, and in acknowledging the abiding validity of the Jewish religion, one is challenged to describe his faith in Jesus differently. If Judaism is admitted to be a continuing, valid religious expression, can one still say that Christ has fulfilled all messianic promises contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially when Judaism's continued existence is the very evidence that it does not believe Christ to be the Messiah? Can a Christian admit the continuing validity of Judaism without compromising belief in the uniqueness and the finality of Jesus Christ? I would like to show how reflection on Israel affects the way the Church understands and defines itself. A proper Christology for the Church today should free the Church to affirm God and itself in Christ without having to negate others.

III. Christologies of Continuity

Contemporary "Christologies of continuity" try to answer these challenges[16]. They argue that with the coming of Christ the election, chosenness and love of God for Israel were not transferred to the Christian church, leaving the Jewish people without a God, a mission, or validity. In other words, Christologies of continuity are decidedly non-supersessionist. For McGarry, Christologies of continuity stress Christianity as the continuation of Israel's covenant, which Christ does not abrogate,

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[15] See *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* (Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews) of March 16,1998. This is the first Catholic Church document completely devoted to the problem of the Shoah. Three main critiques can be uttered *vis-à-vis* this document: (1) The distinction between Christian anti-Judaism and Nazi (racial) anti-Semitism is considered too radical and used rather apologetically. (2) The sharp distinction between the Church and the responsibility of individual Christians implies some serious ecclesiological questions. (3) The role of Pope Pius XII remains controversial in the light of the inaccessibility of the Vatican archives on that matter. It is remarkable that the introduction of *We Remember* by Pope John Paul II is much stronger than the corpus of the text by the commission.

[16] See J. PARKES – J.T. PAWLIKOWSKI – E. FLEISCHNER – A.R. ECKARDT – R.R. RUETHER in McGARRY, *Christology after Auschwitz*, pp. 72-92.

but which he opens up to the gentile world. These Christologies speak about the abiding validity of the covenant with Israel; the positive witness of the Jewish 'No' to Jesus as a constructive contribution to the ultimate salvation of humankind, not as an act of unfaithfulness or haughty blindness; the positive Jewish witness to the unredeemed character of the world; Christ as *partial* fulfilment of Jewish messianic prophecies; and the eschatological unification of all God's people. Christologies of continuity underline that if there is a true sense in which God has manifested himself uniquely in Jesus of Nazareth, it must be said that the mystery of this divine act is in principle no greater than the sacred acts through which Israel was originally elected. The Resurrection and Christ experience function in a paradigmatic way for Christians in the same way as Exodus functions for hope for the Jewish people.

In these Christologies of continuity, the Christian exegesis as typology can have a specific meaning and positive value. The Christological reading of the First Testament has then to be regarded as the discovery of a new layer of meaning in the texts, but not the only and certainly not the first or most original layer of meaning. In other words, Christian typology must leave room for other ways of reading the Hebrew Bible that are just as valuable. I can refer here to the extremely rich, diversified, classic and contemporary Jewish readings of the First Testament. Paul Ricœur pointed out that the Hebrew Bible itself is filled with this sort of typological methodology[17]. We can find in it a succession of different covenants, where each covenant is a reinterpretation of the former one and where the idea of a 'new covenant' can already be found in Ezekiel and Jeremiah.

Hence, the typological link between Judaism and Christianity has to be seen as a continuation of the constant reinterpretation of the covenant inherent to the Hebrew Bible. In other words, if typology is to be acceptable as an exegetical method in contemporary Christian theology, it has to be withdrawn from the apologetic and substitutional scheme, 'imperfect-perfect', and it has to be interpreted anew as one method to use in the rich, complex, and continuous tradition of biblical explanation so typical of Christianity and Judaism, for the enrichment of the mutual belief of Jews and Christians in Yahweh. Christian typology always has to bear in mind that it is not exclusive, but that it is in fact situated inside the internal typological pluralism that is part of Judaism and of

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[17] P. Ricœur, *La critique et la conviction. Entretien avec François Azouvi et Marc de Launay*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1995, p. 248.

which it elaborates only one branch, namely the christological. Seen like this, typology can even become the expression of respect for the primordial, irreducible value and inextinguishable richness of the First Covenant, which is and remains open for a non-Christological hermeneutical reading.

IV. One Covenant and Two Covenant Theories

John Pawlikowski's authoritative article *Ein Bund oder zwei Biinde?*[18] divides the Christologies of continuity between those that see Judaism and Christianity as two basically distinct religions despite their shared biblical patrimony and those that believe in the simultaneous and complementary participation of Judaism and Christianity in the same covenant. These are respectively the double- and single-covenant theories[19].

The single-covenant theories tend to view the Christ event as the extension of the one basic covenant, originally made with the Jewish people and still in their possession, to the non-Jewish world. Judaism and Christianity participate in a simultaneous and complementary way in the same covenant. They belong finally to one covenantal tradition, which started at Mount Sinai. The Christ event is not so much the fulfilment of Messianic prophecies, but it presents the possibility for the Gentiles to become incorporated in the covenant of God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the presence of original Israel, the Gentile question is no longer "How can the Jew be saved," but becomes "How can I be included in the unbroken covenant of God with Israel?" A representative of this one-covenant theory is Franz Rosenzweig, who saw Judaism as "the star of Redemption," and Christianity as the rays of that star[20].

The second, two-covenant school prefers to look at Judaism and Christianity as two distinct covenantal religions that are different, but complementary in an ultimate sense. The two-covenant theories recognise the enduring bond between Judaism and Christianity. But then they turn to the differences between both traditions and communities, and

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[18] J.T. Pawlikowski, *Ein Bund oder zwei Bünde? Zeitgenössische Perspektiven*, in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 176, no. 4 (1996) pp. 325-340.
[19] E.G. Procario-Foley – R.A. Cathey, *Righting Relations after the Holocaust and Vatican II: Essays in Honor of John Pawlikowski*, New Jersey, Paulist Press, 2018.
[20] F. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, Bibliothek Suhrkamp 973, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1988.

show how the service, the teaching, and the person of Jesus mediate an image of God that is surely new.

In my view, Pawlikowski is right in criticizing the one-covenant theories. In these theories, Christianity becomes Judaism for Gentiles. The one continuous covenant can be described as new after the Christ event only in the sense that now it embraces both Jews and Christians. The two-covenant theories are more adequate in representing the relation between Judaism and Christianity, historically as well as theologically. The Christ event is more than Judaism for Gentiles. Why, Pawlikowski asks, start a new community called the church, when Gentiles were already entering the Jewish community in some numbers at the time of Jesus? Why then not simply reintegrate the church in the synagogue —why bother with a separate faith community? The double-covenant theories are in need of answering the question whether the granting of the vision to the Gentiles through Jesus added anything to the vision. Unless Christianity is able to articulate some unique features in the revelation of Christ, then it should fold up as a major world religion.

In his study on Judaism, Hans Küng warns us that today we paint, out of fear of anti-Judaism, Jesus and Judaism to such a degree as grey on grey that it becomes very difficult to recognise Jesus' own distinctive profile, and even impossible to understand why a religion different from Judaism came into being, one that from the beginning took his name and not that of anyone else[21]. In this way the opposition between Jews and Christians is reduced to one long, two-thousand-year-old misunderstanding, and Jewish-Christian dialogue to shadow-boxing. For Küng, neither Jews nor Christians are helped by this kind of illusion. Paul Van Buren mentions that Israel's negative witness is to Christ's novelty: the Jewish rejection says that Jesus Christ is something new and different[22]. What has happened with Jesus' coming and going is not simply part of Israel's story. Jesus has also caused a break in the continuity of the covenant. For Pawlikowski, without maintaining some uniqueness and centrality for the Christ event, there remains little reason to retain Christianity as a distinct religion.

A. Roy Eckardt mentions that his earlier and repeated insistence upon the membership of Christians in the Jewish family has been determined in considerable measure by the necessary warfare against Christian supersessionism. Supposing that this fantasy is at last overcome, he asks

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[21] H. Küng, *Judaism*, London, SCM, 1992, p. 318.
[22] P. van Buren, *Theology*, p. 199.

now, must the family stay together? "I am uncertain how to answer. I do
know that loved ones part from one another and go their different
ways—though they need not thereby cease their loving or their caring"[23].
In the same line, for Paul Van Buren, it is essential to see that the task
of Christology after Auschwitz is not to make it appealing to Jews. A
Christology for the Jewish-Christian reality is not a Christology formu-
lated by the church so that Jews might come to accept it or at least find
it permissible for the church. On the contrary, a Christology for the
Jewish-Christian reality will be a Christology for a church that acknowl-
edges that the reality in which it lives is rightly definable only when
Israel's continuing covenant with God is recognised and confessed as
essential to it.

V. Continuity and Discontinuity

This means that we have to explain both continuity and discontinuity
between the two faith communities. In one respect Christianity is totally
grounded in Judaism. In another respect Christianity is a different reli-
gion from Judaism. It's a distinct religion based on salvation in Christ
and in this way Christian. Küng is defending a Christology of continu-
ity, but combined with a two-covenant theory. "There is now one way
for Jews and one way for Christians. Christians are to respect and recog-
nize the independent way of the Jews, for behind it stands the reality of
the one God of Israel, who is also the God of the church"[24]. For Eckardt,
we have to set ourselves intellectually at times on the side of discontinu-
ity and difference, and at times on the side of continuity and unity. We
must seek to mediate between these two sides, to relate each to the other,
and to go beyond both[25].

The question now becomes whether there is a way to repudiate any
supersessionist theology and Christology while trying to maintain the
uniqueness of the singular grace of Jesus Christ. Is it possible to see
Jesus in continuity with Judaism, to confess him as the Christ, and at
the same time to hold onto the idea that the divine choice of original
Israel retains a positive, constructive effect? For Christianity, this is a
crucial question. Christianity does not, in comparison, constitute the

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[23] A. R. ECKARDT, *A Response to Rabbi Olan*, in *Religion in Life* 42 (1973), 409.
[24] H. KÜNG, *Judaism*, p. 318.
[25] A. R. ECKARDT, *Elder and Younger Brothers*, p. 99.

same problem for Judaism that Judaism constitutes for Christianity. Christian faith is not dogmatically necessary to Jewish faith; had there been no Christianity, Judaism would probably still be alive. But had there been no Judaism, there would be no Christianity. The Church has a theological and Christological vested interest in Israel, as Eckardt rightly explains[26].

Explaining what separates Christianity from Judaism and Jesus from Jewish tradition is a precarious enterprise. Most of the lines often drawn between the Jewish and Christian faith are false and supersessionist. Most familiar is the dichotomy according to which, in praise of either a schizophrenic Bible or a schizophrenic Lord, an 'Old Testament God of wrath' is ranged against a 'New Testament God of love'. On an entirely different level, though still largely supersessionist, are the society-person, rituality-spirituality, law-grace, and fear-freedom dualities.

VI. Moltmann's Christology

It is the Christology of Jürgen Moltmann that may help us enter into the true dialectic between Judaism and Christianity. As a German theologian, Moltmann is strongly convinced that it is impossible to formulate a meaningful contemporary Christology without reckoning seriously with the implications of Auschwitz. In *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, he formulates the fundamental question at the centre of Christology as follows: "Is the Jewish 'no' [to Jesus] anti-Christian? Is the Christian 'yes' [to Jesus] anti-Jewish? Are the 'no' and 'yes' final or provisional? Are they exclusive, or can they also dialectically acquire a positive meaning for the people who feel compelled to utter them?"[27]. The answer he gives to these questions can be seen as a strong and authentic example of a Christology of continuity, but one that shows respect for the different covenantal realities of Judaism and Christianity.

Moltmann stresses that, although Christians trust that the messianic times have definitively begun in Jesus and that the Kingdom of God is among us, they are also aware that not all biblical prophecies about the Messiah have been fulfilled yet. The messianic sign that embodies

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[26] *Ibid.*, p. 143.
[27] J. Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi. Christologie in messianischen Dimensionen*, Munich, Kaiser, 1989, p. 45. See also: A.L. Berger (e.a.), *Post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian Dialogue: after the Flood, before the Rainbow*, Lexington, Lexington Books, 2015.

the end of all evil, and the end of oppression for all people, has not yet come. Moltmann indicates that this is the innermost reason for the Jewish 'No' to Jesus. At this point, we can quote with Moltmann the famous statement of Martin Buber in which he explains why the Jews do not believe in Jesus as the Messiah: "The church rests on its faith that the Christ has come, and that this is the redemption which God has bestowed on mankind. We, Israel, *are not able* to believe this"[28]. Moltmann mentions correctly that it is not a question of Jewish unwillingness or hard-hearted defiance. It is an "inability to accept". It is well known that Buber had a deep respect for Jesus; but his statement of the inability was grounded in an even deeper personal and collective Jewish experience:

> We know more deeply, more truly, that world history has not been turned upside down to its very foundations—that the world is not yet redeemed. We *sense* its unredeemedness. We can perceive no caesura in history. We are aware of no centre in history—only its goal, the goal of the way taken by the God who does not linger on his way[29].

Based on their experience of the unredeemedness of the world, Jews are unable to believe in Jesus as the redeemer of the world. This is the Jewish question to Christian existence: "The Messiah has come, why is the world so evil?"[30]. Christians answer this challenge by saying that they live in the tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet'. In the Christ event God's full victory is assured, but not completely realised. Each messianic statement about Jesus must be spoken in the future tense, not as a contemporary reality. Jesus will become the Christ only at the end of times.

Moltmann sees here also the possibility for a positive Christian theological acceptance of the Jewish 'No' to Jesus, not merely as an act of unfaithfulness or haughty blindness.

> Even the raised Christ himself is 'not yet' the pantocrator. But he is already on the way to redeem the world. The Christian 'yes' to Jesus' Messiahship, which is based on believed and experienced reconciliation, will accept the Jewish 'no', which is based on the experienced and suffered unredeemedness of the world. The Christian 'yes' to Jesus

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[28] M. Buber, *Der Jude und sein Judentum: gesammelte Aufsätze und Reden*, Colonia, Melzer, 1963, p. 562.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] R.M. Brown, *The Coming of Messiah: From Divergence to Convergence?*, in M.D. Ryan, (ed.), *Human Responses to the Holocaust: Perpetrators and Victims, Bystanders and Resisters*, New York, NY, Edwin Mellen, 1981, 205-223, p. 210.

Christ is not in itself finished and complete. It is open for the messianic future of Jesus[31].

If Christians and Christian communities would have heard the meaning of this Jewish 'No', they would have been better protected against all kinds of triumphalism and self-idolatries, as Eckardt remarks[32].

Moltmann refers to St. Paul's Israel chapters (Rom. 9-11), where Paul saw God's will in Israel's 'No'[33]. "Their rejection means the reconciliation of the world" (Rom. 11,15 RSV). It is not the 'No' of unbelievers, but a special 'No' that must be respected. God imposes on the whole of Israel an inability to say 'Yes' to Jesus, in order that the gospel may pass from Israel to the Gentiles. Had the Jewish people as a whole somehow come to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, how could the covenant have been opened to the nations, Moltmann asks? The non-recognition of the messiahship of Jesus by most of historic Israel falls within the sovereign purposes of God, for through this series of historical events his redeeming grace could be extended to the pagan realm. Without the Jewish 'No' the Christian church would have remained a messianic revival movement within Judaism itself. Moltmann hopes that Israel, in spite of its own observance of the Jewish 'No', can also view the Christian 'Yes' to Jesus as a positive contribution to the ultimate salvation of humankind, as the *preparatio messianica* of the nations[34].

In Jesus, the Kingdom of God has begun and Christians are challenged and encouraged to give the best of themselves on its behalf. At the same time, Christians know that they cannot realise this divine dream on their own. The ultimate accomplishment of humanity is also a gift, a divine talent, for which they hope in prayer. In other words, like the Jews, the Christians are waiting hopefully for the final coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. This is known in Christianity as the Second Coming of the Messiah. That is how Christians wait. But they are not alone. The unredeemed world is a problem for the Jew as well. This is a Christian question to Jewish existence: "If there is so much evil in the world, why is the Messiah not coming?" Moltmann is correct that the hard fact of the 'unredeemed world' does not only speak against the Christians. It speaks against the Jews, too. Judaism also awaits the coming of the messianic age. For

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[31] J. Moltmann, *Der Weg*, pp. 32-33.
[32] A.R. Eckardt, *Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians*, New York, NY, Scribner, 1967.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Christians and Jews wait together, in spite of their differences of belief, working for and dreaming of the same goal. Christians and Jews can meet in this common hope, founded on the same promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; Heb. 6:13-18). Hans Küng speaks here of a perspective on the future for whose consummation Jews and Christians wait together[35]. And J.B. Metz calls for a "*Koalition des messianischen Vertrauens*" ("a coalition of messianic trust") between Jews and Christians[36].

From the Jewish side, the solution of Moltmann and others, to see Jesus as Christ in the fullest sense only at the end of times, and to understand his messiahship in a proleptic, anticipatory way, has been severely criticised. It is said that the original essence of Israel means something infinitely more than the non-acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, and for that matter, infinitely more than service as a corrective instrument *vis-à-vis* the Christian church. In Moltmann's solution, the synagogue is finally still subordinated to the church. And although this eschatological solution of the problem creates theological room for Judaism in the present, one asks the question whether this might only be putting the question one step back[37]. The Jewish thinker Manfred Vogel criticises this modern trend to put the resolution of Jewish-Christian tensions in the end times:

> [This] deferment of the problem from the present to the future [enables] one to overcome the urgency of the present and accept the *status quo* for the time being. [This] means that the messianic claim of Jesus *vis-à-vis* the Jewish people is cancelled for the present. If the first coming of Jesus makes a messianic claim on the world, the Jews are exempt! Thus the Christian can overcome the disquietude caused by Jewish non-acceptance of Jesus only by surrendering for the time being the messianic claim[38].

McGarry asks the question how different it is, substantially, to say (a) that the Jews are not called upon now to recognise Jesus as Messiah (either historically fulfilled or eschatologically proleptic), (b) that he is working in them unrecognised, or (c) that in the end time all will be reconciled in Christ[39]. Also, Eckardt argues that Christians might be doing nothing more than pushing the classic concept of Judaism's

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[35] H. Küng, *Judaism*, pp. 344-345.

[36] J.B. Metz, *Voorbij de burgerlijke religie. Over de toekomst van het Christendom*, Oekumene 6, Baarn, Ten Have, 1981, p. 44.

[37] G. Baum, *Introduction*, in R.R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, p. 15.

[38] M. Vogel, *The Problem of Dialogue between Judaism and Christianity*, in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 4 (1967) 684-699, p. 689, n. 2.

[39] McGarry, *Christology after Auschwitz*, p. 83.

invalidation by the Christ event only one step back to the end of times[40]. The great Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, quoted by Küng, said: "whether Jesus was the messiah, will become evident for Jews when the messiah comes"[41]. Küng interprets this remark as follows: "When the Messiah comes, then, as Christians are convinced, he will be none other than Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified and risen one"[42]. The same critique can be uttered here. Anti-Judaism is merely tempered, not finally overcome in this theological stance. The final fulfilment is postponed to the end of times, but Jews still need Christ to reach the Kingdom.

We believe Moltmann's eschatological solution of the Jewish-Christian relations is not a step back. At least it neutralises the potential violence between Jews and Christians by opening ways to mutual respect and collaboration for the Kingdom of God on earth in the present. Do the Jews then still need Christ to be saved? Elie Wiesel states that "Jews don't like to make the world more Jewish, but more human. Christians often think that the world can only become more human by becoming more Christian"[43].

VII. Constitutive and Representative Understandings of Jesus as Saviour

Here I would like to introduce the distinction Schubert Ogden made between a constitutive and a representative understanding of the saving character of Jesus[44]. In a constitutive interpretation of the saving nature of Jesus' life, Jesus is not simply representing salvation. His life and work constitute salvation. Traditional Christology has claimed some sort of efficacious quality to Jesus' life, whose life definitively revealed the Father and constituted salvation, and through whose life men and women have the possibility of resurrection, forgiveness, and life. In a constitutive Christology, the life and work of Jesus bring about salvation in a way that can never happen any other way. In a representative interpretation of Jesus' saving life, the possibility remains open to recognise the potentiality of salvation earlier than, and after, the coming of Jesus, primarily

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[40] ECKARDT, *Elder and Younger Brothers*.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 345.

[42] KÜNG, *Judaism*, p. 345.

[43] R. BROWN – E. WIESEL, *Messenger to All Humanity*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 1983, p. 88.

[44] S. M. OGDEN, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?*, Dallas, TX, Southern Methodist University Press, 1992, pp. 97-104.

given with the beginning of creation. This does not mean, of course, that Jesus is not *confessionally* constitutive for Christians, but it is to say that he is not *exclusively* constitutive.

While a constitutive Christology will easily end up in substitution, a representative Christology opens up the possibility of confessing Jesus as the Christ without repudiating the covenantal representation of salvation in the First Covenant with the Jews. It is only in such a representative Christology that the salvific meaning of Jesus can be described as a representation of the covenantal commitment of God expressed in creation and validated at Sinai. In the same representative way, the covenant of Sinai is an articulation of the covenant of God with humanity given from the beginning of creation. And this does not exclude the possibility of seeing Sinai as *confessionally constitutive* for the life of Israel, just as the Christophany of Easter is *confessionally constitutive* for Christian life. Thus, representative and constitutive Christology do not exclude each other. The resurrection and Christ experience function in a paradigmatic way for Christians in the same way as Exodus functions as hope for the Jewish people. In a representative interpretation, the confession of Jesus as Messiah does not have to lead to a theology of contempt and substitution. Jesus, seen in the perspective of Sinai, represents the covenant mediated there, too. Jesus is perceived by Christians as the one who generously represents this covenantal reality.

VIII. Christ Past and Present

Of course, this does not dissolve the difference between Jews and Christians, but at least it overcomes the destructive concentration on the question who is 'with God' and who is not. Instead, it focuses on the way to honour and represent, as well as possible, in the present, the covenantal reality of God with humanity within both religions. Representative Christology can be a help to avoid two imbalances: to think of fulfilment first and foremost as past fulfilment in Jesus or in the church, or to think it only a thing to be accomplished in the future. The search for the novelty of Christ is mostly put in the past tense. Theologians ask what was different about him, what change took place with his coming and going. Putting the question in that way implies speaking of the Resurrection as a past event and asking what really happened. To be sure, these questions about the past play an important role in a living church, but they are not the most crucial ones. In the first place should always

be Christ present. I quote here with approval Van Buren: "What was new about Christ in the past is what is new about him today or the church's faith is in vain. Living faith will begin in the present, look to the future, and then retell the past"[45]. Or to say it in the words of Moltmann: "Every confession of Christ leads to the way, and along the way, and is not yet in itself the goal. 'I am the way,' says Jesus about himself according to one of the old Johannine sayings (John 14:6)"[46].

This means that Christians recognise the Christ-in-his-becoming, the Christ on the way, the Christ in the movement of God's eschatological history. We see here revelation in the first place as a mission in the present, more than as an accomplishment in the past or in the future. Christology should be open to a constant revision, because revelation stands before us as well as behind us. The story is not over. In different ways, each of the witnesses to Jesus as Lord made this clear. Paul is teaching in Rome "quite openly and unhindered" (Acts 28:31, RSV). Revelation in the present is also for us much more a quest than an accomplishment[47].

Moltmann emphasises the different stages in God's eschatological history with Jesus: the earthly, the crucified, the raised, the present, and the coming one[48]. A possible seduction in Moltmann's approach is that in Jewish-Christian dialogue, we now become too preoccupied with the final end. When so much emphasis is placed on the Christological end of the story, Van Buren argues, the intervening chapters we have to write today in the story of Christ are in danger of being taken with less seriousness. "To live in an unfinished story is to realise that one is contributing to its writing by that living. It is to realise that the story's development and its future course depend not only on God but also on God's partners"[49].

How Jesus Will Be the Messiah

This implies that the way Jesus will be the Messiah will depend upon the way we represent him today. When the church or some of its members fail to represent Jesus' cause authentically, to that extent Jesus' cause is set back and will affect the way in which Jesus will or will not be the Messiah.

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[45] P. VAN BUREN, *Theology*, p. 204.
[46] J. MOLTMANN, *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, p. 51.
[47] See also R. BIERINGER, *The Normativity of the Future. The Authority of the Bible for Theology*," in *Bulletin E.T. Zeitschrift für Theologie in Europa* 8 (1997) pp. 52-67.
[48] J. MOLTMANN, *Der Weg*, p. 50.
[49] P. VAN BUREN, *Theology*, pp. 281-282.

We must return here to the issue that lies in our view at the centre of dialectic tension between the two faiths, but also points to their inner bond: the issue of the unredeemedness versus redeemedness of the world, as we pointed out already with Moltmann. The basic difference between Jews and Christians consists fundamentally in the experience of realised eschatology in the Christ event. Christians are linked to, are baptised into, this eschatological event, and they must extend its meaning and its historical dimensions to human history, in time and space. Jews are witnesses to the 'not yet' of the entire messianic age. Schalom Ben-Chorin adopted this argument as follows:

> The Jew is profoundly aware of the unredeemed character of the world, and he perceives and recognizes no enclave of redemption in the midst of an unredeemed world. The concept of a redeemed soul in the midst of an unredeemed world is alien to the Jew, profoundly alien, inaccessible from the primal ground of his existence. This is the innermost reason for Israel's rejection of Jesus, not a merely external, merely national conception of messianism. In Jewish eyes, redemption means redemption from all evil. Evil of body and soul, evil in creation and civilization. So when we say redemption, we mean the whole of redemption. Between creation and redemption we know only one caesura: the revelation of God's will[50].

Christians must agree with the Jew that the world is not yet redeemed and recognize the importance of Israel's continuing witness to this fact. They must also accept the critique that the Christian insistence upon redeemedness has occupied a central place in the church's ideological justification of its own social dominance. In the light of this historical Christian triumphalism, what could it possibly mean that Jesus is the Redeemer of Israel[51]? In the opinion of Eckardt, the Jew is obliged to ask a painful question of his Christian brother:

> When you set out the cup of communion wine in remembrance of the sufferings of Jesus, what possible specific meaning or lesson is embodied in this symbolic act? Are you ready to suffer as Jesus did? Tell me, where were you when we Jews were living and dying in Auschwitz? In sum, just who are the witnesses of the Redeemer?[52].

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[50] S. Ben-Chorin, *Die Antwort des Jona. Zum Gestaltwandel Israels. Ein geschichts-theologischer Versuch*, Hamburg, Reich, 1956, p. 99.

[51] J.-P. Fortin, *Grace in Auschwitz: a Holocaust Christology*, Augsburg, Fortress Press, 2016, esp. Part II, Chapter 3: 'Kenotic Christ: Salvation in Weakness', pp. 125-190.

[52] A.R. Eckardt, *Elder and Younger Brothers*, p. 112.

The fact that Christians historically did not always represent authentically the redemption in Jesus does not mean that Jesus is for Christians no longer the Redeemer. Also, after Auschwitz, Israel's vision centres in Israel's restoration and the church's eye is on the figure of Christ. Israel's vision of the way to the reign of God's peace and justice on earth turns around its own faithfulness to the commandments; the church sees trust in Christ as the way, as Van Buren puts it[53]. It is and remains a fact of Christian life that Christians experience mercy, or justice, or forgiveness, or love for the enemy in particular lives and communities, and when they experience this radical novelty in the present, they can trace it to the newness of Christ in their lives.

IX. The Weeping Messiah

Here we touch upon the unique quality of Jesus' life and message: redemption in the present, even for those who have wronged, as the strongest manifestation and anticipation of the messianic times here and now. In a beautiful document of the French bishops, "*Lire l'Ancien Testament. Réflexion du Comité épiscopal pour les Relations avec le Judaïsme* (1997)", I read the following passage:

> Jesus radicalized the commandment of love by extending it to forgiveness for the enemies. Does this forgiveness not presuppose that the messianic age is anticipated and that even in Israel the difference between Jews and nations, between the oppressor and the victim, is overcome, although this difference is at the very heart of the Law? It is necessary to ask what right Jesus has to 'transcend' the borders of the Law and Israel. Does he do that out of his own initiative as an apostate who renounced the belief of his religious community and in this way, at least implicitly, declared the erroneous character of this belief? Or is he doing this in the name of the very finality of the Law and in this way following messianic logic[54]?

The great Jewish scholar David Flusser also sees here an element of newness in Jesus' message, as John Pawlikowski clearly states. Jesus' message of love for the enemy stands in contrast to Pharisaic teaching, which only insisted that the person be free of hatred toward the enemy

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[53] P. van Buren, *A Theology of Jewish-Christian Reality*, pp. 198-199.
[54] *Comité episcopal pour les relations avec le judaïsme*, "*Lire l'Ancien Testament. Réflection du Comité épiscopal pour les Relations avec le Judaïsme*," in *La documentation catholique* 79 (13) (1997), translated by D. Pollefeyt, pp. 626-632.

but never insisted in the same way on the need to show love toward him or her. I quote, with Pawlikowski, David Flusser:

> According to the teachings of Jesus you have to love the sinners, while according to Judaism you have not to hate the wicked. It is important to note that the positive role even toward the enemies is Jesus' personal message. In Judaism hatred is practically forbidden. But love to the enemy is not prescribed[55].

In this radicalisation of the commandment of love in Jesus' message, we find the strongest sign that in his person and message, the redemption of the world becomes 'yet' possible. However, this is not something Jesus constituted in the past through his life and death automatically, but something Christians have to represent in the present, to open the messianic future of Jesus.

At this point, we have to mention that the relation between Judaism and Christianity cannot be reduced to a simplistic dialectic between law and grace. Eckardt shows that the relation between Judaism and Christianity holds a much deeper complexity.

> *Relative to their Christian neighbours*, Jews tend to *talk* about unredeemedness, though not very much about sin, as meanwhile they *experience* the sin of the world as a brutal fact yet behave, nevertheless, in a more redeemed way. *Relative to their Jewish neighbours*, Christians tend to *talk* about the crying need of redemption while *behaving* more as though there were no such thing as redemption. There could be no more convincing evidence than this of both the barrier and a blurring of the lines between the two faiths[56].

The Christian response to the message of Jesus must always have a certain strange sound to the Jew whose knowledge of the Christian cross is so vividly one of his own suffering at the hands of Christians, rather than one of the suffering of Christians for the sake of their faith. Jews know from experience that sometimes Christians are the last ones to love their neighbours as themselves. The dialectic between Jews and Christians is thus a strange one. While Jews suffer more, they sometimes show greater social responsibility and utopianism. While Christians suffer less, they show less social hope and more social irresponsibility. Christians like to whisper to themselves that were they to live the fullness of redemption in Christ here

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[55] J.T. Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (Studies in Judaism and Christianity), New York, NY, Paulist Press, 1982, p. 106, in D. Flusser, *A New Sensitivity in Judaism and the Christian Message,"* in *Harvard Theological Review* 61, no. 2 (1968) 107-127, p. 126.

[56] A.R. Eckardt, *Elder and Younger Brothers*, p. 113.

and now, the cost would be too great. And precisely this prompts the Jews to point to the unredeemedness of the world. And, on the other hand, the moral quality of life of the Jews is a partial refutation of their concentration on the unredeemedness of the world and shows what redemption could mean, even if it is not motivated by the power of Christ. We think here of the Jewish refusal to treat Christians the way Christians treat Jews.

Does this mean that Christians should give up their belief in Jesus as the Redeemer? On the contrary. The confrontation with Judaism asks Christians to be more authentically Christian. The sole goal of Jewish-Christian dialogue is, as Fischer puts it, that Jews may have the opportunity to become better Jews, and Christians may become more authentically founded in and representative of their Christianity[57]. Christians should thus not leave open the question of the messiahship of Jesus, but they should accept the fact that Jews are leaving this question open, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said. Christians need to learn to live with the Jewish belief in the 'No' to Jesus for the sake of their own Christology. The way Jesus will come as the Christ and the Redeemer of the world will depend on the way Christians represent him in the present. If Christians are not able to bring his redemption to the world today, especially in relationship with the Jewish people, I fear that at the end of times they will not meet a triumphalising Messiah, but what I would like to call a 'weeping Messiah', a Messiah weeping for the injuries and the unredeemedness Christians caused, especially to his own people. Then it could be that not the Christians, with their triumphalistic messianic perceptions, but the Jews will be able to recognise first the Messiah as the Saviour of the world[58].

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[57] E.J. Fisher, *Faith Without Prejudice: Rebuilding Christian Attitudes toward Judaism*. Revised and expanded edition, New York, NY, Crossroad, 1993, p. 82.

[58] A previous version published as D. Pollefeyt, *Christology after the Holocaust. A Catholic Perspective*, in M. Meyer – C. Hughes (eds.), *Jesus Then and Now. Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, Harrisburg, PA, Trinity Press International, 2001, pp. 229-248.

Chapter Fourteen

The Holocaust as Irrevocable Turning Point in Jewish-Christian Relations

In this chapter, I would like to make clear how the Catholic Church has taken up the challenges of supersessionism, and has tried to find new answers to questions never before put so sharply in the history of the Church. This will not be a story of easy passage, but a critical reading of the Post-Holocaust Catholic theology of Judaism.

For protestant Holocaust scholar F.H. Littell, the cornerstone of Christian anti-Judaism is the superseding or displacement truth, 'which already rings with the genocidal note'[1]. Littell explains how the superseding myth has two foci: "(1) God is finished with the Jews; (2) the 'new Israel' (the Christian Church) takes the place of the Jewish people as carrier of history"[2]. For him, this 'Christian' doctrine is not only unjust to the Jewish people, it also reveals a fundamental flaw in the doctrine of the Church[3]. I agree with Littell that this is one of the most essential theological consequences of the Holocaust, namely that a replacement or supersessionist theology which puts a triumphalist Church of gentiles over and against a rejected Synagogue whose place it takes, is today deprived of every possible foundation. But the question then becomes how the everlasting covenant of God with Israel can be combined, after the Holocaust, with the Christian belief in the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ in a theologically coherent and pastorally applicable way?

In 2015, the Vatican Commission for the Religious Relations with the Jews published a reflection on theological questions pertaining to Catholic-Jewish relations on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate*—and especially chapter 4, which centres on the Jewish people. The title of this document is *The Gifts and*

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[1] F.H. Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews. The Failure of Christians to Understand the Jewish Experience* (Rose 15), Macon, GA, Mercer University Press, 2005, 5th print, p. 2 (first edition: New York, NY, Harper & Row Publishers, 1975).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

the Calling of God are Irrevocable[4], referring to the letter of Paul to the Romans (11:29). I believe that this document is the most recent and most advanced Catholic answer to the challenges of supersessionism. A critical analysis of this document will help us to find an answer to the question of whether the Catholic Church did indeed formulate an adequate theological response to overcome Christian supersessionism.

Nostra Aetate, the declaration of the Second Vatican Council on Judaism (1965) provides after the Holocaust the first systematic theological reflection on the relationship of the Catholic Church to the Jews. "Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures"[5]. Like several other statements in *Nostra Aetate,* this passage also reveals the tensions and even contradictions in the text: the Jews are not rejected or accursed by God "although" the Church is the new people of God. *Nostra Aetate* was symbolically a theological breakthrough but, as *The Gifts and the Calling* correctly says, it has often been too easily over-interpreted in an optimistic way by Catholic theologians as the overcoming of supersessionism and as the definitive recognition of the intrinsic salvific value of Judaism. The document is in several expressions too ambivalent to draw such optimistic conclusions. Take, as another example, the statement: "God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers". Why "for the sake of their Fathers?" And thus not: for itself?

Fundamental changes in the life and doctrine of the Church are often not born out of theoretical reflections, but out of real historical events: dramatic events, such as the Holocaust, but also positive events, such as the encounter of St. Pope John Paul II with Jewish representatives in Mainz, Germany, on November 17, 1980. He stated there: "The first dimension of this dialogue, that is, the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, *never revoked by God* (...) and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to

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[4] Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *"The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable" (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50*[th] *Anniversary of "Nostra Aetate" (No. 4)*, December 10, 2015 [accessed February 23, 2018] http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebra-ismo-nostra-aetate_en.html.

[5] Paul VI, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: Nostra Aetate*, October 28, 1965, nr. 4, [accessed February 23, 2018] http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

say, between the first and the second part of the Bible"[6]. The idea of the 'people of God of the old covenant never revoked by God'— not yet used in *Nostra Aetate*— came from then on into the centre of the reflections on Jewish-Christian relations. The papal position was much more than just a demonstration of pastoral sensitivity or a concession for the sake of interreligious dialogue. It was theologically very well thought out and also repeated later in several papal statements on the doctrine on Israel. The message is clear: the original covenant at Sinai has never been revoked, God never stopped loving His people, the Jewish people stand forever in an irrevocable relationship with God and they continue today to be the heirs of that covenant to which God is loyal until the end. This papal doctrine has strong biblical credentials, especially in Romans 11:29: "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable". And doctrine followed. In 1993, the Catechism of the Church stated: "The Old Covenant has never been revoked" (nr. 121)[7].

But, of course, this did not solve all problems. On the contrary, it made the paradox even bigger: How to combine the clear idea of the covenant of God with Israel "as never revoked" with the Christian doctrinal idea of the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ? In the document *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*, the Vatican clearly rejected in 1985 the solution of the so-called two different paths to salvation: the Jewish path without Christ and the Christian path with Christ. "Jesus affirms (…) that 'there shall be one flock and one shepherd'. Church and Judaism cannot then be seen as two parallel ways of salvation and the Church must witness to Christ as the Redeemer for all"[8]. The solution of the two parallel ways to salvation is seen as endangering the foundations of Christian faith since the mediation of salvation through Jesus Christ is unique, universal and exclusive. This is repeated in 2015 in *The Gifts and the Calling*: "The Christian faith confesses that God

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[6] Pastoralbesuch in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Begegnung von papst Johannes Paul II mit Vertretern der Jüdischen Gemeinde*, November 17, 1980, nr. 3, [our translation, our italics], [accessed February 23, 2018] https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/de/speeches/1980/november/documents/hf_jp_ii_spe_19801117_ebrei-magonza.html.

[7] Catechism of the Catholic Church, *Part One, Section One, Chapter Two, Article 3: Sacred Scripture*, nr. 121 [accessed February 18, 2018] http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p1s1c2a3.htm.

[8] Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Notes on the correct way to present the Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*, nr. 7, [accessed February 18, 2018] http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19820306_jews-judaism_en.html.

wants to lead all people to salvation, that Jesus Christ is the universal mediator of salvation, and that there is no 'other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved' (Acts 4:12)"[9].

At other places in the Church magisterium, in line with the expression of John Paul II ('the never-revoked covenant'), stress is put more on the irreducibility and complementarity of the Jewish and the Christian covenant. Already in 1998, [then] cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote in his memoirs (1927-1977): "I have come to the realisation that Judaism (…) and the Christian faith described in the New Testament are two ways of appropriating Israel's Scriptures, two ways that in the end are determined by the position one assumes with regard to the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. The Scripture we today call Old Testament is in and of itself *open to both ways*"[10]. The brilliant document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 2011, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible,* also recognises the irreducible value of the Christian and the Jewish reading of the Bible. "The Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion"[11]. Now, how can the original covenant be "open to both ways", with the old covenant "never revoked" and yet excluding the 'two parallel ways to salvation' as an answer?

It is Cardinal Ratzinger—later, Pope Benedict XVI—who himself wrote a book on this subject: *Many Religions – One Covenant*[12]. He formulates the central theological question to Christians in clear-cut terms: "Do confession of Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of the Living God and faith in the Cross as the redemption of mankind contain an implicit condemnation of the Jews as stubborn and blind, as guilty of the death of the Son of God?". Ratzinger's answer to these questions is—in line of *Nostra Aetate*—of course: 'No!' His positive answer to the question of the theology of Jewish-Christian relations today reads like this: "Through him whom the Church believes to be Jesus Christ and Son of God, the God of Israel has become the God of the nations, *fulfilling* the prophecy

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[9] *The Gifts and the Calling*, nr. 35.

[10] Card. J. Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977*, trans. E. Leiva-Merikakis, San Francisco, CA, Ignatius Press, 1998, pp. 53-54 [our italics].

[11] The Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, nr. 22, [accessed February 23, 2018] http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html.

[12] J. Ratzinger, *Many Religions – One Covenant. Israel, the Church and the World*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1999.

that the Servant of God would bring the light of this God to the nations"[13]. I believe that this concept of *fulfilment* best summarises Ratzinger's and the official Church position *vis-à-vis* Judaism today. In *The Gifts*, we read: "The New Covenant for Christians is therefore neither the annulment nor the replacement, but the *fulfilment* of the promises of the Old Covenant" (nr. 32). The concept of fulfilment allows the placement of Jesus in continuity with the old covenant. At the same time, however, it is in this process of fulfilment that the Old Testament is—in the words of Ratzinger— "renewed"[14] by Jesus, "transformed"[15], and "brought to its deepest meaning"[16].

A deeper analysis of the concept of fulfilment as used by Benedict XVI shows that this approach is not without ambivalences in light of the quest to recognise the never-revoked Jewish covenant. On the one hand, Cardinal Ratzinger stresses that all nations become brothers and receivers of the promises given to the chosen People and "not one iota of it [the Old Testament] is being lost"[17]. On the contrary, the new perspective in Jesus does not imply "the abolishment of the special mission of Israel"[18]. On the other hand, the emphasis on the newness of Jesus implies that the Sinai covenant "within God's providential rule (…) is a stage that has its own allotted period of time"[19]. The Sinai covenant thus seems to have only a conditional and as such temporary significance. How is this compatible with the idea of the never-revoked covenant? In my analysis, the problem with the concept of fulfilment is that it logically cannot prevent the reduction of thinking to replacement theology—even, moreover, that thought finally implies replacement theology.

This is clear in Ratzinger's *Many Religions – One Covenant* where at several places fulfilment theology shifts silently into replacement theology. He writes: "God, according to the Prophet, will *replace* the broken Sinai covenant with a New Covenant that cannot be broken. (…) The *conditional* covenant (...) is *replaced* by the unconditional covenant in which God binds himself irrevocably"[20]. Nowhere does Ratzinger

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[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 62.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 39.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 32.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 41.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 68.
[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

explicitly distinguish fulfilment from replacement. On the contrary, fulfilment implies replacement.

Thus the Sinai covenant is indeed *superseded*. But once what was provisional in it has been *swept away*, we see what is truly definitive in it. So the expectation of the New Covenant, which becomes clearer and clearer as the history of Israel unfolds, does not conflict with the Sinai covenant; rather, it *fulfils* the dynamic expectation found in that very covenant[21].

Many theological questions can be formulated in relation to this position. What is here the remaining role and significance of the first covenant in God's salvific plan? Are the Jewish people saved through Christ or in and through 'the never-revoked covenant' (John Paul II)? And more concretely, do the Jews have to convert to Christ to enter into God's final Kingdom? In this teaching, is the Catholic Church really overcoming supersessionist theology, which is, in the analysis of Littell, the "cornerstone of Christian antisemitism"[22]?

Ratzinger accepts that this theology ends up in a paradoxical conclusion. 'Separation' and 'reconciliation' between Jews and Christians are intertwined in a "virtually insolvable paradox"[23]. Here we find a characteristically Catholic way for solving the problem of Jewish-Christian relations: the so-called eschatological solution. The *Gifts and the Calling* summarises this very well: "That the Jews are participants in God's salvation is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an unfathomable divine mystery" (nr. 36).

The eschatological approach of the Jewish-Christian question has advantages. It recognises that, finally, it is not the Church but rather God who will bring salvation to all people. The Church gives up its role to be the sole instrument of salvation. Cardinal Walter Kasper writes in this context: "The Church simply cannot do this [see itself as God's only instrument of salvation]. The Church places the when and how entirely in God's hands. God only can bring the Kingdom of God, in which the world will know eschatological peace and the whole of Israel will be saved"[24].

It is our thesis that Jewish-Christian dialogue is still in this paradoxical situation. Since *Nostra Aetate*, the Christian (especially Catholic) theology

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[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.
[22] F.H. LITTELL, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, p. 2.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[24] W. KASPER, *Il Cardinale Kasper e la missione verso gli ebrei. Rispondi alle critiche del Venerdi Santo per gli ebrei*, in *Osservatore Romano*, 10 April, 2008.

of Judaism could not liberate itself from the tension between continuity and discontinuity, between separation and reconciliation, between fulfilment and replacement. In particular, the ambiguities between fulfilment and replacement are not unproblematic, even if placed in an eschatological perspective. For those who are engaged in a real dialogue with real Jewish people, this paradox is very difficult 'to argue' and 'to live'.

A critical example of this ambiguous situation is the outcome of the controversy around the so-called Good Friday prayer of the Catholic Church[25]. Here we see the unfortunate consequences of this paradoxical situation. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI formally rehabilitated in the Catholic Church the old Tridentine rite through the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum*. This concerns the rite that was introduced in the liturgy by Pope V as standard in 1570. In 1970, as a consequence of the liturgical renewal in line with Vatican II, the Tridentine rite was replaced by a new liturgical missal. The old missal, however, has never been abolished and was/is still used by a small number of conservative Catholics, even after the Second Vatican Council. As a consequence of this papal decision, the Tridentine rite was considered as an extraordinary form of the Latin rite, whereas the 1970 Roman missal remained the ordinary form of it. It was particularly feared that the revaluation of the old missal would lead to a reintroduction of the classic (and violent) Good Friday Prayer: "Let us pray also for the perfidious Jews: that Almighty God may remove the veil from their hearts; so that they too may acknowledge Jesus Christ our Lord". The expression 'perfidious Jews' was already removed from the old missal in 1962, and in the new missal, post-Vatican II, the prayer was replaced by another prayer that respects the alterity of the Jewish people as such: "Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God, that they may continue to grow in the love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant" (1970). Instead of replacing the old Good Friday Prayer of 1962 from the old rehabilitated missal with the Good Friday Prayer of 1970, Pope Benedict XVI decided to write a complete new prayer to be used in the old liturgy: "Let us pray also for the Jews. That our Lord and God may enlighten their hearts, that they may acknowledge Jesus

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[25] D. POLLEFEYT – M. MOYAERT, *Israel and the Church: Fulfillment beyond Supersessionism?*, in D. POLLEFEYT – M. MOYAERT (ed.), *Never Revoked. "Nostra Aetate" as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs, 40), Leuven-Parijs-Walpole (MA), Peeters, Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge, Eerdmans, 2010, pp. 159-183.

Christ as the saviour of all men". Here, we see again a shift from the 'never-revoked covenant' logic (as in the prayer of 1970) to a supersessionist logic in the prayer of 2008 (included in the old missal). It shows that the Catholic Church continues to wrestle with the tension between fulfilment and replacement. The call to conversion in the 2008 prayer implicitly means that the election of the Jews as the chosen people and their particular mission have actually lost their significance after the coming of Christ. Fulfilment and replacement are closely tied. In fact, we are confronted still today in the Catholic Church with two different theologies of Jewish-Christian relations, even in Catholic liturgy— once in the ordinary form of the liturgy, and once in the extraordinary form of the liturgy, each with different theological presuppositions.

Perhaps, Pope Francis can bring new perspectives into this situation. In an address to the members of the International Council for Christians and Jews, on June 30, 2015, he stated in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican:

> The Christian confessions find their unity in Christ; Judaism finds its unity in the Torah. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh in the world; for Jews the Word of God is present above all in the Torah. Both faith traditions find their foundation in the One God, the God of the Covenant, who reveals himself through his Word. In seeking a right attitude towards God, Christians turn to Christ as the fount of new life, and Jews to the teaching of the Torah[26].

What do we learn from this perspective of Pope Francis[27]? The Jewish people seek to enact the will of God through the words of the Torah. The Christians seek to do the will of God by following the way of Jesus Christ. Both Judaism and Christianity live in the light of the Logos, the Word of God. The Jewish life is Torah-shaped and the Christian life is Christ-shaped, where Christ is understood as the One who incarnates God's divine Word or Logos. But both faith traditions are founded in the one God of the Covenant who reveals Himself time and again through the Logos. It is clear for Pope Francis that Jews and Christians

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[26] Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to members of the "International Council of Christians and Jews"*, June 30, 2015, [accessed February 18, 2018] https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/june/documents/papa-francesco_20150630_iccj.html

[27] P.A. Cunningham – D. Pollefeyt¸ *The Triune One, the Incarnate Logos and Israel's Covenantal Life*, in P. Cunningham – J. Sievers – M.C. Boys – H.H. Henrix – J. Svartvik (eds.), *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today. New Explorations of Theological Interrelations*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2011, 183-201.

have two distinctive but mutually respectable experiences of the Word of God. This includes a recognition that God's Word animates Jewish covenantal life today. This Logos-perspective is also affirmed by *Gifts and Callings* (nr. 25). In fact, we read here how Christ is confessionally constitutive for Christians, just as the Torah is confessionally constitutive for Jews:

> Judaism and the Christian faith as seen in the New Testament are two ways by which God's people can make the Sacred Scriptures of Israel their own. The Scriptures which Christians call the Old Testament is open therefore to both ways. A response to God's word of salvation that accords with one or the other tradition can thus open up access to God, even if it is left up to his counsel of salvation to determine in what way he may intend to save mankind in each instance (nr. 25).

Is this Logos-approach a promising perspective for the future? It implies that Jews and Christians are both right to believe that their distinctive relationship with the Word of God (Logos) will allow them to achieve their ultimate eschatological destiny. In this approach, Jews do not need to share in the Christian experience of the Logos incarnated as Christ to be participants in the covenant, since they are already experiencing the indwelling of God within their community and people through the Torah as God's Word. From a Christian point of view, the dwelling of the Word of God within the flesh of the people of Israel became even more close, more intimate in the irreversible and unique incarnation of the Logos in Christ, the "authentic son of Israel"[28]. This incarnation of the Word in Christ has not been revealed to Israel as a whole. At the same time, the working of the Word in the Torah in the Jewish framework cannot be understood and experienced fully from within a Christian perspective. If the continuous existence of Judaism and Christianity is the will of God, then their interrelationship must have a positive meaning for a world so much in need of the Word of God[29].

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[28] John Paul II, *Address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission*, April 11, 1997, par. 3.
[29] A previous version published as D. Pollefeyt, *Taking Jewish Existence Seriously After the Holocaust: A Continuous Challenge to the Catholic Church*, in D. Patterson (ed.), *Legacy of an Impassioned Plea: Franklin Littell's The Crucifixion of the Jews*, New York, Paragon House Publishers, 2018, p. 277-286.

Section Nine

Interreligious Dialogue

Chapter Fifteen

The Other is not the Same:
Interreligious Dialogue as Hermeneutic
Power of Encounter

It is common for a Catholic approach to interreligious dialogue to start one's analysis with the presentation and the evaluation of three traditional models to understand religious diversity: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism[1]. This typology has become widespread and almost self-evident among many Christian thinkers and students. One of the theses of this chapter will be that this classic typology concerning 'non-Christian religions' became itself more a stumbling block then a helpful framework to come to an authentic encounter and dialogue with the real religious other. After the critical analysis of this typological approach, and the crisis it provokes concerning the possibility of an encounter with the other, we try to develop new perspectives on the interreligious encounter beyond theological absolutism (usually attributed to exclusivism and inclusivism) and relativism (usually attributed to pluralism).

I. Exclusivism

The first model of religious diversity is traditionally called 'exclusivism'. Exclusivists are convinced that believers of other religions or non-believers can only be saved when they convert to the only true religion, namely the religion they confess themselves. For Christian exclusivists, this means that people can only be saved when they convert explicitly to Christianity and accept Jesus as Christ and Redeemer. This Christian exclusivism is mostly not only Christological in nature, but also ecclesiological: "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*" ["no salvation outside the Church"][2]. Christianity is superior to all other religions. Other religions have nothing to add to Christianity. They are misleading and can thus never enrich one's own, Christian identity. Because the religious truth is

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[1] This typology was first introduced in 1983 by Alan Race in his study: A. RACE, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books,1983.

[2] This statement was first formulated by Cyprianus (205-258), bishop of Carthago.

revealed only through Christ and the Church, Christians have the obligation to proclaim the Christian message to everyone (mission).

Today, exclusivism is no longer the position of the official Catholic Church. Since Vatican II, and as a response to the Holocaust, the Catholic Church took distance from this position. But it can still be found in several other Christian churches, especially evangelical churches[3]. Also in other religions, this exclusivist position can still be found, e.g. in Islam or in some movements in Buddhism. The central idea is that God has revealed himself in a unique mediator or medium and that only through the explicit recognition of this mediator or medium, one can find liberation or salvation. In the course of history, however, it was Christianity that developed an exclusivist theology —accompanied by powerful institutional structures—that sometimes ended up in (even violent) religious colonialism.

II. Inclusivism

In contrast to exclusivism, inclusivism does not deny in advance the value of so called 'non-Christian religions'. The central idea of Christian inclusivism is that salvation outside Christianity is possible, but only thanks to the salvific work of God through Jesus Christ. Inclusivism accepts the idea that God wanted salvation for all people of all times and places and that His salvific will can take many forms. For this reason, one cannot in advance reject all other religions. But inclusivism does not deny the definitive salvific reality of God's incarnation in Christ. Christ remains—as in exclusivism—the norm and the only means of salvation. But what is not needed is *explicit* knowledge of Christ in order for one to be saved. Unlike exclusivism, inclusivism accepts that an *implicit* faith response to general revelation can be salvific. This approach was initially developed before and during the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) by the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner:

> But if it is true that a person who becomes the object of the church's missionary efforts is or may be already someone on the way towards salvation - and if it is at the same time true that this salvation is Christ's salvation, since there is no other salvation - then it must be possible to be (…) an anonymous Christian[4].

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[3] See e.g. the statements of the *Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization* (www.lausanne.org).

[4] K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. I, London, Helicon Press, 1964, pp. 75-76.

Since the Second Vatican Council, this inclusivist position can be identified as the official position of the Catholic church. In the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* of 1964, we read that "those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them by the dictates of their conscience" (nr. 16)[5]. Christian inclusivism includes non-Christian believers in the realm of salvation, because and as far as the spirit of Christ is at work in them. This inclusivist position also exists in Judaism and Islam. The rabbinic tradition asserts for almost two thousand years that the righteousness was established in a covenant with Noah: anyone who keeps the seven commandments of this covenant will be saved, no matter what their religion is. And the Koran revealed through Mohammed, states, "those with Faith, those who are Jews, and the Christians and Sabaeans all who have Faith in Allah and the Last Day and act rightly, will have their reward with their Lord. They will feel no fear and will know no sorrow"[6].

In comparison with the exclusivist position, inclusivism opens much more room for religious freedom and interreligious dialogue. For Pope John Paul II, interreligious dialogue—based on the inclusivist paradigm— is an instrument of peace. In his famous speech on the world day for peace in Assisi (Italy, October 26, 1986), John Paul II asked for "respect for one's personal conscience, rejecting all forms of coercion or discrimination with regard to faith, freedom to practice one's own religion and give witness to it, as well as appreciation and esteem for all genuine traditions"[7]. For John Paul II, this engagement in interreligious dialogue is not in conflict with the proclamation of Christ who is considered as the fullness of truth and who finally asks for the repentance of all people.

Inclusivism has been criticised because it would be a position that is not really open to the reality of the other, or because it would restrict its openness only to what is compatible in the other with my own religious identity. As Hick notes, "inclusivism still rests upon the claim to

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[5] PAUL VI, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium, November* 21, 1964, nr. 16, [accessed February 23, 2018] http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

[6] *Qur'an, Suratal-Baqara*, 2,62.

[7] POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Address at Assisi*, in F. GOIA (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue: the Official Teaching of the Catholic Church* (1963-1995), Boston, Pauline Books and Media, 1997, p. 532.

Christianity's unique finality as the locus of the only divine revelation, and the only adequate saving event. Non-Christians can be saved because, unknown to them, Christ is secretly 'in a way united' with them"[8]. And the other important pluralist theologian, Knitter argues that "when one has already the fullness of truth, there can't be too much to learn [in interreligious encounters]"[9]. The central critique against inclusivism is that it does not take into account adequately the religious self-understanding of the other as other. The other is read, understood and appreciated only in my own religious terms. Burggraeve therefore criticises exclusivism and inclusivism in the same line confronting these paradigms with the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas: "dialogue starts by resisting the inclination to exclude the other ('exclusivism') or by reducing the other to ourselves ('inclusivism')"[10]. Coming from a Muslim perspective, Bulent Senay argues that inclusivism is often seen as a form of Christian imperialism. "On this understanding", Senay writes, "it is not Buddhism that saves, but Christ in Buddhism, and Hindus are not saved by their beliefs, but in spite of them"[11]. Indeed, also for Christians, it would be very difficult to accept that they are called in the dialogue 'anonymous Buddhists'. Inclusivism is especially difficult in Jewish-Christian relations since the Jewish perspective explicitly rejects Christ as universal saviour. One of the central starting points of authentic dialogue is therefore the recognition of the irreducible alterity of the religious other (Levinas).

It is important to note that the inclusivist theology of religions is not one massive and static theology, but is characterised by many variants and considerable recent developments. We refer here (among others) to Jacques Dupuis and his (Catholic) 'inclusivistic pluralism'[12], Mark Heim and his (protestant) Trinitarian theology[13] and Paul Griffiths and his (Catholic) 'open inclusivism'[14]. These developments make clear that inclusivism is a dynamic and complex understanding of religious

[8] J. Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, London, Macmillon, 1993, p. 84.

[9] P.F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names. Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 142.

[10] Quoted from D. Pollefeyt (ed.), *Interreligious Learning*, Leuven, Peeters Press, 2007, p. 237.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 220.

[12] J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Pluralism*, Rome, Orbis Books, 1997.

[13] M. Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1995.

[14] P.J. Griffiths, *Problems of the Religious Diversity* (Exploring the Philosophy of Religion, 1), Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishers, 2001.

otherness and that theologians today are testing the limits of inclusivism traditionally understood in essentially Christological terms. Especially the logo-centric approach of the Belgian theologian Jacques Dupuis can be seen as one of the most innovative developments of the inclusivist position. "The transcendent, illuminating power of the divine *Logos*, operative throughout human history accounts for the salvation of human beings even before the manifestation of the *Logos* in flesh [Jesus Christ]. (…) The divine *Logos* continues even today, to sow his seeds among peoples"[15]. At the same time, we see here how 'open inclusivism' reaches its limits. The *Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith* in Rome promulgated a notification that was published in the book of Jacques Dupuis as a warning:

> It must (…) be firmly believed that Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Mary and only Saviour of the world, is the Son and Word of the Father. For the unity of the divine plan of salvation centred in Jesus Christ, it must also be held that the salvific action of the Word is accomplished in and through Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of the Father, as mediator of salvation for all humanity. It is therefore contrary to the Catholic faith not only to posit a separation between the Word and Jesus, or between the Word's salvific activity and that of Jesus, but also to maintain that there is a salvific activity of the Word as such in his divinity, independent of the humanity of the Incarnate Word[16].

III. Pluralism

Both the developments in the inclusivist theology and the critiques against these developments should be seen in the light of the discussion with a third paradigm: pluralism. This paradigm is even more complex than the inclusivist approach, in its history, content and variants. At the same time, it has become very popular as the background of much of concrete practices of interreligious dialogue and of popular culture. Even more, pluralists sometimes claim silently that their approach is the *only* approach that makes real dialogue possible. The central idea of pluralistic theology is the equality of all religions. All religions are partial expressions

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[15] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 320.
[16] Congregation for the doctrine of the faith, *Notification on the Book Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Vatican, 2001, nr. I.2. (http://www.vatican. va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_ en.html).

of the Ultimate Reality. This ultimate divine reality is as such mysterious, unreachable and inexplicable. The different religions "describe not the ultimate as it is in itself but as it is conceived in the variety of ways made possible by our varied human mentalities and cultures"[17]. This means that religious systems are only relative, cultural-historical conceptualisations of religious experiences of the ultimate divine reality that forms the common ground and source of all religions. All these religions are parallel ways to salvation as far as they can transform human beings from egoism to an orientation towards the ultimate reality. Pluralism often presents itself as the only alternative for the superiority of exclusivism and inclusivism, as the only framework for interreligious dialogue: "For if each [religion] represents a different human perspective on the Real, each may be able to enlarge its own vision by trying to look through the lenses that others have developed"[18].

Also this pluralist paradigm has been the object of very severe criticism. D'Costa has argued that agnosticism is the inevitable outcome of pluralism because pluralism flees away from all religious particularity:

> first from the particularity of the incarnation, then from the particularity of a theistic God, and then from the particularity of any religious claim, be it Christian or non-Christian. The outcome of the escape from particularity can only be into nothing in particular[19].

The presupposition of the pluralistic paradigm is that one should be prepared to accept the relativity of one's own faith position as a precondition to participate in an authentic way to the dialogue. The risk of this liberal position is that in its reaction against exclusivists and inclusivists who try to convert others because they cannot deal with religious difference, pluralism reproduces itself the intolerance it pretends to fight against. In other words, pluralism risks to become again exclusivist for all those who do not accept the pluralistic presuppositions to come to authentic dialogue. Paradoxically, it are often the most convinced believers within a particular religious tradition who have problems with the relativistic understanding of their religion by pluralism and who are therefore considered by pluralists to be unfit for dialogue. Often, we see how the dialogical process shifts from the encounter between representatives from different religious traditions to the

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[17] J. HICK, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 165.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 178.
[19] G. D'COSTA, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, Edinburgh, T. &. T. Clark, 2000, p. 28.

encounter of the representatives—across the different religions—of one common theological paradigm: pluralism, with the exclusion of all other opinions and approaches. The drama of the pluralists then becomes that they are prepared to talk with everyone except with those believers who are convinced of the (exclusive or inclusive) truth of their own religion position. In this way, the question raises if the pluralistic position is really able to tolerate and to dialogue with radical otherness. In this sense, pluralism is in essence not very different from inclusivism and even exclusivism. All three positions think that otherness can be transcended in one general perspective, one common ground which then becomes the precondition for interreligious dialogue. John Cobb warns against the idea of a common ground as the foundation for interreligious dialogue: "(…) real dialogue involves listening to genuine strange ideas, whereas the assumption of common ground limits the strangeness of what can be heard. The listener who is convinced of common ground will not be able to hear the full novelty of what is said"[20].

Even if inclusivism and pluralism have similar weaknesses, it is remarkable to note that most of the discussion on the nature of interreligious dialogue, especially in Christian circles, situates itself between inclusivists and pluralists. It seems as if the dialogue is imprisoned in the traditional typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. It can be argued that by fighting each other, the traditional positions of the trilogy impose their own framework on the broader discussion on interreligious dialogue. This framework is not free from its own hidden agenda. In fact, the traditional typology is created by Christian scholars to reflect on Christian questions, especially questions related to the possibility of salvation for the non-Christian believer. But this soteriological question is a Christian question. Lindbeck speaks about the "soteriological fixation" of the traditional typology as another expression of the idea of Christian superiority[21]. The other can only answer to a question of salvation asked from the Christian perspective. Lindbeck criticises strongly this soteriological agenda behind the traditional Christian trilogy: "Concern for saving souls in anything like the usual Christian sense is not found or is not central in most or perhaps all non-Christian or non-biblical religions. (…) This is an agenda which

[20] J.B. COBB, *Dialogue without Common Ground*, in I. ABBT – A. JAGER, *Weltof-fenheit des christlichen Glaubens. Fritz Buri zu Ehren*, Tübingen, Verlag Paul Haupt, 1987, pp. 145-154, p. 148.

[21] G. LINDBECK, *The Gospel's Uniqueness: Election and Untranslatability*, in *Modern Theology* 13 (1997) 423-450, p. 425.

is of interest to non-Christians to the extent that they feel threatened by Christianity, but not otherwise"[22]. The orientation of e.g. Judaism or Buddhism can hardly be described as an orientation towards salvation as it is understood in the Christian framework. So the critique concerning the respect for the self-understanding of the other should not only be addressed towards inclusivism, but towards the whole enterprise of the trilogical theology of 'non-Christian' religions itself. The trilogy itself in this way becomes an obstacle for the appearance of the other in his irreducible alterity. "Viewed from the perspective (…) of the 'logic' (Griffiths) of interreligious dialogue", DiNoia writes, "participation in such dialogue demands at least recognition of 'the other *as* other' (Tracy) and perhaps the acknowledgement of incompatibility among some doctrine-expressing sentences of some religious communities"[23].

IV. Particularlism

The critique on the trilogical enterprise itself gave birth to another approach to the interreligious dialogue which centres on the particularity of religious systems. This position cannot be identified with the traditional distinction between exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, "rather it attempts to change the terms of the debate"[24] itself. The goal of the particularist in interreligious dialogue is no longer to reduce the difference to a common denominator or common ground, but to discover, to tolerate and to accept as such the differences among the partners in dialogue. The post-liberal theology of George Lindbeck can be considered as the most eminent expression of this position. Lindbeck inverts the pluralistic approach of religions. Religions are not just different frameworks to express human experiences of the divine, but on the contrary, religions are different frameworks that constitute radical different religious experiences.

> Adherents of different religions do not diversely thematise the same experience; rather they have different experiences. Buddhist compassion, Christian love and (…) French Revolutionary *fraternité* are not diverse modifications of a single fundamental human awareness, emotion, attitude, or sentiment, but are radically (i.e., from the root) distinct ways of experiencing and being oriented toward self, neighbour, and cosmos[25].

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[22] *Ibid.*

[23] J.A. DiNoia, *Teaching Differences*, in *Journal of Religion* 73 (1993) 61-68, pp. 64-65.

[24] P.J. Griffiths, *The Properly Christian Response to Religious Plurality*, in *Anglican Theological Review* 79 (1997) 3-26, p. 3.

[25] G. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 40.

Religion is an external word (*verbum externum*) that shapes the self[26]. Lindbeck compares religions with linguistic systems which are also always particular:

> (…) it is just as hard to think of religions as it is to think of cultures or languages as having a single generic or universal experiential essence of which particular religions—or cultures or languages—are varied manifestations or modifications. One can in this outlook no more be religious in general than one can speak language in general[27].

Believers of religions are people who have learned to speak a particular religious language and there is no general religious language. Moreover, what is typical for Lindbeck's position, is that religious languages are untranslatable, in contrast with natural languages, because for him religious languages are intra-semiotic, intra-textual and all-encompassing. Particular religious languages 'absorb' reality. Religious languages cannot be translated outside their own realm. For this reason, for Lindbeck, it is impossible to translate meanings of one religion into another religion. He stresses that "nothing can be translated out of this [e.g. biblical] idiom into some supposedly independent communicative system without perversion, diminution or incoherence of meaning"[28].

The consequence of this position is in fact the impossibility of interreligious dialogue. The relation between different religions becomes a relation between different synchronic realities that use completely different and autonomous language systems. It becomes for believers of different religions even impossible to know if they mean the same if they talk to each other about religious realities. Lindbeck himself speaks of the "balkanization" of the dialogue[29]. His conclusion is clear: "Not only do they [the religions] no longer share a common theme such as salvation, but the shared universe of discourse forged to discuss that theme disintegrates. (…) Those for whom conversation is the key to solving interreligious problems are likely to be disappointed"[30]. What is important in this position, is that Lindbeck is clear in drawing the consequences of his own theology for interreligious dialogue. A radical particularism means the end of interreligious dialogue since there is nothing common to talk about because we are even lacking a common language to understand each other. In this position, we see

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[27] *Ibid.*
[28] G. Lindbeck, *The Gospel's Uniqueness*, p. 429.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 427.
[30] *Ibid.*

how the dominance of sameness is exchanged for the dominance of otherness.

Of course, it is not because this particularism means the end of the possibility of interreligious dialogue that this is *per se* an argument against a position like the one of Lindbeck. Perhaps dialogue is just impossible. But the question is if the presuppositions that Lindbeck uses to understand religion do justice to the essence of the dynamics of religions itself. Are religions closed, untranslatable and all-absorbing linguistic systems creating different worlds that cannot dialogue with each other? Several elements in the self-understanding of religions tend to give a negative answer to this question. First of all, from the Christian, and even broader, monotheistic perspective, all human beings are created in the image of God, and are connected with each other. Also in eschatological perspective, the dream of the biblical God is oriented towards the unity of all human beings, even of the whole of creation. This means that neither the first nor the last word is given to separation or otherness, but to unity and interconnectedness. Difference and separation are from this perspective real, but secondary, in the plan of God with the world. Moreover, God himself is not just a construct created, born or imprisoned in a linguistic system. It is just the opposite: linguistic systems are efforts to refer to God, to explain or to express the relation that people experience with something or someone outside themselves. So religious systems are not auto-referential, but refer to a God or a divine reality experienced as outside or beyond the linguistic system. Precisely because of this external reference, different religions can talk to each other about how they experience and express this 'outside' or 'beyond', and even a discussion is possible on the 'truth' in relation to this reference to the 'outside' or 'beyond'. Further, (religious) linguistic systems are not completely separated from each other historically. There are many linguistic, cultural and theological overlaps and mutual influences. The grammar of faith and practice of the different religions did not develop in near-isolation, on the contrary[31]. Finally, religious traditions are not static entities. Precisely because they refer to a living reality outside themselves, and because the context in which reality is experienced, is changing constantly, religions are also flexible systems. Traditions are therefore dynamic realities that can change in response to

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[31] J.A. STONE, *Philip Hefner and the Modernist and Postmodernist Divide*, in *Zygon* 39 (2004) 755-772, p. 767.

new challenges and in interaction with other traditions[32]. A religion that refuses these characteristics tends to become a sect that locks itself up in isolation from the world. Such closed systems become impenetrable for a God who can also come from the outside, from the stranger, who questions precisely the religious system itself in the name of a greater truth. Lindbeck's approach risks to make of religions 'traditions without God': auto-referential instead of hetero-referential systems that can become either violent or indifferent for all that is different and that cannot be absorbed in one's own system.

V. Hermeneutics

In one of his last works, *Sur la traduction* [*On Translation*] (2004), the French protestant philosopher Paul Ricœur analyses the problem of the (un)translatable character of languages. He is well aware of both the opportunities and the risks of translation[33]. He formulates the paradox as follows:

> Or the diversity of languages expresses a radical heterogeneity—and thus translation is theoretically impossible: the languages are *a priori* untranslatable the one in the other. Or translation—taken as a fact— is explained on the basis of a common ground that makes the fact of translation possible; but then one has or to find this common ground, this is the route of the original language, or one has to reconstruct it logically, this is the route of the universal language: this original or universal absolute language must be provable[34].

In the light on the discussion on interreligious dialogue, in which one tries to translate one's understanding of the religious reality to someone who is not participating in the same religious system, Ricœur formulates here the paradox between particularism and pluralism, between the idea of the radical incommensurability of religious systems and thus the

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[32] J.B. COBB, *Incommensurability: Can Comparative Religious Ethics Help?*, in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 16(1996) 41-45, p. 45.

[33] P. RICŒUR, *Sur la traduction*, Paris, Bayard, 2004.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 10 : "Cette alternative paralysante est la suivante: ou bien la diversité des langues exprime une hétérogénéité radicale—et alors la traduction est théoriquement impossible; les langues sont a priori intraduisibles l'une dans l'autre. Ou bien la traduction prise comme un fait s'explique par un fonds commun que rend possible le fait de la traduction; mais alors on doit pouvoir soit retrouver ce fonds commun, et c'est la piste de la langue originaire, soit le reconstruire logiquement, et c'est la piste de la langue universelle, originaire ou universelle, cette langue absolue doit pouvoir être montrée".

impossibility of interreligious dialogue versus the idea of a common ground for the interreligious encounter. Or still in other terms, the tension between otherness and sameness in our understanding of (religious) identities.

Ricœur is both realistic and hopeful concerning the possibility of translation from one linguistic system to another. As every translator knows, translation is always a precarious enterprise. There is no translation possible without the risk and the reality of losing meaning, changing meaning, perverting meaning *vis-à-vis* the original text. This risk is intrinsic to the task of translation itself. For that reason, it becomes understandable that some believers refuse the task of interreligious translations in the name of their loyalty to the authentic and original revelation. The position of Ricœur is different. Ricœur recognises that the perfect translation is not possible and that one has to give up the dream of the perfect translation. But he warns that this may not end in the affirmation of the unbridgeable difference between the proper identity and the stranger[35]. It is not because the perfect translation is not possible that translating itself would be impossible or only meaningless or dangerous. On the contrary, the activity of translation does not only end up in the loss of meaning, but also in the discovery of new meanings, also in relation to the original text. Even more, in the effort of translating in confrontation with the other, new meanings can appear that were not clear or revealed until now, even not to those who speak the original language. Ricœur speaks about an "enlargement of the horizon of one's proper language"[36] and of "linguistic hospitality", of receiving the other in one's own religious understanding of reality[37].

Of course, one should be aware that every interreligious translation is also a dangerous enterprise because in the translation, one runs the risk of losing or perverting religious meanings and become untruthful *vis-à-*

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[35] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 15 : "(…) l'un d'entre eux a appelé *l'élargissement* de l'horizon de leur propre langue – et encore ce que tous ont appelé formation, *Bildung*, c'est-à-dire à la fois configuration et éducation, et en prime, si j'ose dire, la découverte de leur propre langue et de ses ressources laissées en jachère".

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 20; This is further elaborated in M. Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality*, Amsterdam – New York, Editions Rodopi, 2011; & Id., *In Response to the Religious Other: Ricœur and the Fragility of Interreligious Encounters* (Studies in the Thought of Paul Ricœur) Lexington, Lexington Books, 2014.

vis one's tradition[38]. Since experience and language can never be disconnected completely—and this is even much more true for 'thick' religious language in relation to 'thick' religious experiences— all speech about one's own religion and about the religion of the other will in some way start from and always remain coloured by one's own original language. For Christians, this means that they will inevitably use and continue to use a Christocentric, logocentric or sotereocentric language. In this way, for religious believers, 'inclusivism' in some way, is always inescapable. If e.g. the Christocentric reference is 'translated away' in the dialogue, Christians would have betrayed their own religion, since the activity of the logos in Christ belongs to the essence of Christianity. But the fact that the perfect translation does not exist, that we can never completely transcend our own particularity, that in the dialogue the other will never understand me completely, and that every translation implies the risk of unfaithfulness to the original can never be an excuse not to enter into the hermeneutical process of translation and just to stay in one's own closed linguistic or religious system. A religion that refuses in principle to translate itself time and again destroys its fundamental dynamics born out of the dialectics between sameness and otherness. This dynamics is essential to understand and to live authentically all aspects of religious life: ethics, rituals, prayer, revelation, social life, etc.

In this way 'religious diversity beyond communality' can become a blessing more than a curse. It is interesting to re-read in this context the traditional story of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11,1-9). The inhabitants of Babel tried to create meaning by realising one common project based on one common language: the building of a tower "that reaches to the heavens" (Gen. 11:4). When God saw this idolatry of a world in no need of translation anymore, he confused their languages so that they were no longer able to understand each other. God created otherness. The inhabitants of Babel became strangers for each other and the dream of a common destiny and project was definitively lost. Traditionally, this story is read as a punishment by God, but an alternative reading is possible. In the building of the tower, God saw how humanity was looking for the infinite in the wrong place, namely by reducing the infinite to a common ground at the cost of otherness. God redirected humanity again to the real transcendence—one that is only possible

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[38] This point is strongly and well argued in M. MOYAERT, *Een zekere fragiliteit? Inter-religieuze dialoog en de spanning tussen openheid en identiteit*, Leuven, PhD. in Theology, 2007, promotor: D. Pollefeyt.

through the experience of the stranger, the one who does not speak my language, who is not fit to be an ingredient of my own project, who does not belong to my story. The other represents an invitation to break open my own closed linguistic world time and again, to enter into a 'translational' or 'inter-religious' relation. It is in this translational movement that I can (re)discover God, at the point and the moment that my loyalty is tested to the limit. In exegesis, the story of Pentecost (Acts 2,1-13) was often understood as an undoing of the story of Babel. The descent of the Spirit and the foundation of the Church are then interpreted as an undoing of the drama of Babel and as the re-establishment of the old order: one language and one common project for humanity. But Pentecost, and especially the speaking in many languages, should rather be read as a confirmation of the decision of God to bring into the world different languages. We think here about the changes of (interreligious) dialogue where everyone can speak his or her own language, but people—thanks to their careful translational activities—cannot only start to respect and understand each other but can also learn from each other[39]. As Jacques Dupuis has mentioned rightly, this changes the agenda of the theology of religions in a fundamental way[40]:

> The question no longer simply consists of asking what role Christianity can assign to the other historical religious traditions but in searching for the root-cause of pluralism itself, for its significance in God's own plan for humankind, for the possibility of a mutual convergence of the various traditions in full respect of their differences, and for their mutual enrichment and cross-fertilization[41].

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[39] D.J. FASCHING, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Apocalypse or Utopia?*, New York, NY, State University Press, 1993; ID., *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz. From Alienation to Ethics*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress Press, 1992.

[40] A previous version was published as D. POLLEFEYT, *Interreligious Dialogue Beyond Absolutism, Relativism, and Particularism. A Catholic Approach to Religious Diversity*, in J. ROTH – L. GROB (eds.), *Encountering the Stranger. A Jewish, Christian, Muslim Trialogue*, Seattle, WA, University of Washington Press, 2011.

[41] J. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 11.

Section Ten

Bible

Chapter Sixteen:

Texts of Terror:
Post-Holocaust Biblical Hermenteutics

D. Pollefeyt & D. Bolton[1]

Since historical Christian anti-Judaism co-created the atmosphere and the mentality that made the Holocaust possible, Post-Holocaust scholars are challenged to rethink their relationship with holy texts, such as the Bible, and especially these passages that contain violence and that legitimised hate towards the other: 'texts of terror'. In particular, the New Testament contains a lot of passages that can be characterised, or that at least were interpreted historically as anti-Jewish[2]. The central question in this chapter is how to deal with these texts that have at the same time canonical authority for the Church and its members but that on the other hand were often sources of misunderstanding and even violence among Christians and Jews. We have chosen for this book one crucial passage in the letters of Paul, 1 Thessalonians 2,14-16 where the author accuses "the Jews" of deicide and announces God's wrath over them[3]. The central idea of this chapter is that exegetes often develop strategies to 'neutralise' the violent potential in the text by all kinds of literary strategies. In this way, they try to 'save' the text. We argue that these strategies are often not very

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[2] J. Keysor, *A Horror of Great Darkness: Hitler and the Third Reich in the Light of Biblical Teaching*, Athanatos, 2014, esp. Chapter 1 ('The New Testament and the Jews').

[3] For more extensive research, see: R. Bieringer – D. Pollefeyt – F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (eds.), *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001; R. Bieringer – E. Nathan – D. Pollefeyt – P.J. Tomson (ed.), *2 Corinthians in the Perspective of Late Second Temple Judaism* (CRINT, 13), Leiden, Brill, 2011; R. Bieringer – D. Pollefeyt (eds.), *Paul and Judaism: Crosscurrents in Pauline Exegesis and the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations* (Library of New Testament Studies), NIPPOD edition, London, T&T Clark, 2014; D. Pollefeyt – R. Bieringer, *Open to Both Ways…? Anti-Judaism and the Johannine Christology*, in R. Bieringer – M. Elsbernd (ed.), *Normativity of the Future. Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective*, Leuven-Paris-Walpole (MA), Peeters, 2010, pp. 121-134.

solid, and driven by a defensive attitude to excuse the author and based on the idea that revelation happens 'in' the text by an author that cannot sin. By starting from another understanding of revelation, happening not 'in' the text but between the text and its reader, we try to change the theological frame of the reflection itself in the hope to be better prepared 'after Auschwitz' to deal with texts of terror.

I. The Text NRSV

14a For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators
14b of the churches of God in Christ Jesus
14c that are in Judea,
14d for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots
14e as they did from the Jews,
15a who killed both the Lord Jesus
15b and the prophets,
15c and drove us out;
15d they displease God
15e and oppose everyone
16a by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles
16b so that they may be saved.
16c Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins;
16d but God's wrath has overtaken them at last.

14a ὑμεῖς γὰρ μιμηταὶ ἐγενήθητε, ἀδελφοί,
14b τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν οὐσῶν ἐν τῇ
14c Ἰουδαίᾳ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,
14d ὅτι τὰ αὐτὰ ἐπάθετε καὶ ὑμεῖς ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν
14e καθὼς καὶ αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων,
15a τῶν καὶ τὸν κύριον ἀποκτεινάντων Ἰησοῦν
15b καὶ τοὺς προφήτας
15c καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων
15d καὶ θεῷ μὴ ἀρεσκόντων
15e καὶ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ἐναντίων,
16a κωλυόντων ἡμᾶς τοῖς ἔθνεσιν λαλῆσαι
16b ἵνα σωθῶσιν,
16c εἰς τὸ ἀναπληρῶσαι αὐτῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας πάντοτε.
16d ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος.

II. Setting the Problem

1 Thess 2,14-16[4] is generally acknowledged to be the most vituperative and polemical statement by Paul against "the Jews" (δι ’Ιουδαῖοι). As Leon Morris has written, it is

> a denunciation of the Jews more severe than anything else in the Pauline writings. It is not an outburst of temper but (…) the vehement condemnation, by a man in thorough sympathy with the mind and spirit of God, of the principles on which the Jews as a nation had acted at every period of their history[5].

Five accusations are presented: (1) that they have caused suffering to the Judean churches (v.14a-e); (2) that they have killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets (v.15a-b); (3) that they have driven out the Jewish believers in Jesus (v.15c); (4) that they do not please God or humanity (v.15d-e) and (5) that they try to prevent the Gentile mission (v.16a-b)[6]. In light of this behaviour, their sins are said to have reached (or be reaching) intolerable levels with the outpouring of (divine) wrath (v.16c-d) as the inevitable result.

Owing to the difficulty of the text on a variety of issues, a wide range of scholarly responses have arisen that attempt to find a suitable 'resolution' to the problem. Is Paul the actual author of the text?; does the text refer to all Jews or just some Jews?; is it a normal example of contemporary intra-Jewish polemics?; how far is Paul responsible for the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of this passage? Our own proposal in this chapter is threefold: we shall firstly place the pericope in the context of the letter as a whole; then give an overview of the various positions taken in response to it and finally present our own hermeneutical reading.

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[4] For an introduction to the epistle and its historical background see, e.g.: L. Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1959; F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (WBC vol. 45), Waco, TX, Word Books, 1982; R. Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress, 1986; C.J. Schlueter, *Filling Up the Measure: Polemical Hyperbole in 1 Thessalonians 2,14-16* (JSNTSup 98) Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1994; E.J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1995; D. Luckensmeyer, *The Eschatology of First Thessalonians*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009.

[5] L. Morris, *Thessalonians*, 90.

[6] E.J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 123.

III. Contextualisation

Paul's purpose in writing 1 Thess appears to be based around three main concerns: to express joy at the Thessalonians' progress in the gospel; to vindicate his own mission as shown by the genuineness of their conversion; and to deal with various eschatological and practical matters.

A broad outline, giving more attention to our specific passage, may be presented as follows[7]:

   I. Salutation (1:1)
  II. Paul's Relation to the Thessalonians (1:2-3:13)
      A. Thanks for the Thessalonians (1,2-10)
      B. Defence of Paul's Apostleship & Thessalonians' Conversion (2,1-16)
         1. Positive Defence (2,1-12)
         2. Negative Defence (2,13-16)
            a. The Thessalonians' Reception of the Gospel (2,13-14a)
            b. Their Opponents' Rejection of the Gospel (2,14b-16)
      C. Paul's Desire to Visit (2:17–3:10)
      D. Transitional Benediction (3,11-13)
 III. The Lord's Return as a Motive for Sanctification (4:1–5:22)
 IV. Concluding Remarks (5,23-28)

First Thessalonians is virtually unanimously accepted as a genuine Pauline letter[8]. It is referenced as belonging to the Marcion canon (mid-2nd century C.E.), the Muratorian canon (c.180 CE), as well as being quoted by name by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian. It also appears in the most ancient manuscripts such as the Old Latin, Old Syriac, as well as in fragmentary form in P30, P46, and P65[9]. Despite this external attestation our passage under consideration has often been deemed non-Pauline, even anti-Pauline. The reasons for this are many, and it is to them that we now turn.

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[7] This is largely taken from D.B. WALLACE, *1 Thessalonians: Introduction, Outline, and Argument*, pp. 9-11 [cited 25 August 2009]. Online http://bible.org/seriespage/1-thessalonians-introduction-outline-and-argument. Wallace is Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary and maintains the above website. His outline is more thorough than that given in other commentaries, such as F.F. BRUCE, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, p. 3; or I.H. MARSHALL, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, in *The New Century Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1983), 10-11. F.F. BRUCE has given 1 Thess 2,13-16 the unfortunate title of "Further Thanksgiving".

[8] D.B. WALLACE, *1 Thessalonians: Introduction*, p. 2.

[9] P.W. COMFORT – D.P. BARRETT (eds.), *The Complete Text of the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1999, pp. 118-119; 193-224; 345-351.

IV. Various Strategies to Deal with the Passage

Let us now look to the content of the passage and present a critical overview of the various scholarly responses to it. Summaries have been given among others, by Josef Coppens (1975)[10]; Robert Jewett (1986)[11]; John W. Simpson (1988)[12]; Jon Weatherly (1991)[13]; Carol J. Schlueter (1994)[14]; Earl J. Richard (1995)[15]; Jonas Holmstrand (1997)[16]; and David Luckensmeyer (2009)[17]. It is our purpose to present a critical overview of both sides of the positions taken.

1. *Deutero-Pauline interpolation*

Treating 1 Thess 2,14-16 as an interpolation is probably the most common analysis of the text. Such an approach does indeed seem "to offer the best of both worlds" for, according to John C. Hurd, "we are allowed to keep 1 Thessalonians as an authentic letter of Paul but the historical and theological difficulties posed by our passage are resolved by resigning it to a later period"[18]. The arguments marshalled go back to the work of F. C. Baur (1875), who opined that the passage was a reflection of a post-Pauline period when both Gentile and even Jewish Christians "had begun to regard Jews as enemies of the gospel"[19]. The general approach of viewing the passage as the later work of some anti-Jewish Gentile is based on various considerations such as the polemical tone of the passage, the use of un-Pauline terms, an unusual statement about imitating the Judean churches, the un-Pauline list of accusations and a definitive condemnation of the Jews that contradicts what Paul

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[10] J. Coppens, *Miscellanées bibliques. LXXX : Une diatribe antijuive dans 1 Thess., II, 13-16*, (*ETL* 51), 1975: pp. 90-95, here pp. 91-93.

[11] R. Jewett, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, pp. 36-37.

[12] J.W. Simpson, *The Future of Non-Christian Jews: 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 and Romans 9-11*, Ann Arbor, MI, University Microfilms International, 1990.

[13] J. Weatherly, *The Authenticity of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: Additional Evidence*, in *JSNT* 42 (1991): pp. 79-98, here pp. 79-91.

[14] C.J. Schlueter, *Filling Up the Measure*.

[15] E.J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, p. 17.

[16] J. Holmstrand, *Markers and Meaning in Paul: An Analysis of 1 Thessalonians, Philippians and Galatians* in *ConBNT* 28, Stockholm, Almquist & Wiksell International, 1997, pp. 42-46.

[17] D. Luckensmeyer, *Eschatology*, pp. 162-167.

[18] J.C. Hurd, *Paul Ahead of his Time: 1 Thess 2:13-16*, in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, eds. P. Richardson – D. Granskou, Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986, pp. 21-36, here 25.

[19] J.W. Simpson, *Non-Christian Jews*, 66 n. 2.

writes in Rom 11:26 that "all Israel will be saved". In short the issues deal with textual, historical, form-critical and theological issues.

a) *Textual criticism*

Textual criticism throws up something of a surprise. Despite the strong scholarly *Tendenz* to excuse the problem by appeal to interpolation (see e.g. the works by David Wenham, Norman Beck, and Birger Pearson) [20], the text critical apparatus reveals a bias in favour of inclusion. There is virtually no manuscript evidence that the passage is an interpolation[21]. From the fourth century onwards basically all manuscripts contain the passage in its entirety. Only one eleventh-century manuscript (vatic. Lat. 5729) leaves out v.16d, yet it is highly improbable that this variant goes back to a Greek manuscript[22]. The textual variants in vv.15-16 are of a very minor nature and could not be taken as supporting an interpolation, as William O. Walker confirms[23]. The difficulty comes however, with the discovery of early papyri containing fragments of 1 Thess. According to Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett the earliest textual fragments we have of the epistle are P46 (ca. 125–150 C.E.); P30 (ca. 225 C.E.) and P65 (ca. 250 C.E.)[24]. None of these fragments contain our passage. The nearest is P65 that has 1 Thess 2,1 and 6-13, but then lacks the rest of the letter[25]. P30 has nothing of chapters 1–3[26] and P46 has 1,9–2,3 but then nothing of the rest of chapter 2, nor chapters 3–4[27].

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[20] D. WENHAM, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?*, Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, Eerdmans, 1995, pp. 319-320; N. BECK, *Mature Christianity in the 21st Century: The Recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament*, New York, NY, Crossroad, 1994, p. 82.

[21] D.B. WALLACE, *Is 1 Thessalonians 2,13-16 an Interpolation?*, p. 2 [cited 25 August 2009]. Online http://bible.org/article/1-thessalonians-213-16-interpolation. He shows that manuscripts A B D F G H I P Y 0208 0278 33 1739 Itala, Syriac, Coptic, Origen, Athanasius, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom *et plures* all contain our passage.

[22] D. LUCKENSMEYER, *Eschatology*, p. 162.

[23] W.O. WALKER, *Interpolation in the Pauline Letters*, in *JSNTSup* 213, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, pp. 211-212.

[24] P.W. COMFORT – D.P. BARRETT, eds., *Earliest New Testament*, pp. 118-119, 193-224, 345-351.

[25] P65 (PSI XIV 1373) contains 1 Thess 1,3–2,1, pp. 6-13.

[26] P30 (P. Oxy. 1598) contains 1 Thess 4,12-13, pp. 16-17; 5,3, pp. 8-10, 12-18, 25-28.

[27] P46 (P. Chester Beatty II and P. Mich. Inv. 6238) contains 1 Thess 1,1; 1,9–2,3; 5,5-9, pp. 23-28.

Now at face value, the absence of our passage from these papyri may seem to suggest the possibility of an interpolation, but an honest appraisal has to admit that it is impossible to say, owing to the piecemeal nature of the evidence. Moreover we have discovered that Origen quotes verbatim from 1 Thess 2,14-15 in his Commentary on Matthew (ca. 246–248 C.E.)[28]. He explicitly mentions that the words are from Paul. This places his witness to the authenticity of the text around the same time as P30 and P65. When the codices are also taken into account, it is fair to argue that textual criticism rather tends to support, more than challenge, Pauline authorship.

b) *Historical Criticism*

Historical criticism presents more formidable arguments. The strongest of them may be grouped as follows: that Paul would not appeal to the churches in Judea as an example for his churches to imitate (v.14a-14c); that there is no evidence of persecutions of Christians in Judea at that time (c.50 CE); that nowhere else does Paul attribute the death of Jesus to the Jews (v.15a), and that the only possible historical referent to ἡ ὀργή (v.16d) has to be the later, post-Pauline destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.[29].

However, counter-arguments are also well known. Since Paul only uses the imitation (μιμητής) motif four times in the proto-Paulines (1 Cor 4:16; 11,1; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14) referring to himself and to the Lord, it is simply too categorical to argue that its use here is un-Pauline. Paul in fact does make reference to the churches of Christ in Judea in Gal 1:22. Moreover, though less plausibly, F.F. Bruce has argued that Silas, signified as a co-author of the letter, was a leading member of the church in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:22) and may have been responsible for

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[28] Origen, *Commentary on Matthew, Book II, Chapter 10*, in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. A. Menzies; vol. 10; Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1978, p. 425. The dating to 246–248 CE is based on internal evidence and the witness of Eusebius (H.E. vi. 36). Origen, commenting on Matt 13,57 here writes "And by Paul in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians like things are said: 'For ye brethren became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus, for ye also suffered the same things of your own countrymen even as they did of the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drave us out, and please not God, and are contrary to all men'".

[29] B.A. Pearson, *1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation*, in *HTR* 64, 1971: pp. 79-94, here pp. 82-83, 86-88; D. Luckensmeyer, *Eschatology*, pp. 162-163. N. Beck, *Mature Christianity*, 94, 79; B.A Pearson, *1 Thessalonians 2:13-16*, pp. 82-83; E.J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 120.

this comparison[30]. In any case, as J.W. Simpson has pointed out, the imitation mentioned here is not an imperative, telling them to follow the Judean churches, but a description of an existing situation[31]. In their long-suffering steadfastness the Thessalonians are already imitating the Judean churches.

Regarding the evidence of persecution in Judea, other scholars have put forward a series of possible options. It could refer, either singularly or collectively, to the general persecution between 41–44 C.E. under the elder Herod Agrippa (cf. Acts 12:1)[32], to the revolt of Theudas in 44–46 C.E., to the Judean famine in 46–47 C.E., or to the aftermath of the expulsion of Jews from Rome in 49 C.E[33]. As concerns the attribution of the death of Jesus to the Jews, it has been pointed out that in 1 Cor 2:8 Paul blames the rulers (οἱ ἄρχοντες) as crucifying the Lord of glory in ignorance. Though it is debated who or what this phrase refers to (spiritual powers, Roman rulers, Jewish authorities?)[34], it still shows that this may not be the only place where Paul implicates Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death[35].

Though several scholars, most notably Birger A. Pearson, point to a necessary historical setting of post 70 C.E. and thus a post-Pauline authorship, this is not demanded by the syntax. Pearson contends that ἔφθασεν has to refer to a past event ("wrath has come"), and that only the destruction of the Temple could account for such wrath. Yet according to David Luckensmeyer, the aorist tense of the verb ἔφθασεν governing ἡ ὀργή can have both modal and temporal aspects, meaning that the wrath could be in the past, coming presently or still to come in the future, undercutting the claim that it has to refer to one specific historical referent[36]. Paul could thus still have written verse 16d.

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[30] F.F. BRUCE, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, xxxii; cf. M. GOULDER, *Silas in Thesssalonica*, in *JSNT* 48 (1992): p. 94.

[31] J.W. SIMPSON, *Non-Christian Jews*, p. 115.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

[34] B.A. PEARSON, *1 Thessalonians 2:13-16*, p. 85; F.F. BRUCE, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, p. 47; P.W. VAN DER HORST, *Omgaan met anti-joodse teksten in het Nieuwe Testament*, pp. 1-13, here 8-9. [cited 25 August 2009]. Online http://www.appelkerkenisrael.nl/Lezingen/pvdhorst.pdf.

[35] Acts is the only other New Testament book to charge οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι with Jesus' death (Acts 2,36; 3,15; 5,30; 7,52).

[36] D. LUCKENSMEYER, *Eschatology*, p. 158.

In general then, despite the seeming strength of its arguments, historical criticism remains far from decisive in evidencing an interpolation in 1 Thess 2,14-16.

c) *Form Criticism*

Turning to the arguments for interpolation from form criticism, we find that they largely centre around three things: (i) the fact that 1 Thess 2:13, often taken as a unit with 2,14-16, begins with a redundant and repetitive second thanksgiving (cf. 1,2-10); (ii) that these verses seem to interrupt the natural flow connecting 2:12 to 2:17[37]; and (iii) that the passage uses apparently un-Pauline phrases[38]. However, once again scholars have not been shy in supplying counter-arguments to these authorial challenges.

For while it is true that virtually all the Pauline thanksgivings come immediately after the opening salutations (Rom 1,8-9; 1 Cor 1,4-9; Phil 1,3-11, etc.), renewals of thanksgiving are not unknown (cf. Phil 1,3-8; 4,10-20) and in any case the two thanksgivings are dealing with two different matters, one introductory and general, the other more specific and embedded in a particular context. Furthermore, as Bruce and Murphy-O'Connor note, it is extremely difficult to be able to establish a vocabulary norm for Paul's letters[39]. In contrast to those who see an abrupt transition between 2:12-2:13 and 2:16-2:17, many scholars have also argued that 2,13-16 "is an integral part of 1 Thessalonians overall"[40]. Indeed Daniel Wallace has pointed out that 2,13-16 seems to form an inclusio with 1,2-10 regarding the parallel themes of thanksgiving (1:2/2:13), receiving the dynamic word of God (1:5/2:13), the Thessalonians' imitation (1:6/2:14), their perseverance in the midst of suffering (1:6/2:14), and the deliverance from wrath contrasted with the inescap-

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[37] J.W. SIMPSON, *Non-Christian Jews*, p. 70.

[38] D. SCHMIDT, *1 Thess 2.13-16: Linguistic Evidence for an Interpolation*, in *JBL* 102, 1983, pp. 269-279.

[39] D. LUCKENSMEYER, *Eschatology*, p. 164; D. SCHMIDT, *Interpolation*, pp. 269-70; F.F. BRUCE, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, xxxii; J. MURPHY-O'CONNOR, *Paul the Letter-Writer: His World, His Opinions, His Skills* in *GNS* 41, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1995, pp. 34-35.

[40] D. LUCKENSMEYER, *Eschatology*, p. 164, R. JEWETT, *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 86; C.A. WANAMAKER, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1990, p. 90; C.J. SCHLUETER, *Filling Up the Measure*, p. 25; J.W. SIMPSON, *Non-Christian Jews*, p. 76.

ability of wrath (1:9-10/2:16)[41]. All this goes to show that while form criticism offers perhaps the strongest arguments for an interpolation, it is still far from enjoying a scholarly consensus since the counter-arguments for many are equally persuasive.

d) *Theological Criticism*

As Jon Weatherly has in fact pointed out, most scholars base their interpolation theories on theological grounds rather than on textual, historical or form critical grounds[42]. One could summarise this approach as pitting 'Paul against Paul,' playing off his theology regarding the Jews in other authentic letters against the picture presented here. The main argument centres around the incompatibility of a wrath coming upon the Jews that is εἰς τέλος with what Paul writes about seven years later in Rom 9-11, especially 11:26 that "all Israel will be saved." In 1 Thess 2:16 he appears to be damning the Jews while in Rom 11:26 he is heralding their redemption. Such blatant contradiction is seen to call for either an inconsistent Paul à la Heikki Räisänen[43] or a pseudo-Paul by way of interpolation. Owing to the unattractiveness of the first option, many scholars choose for the second.

However, both options have their problems. For while the former seems to overlook the contextual nature of Paul's writings and the fact that his is a theology 'on the run' and 'in the making', the latter is an argument based on the need for theological harmonisation, and a tendency to take the good and dismiss (as interpolation) the ugly.

A third option is put forward by Hurd, that though Paul's "diatribe against the Jews quite properly offends us" yet "we are not thereby justified in improving his letter by removing the offending passage. The passage is part of the apocalyptic logic which is woven into the fabric of the whole letter"[44]. Hurd has pinpointed the heart of the problem for theologically-based interpolative readings. Dismissing a passage as an

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[41] D.B. WALLACE, *1 Thessalonians: Introduction*, p. 3 n. 6.

[42] J. WEATHERLY, *The Authenticity of 1 Thess 2,13-16: Additional Evidence*, in *JSNT* 42 (1991),: 79-98, here 82-83.

[43] H. RÄISÄNEN, *Römer 9-11 Analyse eines geistigen Ringen* (ANRW II 25.4 1987), pp. 2891-2939, esp. 2925. With regard to our passage Räisänen argues that Paul makes two inconsistencies. Firstly that in 1 Thess 2,14-16 the Jews prevent him speaking to the Gentiles whereas in Rom 11:11f. it is actually Jewish unbelief that spurs him on to speak to them. Secondly that Paul ends with wrath in 1 Thess 2:16 whereas he ends with Israel's salvation in Rom 11:26.

[44] J.C. HURD, *Paul Ahead of his Time*, 35.

interpolation because it seems to contradict Paul's theological discourse elsewhere is tenuous at best. Each letter has to be taken in its own right and allowed to speak with its own voice.

Taking stock of all the interpolation positions presented above, we are struck by the following question: in what way do these various approaches solve the anti-Jewish problem present in our text? It seems clear that any form of the interpolation argument has the effect, either implicitly or explicitly, of saving Paul from being anti-Jewish, at least in this letter. He cannot be held responsible for what he did not write. Yet when we see that the collective evidence in favour of an interpolation is far from being clear-cut, one wonders whether such an outcome, in its potential desirability, has overly influenced the call to label our text as an interpolation. Cataloguing a text or passage as an interpolation should be a matter of last resort. We simply raise the question, therefore, of whether the extreme polemical nature of this passage has led to an overhasty categorisation by some considering the ambiguity of the evidence.

2. *Canon within the canon*

Related to this issue is whether any or all of the above approaches may in fact lead to the practical creation of a canon within the canon. That is, overlooking or disregarding those parts of Paul's letters that one now finds distasteful and emphasising only those passages that please. This is so whether one calls those unpleasant parts interpolations or not.

J. Louis Martyn, for example, makes a good case of showing that the influential 1980 *Resolution of the Landessynode der Evangelischen*, a document by German Protestants seeking to renovate their relationship with Jews, falls into this trap. In its confession it puts ample weight on Rom 9–11 to the utter exclusion of 1 Thess 2,14-16 and other difficult passages such as Gal 4:21–5:1 and 2 Cor 3,6–14[45]. Martyn remarks that such exclusion by silence results in the creation of an "inner-canonical canon". He writes,

> Small wonder that a group of European Christians, living after the Holocaust, and admirably intent on rectifying some of the most grievous wrongs done to Jews by Christians, should concentrate their attention on certain parts of the Pauline corpus, to the practical

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[45] J.L. MARTYN, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1997, pp. 192-193.

exclusion of others. All exegetes work with an operative canon within
the canon, their own context and thus their own history inevitably
playing a significant role in their interpretive labours[46].

This marginalising of difficult texts in favour of universal ones raises
several issues of its own. Firstly, it is clear that selecting those texts that
one thinks present Paul in the best light, offers an incomplete portraiture
at the very least. Secondly, the working assumption that the message in
Rom 9–11 is primarily a positive one *vis-à-vis* the Jews is seriously open
to question.

In Rom 9,22-23 NRSV Paul appears to be equating the Jews (whom
he terms his brethren and kinsmen κατά σάρκα Rom 9:3) with "objects
of wrath that are made for destruction"; in 9:31-33 he charges them with
a form of covenantal legalism (and not covenantal nomism) in that they
fail to attain to a Torah-based righteousness since they pursue it through
works and not faith; in 10:21 NRSV he forthrightly declares, roughly
quoting Isaiah 65:2, that they are a "disobedient and contrary people";
and in 11,9-10 he cites a curse coming from David in Psalm 69,22-24
that the Jews' table may become a trap and a snare, that their eyes may
be darkened and their backs bent continually; and finally in 11:19 he
announces that the unbelieving Jews are broken branches out of the olive
tree of Israel. This is quite a litany in itself, and actually reveals a certain
amount of theological continuity with 1 Thess 2,14-16. Indeed it is only
Paul's supreme conviction that God remains true to his previously elected
people (Rom 11,1-2) and to his covenantal promises (11,26-27) that
gives Paul the further hope in Romans that all will be well with Israel in
the end (11,26-29).

It is therefore doubtful that the canon within the canon position,
though well-meaning and sensitive to its times, suffices as a legitimate
response to this problematic text. It is undertaken, as Walker argues, by
those "who wish to use the biblical writings as a basis for Christian faith
and practice" but it is not a valid "path for literary-historical scholarship"[47].
It is the gap between these two worlds that our own hermeneutical
approach seeks to address at the end of this chapter.

Let us now consider other non-interpolation responses to the passage.

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[46] *Ibid.*, p. 193.
[47] W.O. WALKER, *Interpolation*, 242.

3. *Referent limitation*

Taking Pauline authorship for granted, this position argues that Paul is referencing some Judean Jews, not all Jews non-restrictively. It is contended that Paul used the articular participial phrase translated in (v.15a) "who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets" to restrict the range of those Jews involved[48]. It is only those Jews who carried out these acts and those enumerated in the following verse that are referenced, not all Jews. In this way it is again put forward that there is no theological anomaly with what he says collectively about ethnic Israel's salvation in Rom 9–11[49]. Gilliard[50] and Koenig[51] in separate works all argue that the comma inserted in many translations between vv.14 and 15—"for you suffered the same thing from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets (…)"—illegitimately removes the restrictive limitation regarding the deeds of some Judean Jews to universally referring to all Jews without distinction. This move from the restrictive to the descriptive, it could be argued, raises questions of scholarly pre-understanding or prejudice[52].

Nonetheless, despite its grammatical veracity on this point, the referent limitation model overlooks the fact that the rest of the charges in v.15b-e are unrestricted in nature and take on a supra-temporal tone[53]. For taking the one long clause that defines οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι as solely referring to a contemporary group of Paul "stretches the historical context of 1 Thess 2,13-16 to breaking point"[54]. It is the Jewish people throughout history whom Paul is targeting as constantly resisting God's purposes to their own hurt. Paul is judging the whole historical people and not just the acts of some Jewish contemporaries. So we see that limiting the referent only addresses part of the problem, and not the whole.

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[48] F.D. GILLIARD, *The Problem of the Anti-Judaic Comma between 1 Thessalonians 2.14 and 15*, in *NTS* 35 (1989): pp. 481-502, here pp. 491-2.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 492.

[50] F.D. GILLIARD, *Anti-Judaic Comma*, passim.

[51] J. KOENIG, *Jews and Christians in Dialogue: New Testament Foundations* Philadelphia, PA, Westminster, 1979, pp. 47-48.

[52] A similar thing happens in 2 Cor 11,24-26 where Paul writes that he received lashes Upo. VIoudai,wn and that he has been in danger evx evqnw/n. While the latter is translated in the NRSV "from Gentiles", the former is translated as "from the Jews". The insertion here of a definite article similarly universalises the designated group from some Jews, to all Jews in general. See F.D. GILLIARD, *Anti-Judaic Comma*, p. 493.

[53] E.J. RICHARD, *First and Second Thessalonians*, p. 18; D. LUCKENSMEYER, *Eschatology*, p. 141.

[54] D. LUCKENSMEYER, *Eschatology*, p. 142.

4. *Referent Expansion*

In the opposite direction to the above position, this approach contends that the phrase ὅι ᾽Ιουδαῖοι should be theologised to refer abstractly to "hostility to God in general," rather than to any specific Jewish party or people. Yet this use of "the Jew within" as a trope for human evil conveys the troublesome idea that the Jew represents that part of human nature that needs to be overcome. Ernst Käsemann for example talks of "the hidden Jew in all of us," as "the man who validates rights and demands over against God on the basis of God's past dealings with him and to this extent is serving not God but an illusion"[55]. The problems inherent to this model are self-evident. It is unjustifiable, even from the basis of our passage in question, to portray the Jews as the archetype for evil in humanity. For though this position may actually think it is delivering a blow to any kind of dangerous anti-Jewishness by claiming that "we are all Jews," it actually has the opposite effect of demonising the Jew as the enemy of God[56].

5. *Intra-Jewish polemic*

This brings us to our next model, that of intra-Jewish polemic. This position argues that it is better to understand the pericope as an intra-Jewish literary motif rather than as anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic[57]. It puts forward the idea that "heated rhetoric in the service of religious disputes was quite the norm in ancient times." David Turner comments that "such rhetoric was used in Jewish circles since the days of the biblical prophets, and that it continued to be used in the days of the Second Temple as various Jewish groups critiqued the religious establishment in Jerusalem"[58]. In fact, he goes so far as to tell us that the use of such a motif was "a valid expression of authentic Jewish spirituality"[59].

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[55] E. KÄSEMANN, *Paul and Israel*, in *New Testament Questions of Today*, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress, 1969, p. 186.

[56] See D. BOYARIN, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1997, p. 213.

[57] E.P. SANDERS, *Reflections on Anti-Judaism in the New Testament and Christianity*, in *Anti-Judaism and the Gospels*, ed. W.R. FARMER, Harrisburg, PA, Trinity Press International, 1999, pp. 265-286, here pp. 268-269.

[58] D.L. TURNER, *Matthew 23 as a Prophetic Critique*, in *JBS* 4.1 (January 2004), pp. 23-42, here p. 24.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Turner gives a convenient overview of the rejection and even killing of the prophets in the Tanakh that includes "Ahab and Jezebel's rejection of Elijah and Micaiah (1 Kgs 18–19, 22), Amaziah's rejection of Amos (Amos 7,10-17), Pashhur's persecution of Jeremiah (Jer 20), Jehoiakim's murder of Uriah son of Shemaiah (Jer 26,20-23), and Zedekiah's imprisonment of Jeremiah (Jer 37–38)." He also references the Second Temple Book of Jubilees (c. 150 B.C.E.) that "predicts the judgment which will come to Israel when they refuse to listen to the prophets (here called "witnesses") but instead kill them (1,12-14)"[60].

The similarly construed "Woe oracles" announcing an impending negative divine judgement, are, according to Turner, also found in Second Temple Jewish literature, especially throughout the Apocrypha (Jdt 16:17; Sir 2,12-14; 41:8; 2 Esd 13,16,19; 1 Macc 2,7.23), in Josephus (The Jewish War 6.301-11) and in Qumran (1QPHqb 10:5; 11:2)[61]. Others have similarly noted the striking parallel between Paul's language of wrath in v.16d-e and that contained in the Testament of Levi (6:11)[62].

As a result, Charles Wanamaker writes, "[f]rom [Paul] and his contemporaries' viewpoint, the persecution of the Christians in Judea represented a continuation of the phenomenon going back to the prophets of the OT period and recently manifested in the experiences of Jesus and Paul himself (cf. 2 Cor. 11:24)"[63]. Consequently Linda McKinnish Bridges states that "Paul is not providing fuel for hatred—neither for the first century nor for the twenty-first." While it is admitted that "Paul is very angry" and "his language is harsh and negative, hurtful and spiteful," one must realise that "[t]his is language (…) from the inside to the inside. These words come from one faction of the Jewish-Christian debate to another in the first-century world. Language used by family members against other family members can often be more violent and harmful than language used by outsiders. These words belong to family conflict in the world of Paul"[64].

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

[62] J.S. LAMPE, *Is Paul Anti-Jewish? Testament of Levi 6 in the Interpretation of 1 Thess 2:13-16*, in *CBQ* 65.3 (2003), pp. 408-427. Testament of Levi 6,11 reads "But the wrath of the Lord came suddenly upon them to the uttermost".

[63] C.A. WANAMAKER, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, p. 31.

[64] L. MCKINNISH BRIDGES, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (SHBC), Macon, GA, Smyth & Helwys, 2008, p. 56.

As Luke T. Johnson has pointed out, the apparent purpose of such rhetoric was primarily to define community self-identity by polarising the other, and had much less to do with the actual facts or the supposed deeds of the other[65]. In the words of Carol Schlueter, "Paul, a skilled debater, used polemical hyperbole to polarise issues and to move his readers to his side while casting his opponents (in this case, the Jews) completely on the wrong side"[66].

Thus we may summarise this approach as arguing that Paul, in listing Jewish sins and proclaiming divine wrath, is simply continuing a Jewish tradition that is a motivated self-critique, not done out of hatred, but out of grief for his own people. It is not to be feared for it "is in keeping with both the spirit of the prophets and the rhetoric of the times"[67]. Based on such a premise, this position also assumes that Paul remains a Jew within Judaism, even if on the margins, and that the parting of the ways has not yet occurred[68].

However, at this point several questions need to be raised. For example, does the fact that Paul writes as a Jew deflate or defuse the polemical discourse? In light of the sheer extent of the critique and condemnation given against the Jews, is it not possible to classify Paul here as a Jew acting anti-Jewishly? That is not to say, of course, that he is a self-hating Jew[69], but it is to say that he found little with which to identify in the mainstream or common Judaism of his day. In fact there is nothing in the passage itself that identifies Paul with οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι as his own people. He appears to speak of himself as an outsider and an accuser, rather "than as a member of penitent Israel"[70]. One could easily assume that this passage actually supports an early parting of the ways rather than disproves it. Paul, it would appear, has been able to distance himself from his own kind to such an extent that he is able to condemn them without a blush.

Similarly, one can also ask if this intra-Jewish position overlooks the issue of conflictual ethics, and whether one has the right, even in an

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[65] L.T. JOHNSON, *The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic*, in *JBL* 108 (1989), pp. 419-441.

[66] C.J. SCHLUETER, *Filling Up the Measure*, p. 11.

[67] D.L. TURNER, *Prophetic Critique*, p. 41.

[68] C.J. SCHLUETER, *Filling Up the Measure*, 187. *On the Parting of the Ways between Judaism and Christianity* see J.D.G. DUNN *(ed.), Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, AD 70 to 135,* Cambridge, Eerdmans, 1992.

[69] P. EISENBAUM, *Is Paul the Father of Misogyny and Antisemitism?*, in *Cross Currents* 50.4 (Winter, 2000), pp. 506-524.

[70] J.W. SIMPSON, *Non-Christian Jews*, p. 100.

intra-familial conflict, to neglect or negate a basic ethic for enemies? Paul himself writes in 1 Thess 5:15 NRSV: "See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all". Further, it can also be argued that Paul ought to have been aware of the danger-ous potential that he embedded in this text, especially in light of the revelatory claims that lay at the basis of his missionary activity and the integral role his letters played in that enterprise (cf. 1 Thess 2:13). Finally, the fact that the Thessalonian community was largely or pre-dominantly Gentile in composition moves Paul's words away from oper-ating on an intra-Jewish level to functioning on a Gentile versus Jewish level, with all the perilous possibilities that that transition brings. In the end, the intra-Jewish polemic position, though valuable for its insights, leaves many questions unasked and unanswered.

6. *The Mysterious Plan of God*

This position, largely dependent upon Johannes Munck[71] and Karl Donfried[72], puts forward the case that εἰς τέλος the climax of the pas-sage, should not be understood as conveying a finality or eternal state of condemnation, but rather that it means until the end of the age, that is the παρουσία[73].... Read in this light, it actually agrees theologically with Rom 11:25f. in that the current stubbornness of Israel *vis-à-vis* the gospel (equated with the outpouring of God's wrath in 1 Thess 2:16d) will ultimately be removed and Israel will be redeemed. In this sense εἰς τέλος carries the idea of the wrath as having a functional goal or purpose in the greater salvific plan of God.

Yet the problem with Paul's text in 1 Thess 2,14-16 is rather that there is no hope or promise of redemption once the τέλος or goal of the wrath has been reached. It is this very lack of hope that convinces scholars to see the wrath as final and forever. J. W. Simpson, for example, has argued that Paul is foregoing any further chance of repentance as he assumes such an imminent παρουσία in his own lifetime (1 Thess 4:15; 5:23) that he simply saw no time left for such repentance[74]. Yet we need to ask, how does the Church today deal with this lack of hope now that

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[71] J. Munck, *Christ and Israel: An Interpretation of Rom 9-11*, tr. I., Nixon, Phila-delphia, PA, Fortress, 1967, p. 64.

[72] K.P. Donfried, *Paul and Judaism: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 as a Test Case*, in *Int* 38 (1984), pp. 242-253, here 252.

[73] Cf. J.W. Simpson, *Non-Christian Jews*, p. 151.

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

the supposed early παρουσία has not come? Does the Church still trans-
late the εἰς τέλος as lasting for 2,000 years and continuing with no
anticipation of remittance?

Or should we agree with C. Williamson that to read Paul "in good faith"
is to read him forwards from Thessalonians to Romans, in tandem with his
positive evolution regarding ethnic Israel, and that "to read him backward
is to read him in bad faith"[75]? This may be to pre-judge the issue, for the
real question needing to be asked is whether Paul ever distanced himself
from what he wrote in 1 Thess 2,14-16. As we have seen above, Rom 9–11
does not offer a profound theology of discontinuity with 1 Thess 2,14-16,
but rather brings a severe critique with the hope of a final salvation based
not on Israel's deeds, but actually despite them, on God's grace. So while
the mysterious plan of God approach offers an alternative reading of
εἰς τέλος one that is functional and temporary rather than final and eternal,
we still find that its advocates have to look outside 1 Thess 2,14-16 to
Rom 11,25-36 to try to find a solution to the problem and build on the
rather brittle idea of Paul's supposed u-turn *vis-à-vis* the Jews[76].

7. *Intent and Effect*

This brings us to another type of argument, intent and effect. This
position advocates that there is a distinction to be made between the
intentionality governing a text and the effect it may have on its readers[77].
Two main points need to be made here. Firstly, that the author may or
may not be self-consciously aware of that intentionality when speaking
or writing, and secondly, that one's discourses (whether spoken or writ-
ten) may "have unintended effects"[78]. If a person's rhetoric does in fact
have an "unexpected effect" upon the reader(s), then that person tends
to complain that he or she has "been misunderstood" since people are
often satisfied that their "discourses express [their] good intentions"[79].

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[75] C. WILLIAMSON, *Has God Rejected His People? Anti-Judaism in the Christian Church*,
Nashville, TN, Abingdon, 1982, p. 63.

[76] See E.P. SANDERS, *Did Paul's Theology Develop?*, in J.R. WAGNER – A.K. GRIEB –
C.K. ROWE (eds.), *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of
Richard B. Hays*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2008, pp. 325-350.

[77] D. PATTE, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament: Confronting the Dark Side of Paul
and Matthew's Teaching*, in *CTSR* 78 (1988): pp. 31-52, here, pp. 33-44. Cited and used
by D. LUCKENSMEYER, *Eschatology*, pp. 170-171.

[78] *Ibid*., p. 41.

[79] *Ibid.*

In light of this approach, Luckensmeyer argues that while the effects of 1 Thess 2,14-16 have admittedly been adverse, Paul's intentionality remains pure[80]. Indeed, because of Paul's position within Judaism, and his self-conscious awareness that he writes as a Jew, Luckensmeyer maintains that any negative effects of the text cannot be charged to his account. Being within Judaism is again an appeal to the literary motif of intra-Jewish polemic discussed above (see 4.5) and it again side-steps the question raised there of whether a Jew within Judaism can also be anti-Jewish. In any case, Luckensmeyer finishes his argument by highlighting that Paul is not only limiting the charge of persecutors to 'some Jews' instead of all, but is also including the Thessalonians own compatriots (v.14d) in the claim, stressing in turn that he is actually not anti-Judaistic, nor anti-Gentile but simply "anti-anyone-against-Christ-as-Kyrios"[81]. So the argument goes that Paul's intention is not against the Jews per se but against every opponent of Christ, Jewish or non-Jewish.

Evidently, this is a very interesting position in that it takes not just the world of the text, but also the world of the author and the world of the reader into account. It makes it clear that these three entities are all interdependent to a certain degree. Further, a link is made between the author and the (potentially negative) consequences of his or her writings. But, once again, does this model go far enough? If Paul is equally against all those not accepting Jesus as Kyrios, why does he not equally list the sins of the Gentile compatriots in comparable terms, including the certainty of divine doom? Additionally, the quest to keep Paul's intention sacrosanct and thus divorced from the text's negative effects raises issues. Does this not separate the author too much from any dangerous potential in his text? Indeed, just how far is the author responsible for the effects of the text, whether intended or not? Was Paul fully aware of the intentionality governing his text at this point? This brings us to our next position, that of resistant reading.

8. *Resistant Readings*

This model suggests that Paul's human side is clearly seen in this passage, and that he is openly writing in anger and frustration against those Jews who have personally persecuted and prevented him from

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[80] D. LUCKENSMEYER, *Eschatology*, p. 171.
[81] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

evangelising the nations. Van der Horst[82] reminds us that Paul is not immune from venting his emotions on vellum, as his caustic remark about castration in Gal 5:12 reveals. Nonetheless, van der Horst also notes that this text is part of our New Testament and is read in our Churches. Indeed he remarks that the statement that the Jews "displease God and oppose everyone" (v.15b) is very similar to classical pagan anti-Jewish comments by Tacitus and others and gives the impression that Paul is joining in pagan condemnation of his own people. Van der Horst is direct in his judgement: "Paul, (or whoever) you ought not to have written that!"[83]. He is convinced that we have the right to "rap the fingers" of the Bible writers, if only in the sense of distancing ourselves from such comments while realising their contextual character. He argues that it is only in recognising and responding to the *Umwelt* of these statements that one can do good theology and at the same time relativise the author's polemics. According to him, such an approach will save us from the danger of Biblicism (a kind of fundamentalist reading of the text) that eternally keeps alive the anti-Jewish feelings of any given biblical writer.

This method is clearly more critical of the author per se. In the name of the reader it judges that it was unwise for Paul to write what he did and so the Church should take distance from it. This position seeks to resist what it considers an oppressive use of power in the discourse. Where is the alternative Jewish voice in this passage? Why is it silenced? Once more, however, one can ask if this position really does adequate justice to Paul himself. Is Paul simply to be left with bruised fingers for writing a bad text or does the idea of him imparting revelation through his letter writing not go deeper than this? The resistant reader model seems to leave us in a kind of binary opposition to the text and its author. Is there no room for moving beyond such a reading to a fresh engagement with the text that can lead us to a type of Ricœurian second naïveté[84]? This brings us to our third and final section: revelation in Pauline texts and how God writes straight on crooked lines.

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[82] P.W. VAN DER HORST, *Omgaan met anti-joodse teksten*, p. 8 [cited 25 August 2009]. Online http://www.appelkerkenisrael.nl/Lezingen/pvdhorst.

[83] *Ibid.*, 9: "Paulus (of welk ander dan ook), dat had je niet moeten schrijven!"

[84] Central to Paul Ricœur's work is a strong conviction that theological interpretation of the Bible ought to deal with the text's message, more than just its meaning. In other words, one ought to be concerned with engaging the divine reality to which the text bears witness. This is reflected in his method of observation, reflection and appropriation (coming to a second naïveté). In this desire he has similarities with Karl Barth and the Post-Liberal movement. See M.I. WALLACE, *Second Naïveté: Barth, Ricœur, and the New*

V. Revelation in Pauline Texts
God Writes Straight on Crooked Lines[85]

This has been no easy journey. We have seen that various attempts have been made to deal with this passage, with the majority trying either to justify Paul or limit the damage of the text. Some have gone so far as to make a connection between negative effects and Paul's intent, but only one model (that of resistant reading) has actually said that Paul was misguided to write what he did.

An honest appraisal would take all these positions into consideration and grant that all of them have something of value to say. Yet it is our evaluation that none of them is capable of dealing with all the issues on its own. Regarding the various interpolation theories, we have seen that the balance of arguments is very tight, with, in our view, a bias in favour of inclusion. Nevertheless, no matter which side a scholar chooses in the debate, it still does not negate the fact that the text, as it now is, remains part of the Christian canon and thus scripturally authoritative.

Regarding the practical fall-back position of a canon within the canon approach, we would caution that the subjective and selective use of some Pauline texts as normative while neglecting other parts of the whole corpus is openly questionable. As regards referent limitation, it is true that while Paul should not be falsely accused, and the universalising anti-Jewish comma ought to be removed from translations, the rest of the sweeping charges against "the Jews" still stands.

As concerns the referent expansion option, it presents a troubling caricature of the Jew as the basest part of human nature and simply needs to be rejected outright. Likewise, the literary motif of the intra-Jewish position only succeeds in displacing the problem but not removing it altogether. The author is still responsible for the passage, whatever its genre or type, and cannot, merely by being a Jew, avoid all responsibility for its history of effects.

With regard to the mysterious plan of God, it is important to note that εἰς τέλος can be interpreted in non-final ways. That it can indeed point to a goal beyond itself is significant. Unfortunately though, this further horizon is missing from the text. As for the intent and effect position, it is an important step forward. Yet its application in this case leaves other questions unanswered. It too quickly seeks to defend the author's intention and blame the interpreters for any negative effects of the text.

Finally, rapping the author's fingers for writing such polemic is a bold and controversial step yet one that is defended in the interest of good theology that disallows contextual outbursts of anger to become sacralised truths. While we would agree that divine inspiration does not do away with the humanness of the authors, such an upbraiding of Paul and subsequent distancing from the text seem to disengage too much from the text as revelation. Can we honestly say that this is in the interests of good theology?

This is the point where hermeneutical approaches may go beyond the limits of the historical-critical method. While the latter remains an indispensable tool, it stops short of asking crucial questions that do deal with the revelatory nature of the text and its dialogue with the historical Church community.

In varying degrees of contrast to all the above approaches, we believe that "[a] hermeneutical approach will allow us to accept the normativity of a seemingly oppressive text"[86]. It can enable us to do this by seeking a way that both includes, but goes beyond, the historical-critical approach, with its almost exclusive focus on authorial intention, and equally includes, but goes beyond, the reader response approach, with its rather exclusive interest in the meaning given by the reader[87]. In this regard we follow the hermeneutist Paul Ricœur who escapes the polarisation between authorial intent and the reader monopoly by stressing the importance of the text as a mediating and creative factor in the relations between both author and reader[88]. All three elements (text, author,

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[86] R. BIERINGER, *"Come and you will see" (John 1:39): Dialogical Authority and Normativity of the Future in the Fourth Gospel and in Religious Education*, in *Hermeneutics and Religious Education*, eds. H. LOMBAERTS – D. POLLEFEYT, Leuven, Peeters Press, 2004, pp. 179-202, here pp. 186-187.

[87] G.J. LAUGHERY, *Reading Ricœur: Authors, Readers, and Texts*, in *European Journal of Theology* 9.2 (2000), pp. 159-170.

[88] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

reader) need to be taken into consideration, yet a certain priority is to be given to the text as *primus inter pares*[89].

According to Ricœur, a text can in fact escape the finite horizon lived by its author[90]. In his joint work with A. LaCoque, *Penser La Bible*, he frames the biblical text as largely autonomous and in need of fulfilment by the reading community[91]. For whereas historical-critical methods often focus exclusively on the historical world 'behind' the text or the semantic world in the text, Ricœur highlights the world projected out *in front* of the text. This unfolding of the world of the text in front of itself is most important[92]. On the one hand, the text, as revelation, though dependent on its author for mediation, goes beyond its author in its unfolding of the transcendent. On the other hand, the reader is "called to dialogue with the text"[93], especially with this world as thrown out in front of the text.

So what is the unfolding world of 1 Thess 2,14-16? Is it unending eschatological wrath for the Jewish people? Remarkably, just two verses prior to our passage, Paul's kerygma actually centred on "God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:12b). In a real way that divine invitation openly challenges what he most likely wrote four verses later in 2:16d. While 2:12b holds forth the universal and eschatological dimension of God's call to participate in his glorious reign, our passage of 2,14-16 leaves us with a text of dangerous potential that seems to replace that universal call with unremitting wrath for the Jews. It appears to offer a frightening apocalyptic dualism that has *apriori* and unconditionally condemned those who have not (yet) positively responded to that call.

It is our opinion that the author of 2,14-16 risks losing sight of the universal horizon of God's call in the heat of his immediate contextual conflict. It may be a very human and understandable response in the face of suffering, but limiting the horizon in 2:16d to one of utter condemnation is theologically hazardous to say the least. It has to be admitted that

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[89] *Ibid.*, p. 163.

[90] P. Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and Surplus of Meaning*, Fort Worth, TX, Christian University Press, p. 30.

[91] P. Ricœur – A. LaCoque, *Penser La Bible*, Paris, Seuil, 1998, p. 12. See also P. Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology*, in Id., *From Text to Action* (tr. K. Blamey – J.B. Thompson), Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1991, pp. 270-307.

[92] P. Ricœur, *Temps et Récit*, I, 22. Cited in G.J. Laughery, *Reading Ricœur*, p. 162.

[93] A. Paddison, *Theological Hermeneutics and 1 Thessalonians* (SNTSMS 133) Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 48.

the negative use of this passage, among others, in the formation of the 'theology of contempt' towards the Jewish people, chief among which is the charge of deicide, gives pause for thought[94]. Are the interpreters solely to blame, or does the evidence not point to the author's own humanity, in all its fragility? It is at just such a moment that the Church community may be called upon not to distance itself from the author and his work, but to challenge the author to see the bigger picture and the larger horizon, as revealed almost despite himself, within that same mediated text. So we need to ask, is there a further redemptive horizon in this text itself, unfolding with eschatological purpose and waiting for readers to perceive it and interact with it as providing an eschatological norm? We need to ask, theologically and pastorally, what is "the eschatological potential" of the text[95]? To which ultimate end does it point? According to us, 1 Thess 2,14-16's own widest eschatological horizon is unfolded in the word σώζω (2:16b).

Σωτηρία is God's salvific will extending to all. Such is evidenced in Paul's own probable proclamation of the gospel in the synagogue in Thessalonica (Acts 17,1-2) and in his salvific proclamation in this letter whose audience undoubtedly contained many Gentiles[96]. And it is this divine will to save all, though somewhat hidden in this pericope, that throws up another horizon. A horizon that can be recognised by the reader and be seen to transcend the narrower usage of it here as applying only to Gentiles (2:16b) and which is in fact overtaken in importance by an apocalyptic ὀργή (2:16d). Instead, we are persuaded in dialoguing with the text that God's call, God's σωτηρία, presents itself as the further and stronger horizon, one that can certainly include what is written in 2:16b, i.e. that salvation is for the Gentiles, but it cannot stop there. 1 Thess 1:10 and 5:9 highlight that within this epistle as a whole, ὀργή is not God's ultimate horizon for humanity, including the Jews, but σωτηρία is[97]. God's salvation reaches beyond God's wrath.

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[94] Blaming the destruction of Jerusalem on the Jewish crime of pressing for Jesus' death is already evidenced as early as TERTULLIAN, *Adv. Jud.* 13, Gospel of Peter 7,25, Barn. 5,12 etc. For a recent work on Paul's use of Kyrios to declare Jesus' deity, see G. FEE, *Pauline Christology: an Exegetical-Theological Study*, Peabody, MA, Hendrickson, 2007.

[95] A. PADDISON, *Theological*, 52.

[96] C.A. WANAMAKER, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, p. 7. Cf. Acts 17,4.

[97] 1 Thess 1,10 NRSV: "and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming"; 1 Thess 5,9 NRSV: "For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord

In our reading then, the revelatory text itself in 2:16b presents another horizon in tandem with 1:10, 5:9 and 2:12b that lies beyond what is mediated by the author in 2:16d. The inviting horizon thrown up by σῴζω ultimately transcends any myopic vision on its author's behalf. In this way, through reader recognition of the revelatory nature of the text, and the text's own ability to unfold its fullest eschatological dimension even beyond the original authorial intention, the passage, over time, can actually recontextualise itself. In this particular case, we discovered that the text does contain a universal redemptive horizon that the author either missed or deliberately ignored. As a result we find that the pericope itself ends up challenging the author's confinement of the text to an apocalyptic dualism (salvation to the Gentiles, wrath to the Jews) that neglects to offer an ongoing salvific invitation to the Jews.

Hermeneutically speaking, it is the revelatory Word in Paul's words that should be our interest and enable us to discern where the wider redemptive horizon of the text lies in its ongoing unfolding of God's revelation[98]. In our theological-hermeneutical perspective, we find that this passage's own ultimate horizon of σῴζω shoots beyond ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος, highlighting that God's covenantal faithfulness is greater than his wrath. In our view, the author should have been aware of this. As such, this position does not need to fall back onto ambiguous interpolation theories to justify the author, nor does it need to look further afield to another letter to redeem this pericope's contents. Instead, it maintains the author's responsibility for what is written, while looking to the text as a source of continual unveiling to see what it is ultimately telling us about the kingdom of God. It thus allows that text, in dialogue with the contemporary reader, to be read eschatologically, recognising it as a signpost to the kingdom that we are convinced offers σωτηρία for all[99].

Jesus Christ". The 'us' here includes Jews as much as Gentiles in its scope and shows that the will of God for both is salvation, not wrath.

[98] As P. RICŒUR, *Contribution d'une réflexion sur le langage à une théologie de la parole*, in *Exégèse et herméneutique: Parole de Dieu*, ed. X. LÉON-DUFOUR, Paris, Seuil, 1971, pp. 301-320, here p. 303, where he writes "All theology is a theology of the Word".

[99] A previous version was published as D. POLLEFEYT – D. BOLTON, *Paul, Deicide and the Wrath of God: a Hermeneutical Approach to 1 Thess 2:14-16*, in T. J. SIEVERS (ed.) *International Symposium: "Paul in His Jewish Matrix"*, Rome, Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2011, pp. 229-257.

Section Eleven

Nature

Chapter Seventeen

A Post-Holocaust Theology of Creation

In this chapter, we develop a post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian approach to nature through a recontextualisation of the theological notion of 'creation'. Often, the Jewish and the Christian traditions with their transcendent God have been criticised as indifferent and instrumentalising *vis-à-vis* nature. God is far away from the Earth and nature is thus in the hands of all-powerful human beings. Biblical texts, the arguments goes, would be responsible for exalting man to the position of the anthropocentric pinnacle of nature. Being the only creature made in God's likeness, man's mission is to 'have dominion' over nature and to 'subdue' it (Gen 1,26-28). By such phrases the Bible seems to suggest that nature is merely the object of man's capriciousness and self-glorification. Or, in other words, the proposition that (only) 'man is made after God's (imageless) image' is a pretentious Jewish and Christian statement. It is no surprise then, that a lot of today's students are (again) fascinated by Richard Rubenstein's re-appreciation of nature as divine source of life. For Rubenstein, the Holocaust teaches us that the transcendent God of the Jewish and Christian traditions is death. God 'reappears' in his theology, however, as Mother Nature 'that' offers us redemption by absorbing us finally in its Holy Nothingness. It is a vision that seems to show more respect for nature then a modernistic view that only sees nature in instrumental terms. On the other hand, Rubenstein's vision is not very romantic: nature appears as a violent and blind force and its redemption happens through absorption and finally destruction. When Emil Fackenheim criticises Rubenstein for granting Hitler posthumous victories, the same can be said of Rubenstein's concept of Nature. It comes very close to the Nazi deification of nature as divine source and power. Remarkably, the Nazis often seemed to show more respect for 'nature' than for men (Jewish people, handicapped, war victims, etc.). Rubenstein reveals in my view the less-romantic, more realistic side of many trends that today elevate nature to its own transcendent reality. My goal in this chapter is to take into account the critiques on the Jewish and Christian approach of nature. The result will not be a duplication of the Nazi deification of

Nature *à la* Rubenstein, but a reformulation of the relation of a transcendent, creating God in relation to creation—a God who does not redeem by destroying, but by showing a perspective *au-delà* or beyond the forces of nature.

We are inspired in this by the thought of the Jewish philosopher Catherine Chalier[1], a former pupil of Emmanuel Levinas. In doing so we will try to uncover a 'forgotten' dimension of the Jewish-Christian tradition, namely the *connectedness* of the Biblical concept of God with the whole of creation (Jer 33:25).

Chalier says that the demise of the 'ecological' dimension within the Jewish tradition is connected to the historical experiences of exile of the Jewish people, experiences that brought with them an alienation from their country for the duration of centuries and a forced dissociation from nature and its rhythms. To the extent that the Jewish people were 'tolerated' by foreign societies, they were also systematically denied immediate and intimate contact with nature. Moreover, this enforced reticence towards nature has always had an apologetic function in Judaism, as it allowed Jews to distance themselves from pagan idolatry and the deification of natural and cosmic forces. On the downside, however, this defensive attitude led to the loss of the idea that the path to the secret runs *through* nature as the work of God. The great Jewish liturgical festivals, which commemorate historical events, were celebrated without reference to the moments in nature's cycle with which they coincide and which they factually celebrate. Nature only was a comfortless desolation that surrenders man to alien, depersonalising forces of being (*il y a*) (Levinas)[2]. God is totally 'other', completely different from the world (*autrement qu'être*), hidden in a total transcendence, which has no reference point whatsoever in the 'good' creation.

However, man's forlorn state, living in a cold and indifferent world is neither the first nor the last that is said about man's relationship to nature in the Bible. On the contrary, this chapter will show that, in the Bible, the covenant between God and man takes shape within the heart of creation itself, that nature has been touched by the same creative breath from which man has sprung, and that all things have a common goal.

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[1] C. Chalier, *L'alliance avec la nature* (La nuit surveillée), Paris, Cerf, 1989, p. 211.
[2] See Chapter Six: *To Love the Torah More Than God.*

I. The Face of Nature?

When I visited Catherine Chalier's teacher, Emmanuel Levinas in Paris of 1991, while in the company of a group of students, one of the students asked him whether "an animal has a face". Levinas was visibly surprised by the question. In his thinking nature is understood chiefly as *il y a*, some sort of a formless and impersonal swarming, as 'being without a face', as that which depersonalises. This view of nature can be elucidated by a quick look at the *Sitz im Leben* from which Levinas' thought has grown[3]. The notion of *il y a* was first developed in Levinas' book *De l'existence à l'existant*, which was written during his internment in a *Wehrmacht* camp in Hannover in 1939. In the camp, Levinas and some fellow-Jews were assigned to a special command that had to carry out heavy duty labour in the woods nearby. During his days in the labour camp, Levinas went through a grim existential *struggle for life* against the depersonalising forces of nature. His notion of *il y a* can thus be seen as a philosophical translation of this experience. It is then also quite evident that Levinas did not become a lover of nature and rather turned to the city in later life. For Levinas, philosophy does not start from the miracle of nature (as it does for Heidegger, who speaks of the 'lights of being'), but from the trauma of evil[4]. He holds that God reveals Himself in the vulnerable face of the other, which can take down every fragmentation, and not in the merciless, unpredictable forces of nature that harm man's vulnerability. This may explain the fact that Levinas has not developed his thought on the level of ecology.

Unlike her mentor, Chalier does take up the challenge of ecological thinking from the perspective of Levinas' thought. Where Levinas speaks of God revealing Himself in the *face* of the other, Chalier speaks of God revealing Himself in the *traces* He has left in nature. With her notion of 'the trace of God', Chalier combats two one-sided views on the relationship between God and nature: the pagan identification of God with nature on one hand, and the modern day desacralisation of nature on the other.

According to a later interpretation of the creation story, God creates being out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) through the Word. The concept

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[3] *Ibid.* See also chapter Six.

[4] D. Pollefeyt – L. Anckaert, *Tussen trauma en verwondering. Rosenzweig, Levinas en Fackenheim*, in B. Raymaekers (ed.), *Gehelen en fragmenten. De vele gezichten van de filosofie*, Leuven, University Press Leuven, 1993, pp. 159-164.

of creation implies God's transcendence over the world. Through creation God calls into existence something other than Himself. As a matter of fact, the Bible thus articulates a sharp criticism of pagan practices that deify nature. The Biblical God is not—as in Rubenstein's view— the diffuse, supportive ground for Being that exercises a 'fascinating' and 'frightening' attraction over man which is so great that man wants to participate in this ground and wishes to dissolve in it. Such a *Gott mit uns* would no longer be a critical, Biblical 'opposite', but a numinous power that on the one hand stirs up the human being to a blind and irrational enthusiasm, but on the other hand spreads an arbitrary terror that dissolves the basis for any kind of personal responsibility.

The Jewish tradition holds that God's glory exists precisely in the fact that He has placed someone in his creation who can seek Him out in his separation and who is *in the ability* of being responsive to Him (though not obliged to do so). Holding on to the absolute transcendence of the Creator implies the possibility of atheism. Man can experience the irreversible separation between God and the world as an enormous absence. Human beings are in danger of being overwhelmed by the inhuman neutrality of a silent and obscure cosmos.

The distance between God and the world, however, is not absolute for the Bible. Nature is not merely the atheist, threatening *il y a* that has to be controlled. The entire cosmos contains Traces of God's creative actions. Man is called to uncover and unravel the Traces that God has left in his Creation, and to bring new life to their meaning. Yet, this presupposes a hermeneutical attitude towards nature on the part of the believer.

II. Towards a Hermeneutics of Nature

The tradition often attributes the Jewish forgetfulness towards nature to the rabbinic passion for the study of the Scripture. The Jewish exegete searches after the power of the text (hence not a literal, fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible). He closely examines the verses in hopes of finding (previously) hidden faces. Because of this, however, the rabbi not infrequently progressively forgets the necessity to contemplate that other great riddle: creation.

Although nature is not divine, it does testify of God. It can just as well be seen as a great 'Book' (a text) which has to be read and interpreted to (get to) know He who has left His Signature in the whole of Creation. The Creator of nature and the Giver of the Torah are thus

one and the same God. Especially Chassidism has taken this other route towards finding God's love, rather than studying the Scripture. Chassidism has returned to careful listening to the earth and the heavens which speak of the Beauty of the Eternal on earth. Its followers are taught that nature is the place where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have found revelation.

The fact that God can also be found in that other book (nature), in no way means the end of the relevance of the Scripture. On the contrary, the Scripture itself tells us to look to nature as a work wherein God has left his Traces. Without the Scripture, man would never be able to listen to Creation as the site of God's revelation. When we would read nature *in opposition to* the Scripture, we would never be able to find that of what nature is the sign. Then, the temptation of paganism, wherein nature itself is exalted to being an ultimate, divine reality (*cf.* the theology of Rubenstein), would arise.

The interdependence of reading nature and reading the Scripture even stretches beyond this. For nature cannot be read differently from the words in the Scripture. Contemplating nature as a 'riddle', which means that nature is thought of as receptive to a hermeneutics (or interpretation), is principally impossible for someone who has not learned to read the Scripture. 'Hermeneutics' can be placed in opposition to 'dogma' here. A dogma is posited without riposte, as if the utterance would once and for all be fixed in the unchanging character of the letter. The Jewish tradition, conversely, holds that the Torah has seventy faces. The Torah is as it were waiting for every (irreplaceable) generation of readers. The Zohar, the collection of influential mystical comments on the five books of Moses, calls for heavenly joy for every new interpretation of the Scripture. Because it is not the literal meaning that matters, every new reader is important. The Scripture needs to be taken up time and time again as a pathway to its secret, the transcendence, which as it were must be begged to the surface. Without such an exegesis as hermeneutics, the Scripture would be meaningless for us, like a flame without a wick, slowly dying out.

The old imperative to search for Traces of God in the humility of the verses and the letters of the Bible, to search for the part of the secret which it still harbours, now *mutatis mutandis* also applies to the Traces that God has left in the 'clods of the earth' (Job 38:38) and the 'rocky crags' (Job 39:28). For, like the Scripture, nature presents its riddle to us as a language that asks to be interpreted. Truth sprouts from nature, similar to the way it reveals itself to a student of the Scripture.

In Chalier's thought, Scripture thus is the necessary mediation between man and nature. Without Scripture, man runs the risk of contenting himself with the immanent beauty of nature. Pantheism is not far off in such a case. The study of Scripture, on the other hand, teaches man to orient himself to the Infinite that is revealed in and through the cosmos, but which is not the cosmos itself. Scripture teaches man to see beyond that his own (literal) horizon. No matter how incredibly small Scripture may be in comparison with the overwhelming dimensions of nature, it still offers the perspective through which nature *can* reveal itself as the Word of God.

III. Man: Lord and Master over Nature?

A hermeneutical openness to nature as God's creation such as the one described above is not quite as evident as it may seem. A good example of the need for an apt attitude to see Creation as God's revelation is the story of Job. After a long period of remaining terribly silent to Job's protest, God suddenly decides to reply to Job with an inventory of the richness of His Creation. Job thus does not get the answer he was hoping for: a theoretical explanation or some words of comfort are not on God's mind. God just presents Job with His Creation as if His answer to Job's misery lies there. He speaks to Job about the coming to being of Creation: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:4). The beauty of the Creator which shines through in all things, great and small, had been unnoticed by Job. Seeing this beauty with own eyes, as he does from that moment onwards, was something that had to be taught to him. His misery was an obstacle in his understanding of the language of Creation. The miserable are condemned to live within the confined limits of their own ill bodies. They are hounded by their own vulnerability, which turns every contact with the world into inhuman torture. The hermeneutical paralysis of suffering men is a consequence of their inability to safeguard some space in themselves where the other can be received. Job's immense sufferings deprived him of the ability to look to nature through a different frame of mind, and not merely see it as something that just pursues its own course, totally indifferent to his misery, almost mocking him. How great is not the temptation to see nature merely as an eternal and vain frivolity (Eccl 1,5-6)?

The receptivity for that specific, 'appealing' opening in nature, that unique marking in nature which orients man to an *au-delà*, is hard to

experience for someone (miserable) who is strongly bound to his own being. When man is absorbed in his interest for his own being (Levinas), he will not be able to see nature as the work of God wherein He has left a Trace. God only shows Himself to those who are receptive to His Traces. In extreme circumstances, this receptive attitude can best be described as sanctity. A saint is someone who always leaves space in himself for the beautiful, even when he is filled with and surrounded by nothing but death and destruction. Etty Hillesum describes the intensity of being touched by a blooming jasmine that was reaching up to the blue sky in the mud of the Nazi camp in Westerbork. In a place where all is lost and abandoned, Hillesum learns to listen to nature, as if the sense for the other, hidden in nature, can only be found in places where all human and natural sumptuousness has been discarded, where man is thrown back upon his lowest degree of being[5]. Chalier calls experiences like that of Hillesum 'desert experiences'. In the desert, man is stripped of everything, initiated in the humility of being deprived of every form of possession and almost forced into an extreme listening to the meaning that comes out of the paucity of things. The Hebrew language holds an immemorial connection between 'the one who speaks' (*medaber*) and 'the desert' (*midbar*). In the desert of Sinaï the Jewish people, still burdened by their suffering as slaves and with the hardship of their passage on their minds, received the Torah. It seems as if they had to go through the experience of the great prohibition to appropriate things before they could enter the Promised Land, a land of 'milk and honey' (Ex 3:8), 'a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey' (Deut 8:8).

In the desert, man discovers that he is not always condemned to turn back upon himself but that he can open himself to the other which pulls him away from himself and which frees him of himself. The contemplation of nature can dis-engage man from his own individuality and lift him above his own interest. This way the infinite can invade his existence and order him to give up the things that normally keep him busy (health, money, and life) to the benefit of a destination that transcends the narrow limits of his own interest.

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[5] E. Hillesum, *Etty. De nagelaten geschriften van Etty Hillesum 1941-1943*, K.A.D. Smelik , 3rd rev. ed. Amsterdam, Uitgeverij Balans, 1991. See also: K.A.D. Smelik, *The Ethics and Philosophy of Etty Hillesum* (Supplements to the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy) Leiden, Brill, 2017.

Precisely this relation to nature has become problematic today. In modernity, man has set himself up as the *maître et possesseur* of nature (Descartes). The physical world has been reduced to its mathematical dimensions and has been brought to silence. Although the world is still an enormous book 'written in a mathematical language' (Galilei), it no longer speaks to the human heart. The modern world no longer participates in an attentive hermeneutics of nature, but forces nature only to answer the self-interested questions that man asks it. It is not the 'exegesis' which is central in our understanding of nature today, but the 'genesis' of nature. Modern Bible exegesis is often limited to a study of the Bible's 'genesis', which is a study of the social, historical and literary background of the Bible texts, as if those collected texts are merely a worn-out fossil that no longer sets one to thinking[6]. Similarly, modern science mostly focuses on the laws of physics without believing in a 'talmudic' reading of nature, which is a reading that brings to light the new, current, and unspoiled power that speaks from nature. The strict, mathematical approach of science thus has become the only legitimate approach for studying nature (and the Scripture). This, in turn, leads to a state of affairs wherein the proud theoretical study of the genesis of natural phenomena replaces exegesis' humble singular search for meaning. Man's inexhaustible urge for control reduces and substitutes the speaking power of nature. This brings along the deep existential fear that sometimes takes a hold of people when they discover that nature's riddle will in the end always be undecipherable. At such moments, science leaves us with many uncertainties about the place and the meaning of our presence on earth. A saying by Pascal is exceptionally paradigmatic for this feeling: "*le silence eternal de ces espaces inifinis m'effraie* (the eternal silence of those infinite spaces frighten me)"[7]. With this phrase, Pascal expresses the panic of modern man who feels himself to be radically alien in a universe that has been constructed by the measuring and calculating mind, a universe in which order has replaced interpretation.

IV. **Nature as a Meeting Place with the Other**

As such, the modern, totalising subject of the *Aufklärung* is the most important obstacle for a hermeneutics of nature as a work of God. The

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[6] R. Burggraeve, *De bijbel geeft te denken: schepping, milieu, lijden, roeping, Gods passie en de ander, vergeving, bevrijding van de ethiek, in gesprek met Levinas*, Leuven, Acco, 1991, Chapter 1.

[7] B. Pascal, *Pensées*, Paris, Flammarion, 1973, nr. 91.

ideal of scientific objectivity makes modern man lose its sense of humbleness: he is no longer capable to receive within himself that which goes beyond his self-interested concepts and theories. As lord and master over nature, modern man has lost every openness for a meaning and sense which gives itself in the form of an infiniteness, and which at the same time also retreats itself in its giving as the humbleness of a Trace. By confining reality in a network of concepts and theories, a hermeneutical interaction with that which will always throw up resistance as alternity and exteriority has been totally lost. Instead of astonishment for things that will always resist its reductions as 'the other', science has developed a deep aversion for the riddle of nature, a riddle which nonetheless holds a secret that should encourage people to a different kind of hermeneutical thinking.

Watching and listening to nature with modesty and dis-interestedness, without wanting to immediately claim and possess it, is in other words a prerequisite for the welcoming of the infinite in the finite. The meaning of nature as a Trace of God's creation will only present itself when man is able to reserve a space within himself for the other as other. This other does not force itself on man, but gives itself in the discretion of a presence that always retreats at the moment that it is in danger of being trapped by the concept. Thus, it is not so much a matter of apprehension of the other, but rather a matter of receiving the other, averse to any violent conceptualisation, and up to the point of shuddering for the fragility of this other. For Chalier, this disinterestedness contains, precisely by its opening up and redirection of our own needs and interests, the key to a new, ethic relationship with nature. When man is called to 'subdue' nature, this does not mean that he is called to abuse it, shamelessly exploit or reduce it to whatever profits one can get out of it. It is the submission of that which embodies the Trace of creation, of that which does not coincide with being human and which is never to be reduced to the human. Man has to abandon a purely reductionist view of nature. When he discovers the Traces of creation in the things he controls and cultivates, he will also become aware of the fact that he is not *chez soi* in this world, that he fundamentally is and remains a stranger.

The ethical encounter with nature thus presupposes the ethical excellence of the subject, to the extent that it is capable of orienting itself towards the other, without continually returning to itself. Only such an ethical subjectivity can be witness of nature as a work of God. Ethics opens up the immanence of the natural order and the human control over it by opening itself for an *au-delà* that has been left in it as a divine

Trace. Without ethics, in other words, the riddle of nature stays lost, distancing itself in nature's violent indifference. The meaning of nature can thus not be deduced from some rational or technical analysis, similar to the way in which natural theology searched for the great motor of the universe. The riddle's meaning is radically dependent on man's readiness to reshape itself to an openness, to a meeting place wherein the other can live. Only the disinterested humbleness of the mind and the heart opens up the room that is necessary for a contemplation of nature as a work of God. Without the ethical subjectivity, the riddle of nature finally withdraws behind an unreachable horizon.

V. The Miracle of Nature?

Of course, the question remains whether 'after Auschwitz' such a view of nature is not dreadfully naive. In the extermination camps, nature has not only shown itself as utterly indifferent to man's fate (the flowers were equally beautiful in Auschwitz), but also as a supplementary source of suffering (cold, hunger). How can one in the century of Auschwitz still speak of the divine 'miracle' of nature? Still, many in the extermination camps were able to retain their ability to, with astounding mental clarity, receive the birth of every new day as a pathway to the other and a gift from God. Many Jews in Auschwitz also continued their prayers and the celebration of liturgical holidays, wherein, even more than before, the connection with nature's cycles played an important role. They again looked to the sun and the stars as God presented them at the beginning of creation: "for signs and for seasons and for days and years" (Gen 1:14).

That is why Chalier still dares to speak of the 'miracle' of creation in the face of Auschwitz. Thanks to people like Hillesum, who *in* Auschwitz have seen nature as a Trace of God, we are still able to perceive nature as a work of God *after* Auschwitz. The experiences of Holocaust victims do not only make this possible, but they also categorically call upon us to not condemn man to a cosmic solitude because of Auschwitz (Fackenheim)[8]. Seeing nature as a 'faceless abyss' or a 'cannibal Earth-Mother that can only be appeased and satisfied by human offerings', as Richard Rubenstein does[9], would amount to giving a posthumous

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[8] See Chapter Seven: *The Encounter of Athens and Jerusalem in Auschwitz.*
[9] See Chapter One: *Post Holocaust Ethics and Theology: A Catholic Perspective.*

victory to Hitler. The sacralisation of the immanent forces of nature and the *Wille zur Macht* were central concepts in Hitler's *Weltanschauung*.

At this point, we are able to formulate a critique of the way in which the 'miracle' is usually understood, namely as a random abolition of the natural order. Such an understanding of the miracle, however, reduces God's diligence to 'what is good for my own being'. Such a God becomes a *Gott mit uns*. Yet, God's created nature obeys a regularity of laws that cannot be altered by the Creator. The medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides (1135-1204) already said that the miracle is a possibility of nature, and not a consequence of an abolition of nature's laws, laws that actually keep nature in existence. When God intervenes in natural processes, he does not damage the laws of physics according to Maimonides, but rather uses them to their optimal effect to His wishes. For Chalier, the miracle does not happen in the noise of great events, but rather discretely in the heart of daily events. We have to leave the prevailing idea of the miracle as an adaptation of the other to the will of the same. Exactly the opposite happens in the miracle: the invasion of the order of the same by the intrusion of the other. The miracle does not allow for a human explanation, as it immediately exceeds the limits of the understanding individual as the entrance of the other in the same.

The pre-eminent miracle is creation itself, not just as a singular divine act in a distant past, but as a wondrous event that keeps extending itself in the present. For believers, God continues to create reality at every moment. The Jewish sabbatical year is a good illustration of this. When Jews stop working, sowing and harvesting for an entire year every seven years on the basis of a commandment of absolute rest for man and animal (Lev 25,2-7), they do not only express a complete distancing from the unlimited dominion over nature, but they also come very close to the idea of the continuous recreation of nature. Leaving the earth to itself, allowing it to rest completely, reminds man of the fact that he does not fully possess the earth, but also of the internal impetus that is at work in creation and which should be respected. Creation is not only a divine gift (Deut 21:1) which we can not just treat according to our own discretion, it is also animated by an unstoppable force that by definition escapes human omnipotence. The sabbatical year reminds us of the fact that 'creating' is not a singular past event, but that creation produces itself constantly, again and again every moment. All things are created out of nothing all the time. Without the continuously animating breath of God that constitutes the very inner of every being, things would relapse into nothingness. Charlier calls

the idea of a continuous creation the foundation of God's own Name: 'I am who am' (אהיה אשר אהיה)(Ex 3:14). God's promise to Moses is not only a pledge to never abandon Israel in the course of history, but it is also an expression of loyalty to the durability of all nature's life. God reveals a fundamental secret to Moses: he teaches him to recognise the infinite, divine life in the finite.

VI. The Messianic Creative Assignment of Man

In the book Ezekiel, we find the idea that the messianic peace concerns both nature and the human community (Ezek 34,24-29). There is no hope of peace at the end of times when relationships between humans are good while the violation of nature continues. Reconciliation between manhood and nature is also necessary.

For the prophet Isaiah, it is clear that the totality of creation awaits the end of times and the exile. As man has dragged nature along in his fall, nature will also participate in man's rebirth.

> The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11,6-9).

The radical renewal of creation thus does not only concern man. For the Bible, it is no use speaking of salvation as long as the desert keeps its dryness, the fields their barrenness and the animals their cruelty. Moreover, the hope of salvation goes a lot further than the mere restoration of the order that was destroyed by sin and suffering. In the prophetic texts, a new reality is announced: a new heaven and a new earth.

VII. The Difference Between Man and Animal

Although not only man, but the entirety of creation has been taken up in the covenant with God, it is only man who has been called on to hold the responsibility for nature's survival. An animal only follows its instincts and does not experience a desire to transcend its own nature.

It is not aware of the golden thread of the inner that links man to the transcendent. It does not have that intimate and fragile place where the transcendent can be received. The animal's drama is the radical dissociation of the inner and the outer. The animal is darkened by the power of its own impulses. It is forced to find satisfaction in the outer world, and at the same time this misty impulsivity obstructs any possibility to make space to receive meaning. Abraham's departure from Ur is a powerful symbol of man letting go of the animal ties to nature, and his going on, from horizon to horizon, to find the meaning of existence in a dialogue with the Other (and this without returning to oneself, in contrast to Greek philosophy). Only man is capable of such a demanding interiority which enables him to receive the word of the Other.

It is *this* human being who is summoned to rule and have dominion over all creatures. Exactly in this responsibility for the entire universe lies man's calling and his unique being-image of an imageless God. Man is the only creature that can distance itself from itself, even if it is but during one moment of his life. Only man can 'disinterest' himself. I absolutely do not deny that self-interest is (or can be) healthy, but I do want to ask whether man is not a murderer when he is only healthy.

Evidently, the necessity to appeal on nature's resources for man's needs will remain a fact of life, even if nature is transformed by man. It goes without saying that modern science is an improvement over premodern man's fear for the numinous, unpredictable forces of nature. Yet still, this known fact does not necessarily have to lead to the exploitation of nature for blind profits or man's tyrannical urges. Cultivating the earth, watching over the plants, descending into the heart of matter to distil life energy from it and even eating animal flesh to alleviate one's hunger, do not inevitably imply the destructive exploitation of natural resources and extorting animal life for commercial purposes. The first attitude holds on to the sense for the other. The second attitude cancels out this reference to alterity and complacently settles for a purely reductionist attitude wherein in the end only the interest for one's own being is the norm. The first position is enlightened by a concern for the good that gives meaning to human actions (this can for instance take form in an ordering of non-human life on the basis of a 'pathocentrism'). The second approach reduces itself to a functional rationality that contents itself with a limited concern for one's own being only.

VIII. Plea for an Ethically Qualified Anthropocentrism

This chapter has shown how the recovery (*tikkun*) of the world, broken by man's and nature's suffering, is inseparably connected with altered thinking. Only human beings that are oriented by alterity can maintain the hope for a new heaven and a new earth. The realisation of this hope is already promisingly announced in God's Trace in nature itself. Catherine Chalier has accordingly led Emmanuel Levinas' alterity thinking along ecological lines. The Scripture says man is the last step in creation. The entirety of God's creation was already there before man was created. Man, in other words, has to 'discover' the world, and can never pretend to be the source and origin of everything. We are discoverers ('exegetes') before we are creators ('geneticists'). Before we are to rule, we find ourselves in a relationship of givenness. 'Having dominion' is not the first step, man is placed in a certain relation to nature. Man is not only the *last* creation but also the *first* to be punished. This demonstrates how man's relation to the creation is to be understood: as an ethical relationship.

Finally, let us briefly return to Levinas' reticence towards nature. Although nature is God's good creation, it eventually also has a threatening meaning. A postmodern, aesthetic, holistic harmony model of nature is naïve, because it insufficiently takes into account nature's threatening disposition for man. The AIDS virus does not deserve any kind of respect. Genesis says that man 'has dominion', and this is also exactly what *should* be said (contrary to 'ecocentrism'). This phrase does not only oppose a certain (subjugating) God concept and does not only exalt man to a position of importance, but also reflects the experience of nature's ambivalence. As such, it is not so much the question whether man's return to nature is important, but rather the question to *which* earth we should return. 'Earth' with a capital is too good to be true. With Chalier, we have opted for an anthropologically understood biblical-ecological revival—albeit not for any kind of anthropocentrism, but rather for an *ethically qualified* anthropocentrism. "Which also means that God's great work waits for its exaltation by man"[10].

Together with the Jewish tradition, Levinas presents a sound word of caution *vis-à-vis* a nature whose powers can easily be divinised. Nazism is a clear illustration of the fact that respect for nature can go perfectly together with disrespect for human beings and how a pagan definition

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[10] Concluding sentence in CHALIER, *L'alliance avec la nature*, p. 207.

of nature played a constitutive role in its deadly ideology. What I want to underline in this chapter is that Levinas' Jewish philosophy has a *potentiality* to value nature without ending up in a pagan divinisation of nature as such, but that this potentiality remained undiscovered in Levinas' own thinking. I think this is understandable in the light of both his personal and existential confrontation with the brutal forces of nature during his imprisonment under Nazism and of his philosophical wrestling with Heidegger's philosophy, and more broadly with ontological and totalitarian thinking as such. With Catherine Chalier I believe that Levinas' thought has not failed at this point and that it can be made relevant and meaningful for contemporary ecological concerns. Chalier further developed Levinas' philosophical framework based on an anthropocentrism that is ethically and theologically qualified, meaning that it is oriented by an ethical monotheism: the belief in a personal and commanding God who gives power to man to rule over creation in a moral way.

IX. Against the Nazi Deification of Nature

It seems to me that any challenge to the kinds of monotheistic frameworks proposed in Levinas and also Chalier with regards to nature must resist supplanting (or reverting) 'humanity's power over nature' with 'nature's power over humanity'. Levinas made us aware of the depersonalising, 'il y a-tic' power of nature, a power with no compassion, a power with no moral sensitivity. That is the reason why in my view humanity *should* dominate over nature. Nature is not just a romantic place. This control over nature is a human vocation, serving both men and women and especially their children. This domination should not be inspired per se by a 'will to power', but should be understood in the line of Levinas as an ethical responsibility for something that is given to us as a gift and that still bears the traces of its divine giver/creator. Even if nature in this view is not a moral subject itself, neither human nor divine, it is an object of our moral consideration because it is a divine creation. One of the lessons to be learned from Nazism is how dangerous a divinisation of natural powers can be. It was Nazism that submitted itself and the whole world to the divine powers of nature as they understood them. In this sense, I fully agree with Fackenheim when he criticises Rubenstein and his mystic nihilism ('God as Mother Nature') as a posthumous victory for Hitler. It is true that the eclipse of nature in

Levinas' thinking goes back to a much longer tradition of Jewish ethical reflection, but the Holocaust makes Levinas' attitude towards nature and the divinisation of the blind forces of nature even more understandable and necessary. In the book of Job, it is true, God speaks through the manifestations of nature, but Job resists. God speaks in and through the aesthetic, but does not obliterate the ethical. But the book of Job is protest literature. The message of the book of Job is precisely that Job becomes heated and angry *vis-à-vis* such a hostile and morally incomprehensible deity. One cannot isolate some quotes of God or attributed to God from the book of Job and its central message. Especially in the epilogue of the book of Job (written by another author), God says that Job is in the right (Job 42:7). It is true that the book of Job poses the question of theodicy—that is the relation between God and human suffering—but theology has provided many other answers to this question than by putting evil into God himself who delivers humanity over to pure arbitrariness. Under the influence of Greek dualistic thinking in the course of the centuries, Christianity developed a very negative view of the human body, and more generally, the material world. I do believe that this is an element that historically contributed to the Christian relativisation and legitimisation of the drama and the evil of human suffering, especially in relation to the gassing and the burning of the body of Israel during Nazism.

X. A Catholic Re-Appreciation of Nature After Auschwitz

From this perspective, the topic of Holocaust and nature also presents a challenge to Christian/Catholic theology and to the Christian/Catholic tradition as such. A post-Holocaust understanding of nature should avoid a devaluation of the material world, of the body, of creation. The reason for this can be found in the centre for Christian faith, namely in the events of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Incarnation means that the Word became Flesh, that God became material in the world. Even more, God made himself vulnerable to the world and suffered through his Son on the cross. This is another way of looking at the question of theodicy: in a story where God suffers, suffering can no longer be turned against God; it is a risk connected with freedom and a consequence of evil. Resurrection, especially[11] the resurrection of the

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[11] See Chapter Twenty-One: *The Last and Final Things.*

body, means for Christians that the whole human person and not just an abstract soul will be saved. Especially in the Catholic tradition, and in Catholic liturgy in particular, sensitivity to the body, to the material, to a connection with the seasons of nature plays a central role. For a Catholic, it is not difficult to see and to value that people—like Etty Hillesum— can experience God outside scripture as a medium. Catholicism is not based on a protestant idea of *sola scriptura* ('scripture alone'). The Catholic tradition can recognise that other traditions and human experiences can also reveal aspects of God, since there the Word of God (the Logos) is also at work (even if, for Catholics, this work of the Logos can never be disconnected from Christ). This further explains why God can be experienced without the mediation of scripture (even if the fullest meaning of life for Christians can only be found in the light of the gospels). For Christians the incarnation and resurrection imply that God engages with humanity and the world, fully and in a unique way, and that God will save the whole person, body and soul, individual and community, culture and nature. This stands in radical contrast with the pure spiritualisation of the Kingdom of God that was part of the working history of Christianity and that often led to a dualistic and anti-natural understanding of salvation. Christians live in the hope of the liberation of the whole creation. In contrast to popular presentations, Christianity does not claim that we will forever stay in heaven, but rather in a newly transformed material world, a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1). Saint Paul speaks in Romans 8 about the destiny of the natural world as not being one of destruction, but of transformation: "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21)[12].

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[12] A previous version published as D. POLLEFEYT, *The Bible in the Ecological Debate: Obstacle or Guide?*, in D. POLLEFEYT (ed.), *Holocaust and Nature. On the Relation between Holocaust Studies and Ecological Issues*, Seattle, WA, University of Washington Press, 2011.

Section Twelve

Holocaust Education

Chapter Eighteen

Overcoming Holocaust Fatigue in the Classroom

Since 1995 I have been teaching courses on the Holocaust at the bachelor and master levels in all disciplines (theology, philosophy, education, languages, history, sports, and so on) at a Western European, Catholic university that performs in the top 50 of world university rankings: the KU Leuven in Belgium[1]. Since the mid-eighties, I have been doing research on Holocaust ethics and Holocaust education and I am well aware of and thankful for the efforts and the struggles of previous generations of Holocaust scholars to convince both civil society and the educational system of the importance of the Holocaust in school and university curricula. From around the year 2000 onward, I have started to see signs of what I then called 'Holocaust fatigue' in the classroom. This is a phenomenon among students who, when confronted with the Holocaust as a topic in school, react with a complex combination of disinterest, passivity, inertia, latency, boredom, indifference and sometimes resistance. Holocaust fatigue is not the same as an aggressive rejection of the Holocaust based on anti-Semitism or negationism. Rather, it comes from moderate, ordinary young people who have gone through a typical primary and secondary education. It has an analogy in so-called 'Bible fatigue' in which students, when asked in religion classes to take out their Bible, start sighing and complaining with words like: 'not again' or 'I am tired of this subject' or 'I cannot handle this anymore'[2]. 'Holocaust fatigue' is something different from students' disrespect of the Holocaust as we see in recent phenomena like 'yolocaust behaviour' during class trips to Holocaust memorials[3]. 'Holocaust fatigue' is a more moderate attitude, however this does not mean that we should underestimate it. When I started talking about these observations at the beginning of the

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[1] See: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/ku-leuven.

[2] D. Pollefeyt – R. Bieringer, *The Role of Biblical and Religious Education Reconsidered. Risks and Challenges in Teaching the Bible*, in R. Bieringer – M. Elsbernd (ed.), *Normativity of the Future. Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective*, Leuven-Paris-Walpole (MA), Peeters, 2010, pp. 377-402.

[3] D. Reynolds, *Consumers of Witnesses? Holocaust Tourists and the Problem of Authenticity*, in *Journal of Consumer Culture* 16(2)(2016), pp. 334-353.

21st century, I initially met some unbelief and even resistance among Holocaust scholars. Today, not only do I now see this very phenomenon being described by other scholars[4], but I also see it becoming more and more recognisable in my own teaching experience. This chapter explores the causes of Holocaust fatigue and ways to prevent and overcome it. The general thesis is that Holocaust fatigue is not so much the consequence of overexposure to the Holocaust as a topic but rather of an overexposure to certain ways of presenting the Holocaust. I will describe four such ways of presenting the Holocaust. My thesis will be that by shifting the stress in Holocaust education from a 'normativity of the past' to a 'normativity of the future', the Holocaust can be recontextualised and in this way Holocaust fatigue can be overcome.

I. Four Explanations of Holocaust Fatigue

1. *The Holocaust: the first naïveté approach*

When I look into the prior knowledge of university students in my courses, I see that they have often been educated in a very 'traditional' way about the history of the Holocaust. All of them have received almost the same 'canonised' message of the Holocaust, but they have not (yet) learned in large part to deal in a critical way with the event and its living history. They have learned the central stories, facts and figures through an educational approach in which a lot of reductionism and selectivity is at work. The Holocaust is presented as (reduced to) a monolithic 'big story' and facts and events are carefully selected to shape and support this predetermined story. In such a presentation, complexity is lost or even avoided. The selections made often support the absolute evil nature of the Holocaust and its perpetrators. The perspective taken is mostly that of the victims and not of the perpetrators. The story of the Holocaust is treated more so as something unique rather than something with universal

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[4] S. Schweber, *"Holocaust Fatigue": Teaching It Today*, in *Social Education* 48(20063)48-55; R. Weiner, *Holocaust Fatigue? Educators Worry about the Future of Shoa Memory in the Schools*, in *New Jersey Jewish News Online*, December 13, 2007; A. Stein, *Reluctant Witnesses: Survivors, Their Children, and the Rise of Holocaust Consciousness*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, Chapter 6: 'Too Much Memory? Holocaust Fatigue in the Era of the Victim'; A. Steinweis, *Diagnosing and Combatting Holocaust Fatigue* (Rabbi Sidney and Jane Brooks Lecture, 2008): https://vimeo.com/181450516; M. Gray, *Contemporary Debates in Holocaust Education*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 37-38.

dimensions and broader meaning. Often, this approach in primary and secondary school shocks students into learning, since the driving 'pedagogical principle' says that the telling of shocking events and the showing of shocking pictures somehow 'imprints' the message of the Holocaust almost automatically, deeply and permanently. As a consequence, for many students, the Holocaust is like a kind of 'negative sacred event' that leaves them powerless and speechless. In this 'canonised' message of the Holocaust, most students are formed to be 'literal believers', left without the opportunity to question its message or meaning. If and when students are later confronted again with the topic of the Holocaust, they feel a kind of anxiety and resistance (to have) to go through this experience again. They want to avoid the topic. They close their eyes. Sometimes, students ask me if they can leave the university lecture hall when stories are told or movies are shown. At other times, student representatives make it clear that students cannot be forced to confront the Holocaust unexpectedly or involuntarily. Of course, given the nature of the event, it is understandable that students have massive emotional responses to the topic and their experiences of anger, fear and powerlessness are crucial elements to be taken seriously in every program of Holocaust education. Dealing with these emotions is necessary but not enough, and can even be counterproductive. Students can close themselves off to the topic because it is too hard and too repetitive. "It is always the same thing". "We know this already". "Not again". Moreover, when students are (later) confronted with the complexities of the Holocaust—that is, with different perspectives including those of the perpetrators, or with the ideological use or misuse of the Holocaust—there is a risk of radical rejection stemming from the 'first naïveté' with which they believed in the 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust as an unquestionable event with a unilateral meaning. Thus their 'literal belief' turns into 'external critique': students put themselves outside of the realm of the Holocaust, and they resist, reject or even deny its message. They have not learned to engage with the reality of the Holocaust and its meaning for today in a more complex, critical or multidimensional way. Its meaning was already defined, determined and transmitted with strong emotional overtones by their Holocaust educators.

2. *The Holocaust as object of historical-critical research only*

A second approach is not so much synthetic but analytical; not emotional, but rational; oriented not towards the uniqueness of the

Holocaust, but rather towards its universality. The Holocaust is approached as an historical event and analysed with scientific methods just like any other historical event. The effort is to reconstruct, to understand, and to analyse the Holocaust. Everything is not condensed into one image, but dissembled into many small pieces. What is important in this approach is to situate the Holocaust in its original historical context. While in the approach of first naïveté the Holocaust is a sacred event standing almost outside of history, in the historical-critical approach the Holocaust becomes de-sacralised. There is no taboo in trying to understand the perpetrators; on the contrary, studying the perpetrators is the precondition for really entering into the dynamics of the Holocaust. This approach can be very critical towards the perspective of the victims. The victims do not often have the correct perspective or tools to understand the Holocaust, are too traumatised or have a post-Holocaust, ideological agenda that is projected back into the history of the Holocaust. This approach does not reduce the Holocaust to one story, but presents it as a complex tapestry of many small stories. The intention and the hope of this approach is to show the Holocaust 'as it actually happened', without the interference of emotion or ideology. This approach also has its own value and importance: there is no education without understanding the context in which the Holocaust could take place. But this approach also has its dangers. Reconstructing the Holocaust 'as it actually happened' is almost impossible. The historian can never completely eliminate himself or herself from the choice of the topic, from the selection or omission of facts, or from the conclusions drawn. The more one studies the Holocaust historically, the more one becomes aware that its core is in fact not re-constructable. The Holocaust is not simply a historical event; it is a deep and moving human drama that also transcends our capacity to grasp it fully. It challenges all aspects of the human person, of every community and of human society. In a purely historical analysis, the event of the Holocaust risks becoming 'imprisoned' in its original context. The more the gap grows between the original context and our context today, the more the Holocaust loses any social, moral or pedagogical importance for today and for the future. This kind of educator can be so obsessed with a normativity of the past that he or she loses students who are moving into the future. The Holocaust is then treated as 'just' one historical event like any other, something that happened in the previous century in a context far removed from our own lives.

3. *The Holocaust as an ethical or political recipe book (moralisation)*

A third approach to the Holocaust in education is the so-called 'mono-correlational' one[5]. In this approach, the teacher has a certain moral, political, ideological or religious point that he or she wishes to make and the Holocaust is used to support or underscore this point. Time and again, the teacher unilaterally draws a single connection or correlation between aspects of the Holocaust and his or her own educational agenda. Such 'monocorrelation' can be very open, but most often it is hidden, or at least the teacher thinks it is hidden. Sometimes it can in fact be so hidden that even the teacher himself or herself is unaware. There are many ways to develop monocorrelations. For example, a teacher may use the Holocaust to argue for an interventionist God, often inspired by anti-Jewish presuppositions; or he or she may argue that God is dead, often inspired by anti-religious feelings. The Holocaust may also be used to explain that the state of Israel is a moral or political necessity; or to put it the other way around: the Holocaust is used to criticise the actual politics of the state of Israel *vis-à-vis* the Palestinian people. The slogan 'Never again' can mean very different and even opposite things[6]. Whatever the particular ideology, the teacher has in general decided in advance what the Holocaust should mean and will use every opportunity in the classroom to make this clear: for example, that Nazism was a religion, that Nazism was a Darwinist movement, and so on. We call this 'mono'-correlation because the pedagogical line between the historical and contemporary contexts is always drawn in the same direction. Especially at a younger age, students are not always aware of this hidden strategy of the teacher. Holocaust education can then approach hidden indoctrination. One projects one's own ideology onto the historical event that is reconstructed time and again to serve in support of one's message. This happens most often at the cost of the victims or the historical complexity of the event. The risk here is that the Holocaust too easily becomes a kind of universal paradigm for evil increasingly disconnected from its particularity and uniqueness. This kind of presentation of the Holocaust becomes superficial, predictable, and without nuance. Aspects that do not fit the monocorrelation or

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[5] For the difference between 'monocorrelation' and 'multicorrelation', see: D. POLLEFEYT, *Difference Matters. A Hermeneutic-Communicative Concept of Didactics of Religion in a European Multi-Religious Context*, in *Journal of Religion Education* 56 (1) (2008), pp. 9-17.

[6] A. BAER, *Memory and Forgetting in the Post-Holocaust Era: the Ethics of Never Again*, London – New York, Routlegde, 2017, Chapter 5: 'Beyond Antigone and Amalek: Toward a Memory of Hope'.

that contradict it are silenced, relativised or left out entirely. This monocorrelational strategy works well in combination with a first naïveté approach to the Holocaust. As students get older, they start to become aware of this hidden agenda of Holocaust education. This approach is challenged when students are confronted with the complexity of the Holocaust, and with aspects that do not fit into the pre-programmed message or with ideological critiques of the Holocaust: for example, a confrontation with the concept of 'Holocaust industry' or with revisionist authors that use ambiguities in the history of the Holocaust to call everything into doubt. If these student concerns are not taken seriously, students run the risk of becoming passive or indifferent towards Holocaust education, or even more bluntly, of rejecting it outright. This is what I have come to call the 'shutter phenomenon': you are teaching large groups of students, and at the moment you start to speak about the Holocaust, you see on the faces of the students that the shutters are being drawn. From an American perspective, it is difficult to believe, but using the Holocaust in moral, political or religious debates is no longer done in public in Europe; even more so, it will backfire if you use the Holocaust as an argument in contemporary issues.

In my analysis, there are three main reasons for Holocaust fatigue: a first naïveté approach, an exclusive historical-critical approach and a monocorrelational approach. The reason why these strategies fail and are even counterproductive, in my view, is that all of them try 'to fix in advance' the meaning of the Holocaust for education. These are all pre-programmed approaches that situate the meaning of the Holocaust in the past. The learning process is neither open to nor oriented towards the future. In the first naïveté approach, this meaning is a canonised and harmonised version of the Holocaust that has to be taken as given; in the historical approach, the meaning is found in the 'correct' historical reconstruction of the 'essence' of the Holocaust 'as it really was'; in the monocorrelative approach, the meaning is found in a moral or ideological idea. In all three approaches, the student is not really engaging actively with the Holocaust as an appealing but complex and multidimensional reality but rather has to conform or submit himself or herself to a fixed meaning of the past. Over the long term, the result is passivity, disinterest, distrust or even resistance. That is what I encounter with many students in university lecture halls when speaking about the Holocaust: the correlation with their lives has become an interruption. Starting to teach the Holocaust first means fighting against these mechanisms and un-teaching a lot of what they have been taught before.

4. *Holocaust education and postmodern relativism*

It is important to situate our analysis of Holocaust fatigue and Holocaust education in the context of a secular Europe—a context that is quite difficult to understand from an American perspective in which religion plays a much more prominent and more public role. Secularisation in Europe means that all absolutes can now be deconstructed and nothing is sacred anymore. Everything and everyone—including the world of education—is subjected to such deconstructive analyses, and to a search for the power elements that are at work. God is no longer recognised or accepted as the ultimate foundation of ethics or even of religion. But the same kind of secular attitude is also true for 'negative sacred realities', such as the Holocaust, which are also deconstructed critically. This makes it difficult, if even untenable at all, to relate to the Holocaust with a first naïveté. Whereas in the United States the Holocaust has become much more the foundation for a kind of civic religion, in Europe this is not the case. Holocaust comparisons, for example, are unmasked easily as power claims of a certain group of people or as a technique in service of a certain political, moral or religious agenda. This can sound very shocking for teachers and scholars coming from other contexts. It means that students in such a secular context are very critical towards the prescribed educational strategies and their hidden presuppositions, especially when teachers themselves are not aware of their own strategies and agendas. This relativistic framework can also explain extreme behaviour among certain groups of students: blunt critiques on Israel and its use of the Holocaust, widespread black humour about the Holocaust among European youngsters, experimentation with revisionist ideas (particularly among young Muslim students) and even 'blasphemic' behaviour such as the yolocaust phenomenon. These developments leave serious questions on the table for Holocaust educators: for example, when showing a Holocaust film in class, inviting a Holocaust survivor to school or visiting a Holocaust museum as a group. One can no longer be sure that the pre-programmed educational outcome will be achieved. Holocaust educators, including myself, are time and again surprised, shocked and even angry when confronted by such phenomena in the classroom, but the challenge here is to move beyond external critique and to re-present the Holocaust in ways that can deal with this new cultural and pedagogical context.

II. Beyond Holocaust Fatigue

In order to overcome Holocaust fatigue, for this analysis it is important to address three interconnected pedagogical principles in Holocaust education: moving students in their relationship to the Holocaust from first naïveté to second naïveté, making the shift from a normativity of the past to a normativity of the future and exchanging a strategy of monocorrelation for a recontextualisation of the Holocaust in the contemporary context.

1. *Second naïveté (Paul Ricœur) and Holocaust education*

In 'first naïveté', students uncritically accept a pre-programmed and canonized version of the Holocaust. Such a representation is often based on a specific selection of the events of the Holocaust that together support a uniform and stereotyped version of it, to which students have then to subordinate themselves in order to be loyal to both its message and its victims. There is something positive in first naïveté, since it is in fact important that students involve themselves emotionally and with loyalty to the message of the Holocaust. By contrast, 'second naïveté' means that one has already gone through a process of critical reflection and personal appropriation of the Holocaust. There are multiple ways to do this and the outcome will not be the same for all students. 'Second naïveté' is only possible when one is aware of the ideological critiques on the use of the Holocaust and of the complexities and many possible perspectives. What is typical in 'second naïveté' is that one does not remain stuck amid these critiques or become relativistic or cynical *vis-à-vis* the Holocaust, but that one takes a 'post-critical' stance, a dedication to the topic of the Holocaust and its meaning 'despite' and 'beyond' the critiques. Paul Ricœur used the term 'second naïveté' in the religious context to describe a mature, adult believer who has lost his or her naïve, literal belief in the tradition, who is aware of all possible critiques but who 'nevertheless' devotes himself or herself to the source of life (God).

> After passing through, but never around the first innocence of original understanding and the desert trial of rigorously examining the text's parts, the reader is asked to risk reading the text critically and naively once more to become [an] adult critic and naïve child, as Ricœur says in order to resituate one's life and understanding within the horizon of the text's 'reality'[7].

[7] M. WALLACE, *The Second Naïveté: Barth, Ricœur, and the New Yale Theology*, Macon, GA, Mercer, 1990, pp. xiv-xv.

In the same way, one can move as well in Holocaust education from a pre-critical way of relating to the Holocaust, through a more critical approach, and into a post-critical position in dealing with the reality of the Holocaust. Post-critical Holocaust education accepts the genuine insights of the critical disciplines (such as history, sociology, psychology, and so forth), no matter where they lead, but still continues to foster learning and reflection in dedication to the Holocaust, its victims and its message for the world today. Other authors have also described the same kind of development: for example, Fowler describes the movement from a synthetic-conventional stage (pre-critical), through an individual-reflective stage (critical) and into a conjunctive stage (post-critical)[8]. In other words: after a naïve understanding and a rational explanation, the student comes to a personal and existential re-appropriation. The Holocaust becomes a lifelong hermeneutical key to understanding his life and the society in which he lives. Stimulating such a process is in my view the best way to fight against Holocaust fatigue.

2. *From monocorrelation to multicorrelation and the Holocaust*

To allow for such a personal reconfiguration of the Holocaust, one has to take the risk of leaving the safe educational pathways of pre-programmed monocorrelation. In educational processes, correlation is the way we connect 'events' with 'meaning', history with our own context, the lives of the people then with our lives now (correlation, mutual relation). Correlation is not a problem as such. In *mono-*correlation however, this always happens in the same predictable way, starting with the same stories, the same analysis, the same authors, the same condensed and often stereotyped presentation of the Holocaust. This is then connected to conclusions such as 'never again', 'every democracy can turn into totalitarianism', 'all people are able to do evil', 'forgiveness is impossible', 'God was murdered in Auschwitz', and so on, depending on the context or the agenda of the teacher or the school system. Such an educational approach works like a mechanical process in which teachers are trained to provide the information and students are expected to give the 'right' responses. This approach is successful to a certain extent and until a certain age. At the moment that (older) students are confronted with more complexity or with ideological critiques on the Holocaust, the correlation turns into an interruption.

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[8] J. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, New York, NY, Harper & Row, 1981.

After many years of Holocaust education, students know the hidden agenda of the Holocaust educator. Holocaust education becomes predictable, and is sometimes even seen as a form of moral manipulation and indoctrination. In my view, the solution is not to stop drawing correlations between history and context, but to allow for more complexity in the open space between then and now, between one interpretation and a multitude of interpretations, by inviting students to learn to deal with complexity. This is what I call a multicorrelational approach to the Holocaust. Only someone in second naïveté can do that. To put it the other way around: learning to deal with complexity in Holocaust education is a way to foster second naïveté. This approach makes students stronger when confronted with critiques, with ideological misuse of the Holocaust, with negationism, with relativism, and so forth. If multicorrelation is allowed in the educational space, then new faces and new dimensions of the Holocaust can always be discovered by students, such that Holocaust fatigue can never overwhelm the process of a continuous way of learning that always goes deeper. Second naïveté and multicorrelation are themselves also already an answer to Nazism. The Holocaust was only made possible because the Nazis 'killed' complexity, they did not allow for different interpretations of the world and were not open for further discussion or interrogation. Of course, a possible critique on multicorrelation in Holocaust education is that it ends up in relativism: any interpretation becomes acceptable and students can do whatever they want with the Holocaust in their own lives. This challenge is then addressed by the third necessary pedagogical principle.

3. *From a normativity of the past to a normativity of the future: remembering for the future*

The first three approaches I described in Holocaust education have one thing in common: they start from a 'normativity of the past'. They are convinced that Holocaust education is successful when students become convinced that a fixed meaning of the Holocaust is to be found in the past: that is, as its literal essence ('the canonised story of the Holocaust'), its historical reality ('the perfect presentation of the Holocaust'), or its ethical meaning ('the core moral message of the Holocaust'). These approaches make students passive recipients of Holocaust studies. They are educational approaches that leave students submissive, bored, and in the long term indifferent.

In her famous essay on education, Hannah Arendt writes: "Education (…) is where we decide whether we love our children enough (….) not to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world"[9]. In this understanding of education, we see a movement from a 'normativity of the past' into a 'normativity of the future'. Arendt argues that we do not have to decide in advance the outcome of educational processes. We do not have to take this out of the hands of our students. She speaks of 'new' and even 'unforeseen' outcomes of education. The past does not dictate the future completely. The meaning of the Holocaust for today is not an automatic, prefixed given. Every new generation and every new context will reconstruct and appropriate the Holocaust in new and unforeseen ways. There is not one, neutral, predetermined way of dealing with the Holocaust since neutrality does not exist. This is even true for those of us in Holocaust studies and Holocaust education who do in fact have our own presuppositions that play out in our research—even claiming that neutrality is possible is not itself a 'neutral' statement, since such an assertion is still questionable. Holocaust education engages all aspects of the human person: intellect, emotions, memory, actions, political convictions, context, culture, history, spiritualities, and so on. Good Holocaust education will make students aware of the continuous recontextualisation of the Holocaust in multiple ways and contexts, including in their own lives.

Does this mean that every presentation or interpretation has the same value in Holocaust education?[10] Hannah Arendt speaks about an orientation towards "renewing a common world". I think this can be a useful criterion for Holocaust education. I would like to call this 'the normativity of the future'[11]. In Holocaust education, we always have to ask the question: what future are we creating through Holocaust education? For Hannah Arendt, this should be "a common world", an inclusive world. Holocaust education should be driven by that dream of another world for (young) people. Every interpretation of the Holocaust

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[9] H. ARENDT, *Between Past and Future*, New York, NY, Penguin Books, 2006, Chapter 5: 'The Crisis of Education', pp. 170-192.

[10] See also: N. BORNMANN, *The Ethics of Teaching at Sites of Violence and Trauma: Student Encounters with the Holocaust*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

[11] The term was developed by R. BIERINGER – M. ELSBERND, *Normativity of the Future. Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective* (Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia, 61) Leuven, Peeters, 2010.

should thus be measured by this standard: does it open up or close off the future for people to live in a "common world". It was this inclusive world that the Nazi's tried to destroy. Holocaust education will overcome Holocaust fatigue in young people once they are invited to engage all possible dimensions of the Holocaust openly, from within their context, with the totality of their being and driven by that dream. The 'locus' of authority of such an educational process is not to be found in the past, but in the future: in such a common world for all, a world in which genocide becomes less likely. It is such an orientation towards an alternative world that can give Holocaust education a transformative power: a future for all of humanity based on human rights, Holocaust and genocide prevention, justice, love, freedom, non-violence, rights, dignity, truth, life and holiness. If we put this future in the hands of our future generations, we can then trust that Holocaust education will end neither in fatigue nor in relativism.

Chapter Nineteen

Comparing the Incomparable:
On the Use of the Holocaust as an Analogy in
Contemporary Social Issues and Education

The realms of Holocaust studies and—more specifically—Holocaust education are often legitimised politically and pedagogically through reference to their formative role in the identity building and moral formation of students and societies. Holocaust education is then seen as an instrument to fight antidemocratic ideologues of exclusivism, racism, antisemitism and the like. The presupposition, here, is that by studying *the past of* the Holocaust, the eyes of the students will be opened *for the present*, and for the abuses and evils of the current historical moment. By studying the past in this way, one thinks and anticipates that a feeling of connectedness can be created to bring about a more welcoming contemporary society—especially, for today, *vis-à-vis* refugees. For this to work, Holocaust education often must draw parallels between the Nazi Holocaust and current events, such as the fate of Muslim refugees in Europe and other places in the world. As in the thirties, it seems that today our attitude towards refugees is also characterised by indifference and even enmity. 'The Holocaust started with a refugee crisis' or 'Muslims are the new Jews' are parallels made in popular political rhetoric. Indeed, sensitive and even controversial parallels, such as the confiscation of refugees' possessions at the borders or the recent prohibition of refugees entering swimming pools in different European countries, are easy to find. At the same time, however, we also see in the public debate today a strong and occasionally violent rejection of all possible analogies between the Holocaust and actual political events, including the refugee crisis. Analogies are presented as superficial, not respectful of the uniqueness of the Holocaust and its victims, and even as false and dangerous. Refugees, for example, are not seen as people fleeing from cruel regimes, but as terrorists threatening our national security, perpetrators (potential or real) of new evil and violence.

In this chapter we question how to respond as a Holocaust scholar to the never-ending humanitarian crises of refugees all over the world, and especially on the use or misuse of the Holocaust and Holocaust

comparisons in this context. Can we make historical and moral comparisons between Holocaust refugees and actual refugees e.g. from the Arabic world? Do we need such comparisons, in order to condemn the inhuman treatment of refugees today? How can we avoid that the Holocaust becomes a political instrument in the hands of left or right wing politics in a battle on the place of Islam in the west? And how do we do this without reducing the Holocaust to a historical event, potentially disappearing in the twentieth century and becoming more and more irrelevant as a 'memory for the future'?

I develop the argument that there are different ways to understand the relationship between history and present social context and that this also creates different approaches to the role of Holocaust studies in general and Holocaust education in particular in contemporary society. I will distinguish three paradigms to understand the relationship between (the) history (of the Holocaust) and the present context and apply it to the contemporary discussion on refugees in the West. Each of these ways of dealing with the history of the Holocaust has its own presuppositions and rationality, as well as strengths and weaknesses. Out of this analysis, I will try to develop my own approach and show what this implies for dealing with refugee crisis in a post-Holocaust perspective.

I. Paradigms of Holocaust Education

There is no consensus among historians as to the role of history in contemporary socio-political discourse, with some of them at times questioning if it should play a role at all. For my part, I see three groups of historians in this discussion. Traditional historians focus on history as the study of the past, emphasising both the originality and the independent nature of the discipline. History is unique and contextual. The past is not something in service of the present. Other historians are convinced that study of the past is guided by the presupposition of sameness between past and present, expressed through a form of solidarity between teachers and students and a concern for the common good of our societies. In this way, history can strengthen moral categories in uncertain times. A third group of historians will argue that in studying the past, there is an unavoidable engagement with the present and the future: that a historian is always involved, and that becoming aware of this unavoidable involvement is an essential task of historiography. In more philosophical terms: the first group of historians are concerned with the interpretation of the text (a good reconstruction of history); the second group is relating

this to the interpretation of the actual context; and the third group is aware that not only a hermeneutics of the text and a hermeneutics of the context are necessary, but also a hermeneutics of the interpreting subject—the activity of the historian himself or herself. We first describe these three different approaches to the past more systematically[1].

1. *The premodern paradigm: historicism*

'Historicism' is the first approach that was developed to understand the relationship between past and present. In the nineteenth century, the famous historian Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) saw a rupture between the past and the present. Contemporary societies are so different from our previous contexts that we cannot speak of a spontaneous continuity between the past and the present. The academic science of history should respect the autonomy of the past and the specificity of each historical era. The idea is that history should be studied for itself and should not impose 'lessons' on the immediate present. Historical research is about *bloss zeigen wie es eigentlich gewesen* (von Ranke)[2]: "only to say, how it really was" or "…in its own light". At that time, historical research started almost exclusively from official sources: political declarations, diplomatic correspondence or military information. In an educational setting, historical study functions to introduce students to the canon of Western history and culture through the transmission of historical facts and figures. Special attention is given in this model to the saints and sinners of each historical period, the heroes whose example can be followed and the anti-heroes whose behaviour should be condemned. The main critique on this model today is its lack of awareness of the social and economic developments in history and its lack of attention for the daily life of concrete people in history, especially victims whose voices cannot be found in the official sources of history. Nevertheless, this paradigm remains important for the academic approach to history today.

2. *The modern paradigm: the turn to social sciences*

After the Holocaust, historicism was strongly criticised. It seemed we had learned nothing from history. The stories of heroes and anti-heroes

[1] A. Schampaert, *et. al.*, *Opvattingen en praktijken ten aanzien van het gebruik van heden en verleden in het geschiedenisonderwijs*, Leuven, School of Education, 2011.
[2] L. von Ranke, *Geschichten der Romanischen und Germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1535*, Leipzig, Duncker & Humblot, 1824, Vorrede, p. 1.

not only failed to prevent evildoers coming to power but, perhaps, even contributed to their rise. The educational authority and the very meaning of history as a teaching subject in classrooms were seriously questioned. The trauma of the war had undermined the naïve belief that objectively studying the praiseworthiness of the past was enough to create a better future. For many historians, history has to become a social science, connecting the past with the social concerns of the present, and with special attention for the stories past and present of ordinary people. History has to be reflected upon with the contemporary context and its questions as the starting point. In schools, history is legitimised because and as far as it contributes to the preparation of students to participate in a democratic society. This attention for the social function of history was strengthened by a general tendency in education from the sixties to make school more relevant for young people's real lives, to appeal to their interests and their future. An extreme form of this approach is that history is *only* relevant *as far as* it has something to say about the present. From this perspective, history for the sake of history within the school curriculum comes under pressure and is even questioned by a modern educational system that becomes more and more ruled by efficient outcomes and socioeconomic goals. This reductionism is the strongest critique against this approach.

3. *The postmodern paradigm: (de)constructivism as challenge and goal*

From the eighties on, postmodern philosophy started to influence historiography. Central to this new approach is that we never have a direct access to history. All knowledge, historical knowledge included, is mediated knowledge. The past always presents itself through historical representations and reconstructions. Not only are these reconstructions influenced by the past and the present, but also by the people making the constructions, their presuppositions, their open and hidden agendas, their reading of the facts. This is not a problem as such. Over and over again, the past has been given new forms in the present by the voices of new generations. The re-construction of history is an ongoing and global process each day I open my newspaper. We re-write history continuously. Every society tries to approach history from its own perspective, tries to reconstruct it and then give meaning to it. Education should take notice of the evolving and even conflicting interpretations that are given to history to show what interests, agendas, concerns, power games, cultural presuppositions, gender dimensions, and so on play a role in this process. This again closely follows general evolutions in pedagogy: in a postmodern

context, students should become active participants in the process of deconstructing and reconstructing (historical) knowledge. The critique of this model is that it ends with relativism: if everything is interpretation and construction, and if every presentation of history can be deconstructed, it becomes impossible to say something about the past.

The different understandings of the relationships between past and present, or between history and contemporary context also influence the way Holocaust education and Holocaust educators understand and define themselves[3]. The presentation of the three models of history also allows us to construct three different types of Holocaust education. In fact, these are only theoretical constructs, and real Holocaust educators will always be a mix of these different approaches and types.

II. Orientations of Holocaust Education

1. *The past-oriented Holocaust educator*

This approach is inspired by historicism as paradigm. The Holocaust is studied in the classroom or auditorium independently and for its own sake. The starting point is that the Holocaust is somehow fundamentally detached from our own context and time. Students need to learn the strange and new facts of the Holocaust. Events have to be situated in their original historical context using primary sources that allows us to enter into the 'real' world of the Holocaust. The value of this 'contextualisation' is evident, but the risk of such an approach is that students start to think that the Holocaust has nothing to do with their own lives. Epistemologically, the Holocaust scholar thinks he has unmediated access to the past. In this realistic approach, 'history' and 'past' coincide. In terms of Holocaust history, no distinction is made between history as study of the past and the past itself. Based on this realism, the Holocaust educator believes that all historical knowledge of the Holocaust is objective, certain and unchangeable.

2. *The present-oriented Holocaust educator*

Holocaust education starts from the present. The teacher motivates the students to study the Holocaust by including references to contemporary

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[3] A. Schampaert, *Opvattingen en praktijken*, p. 18-21.

social issues and challenges. The contemporary social climate is the source, point of reference and final concern of Holocaust education. The past is (only) helpful insofar as it contributes to a better understanding of the present. Sometimes the Holocaust is presented as the logical and linear culmination point of centuries of history. This approach can cultivate the idea that in history nothing is new, that everything comes back around and that a lot of evil is 'of all times'. The Holocaust educator searches for continuity more than discontinuity and for analogies more than differences in the relation between past and present. This type of Holocaust education does not strive for 'detachment' but for 'engagement' in the relation between past and present. Epistemologically, this Holocaust educator also starts from a 'realistic' position: the past is knowable and our knowledge of it is certain and objective.

3. *The postmodern Holocaust educator*

This type of Holocaust education will begin with the manifold ways the difference between the Holocaust and the actual context is expressed and experienced. The central idea in this approach is that the past is repeatedly reconstructed. The educator wants to make clear to students that history never comes to us unmediated, as something directly knowable. Students need to become aware of the different interpretations that exist when looking at the Holocaust. The postmodern Holocaust educator will use the Holocaust to show students how societies present the past and how collective memory plays a role in reconstructing the past. This can end in a certain historical relativism: there are not many things that are certain about the past because the past comes to us through reconstructions and through the presuppositions of people. Epistemologically, this kind of perspectivism is typical for the postmodern mindset. History is not the same as the past, but a reconstruction of the past. Historical knowledge is not certain and objective, but changeable and highly subjective.

III. Holocaust Education in Context

In the debate on the use of the Holocaust in the refugee crisis, we see how the different paradigms come back and work with or against each other. We illustrate each of the approaches with concrete positions that are defended in relating the past of the Holocaust with the present

refugee crisis. We start with the second, modern paradigm, which is the most common in popular media and politics. We then show how certain historians stop short of making easy comparisons, based more on arguments from the premodern paradigm. We finally make clear how a postmodern Holocaust educator would approach the use of the Holocaust in contemporary discussions on refugees.

1. *"Today, to our shame, Anna Frank is a Syrian girl"*

In Washington, DC on December 15, 2015, President Obama gave an address at a ceremony marking the 224th anniversary of the ratification of the Bill of Rights and drew a comparison between Syrian refugees at that moment and Jewish refugees during World War II. "In the Mexican immigrant today—we see the Catholic immigrant of a century ago. In the Syrian seeking refuge today, we should see the Jewish refugee of World War II. In these new Americans, we see our own American story", the US president said[4]. His address came after the publication, ten days earlier, of a letter on refugees to the US Congress from more than 1000 Rabbis. This letter refers to the well-known tragedy of 1939, when the St. Louis boat was refused to dock in the United States, sending over 900 Jewish refugees back to Europe, where many died in extermination camps:

> That moment was a stain on the history of our country—a tragic decision made in a political climate of deep fear, suspicion and anti-Semitism. The Washington Post released public opinion polling from the early 1940's, showing that the majority of U.S. citizens did not want to welcome Jewish refugees to this country in those years.[5]

The conclusion of the letter is: "Let us not make the same mistake again". The paradigm behind this approach is clear, simple and appealing: the refugee crisis parallels the Holocaust, potentially or in reality; the Holocaust should be condemned and, thus, the treatment of actual refugees should be morally condemned before it is too late. Comparisons help make political decisions appear in-effect more humane. Reference is often made in this approach to the arguments that

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[4] *Remarks by the President at Naturalization Ceremony*, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, published December 15, 2015, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/15/remarks-president-naturalization-ceremony.

[5] *1,000+ Rabbis Sign Letter In Support of Welcoming Refugees*, hias.org, delivered December 2, 2015, https://www.hias.org/1000-rabbis-sign-letter-support-welcoming-refugees.

were used during the Second World War to limit the income of refugees— namely, the fear, often inspired by anti-Semitism, that the Nazis would plant agents, spies and saboteurs among the Jewish refugees and that Jews with families in Germany could be put under pressure to collaborate from abroad with the Nazi regime. These kind of arguments very much parallel the arguments used by Western countries to accept refugees today. A reference to the Holocaust helps show what could be the catastrophic outcome of such argumentation. In an article in the *New York Times* of August 25, 2016, columnist Nicholas Kristof parallels the anti-refugee hysteria of the 1930s and 1940s with Syrian refugees, concluding his text provocatively with the quote: "Today, to our shame, Anna Frank is a Syrian girl", putting similar pictures of Anne Frank and a wounded Syrian girl next to each other[6]. One can imagine that this text and pictures have been used in many classrooms all over the world to show both the remaining relevance of the Holocaust and our moral and political obligations to refugees. The message is strong, concrete and historical. At the same time, the column gave rise to a big controversy.

2. *"The Syrian Refugee Crisis is Not Another Holocaust"*[7]

A second approach starts more from the concrete historical reality of the Holocaust and its specific and even radically unique characteristics. In this way, it warns against comparing refugees traveling from Syria to Western countries with Jewish Holocaust era refugees. These comparisons are seen as 'superficial', 'historically inaccurate', and even in contradiction with the message of the Holocaust and generating new anti-Semitism by denigrating the horrors of the Holocaust. This is more typical of the first paradigm of 'historicism' as we described it in this chapter: the Holocaust needs to be respected and studied in itself, and easy comparisons should be avoided and criticised. Of course, the Holocaust has its heroes, such as Anne Frank, but they cannot be compared too easily with Syrian refugees today. In an article in *The Algemeiner*, Michael Werner brings together the most common arguments against a historical comparison between the (Jewish) refugees of World War II and the (Muslim)

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[6] See also for the two pictures: N. Kristof, *Anne Frank Today Is a Syrian Girl*, published August 25, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/25/opinion/anne-frank-today-is-a-syrian-girl.html.

[7] C.D. Dunst, *forward.com*, published February 3, 2017, http://forward.com/scribe/362157/no-the-syrian-refugee-crisis-is-not-another-Holocaust/.

refugees[8]: 1. Jewish refugees were no threat to anyone, while refugees escaping Syria are involved in a war in their own country "in which they are on one side or another"[9]; 2. Jewish refugees could be killed everywhere, while this was not the case for (almost) all Muslims who were seeking migration; 3. Jewish refugees were fleeing for their lives with no place to go, while Syrian refugees were fleeing for a normal or safer existence with the option to travel to a neighbouring Arabic country; 4. Jewish refugees had no conflict or problem with the West, while the Arab world is in an open war with the West; 5. Jewish refugees were not bringing any terrorist problem to the Western countries, while Islamic violence and terrorism is already associated with Muslim refugees; 6. Jewish refugees were stateless people, while Muslim refugees could turn to Muslim countries (that refused them nevertheless). Holocaust education in this paradigm will make clear to the students that the historical contexts of both refugee crises are very different and thus that the moral critique *vis-à-vis* the treatment of Jews during the Second World War should not automatically imply a blind moral or political support for refugees today. In this Holocaust education, discontinuity takes over from a too easy continuity.

3. *"Historical comparisons are never non-binding"*[10]

A Holocaust educator in the postmodern paradigm will teach his students that there is no unmediated presentation of the Holocaust and that comparisons as well as rejections of comparisons are always based on a selective presentation of the Holocaust—a construction, one that can be explained by looking into the philosophical, ethical and political presuppositions of the person who speaks. Here, attention is not only given to the hermeneutics of the text (historicism) or the hermeneutics of the context (social sciences) but also to the hermeneutics of the interpreting subject (constructivism and deconstruction). What is driving the interpreting subject? Anxiety or solidarity? Identity or alterity? Elimination of risk or vulnerability towards otherness?

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[8] M. WELNER, *algemeiner.com*, published December 27, 2015, https://www.algemeiner.com/2015/12/27/we-cannot-allow-comparisons-of-mideast-refugees-to-Holocaust-survivors/.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] T. BOEYKENS – D. BRUNEEL – L. NYS, *demorgen.be*, published August 24, 2017, https://www.demorgen.be/opinie/historische-vergelijking-tussen-nazisme-en-jihadisme-is-niet-onschuldig-bb471830/.

Cognition or affection? Concern for the uniqueness of the Holocaust or sensitivity for its universal dimension? And finally: left wing political conviction that (legitimately) is welcoming refugees or a right wing political conviction that (legitimately) is concerned with national security for its citizens? A postmodern Holocaust educator will show students how analyses are made from the present towards the past. It is because someone has certain moral or political presuppositions that he will construct history in this or that way. A postmodern Holocaust education will thus take a meta-perspective, see how historians construct the Holocaust and de-construct these presentations by showing how they are driven by the hermeneutics of the interpretation behind it (e.g. a Marxist reading of history or an Islamophobic attitude). A consequence could be relativism: one can do everything with the Holocaust depending on one's moral, ideological or political agenda. This can be very discouraging for students and is also paradoxical: in asking for clear and immediate moral rejection, the Holocaust enters into a dynamic that leads towards political powerlessness, moral relativism and even existential nihilism.

IV. Towards a New, Integrated Approach:
'Recontextualising' History Time and Again

"It happened, therefore it can happen again" (Primo Levi)[11]

Most Holocaust education will be a mix of the three mentioned paradigms of studying history. Every approach has its strengths and risks. Therefore, a certain combination of these approaches is necessary. The advantage of a past-oriented Holocaust education is its stress on discontinuity: the past cannot be sublated into sameness with the present, but must be stressed for its uniqueness. A danger of this approach is its possible unworldliness, its glorification of heroes and diabolisation of perpetrators and its neutralisation of the Holocaust as a story with a moral, worldly-relevance to the present. A present-oriented Holocaust education will stimulate the interest of the audience, weighing as equal the understanding of both past and present, and will thus disclose the continuity between past and present and show a strong present moral

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[11] P. LEVI, *Se questo è un uomo; La tregua; Il Sistema periodico; I sommersi et I salvati* (Collected Works), Turin, Einaudi, 1987, pp. 818-819.

concern. Dangers here are of selecting historical facts based solely on their relevance for today and of a too-quick moral judgement of the past starting from one's own presuppositions. A postmodern approach will give attention to the reconstruction of the past and to the fact that reality is only knowable through mediations. Here, the danger is a form of historical and moral relativism and even an indifference towards the unknowable and always subjective past.

Beyond historicism, moral recuperation and postmodern deconstructionism, we propose 'recontextualisation' as a new way to deal with the Holocaust in education[12]. The Holocaust always appears in new contexts, and new generations 're-contextualise' it: the Holocaust receives new meanings and a new plausibility for every new generation and context. In 'recontextualisation' the concern for the historical, moral and social meaning of the Holocaust for our context is central (contra historicism) even if not easy to answer (contra social reductionism). The complexity of dealing with continuity and discontinuity is central. The process of recontextualisation is a hermeneutical activity that comes about through a threefold hermeneutics: the hermeneutics of the text (the history of the Holocaust), the hermeneutics of the context (our society or community) and the hermeneutics of the interpreting subject (the active subject that deals with history). The first hermeneutics will make clear that no historical parallels are perfect. The refugees of today are not the refugees of the past. The past has its own context and its own specific logic that deserves to be studied as such. The past is not merely a 'prehistory' of the present time, but a specific culture that is strange to our time. A historian is a specialist, looking from a distance. Taking distance is necessary to study the strangeness of the past. But the rupture between past and present is not complete. And the Holocaust is not just a neutral object of study but a horrific event that makes an appeal to our moral, social and political responsibility today. If the historical uniqueness of the Holocaust is taken to the highest absolute, then its remembrance cannot help but become irrelevant. Our context is wrestling with the same hermeneutical conflicts as that of the past—in our case, the tension between issues of moral compassion and (inter)national security. There are differences between now and then. But there are also very disturbing

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[12] For the concept of 'recontextualisation' in an educational context, see: D. POLLEFEYT – J. BOUWENS, *Identity in Dialogue. Assessing and Enhancing Catholic School Identity* (*Christian Religious Education and School Identity* 1), Zürich – Berlin, LIT-Verlag, 2014, p. 472.

similarities between the rhetoric of today and the treatment of Jewish refugees during the Second World War. Recontextualisation will take these similarities seriously and re-evaluate them in light of our new context. As Primo Levi summarised the whole of his work: "It happened, therefore it can happen again." Also in our context. The present is not cut off from the past, as historicism thinks. But historical events are not, as the modern paradigm often presupposes, predetermined: history can take another course. "It *can* happen again", not: it *will* happen again. Recontextualisation takes responsibility for the future of history. Also, this act of recontextualising history should always be critical of its own comparative enterprise and the possible counterproductive (even anti-Semitic) effects. In a remarkable contribution *The Problem of Comparing Syrian and Jewish Refugees*, Phoebe Maltz Bovy makes an interesting deconstructive analysis of moral comparisons between past and present. For her, comparisons put Jews again at the centre stage of world history as points of reference and symbols of universal suffering:

> And it's not (…) that Jewish-analogizing *is anti-Semitic*. (…) The problem is that in the aggregate, this repeated centering of Jews, these repeated rhetorical reminders of Jews, no matter what the subject at hand, have a way of further installing Jews in the position of eternal symbol. And it's not so great at the symbolic center[13].

The reflections of Bovy are an example of the critical mindset needed in all efforts of recontextualisation. These efforts do not only take the past and the present into account, but also the future. Her question is simple but right on the spot: "Consider the assumption that lies at the heart of the comparison: No one today would think to advocate for turning away Jews, right? To which I feel compelled to ask: are we so sure?"[14]. In a process of recontextualising the Holocaust, one is aware that anything *can* happen again: not only to new refugee victims, but to the original Jewish refugees as well, creating new forms of anti-Semitic violence. We have thus a moral responsibility in representing the Holocaust in our context. In an unwritten future, nobody is safe from becoming a victim. Every recontextualisation of the Holocaust should be done with care, with a sense for complexity, in responsibility for old and, potentially, new victims. "It happened, therefore it can happen again".

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[13] P.M. Bovy, *newrepublic.com*, published November 20, 2015, https://newrepublic.com/article/124298/problem-comparing-syrian-jewish-refugees.

[14] *Ibid.*

It is that awareness that drives the recontextualisation of the Holocaust. Historical events have a high degree of unpredictability, but if we consciously and critically recontextualise the past, we create the best possible context to prevent new people, whoever they are, from becoming victims of history in the future.

Section Thirteen

Politics

Chapter Twenty

Politics and Ethics in the Land of Israel

I. The End of Powerlessness

In contemporary Jewish thinking the legitimacy of the state of Israel is often defended from out of the need for Jewish political self-determination— particularly following upon the tragic situation of utter powerlessness during the Holocaust in Europe. According to Emil Fackenheim, Jews may not carry out what Hitler failed to do: destroy Judaism and its ethical message[1]. After Auschwitz, Jewish survival has itself become sacred, a moral and even religious obligation.

The logic behind this approach is certainly understandable and legitimate: no people can ignore being concerned about their safety. One can refer here to the critique that has been formulated against Jews after World War II for allowing themselves to be led as sheep to the slaughter in Auschwitz[2]. One cannot criticise the Jewish people for being too passive in confrontation with anti-jewish violence and at the same time reject their efforts to establish a safe social and political space. To continue choosing or undergoing powerlessness as a community would —as Rubenstein makes clear—be completely immoral for the Jewish people both in light of Europe's catastrophic history as well as the unremitting Arab (death-)threats to the state of Israel.

While the legitimacy of the state of Israel and the entrance of the Jews upon the political scene is certainly not being questioned, one can nonetheless discuss the underlying ethical and theological frame of thought that is often employed in legitimating this political coming-into-being. In Fackenheim's thinking, Jewish survival simply becomes a witness for the Good against the forces of evil in the world. In this Manichaean scheme of thinking the distinction between authenticity ('loyalty') and inauthenticity ('betrayal') is often theologically and ethically redefined in terms of the unconditional support or threat one

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[1] E. FACKENHEIM, *To Mend the World. Foundations of Future Jewish Thought*, New York, Schocken Books, 1982.

[2] H. ARENDT, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, New York, Grove Press, 1978, pp. 246-248.

presents to the state of Israel. Critique towards the politics of the state of Israel becomes almost absent or impossible.

II. Land and State

At this point, it becomes immediately clear how complex the relation can be between Holocaust studies and the Israeli-Palestinian debate, especially for a Christian scholar. As a Christian Holocaust scholar, one can devote oneself to the correction and eradication of anti-Jewish elements in Christian theology and praxis and one can engage in Jewish-Christian dialogue, as a moral and theological answer to the drama of the Holocaust. This answer will imply the recognition of the *historical* and *theological* legitimacy of the claims of the Jewish people on the *land* of Israel. In this way, one can build up trust and even restore religious relations between Judaism and Christianity on the individual and institutional level; relations that have been disrupted for many centuries, mainly because of religious and theological arrogance of a powerful Christian majority in the course of history. But when it comes to the *political* discussion on the effective *State* of Israel, some Jewish partners in dialogue expect that the Christian engagement in post-Holocaust interreligious dialogue *automatically* translate itself in an *unconditional* support for the *politics* of the State of Israel. Even more, some Jewish partners in dialogue assume that *because of the Holocaust*, especially because of the collective guilt of Christendom for the Holocaust, to which all Christians participate[3], Christians should support unconditionally the State of Israel and its politics. The *a priori* political support for the State of Israel then even becomes a kind of test for the trustworthiness of Christians after Auschwitz. A Christian Holocaust scholar who dares to nuance this scheme then runs the risk of being depicted immediately as unreliable, as someone who has finally not overcome anti-Semitism and who cannot be trusted in light of the safety of future Jewish generations. This translates itself easily in the accusation that one is opening the gate for a new Holocaust against the Jewish people. Christian scholars are not the only ones running risks when they engage in the discussion around the future of the state of Israel. Everyone who enters this discussion as a scholar, as a (Jewish, Christian, Moslem) believer, as a politician, as a civilian, etc. can be forced at a certain point to 'confess colour' and run

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[3] See Chapter Eleven: *Forgiveness after the Holocaust.*

the risk then to be judged and even condemned as 'loyal' or 'disloyal' to this or that ideological or nationalistic perspective.

III. Beyond Manichaeism

This chapter starts by taking distance from these patterns of post-Holocaust thinking that on the basis of a Manichaean political use of the Holocaust choose to characterise any criticism upon Jewish political self-determination automatically as evil because it would be a betrayal of the Holocaust. Such an ethical and theological use of Auschwitz ultimately leads to indifference to the history of liberation of others, in particular the Palestinians. It will be the thesis of this chapter that precisely this Manichaean use of the Holocaust is disloyal to the legacy of the Holocaust itself and the solidarity that it asks for *all* victims in the world, Jews and non-Jews. Our analysis is driven by the idea that being a victim of past evil does not make oneself *automatically* immune to become a perpetrator in the future, even on the contrary. As paradoxically as it may sound from a Manichaean perspective on the Holocaust, this thesis is formulated out of a moral and theological concern for protecting the memory of the Holocaust and for Jewish survival, because precisely the continuous, ideological reconstruction of the Holocaust as an argument in blind support of contemporary Israeli politics is becoming a new source of criticism and rejection of the Holocaust, and even of anti-Semitism, not only in the minds of some extremely dangerous Arabic terrorists, but, perhaps even worse, in the minds of many 'ordinary' people, all over the world.

IV. Exodus

We hereby attempt to give central focus to that delicate balance between Holocaust and entrance into political history. While we wholeheartedly recognise that the future of the Jewish people can only be guaranteed by having a state, we would also plead that Jewish selfhood should be intimately bound up with the liberation struggle of others[4].

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[4] See the work of M.H. ELLIS, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation: the Uprising and the Future*, Orbis Books, 1989; ID., *Ending Auschwitz: the Future of Jewish and Christian Life*, Westminster, John Knox Press, 1994; ID., *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation: the Challenge of the Twentieth-First Century*, Waco, Baylor University Press, 2004.

Becoming politically powerful is to be suspected when others are made the victims of it. If the Jewish people do not allow themselves in this difficult balancing act between selfhood and power to be challenged by the memory of their own powerlessness, then the danger unfolds of hardening oneself to the suffering of others. It thereby becomes even more difficult to formulate a witness that is in harmony with one's own history of suffering, with the Biblical tradition of respect for the stranger and with the moral lessons of the Holocaust. Paradoxically, it is perhaps Christianity, itself having persecuted the Jewish people both religiously and socially with its anti-Judaism, which through the contribution of Christian liberation theology could help set Judaism back on the path of its own tradition of Exodus out of slavery, of the prophetic 'no!' against injustice and idolatry, and in this way challenge it towards recapturing aspects of its own history. This idea can be seen (and neutralised) as a sign of Christian arrogance. True interreligious dialogue however presupposes a kind of elementary symmetric relation between the partners in dialogue. Christians can learn in this view from Jews, and Jews can learn from Christians, even if, because of historical and moral reasons, the Christians are the first to listen and learn, and the Jews are the first to speak and to teach. In a symmetric dialogue, however, Christians can also at certain points mirror back the common biblical idea that the Jewish people can only be true to its own biblical values by showing solidarity for the liberation struggle of others. It has to be prepared to cooperate towards making an end to the spiral of violence. Self-determination can never be an end in itself, neither is it ever unambiguous. It is merely an intermediate stopping place along the way to liberation *or to use Mandela's phrase*: on "the long walk to freedom"[5]. Power on its own, even for the sake of survival, without the guidance of ethics and a passionate feeling of solidarity with all who suffer, creates new evil and signifies a tragic end to the hope for full liberation.

V. Rabin

On 4 November 1995, the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated. Rabin had dared to go against an established and sacral pattern of the 'good Jew' versus the 'bad Palestinian' and instead reconnected with a strong Biblical tradition of respect for the stranger as

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[5] N. MONDELA, *Long Walk to Freedom: the Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, London, Little Brown, 1994.

bearer *par excellence* of the image of God. As an astute politician and experienced soldier he also realised that a military defeat can best be avoided by making peace while one is strong. With the handshake between Rabin and Arafat on the lawn of the White House in Washington the end of the downward spiral of violence and reprisals of which the Jewish people were both object and subject came nearer, and for the first time in the history of the Middle East a hopeful perspective was opened for a lasting peace between Jews and Palestinians. In the immortal words of Yitzhak Rabin: "[W]e who have fought against you, the Palestinians — we say to you today in a loud and clear voice: Enough of blood and tears. Enough. […] We, like you, are people who want to build a home, to plant a tree, to love, live side by side with you—in dignity, in empathy, as human beings, as free men"[6].

Whereas the young Orthodox Jew and murderer Amir attempted to reinstate the certainty and validity of the Manichaean pattern of 'Jews' against 'Palestinians', he in fact paradoxically achieved the opposite. He confronted numerous Jews with the shocking realisation that evil could tinge their narrative too. By his actions he managed to falsify in front of the whole world the very ethical and theological framework that he was seeking to defend. Amir's crime was essentially inspired by a fear of the universal character of Jewish ethics, more precisely the fact that the Jewish covenant can only be fully realised when one accepts that Jews and Palestinians share a single destiny and that the question is only one of how best to share this destiny in the most human way possible.

Rabin's murder was the malignant protest against Israel's attempt to set an end to the spiral of violence. While one can point to the Orthodox background of Amir, Rabin's killer, one should also state that his basic convictions were shared—whether explicitly or in milder forms—by Jews from extremely disparate religious and political viewpoints. We should not socially and politically isolate and abnormalise Amir (as 'an extremist exception') the way some Jewish commentators sometimes did at that time. This was how the wider political community in Israel sometimes attempted to shift the blame from itself and avoided confronting the danger of the underlying and even further degeneration of ethics into a mere ethnocentric politics of self-interest.

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[6] Y. RABIN (1922–1995), *Remarks by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on the Occasion of the Signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles*, Washington, DC, September 13, 1993. Full text: http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/mfadocuments/pages/remarks%20by%20pm%20yitzhak%20rabin%20at%20signing%20of%20dop%20-%2013.aspx [accessed March 1, 2018].

VI. Christian Self-Criticism

But to this criticism must also be added a sharp warning. In the foregoing we developed a prophetic criticism on the Israeli situation and a post-Auschwitz exhortation to radicalise and universalise the Jewish ethic to welcome the stranger. Jewish victimhood carries with it no moral prerogative. The murder of Rabin by a fellow Jew and citizen was the shocking proof that evil does not merely lurk in the other but also in one's own. Christians might happen to abuse this by pointing a one-sided finger at the Jewish people in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict[7]. When the Christian world today finds itself so easily incensed on behalf of the Palestinians in Israel, it should first confront its own moral anger. Christians who think that the Middle East problem is merely a Jewish problem forget in fact to confront themselves with their own history of centuries of Christian anti-Judaism, which has itself made of Jewish life a problem. In other words, if Christians—especially in Europe—are only indignant about the historical wrongs of the Israeli's and not about their own history of anti-Jewish wrongs, then they are no different from those Jews who only see the historical wrong that was done unto them and no longer the wrong that Israeli's inflict. In that sense, Christians do not have the right to level ethical questions at Israeli Jews without at the same time *and with equal* urgency being engaged in looking for a solution to the centuries-old and legitimate question of Jewish (in)security. The one-sided European indignation at Israeli injustice to the Palestinians should thus be the reminder and challenge for Christians to face up to their own historical responsibility for the drama in the Middle East. When Christian peace movements lose sight of this, their interventions in the debate lose credibility and are even arrogant.

VII. Majority and Minority

The difficulty and paradox of the Israeli-Palestinian question is that both communities are *at the same time* a minority and majority [8].The Palestinians are a foreign minority in Israel, but *simultaneously* the Israeli Jews remain a foreign minority within an inimical Arab world that is part

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[7] D.J. FASCHING, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Apocalypse or Utopia?*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993, pp. 157-160.
[8] G.H. COHEN STUART, *Een bevrijdend woord uit Jeruzalem? In gesprek met Joodse en Palestijnse bevrijdingstheologie*, 's-Gravenhage, Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1991.

Christian, part Islamic. The Middle East is no simple story of the evil and strong Israel against the good and weak Arabs, as many people in Europe think. The Middle East is an unfathomable world of cogwheels within cogwheels, of secret drawers which hide a complex network of secret alliances and inter-Arabic plots (and of which the Palestinian people itself has often been the victim!). When the Jew welcomes the Palestinian as stranger without the reverse happening, then this inevitably amounts to suicide for the Jewish people. Christian Holocaust scholars naturally do not resign themselves to this paradox, but rather help to pave a way out so that human beings choose to live in a shared world where there is mutual recognition among peoples. This way out cannot exist in our choosing one-sided positions. Some Christian voices today argue that if the Israelis were to resolve the Palestinian question they would win recognition and respect in the Middle East. Such a statement not only fails to appreciate the enormity of anti-Jewish sentiment present in Middle East countries today, but also historically returns the tensions in the Middle East to once more being a 'Jewish problem' in origin. It is then again exclusively the Jewish people who are the cause of anti-Jewish resentment. At the same time it exculpates the surrounding Arab world from fully engaging themselves in the Middle East peace problematic. Here the same reasoning should be developed as *vis-à-vis* Israeli's in relation to the fundamentalist Jew Amir. In confrontation with terrorist attacks by Muslim fundamentalist groups in Israel, Muslims all over the world, individually and collectively, should raise in protest, condemn the blind terrorist violence and show solidarity with innocent victims, non-Jews and Jews. In many cases, however, the silence of the Muslim world makes it guilty by omission. Here, Christians have specific responsibilities to develop next to Jewish-Christian dialogue, also Christian-Muslim relations and to promote the trialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The murderous suicide bomb attacks by Muslim extremist groups such as Hamas also indicate how extremely fragile an ethical option is for Israelis. They reveal the enduring legitimacy of political and military struggle, not as an end in itself, but as a political means that is sometimes (yet always in due proportion) necessary. Nevertheless, a choice needs to be made between two fundamentally different scenarios. In the first scenario Jews, as well as Palestinians, run the risk on the basis of their mounting hurts to once again immerse themselves into comfort giving —but violent—schemes of '*the*' bad Palestinian or '*the*' bad Jew, risking the peace process being thwarted time and again and the danger

becoming real that suicide bombers will in a tragic way have assured themselves a posthumous victory. In the second scenario Jews *and* Palestinians will be able to condemn evil together, mourn as one, and allow their hurts to heal. Real 'security' is more beneficially guaranteed through having good relations with the neighbours than by two parties maintaining a deadlocked, depleting and consuming repression.

VIII. Multi-Directed Partiality

What can be the specific contribution of a (Christian) Holocaust scholar to this peace making process? Holocaust scholars should start with an adequate historical-critical analysis of the Holocaust. The Holocaust happened in a very specific historical context. It was a historical event with unique and contextual characteristics. This historical analysis forms a critique *vis-à-vis* every easy comparison between the Holocaust and the politics of the State of Israel[9]. Securing Israel is in no way to be equated with Nazi genocide. Holocaust scholars can show how drawing such historical analogies is completely wrong both historically and morally. On the other hand, Holocaust scholars should elevate also the basic anthropological and political dynamisms at the origins of the Holocaust. The Holocaust refers to universal human and social phenomena. Manichaeism is in my analysis[10] the basic structure of the Nazi political system. Manichaeism is the radical ontological separation between good and evil, and the attribution of good to oneself and evil to the other, a movement in which one forgets (and in this way activates!) evil in oneself[11]. Even if the Holocaust is not reproduced historically in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the basic Manichaean structure of it reproduces itself continuously, creating new forms of violence in new contexts, also in the Middle East, both at the Israeli and the Palestinian side. Manichaeism is both the consequence of and the answer to an individual or social situation of violation of trust, giving 'destructive entitlement'[12] to its victims, in an endless circle of self-fulfilling prophecies. Only through a process of deconstructing Manichaeism,

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[9] See Chapter Nineteen: *Comparing the Incomparable.*

[10] See Chapter Three: *The Perpetrator: Devil, Machine or Idealist?* See also: D. POLLEFEYT (ed.), *Incredible Forgiveness. Christian Ethics between Fanaticism and Reconciliation*, Leuven, Peeters, 2004.

[11] See Chapter Ten: *Ethics and the Unforgivable After Auschwitz.*

[12] I. BOSZORMENYI-NAGY – B.R. KRASNER, *Between Give and Take. A Clinical Guido to Contextual Therapy*, New York, Brunner Mazel, 1986, p. 415.

there can be a real future for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Holocaust scholars should not be with the politics of the State of Israel as such, but with the victims of all conflicts, also in Israel. Through an attitude of multi-directed partiality, they should help the groups in conflict to exonerate each other, that it to help them to see how the other came to his or her position, and also to the violence in his or her position; not as a way to excuse the violence, but to help to understand and to de-diabolise the other and to re-asses one's own position.

IX. Binationalism

It was Hannah Arendt who for the first time in Holocaust studies broke with the paradigm of Manichaeism in her famous book on *Eichmann in Jerusalem*[13] and who analysed the origins of totalitarianism[14]. Perhaps it is also time to reconsider her political solution for the Israeli-Palestinian problem coming out—not accidentally—of her analysis: binationalism[15]. Binationalism is based on the idea that Israel should be transformed into a secular-constitutional state with Jews and Arabs as its national citizens. It can be summarised in the statement 'One Land for Two Peoples'. Binationalism is distinguished from the more familiar two-state solution, according to which two states, one Israeli and the other Palestinian are seen to coexist next to each other. It is also distinguished from the current situation in which one clear State of Israel coexists next to scattered Palestinian areas.

Binationalism is a value system that aims at the coexistence between peoples and communities that live on the same territory of historical Palestine, on the basis of equality and respect for the specificities of each of these groups. This system is the opposite of a philosophy of separation that forms the essence of the actual conflict between Israeli's and Palestinians. The philosophy of separation is Manichaeistic: the lesser contact with the other, the better: "they with them, we with us"[16]. Endorsing binationalism implies a radical change in the political

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[13] H. ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York, Viking Press, 1963.

[14] H. ARENDT, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New edition with added prefaces (Harvest book 224) New York, Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, 5th ed., 1973.

[15] A. RAZ-KRAKOTZKIN, *Binationalism and Jewish Identity: Hannah Arendt and the Question of Palestine*, in S. ASCHHEIM, *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2001, pp. 165-180.

[16] M. WARSCKAWKI, *Israël-Palestine: le défi binational*, Paris, Seuil, 2001.

approach of the Israeli-Palestinian problem, both for Israeli and Palestinian authorities, away from Manichaean ethics and politics. Instead of two conflicting parties appealing both to international law as arbiter, Israeli's and Palestinians accept in binationalism mutually each other's moral and juridical rights as members of one single political society. Instead of discussion among the division of territories, Israeli's and Palestinians (as a historically persecuted minority) both attach their demands to Israeli properties (law, education, economy, etc.) as national citizens of the State of Israel. A binational solution asks for a shift from two competing blocks in military or terrorist war, to individual and social groups within Israeli society all asking for justice by one court of judges protecting all inhabitants on the basis of universal, democratic and constitutionally guaranteed civil rights.

This defence of binationalism is in line with my analysis of the Holocaust in terms of Manichaean violence. Finally binationalism demands to end the 'ethics of war' between two conflicting parties fighting for the good and against evil, implying more and more deaths on both sides. It replaces Israeli military power and Palestinian martyrdom by an 'ethic of the legal claimant' (Abu-Odeh): "rights-obsessed, constitution-fixated, friend of the lawyer, unwelcome but tireless visitor to the courtroom"[17]. It brings in the *same* weights and measures for both Israeli's and Palestinians: ethics and justice.

> The argument for binationalism is that it would force both parties to engage in each other's discourses: force the Israelis to rise up to their claim of being an island of liberal democracy in the middle of an authoritarian desert, and force the Palestinians to give up the fantasy of military triumph in a war waged across the borders[18].

There are many problems connected with such a social and political model. They explain why there is not that much political support for this solution in Israel. A binational proposal demands e.g. for a (constant) redistribution of the economic wealth, which is not evident. It is not a romantic model, but at least it can diminish or prevent (but not necessarily eliminate) violence among the citizens of a country. With its critique against Manichaeism and its intrinsic violence, binationalism can be an answer to the post-Holocaust imperative not to hand Hitler posthumous victories.

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[17] L. ABU-ODEH, *The Case for Binationalism*, in *Boston Review. A Political and Literary Forum*, December 2001/January 2002. http://bostonreview.net/BR26.6/abu-odeh.html [accessed March 1, 2018].
[18] *Ibid.*

X. The Role of the Holocaust

The goal of this chapter is not to discuss in extent political solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian problem, but to scrutinise the role of Holocaust studies in the struggle with this problem. Research in Holocaust studies on the role of memory has shown how the remembrance of the past is never a pure reproduction of the historical facts but always a reconstruction of these facts; a reconstruction that not only reveals history itself, but also those who reconstruct it and that is also influenced by facts happening between the original historical event and the contemporary situation. This means that also new, post-Holocaust political agendas can enter the way the remembrance of the Holocaust is reconstructed. The more the historical distance is growing between the context of the Holocaust and the contemporary context, the less it is evident to draw an immediate line between the Holocaust and concrete, contemporary political or moral issues. Just as one cannot draw a self-evident comparison between the Nazi genocide and the repression of the Palestinians in Israel today, it is neither possible to draw an immediate moral line between the Nazi genocide and concrete decisions to be made in the politics of the state of Israel today. In both cases we can speak of the risk of a 'fundamentalist' reading of the meaning of the Holocaust (either in the form of negationism or extreme forms of Zionism legitimated by the Holocaust). Holocaust studies should criticise such recuperations of the Holocaust[19] both by the enemies of the legitimate struggle of the Jewish people to survive politically today as by a certain Israeli politics, because it is respectively an insult and an instrumentalisation *vis-à-vis* the legacy of the victims.

Such a critique on the ideological (mis)use of the Holocaust[20] is also an important antidote for the growing 'Holocaust fatigue' that arises more and more—at least in Europe—as a consequence of the ideological (mis)use of the Holocaust. This 'Holocaust fatigue'[21] is perhaps a softer anti-Jewish phenomenon then hard and explicit Holocaust denial, but nevertheless as dangerous, if not more dangerous, for the future of the Jewish people. It is among other things the result of a certain canonisation of the history in the Holocaust, fixing the meaning of the Holocaust in certain pre-programmed messages, serving certain clear or (seemingly) hidden moral, ideological or political agendas. In this way, one can conclude that if the memory of the Holocaust is not allowed any longer to be 'a dangerous

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[19] See Chapter Nineteen: *Comparing the Incomparable.*
[20] T. Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire*, Paris, Arléa, 1998.
[21] See Chapter Eighteen: *Overcoming Holocaust Fatigue in the Classroom.*

memory' also for the politics of the state of Israel, the state of Israel can become a danger for the memory of the Holocaust ('a memory in danger').

As the violence in Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues without an apparent end, an increasing number of people in the world are thinking that the separationist two-state idea is unable to produce a realistic and effective solution. The two-state idea to divide the contested territory into two nation-states on ethnic grounds seems not to be realisable because it fails to take into account either the complexity of the conflict or the degree of intertwining that exists and will continue to exist between the conflicting parties in the region. The goal of my chapter is thus not to demonize the two-state solution as such but, rather, to look for alternatives that perhaps can bring peace closer in the area. At the same time, my approach is a critique *vis-à-vis* the policy of the isolation of the Palestinian territories by the Israeli government as an (admittedly) excessive variant of a two-state solution. It is not understandable how a two-state solution can be defended at the same time that a fence/wall has been built to separate the two peoples. One Israeli journalist proclaims: "You can erect all the walls in the world here but you won't be able to overcome the fact that there is only one aquifer here and the same air and that all the streams run into the same sea. You won't be able to overcome the fact that this country will not tolerate a border in its midst"[22].

A former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, Meron Benvenisti, further compares the Israeli situation with the situation in South Africa, where an attempt to create a "homeland for the blacks" failed to solve the problems between blacks and whites. When it became clear that this scenario of 'decolonisation' was made to expel or transfer blacks, the proposal collapsed from within and was condemned by the international community. As the possibility for a two-state solution fades in the Middle East, there is an opportunity to advance new ideas as to how to escape the bloody impasse by creating an alternative conceptual universe. Originally the *enfant terrible* among the solutions for the Middle East, the democratic binational solution is moving more toward the centre of contemporary discussions; it is being discussed by people from different ideological and political backgrounds—not only from the Palestinian side, but from the Israeli side as well. According to Benvenisti,

> [We Israelis] should start to think differently, talk differently. Not to seize on this ridiculous belief in a Palestinian state or in the fence. Because in the end we are going to be a Jewish minority here. And

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[22] A. SHAVIT, *Ha'aretz*, August 8, 2003.

the problems that your children and my grandchildren are going to
have to cope with are the same ones that de Klerk faced in South
Africa. The paradigm, therefore, is the binational one. That's the
direction. That's the conceptual universe we have to get used to[23].

A binational solution is a combination—possible in many variants—
of unity with diversity, of 'one' and 'two'. For this reason, most modern
binationalist proposals involve a form of federalism or the recognition
that the state can comprise a number of self-governing regions
(or 'states'), united by a central ('federal') government. This federal
perspective is not a European solution for an Arab problem but a solution
that has been adopted in many parts of the world, such as in the United
States, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, and India. For historical
Palestine, it could mean a division of the land into Jewish and Arab
cantons.

Binationalism is an alternative to a two-state solution, which connotes,
in my view, an unfortunate binary opposition that binationalism does
not entail. The two-state *non*solution is a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is a
solution for the Manichaean mind trapped in binary thinking. It is at
one and the same time the ideal and the impossible solution. It is the
ideal solution because it divides the conflicting parties, but at the same
time it is the impossible solution because neither party trusts the other
enough to realise it. Many people in the Muslim world do not begrudge
Israel a safe and independent future, but the two-state solution is not
acceptable to most Muslims. Furthermore, an independent Palestinian
state would pose a greater security threat to Israelis than a binational
solution because such a state would house millions of Palestinians who
have endless claims that Israel cannot meet. In this sense, the two-state
solution fails to provide long-term security for Israel. A two-state solution
is presented by many as the only way out of the conflict, yet the violence
continues day after day, and a two-state solution is not likely to change
that state of affairs.

In the summer of 2005 Ariel Sharon, the Israeli prime minister at the
time, decided unilaterally to evacuate twenty-one settlements in Gaza
and the West Bank. Without any consultation with the Palestinian
president Mahmoud Abbas, Sharon demanded that the Palestinians
disarm Hamas and Islamic jihad. The evacuation from Gaza was
eventually completed 'successfully'; and the Palestinians celebrated. But
this division of territories did not bring peace to the region. The Gaza

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[23] M. BENVENISTI, *Ha'aretz*, August 8, 2003.

Strip is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. The 2016 population stands at about 1.9 million, giving the region a population density of 5239 people per square kilometre[24]. 42.7 percent of the population was below 15 years of age. As of this writing, Israel continues to control the borders and the airspace of Gaza. Gaza is, in this sense, an immense open-air prison, with 70 percent of its people holding refugee status in their own land. Additionally, unemployment in Gaza remained high for 2017, reaching 44 percent, with only 24.6 percent of working age Palestinians finding fulltime employment[25]. In this context, it can be predicted that organisations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad will continue to receive the support of many Palestinians. By withdrawing from Gaza, Sharon put the ball in the Palestinians' court, but in this context, Palestinian authorities will not be able to stop suicide attacks. The 'ideal' two-state solution continues to be the impossible solution.

The binational approach tries to bring another kind of resolution to the conflict by directly critiquing the process of mutual diabolisation —the engine driving the conflict—and the two-state solution that is bedevilled by that process. It is characteristic of this process of mutual diabolisation that both parties to the conflict situate evil solely in the other. Meanwhile, goodness is situated in oneself. Each selects from the identity of the other all those aspects that sustain and strengthen the construction of an evil 'other'; at the same time, each party avoids self-criticism. In this way, both parties can act violently in the name of the Good.

'Are not Palestinians more radically Manichaean?' is a typical Manichaean question presented from the Jewish side. And Palestinians could ask exactly the same question, albeit from the opposite perspective within a Manichaean worldview. The bottom line of these kinds of questions is: 'You are more evil than I am', or 'I have more reasons to mistrust and to violate you than you have to mistrust and to violate me'. Israelis will always find reasons why the Palestinians are more Manichaean than they are, while Palestinians will always find more reasons why Israelis are more Manichaean than they. Of course, these reasons have some objective grounding; 'the other' is to a certain degree Manichaean.

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[24] PCBS, *Palestine in Figures: 2017*, http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2362. pdf [accessed March 9, 2018].

[25] World Bank, *Economic monitoring report to the ad hoc liaison committee (English)*, March 19, 2018, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/324951520906690830/ pdf/124205-WP-PUBLIC-MAR14-5PM-March-2018-AHLC-Report.pdf [accessed April 6, 2018].

The problem is not in the facts but in the selection and the one-sided reconstruction of these facts. In the course of time, so much evil and violence have happened, legitimised by these constructions on both sides, that it has become impossible to say who is more or less evil than the other. At this point, the discussion mainly shifts to the question as to who has started the violence and injustice, and who is 'in the right'.

XI. Demography

Conflict resolution theories propose that these kinds of questions will never bring about peace but are themselves part of the problem. With regard to conflicts such as the one studied in this chapter, these theories argue for 'multidirected partiality'. Such a stance is not one that strives for unattainable objectivity but one that exerts effort toward a critical understanding of the perspectives of all the parties to a conflict. Instead of arguing who is most evil, my approach starts by attending to the legitimate goods that each party to the conflict wishes to protect: a safe future for its own people. In this approach, the question is not who is most evil but how one can do justice to a realisation of the goods that each party wants to protect. This outlook criticises evil on all sides. It recognises and defends the need for a safe place for both the Jewish people and the Palestinian people. Because of the demographic situation, it argues for a binational state with equal rights for both Israeli Jews and Palestinians. If, as I have argued, it seems impossible to divide the land, then one state would give all the land to all the people. In fact, this solution is not extreme. It realistically accepts the undeniable fact that Israel and the Occupied Territories already form one single state sharing the same transportation network, the same telephone system, and the same international frontiers.

With the practical implementation of a binational state, many questions will arise. One central question is whether Jews can feel safe in a binational state in which they will inevitably become a minority. I understand the Israeli fear that large numbers of Palestinians would enter the binational state, making Israelis a protected but less than all-powerful minority. Social politics make clear, however, that richer citizens have enormous and uneven power in liberal-democratic states. Even if Israelis constitute a quantitative minority, in light of their much better economic situation, they would still exercise overwhelming power in the new state. Moreover, in a binational context, the actual central line of

division between Israelis and Palestinians would be progressively replaced by many other lines of division; as in every other society, dividing lines would pivot around social class, worldview, gender, race, or local differences. From a socioeconomic perspective, the binational solution is more of a problem for Palestinians than for Israelis. Palestinians have reasons to fear that in one state in which they would be excluded from substantial economic and educational opportunities and goods, the international conflict will merely be transformed into internal economic and social strife between two peoples, strife that would now be more hidden from the international community. The binational solution must therefore be accompanied by a political program to foster social and political justice.

XII. Future

I understand that many Muslim and Jewish religious leaders are not prepared to live together in one state. Many Israelis and Palestinians have been educated to deny, distrust, and even hate each other to such an extent that recognising the humanity of the other is a very big step to take within one generation. Yet in a democratic binational state, there would be no place for Hamas and Islamic Jihad-groups that feed on hate. Such extremist movements constitute a problem for every proposed solution to the conflict in the Middle East. The binational solution takes away the 'fertile soil' of Manichaeism on which such movements flourish. Violence is the result of the absence of viable political alternatives to an unacceptable status quo. An important element of the binational solution is the call to the Palestinians to change drastically their politics of armed and violent struggle. When Israelis and Palestinians are treated on an equal basis under the law, fewer Palestinians will be motivated to blow themselves up; movements such as Hamas will become less popular when both sides realise that the fight is over and when they start to know each other in constructive ways.

A common home for Israelis and Palestinians cannot be built in one day. The process will be as long as it is transformative. It will probably take more time than the lengthy effort that has already been given —without positive results—to a proposed two-state solution. The binational solution cannot be imposed on people, but educational, juridical, economic, social, and political conditions can be created to favour it. Binationalism is an open, contextual, and always growing

process. It will have to start with small steps and local initiatives by grassroots peace movements—but also with political movements on a national scale. I am convinced that political processes will lead in that direction. Here are some concrete examples of my thesis: the presence of a room for Muslim prayer in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) and the idea to translate the Knesset Web site into Arabic[26]. And if the binational solution cannot be realised as a practical, on-the-ground possibility, it can at least expose the problems that a two-state solution faces and remain as a sign of promise for a better future in the Middle East.

Is binationalism loyal to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust? The Holocaust proved that Jews need a safe place. But it does not follow from the Holocaust that Jews deserve unconditionally to have a state established at the expense of another people. If every people in the world were to ask unconditionally for a national state, this world—with more than 5000 peoples and only 200 nations—would end up embroiled in global nationalistic war[27]. The idea that for every people there needs to be a nation is more characteristic of Nineteenth Century nationalism than of the internationalism of the Twenty-First Century. The Holocaust was the outcome of the dangers of exclusive nationalism ('*Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Fuhrer*' [One people, one empire, one leader]). The effort to come to a more inclusive nationalism can be considered and experienced as a way to do justice to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust[28].

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[26] Online at http://www.knesset.gov.il/main/arb/home.asp [accessed March 9, 2018].

[27] L. Reychler, *Het 5000-200 probleem: Enkele nota's over etnische en nationalistische conflicten*, in *Cahiers van het Centrum voor Vredesonderzoek*, (1991), 30, Leuven.

[28] A previous version published as D. Pollefeyt, *Between a Dangerous Memory and a Memory in Danger. The Israeli-Palestinian Struggle from a Christian Post-Holocaust Perspective*, in J.K. Roth – L. Grob (eds.), *Anguished Hope: Holocaust Scholars Confront the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2008, pp. 135-146, 148-153.

Section Fourteen

Death

Chapter Twenty-One

The Last and Final Things:
Life after Death in a Post-Holocaust Perspective

From time immemorial, humankind has felt the irresistible urge to give expression to its continuous alliance with life, surpassing the boundaries of both time and space. Therefore, throughout history, human beings have pondered over meaningful images and expressive metaphors that enable them to participate in life in the most honest and creative way without losing touch with the ever-present reality of death.

The twentieth century, however, will always be marked as the age that shook the human perception of death to the core. Auschwitz and Hiroshima uncovered an as-yet unpublished face of death: death as a collective, arbitrary, anonymous, massive, and technological event. Between 1933 and 1945, the factories of death built by the Nazi regime killed millions of people in the most systematic and efficient way, and since the first atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, humanity as a whole has lived with the constant awareness of the possibility of complete and immediate mass destruction.

This final chapter of the book seeks to demonstrate that these apocalyptic events, among others, radically challenge our ways of coping with death and the afterlife. In the decades after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, the human capacity to deal with death in a symbolic and faithful way was unable to keep step with the speed of these life-changing historical events. This drove the world toward a new and yawning gap between the social and historical realities of mass destruction, on the one hand, and the inner psychological reality of human beings in relation to death, on the other. As a consequence, the need for a new understanding of death—but also a more intense form of fear of death—emerged[1].

From a Catholic theological perspective, we refuse to reconcile ourselves to this pessimistic analysis of our contemporary times. Instead, we seek to offer new tracks that take us away from these pernicious currents and lead us toward a more authentic way of coping with death. We also consider

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[1] R.J. LIFTON, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life*, Washington, DC, American Psychiatrist Press, 1996, p. 354.

whether the Christian idea of resurrection can appear in this context as a liberating chance of a return to faith after Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

I. Symbols of Immortality

Human beings have the ability to create symbols. They live from and through images and metaphors. The human person can only get a grasp of his or her body and soul through its imaginary capacity. In order to develop, the human person must compose these images into metaphors and models. This self-actualisation of humanity is a universal process to which writers, artists, and visionaries but also scientists, philosophers, and theologians provide essential support.

Throughout history, the human desire to give utterance to the inevitability of death has also led to various vigorous symbols of immortality. In various works, the American religious psychologist Robert Jay Lifton calls them "modes of symbolic immortality". In total, he distinguishes five modes.

The first and probably most common perception of immortality is the sociobiological mode. That we live through and in our sons and daughters makes us part of a long, endless chain of humanity. This mode is of great importance in East Asian culture, but it also seems to be a universal idea. This category of thought is not a merely biological one, but comprises a social dimension as well: one lives on through one's tribe, organisation, people, or nation[2].

A second mode of symbolic immortality is the creative mode. One can extract the feeling of immortality from teaching, performing, building, repairing, writing, healing, inventing, and so forth. Through these acts, a human being is able to have an impact on the world and to have a self-transcending influence on humanity as a whole[3].

A third mode of symbolic immortality is the theological mode. Various religions have the idea of an afterlife, or are at least familiar with the general theological principle of the triumph of the spirit over death. Therefore, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, each in their own way, transcend death or show the way to transcendence by means of diverse combinations of moral skills, rituals, and revelations[4].

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[2] R.J. LIFTON – E. OLSON, *Living and Dying*, New York, NY, Praeger, 1974, p. 76.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[4] R.J. LIFTON, *The Broken Connection*, p. 285.

A fourth mode is the feeling of immortality one experiences because of the continuity with and in nature. One has the experience of living on in the elements of the universe. This environmental approach is a typical feature of animism, indigenous religions, European Romanticism, and Japanese perceptions of nature[5].

The fifth and final mode differs from the others because of its foundation on an inner condition. It is called the mode of the transcendent experience. This position comprises the experiences of enlightenment or exaltation in which the boundaries of time and space become blurred. These kinds of experiences transcend both daily life and death. They are to be found in religious experience but also in music, dance, conflict, athletics, contemplation of the past, sexual relations, childbirth, friendship, and so forth. The arising of this experience is boosted by festivals and ceremonies in which daily life gets interrupted and all participants are able to forget about time and space. They experience an extraordinary psychological unity, intense corporality, or inexpressible enlightenment. These experiences can be associated with the Dionysian principle of border crossing, the mystical experience of unity with the universe, and Freud's description of the oceanic feeling[6].

When a human being is able to integrate one of these symbolic modes of expression into his or her perception of death, he or she will, according to Lifton, obtain a feeling of immortality. The active and vital life will persist even in confrontation with contingency and death.

II. Psychological Disruption after Auschwitz and Hiroshima

The slaughters of the twentieth century caused a general feeling of disruption. The ancient correspondence of vital and nourishing symbols of tradition has been fundamentally harmed. Humanity has always feared death, but what is new is the awareness not only that every individual man or woman will once stand face-to-face with death but also that segments of the population or humanity as a whole will. This threat was anticipated in Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Humanity demonstrated that it is able to apply technology to the destruction of its own kind. Previously, weapons and wars killed or wounded individuals, leaving shocked families behind, but the boundaries remained: some

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[5] R.J. Lifton – E. Olson, *Living and Dying*, p. 80.
[6] *Ibid.*, 25.

people suffer, others are restored. History goes on. Modern warfare, however, reveals a ludicrous experience of death: unnoticed victims with no names suffering and dying among thousands of others without ever having seen the faces of their opponents. Humanity has lost the certainty of its eternal existence as a species.

Every mode of immortality has been affected by this extreme disruption in the experience of death, and Lifton explains it from the perspective of Hiroshima[7]. This chapter considers how his argument can also be made by looking to the impact of the Holocaust on our perception of death.

Even when atomic weapons are kept in their bunkers or even if no gas chambers are currently operating anywhere on earth, their use in the past continues to constitute an inexpressible threat to our actual perception of life and death. The mere possibility of humanity destroying itself, or at least a major part of it, using its self-made technologies of atomic bombs or industrial mass extermination camps fundamentally alters the relationship between the human imagination and the modes of symbolical immortality. In that sense, we have all survived Hiroshima and Auschwitz. We are all part of the struggle for meaning and sense in a world where similar tragedies can potentially emerge again.

For the biological mode, the harmful effect is the most clear. The perspective of surviving death through one's offspring becomes doubtful. It is technologically possible to extinguish a whole community, a whole people, and even the entire human race. National borders no longer offer protection. Missiles can be launched instantly, causing mass destruction. People can be deported from all reaches of a continent to one centre of extermination. Humanity as a whole could be wiped out.

Problems are even more severe for the theological mode, since it was already affected by the empirical scientific reduction of reality. If very few people survive biologically, or none at all, then the image of spiritual survival loses its symbolic and consoling strength. The theological language of the spiritual and continued supernatural existence after death turns out to be a doubtful promise, if humanity is not even able to guarantee the continued natural existence of a normal life. This crisis in the theological mode is reflected in the deep crisis that the Holocaust caused in the theological belief in a supernatural, almighty, perfectly good, personal God who is concerned with each of us individually and collectively.

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[7] R.J. LIFTON, *The Broken Connection*, p. 339.

Immortality through the creative mode depends on one's view of the continued existence of one's achievements in areas such as art, literature, social organization, and thought. The extermination of the Jewish people can be seen as the actual witness of the possibility of wiping out the history of a complete nation. Because of the existence of weapons of mass destruction, doubts arise over the endurance of human contributions to culture as such.

Regressing to the fourth, ecological mode is not a possibility either. We all know very well how vulnerable nature is, not only because of our polluting activities but also because of (biological and chemical) weapons. Also here, not only Hiroshima but also Auschwitz undermines the ecological mode. The Holocaust can be seen as an attack not only on humanity, but also on nature. The Nazis' ideology made use of naturalistic categories to legitimise their crimes. For the victims, nature was an additional source of suffering rather than a source of redemption[8].

The disruption of these four modes has led, at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, to a greater trust in the mode of the transcendent experience. With this shift, the postmodern world of experience carries the burden of meeting these needs. It is not a coincidence that we live in an era of widespread attention to intensified forms of experience through music, Eastern meditation techniques, dance, alcohol, hunger for violence and sensation, sexuality, and drugs. People are attracted by immediate sensations and, as a consequence, are less susceptible to deterioration of the historical durability upon which the other modes are much more dependent. In the end, the existential desire for meaning that is filled up by these experiences turns out to be continued and even strengthened[9].

In the end, numbness and insensibility also become characteristic problems of our present-day society. The historical events of recent history are too absurd and dreadful to be turned into meaningful events. The symbols our culture has at its disposal are not able to make these transformations. Suicide therefore is not only a private affair. When someone takes his or her own life, he or she reveals the failure of our society to pass its symbols of continuity along to its individual members. Experiences that cannot be symbolised in a meaningful way or be internally converted can no longer be integrated in society. Things that we can no longer face, but which cannot be avoided, are to be covered

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 171. See Chapter Seventeen: *A Post-Holocaust Theology of Creation.*
[9] R.J. Lifton – E. Olson, *Living and Dying*, p. 83.

up. For medical science, for example, death becomes a defeat—an unwelcome intruder—that cannot be accepted anymore as an event characteristic to life. This attitude toward bereavement explains why Western people in general are not able to mourn anymore, despite the importance of this phase for psychological health. Today one tries to hide the factual reality of death from oneself[10]. This denial of death is also an important breeding ground for the so-called revisionism and negationism that relativise, minimise, or even deny the extermination camps.

During the nineteenth century, the suppression of sexuality led to various underground and degenerate forms of sexuality, as Freud saw in his consultation room. Our era can be connected to the development of a film genre all its own, which one can describe as a pornography of death. Finally, the loss of belief in immortality might also lead to desperate attempts to conquer the fear of death. In this context, totalitarianism can be understood as the absolute allegiance to a political system of power composed of all-or-nothing concepts, violently suppressing the complexity of reality and nonconformity. That these totalitarian systems often victimise social groups and minorities betrays a deficient and harmful psychological attitude toward one's own immortality. Through considering others (Jews, gypsies, homosexuals) as less human, one tries to guarantee one's own immortality by radically denying that of others. In this way, psychological despair led to the legitimisation of Hitler as a hero and victor over death. Due to this reality, however, the degenerated search for immortality has produced an endless flood of corpses.

III. Toward a Renewed Immortality

Freud's patients were victims of their repressive social situations: they suffered from fear and a sense of guilt because of their inability to express their sexuality. Today humanity faces a new taboo: the violent death of a hundred million human beings in several wars and extermination camps all over the world. These victims make it very difficult to speak about death. Death remains covered, negated, and buried as much as possible. Death has been banished from family life and is reduced to a medical act. An increasing number of funerals, for example, are held in

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[10] R.J. LIFTON, *Boundaries: Psychological Man in Revolution*, New York, NY, Random House, 1969, p. 95.

strict intimacy, which means without the participation of the larger community. Moreover, acquaintances are often informed afterward.

But no more than the suppressed sexuality in Freud's days will death disappear of itself without critical awareness. All over the world today people can begin to realise that the new possibility of self-destruction calls for a renewed understanding of death. If we want to overcome today's cultural-historical crisis, we will have to reconsider our ways of thinking about death. This step forward will turn out to be the only way to reorganise our lives. Auschwitz and Hiroshima offer critical opportunities for preventing an even more overwhelming destruction—a catastrophe whose shadow they have already cast before us. Therefore, it is essential to look for the revitalising powers that are able to bridge the contemporary anthropological and religious gap concerning symbols of immortality[11]. To clarify the means of constructing this new symbolic language, we will have to turn back again to the five modes of immortality.

Today the social-biological mode crops up again in the rediscovery of certain fundamental biological facts: our choice for organic food, our perception of sexuality as meaningful, the joint education of children, the spontaneity of our corporal and psychological expressions, the increasing role of elderly people in our society. Also, the societal struggle with the binaries of masculinity and femininity, the ongoing debate over the end of life of terminal patients, the renewed interest in palliative and terminal care, and the public discussions over abortion and euthanasia point at important developments within the biosocial mode of immortality.

The way that human beings relate to their work is altering as well. More and more people strive for a working experience that contributes immediately to the continuity of their human aspirations, illustrated by the present-day working communities of artists, educators, and activists on a small scale. Technology has made it possible to leave degrading work to machines and has enlarged the facilities for spare time and its creative possibilities. In many areas, one strives to narrow the gap between work and family life.

The human aim for immortality by means of nature becomes manifested in the ecological concern that is increasing worldwide. In the search for a closer relationship, the meaning of nature symbolism is affirmed again.

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[11] R.J. Lifton – E. Olson, *Living and Dying*, p. 124.

In the domain of the transcendent experience, more people strive toward renewed forms of authenticity beyond the feeling of emptiness. Through their work, politics, games, meditation, and all kinds of everyday relationships, people search for periodic or permanent forms of inner harmony, completeness, and unity. In the future, this transcendent meaning can lead toward very important forms of symbolic reorganisation.

IV. Christian Perspectives on Life after Death

But what about the theological mode after Auschwitz and Hiroshima? From a Christian point of view, the revitalisation of the theological perspective of life after death is crucial, especially in the light of mass destruction. If the God confessed in Christianity is really a God who loves humanity unconditionally, and thus really saves people, it is impossible for us human beings to believe that this love would cease at death, and especially at a death through genocide and mass destruction, the most radical and inhuman form of death. This conviction is based on the core of the experience of God in the Christian tradition as it finds its origin in the First Testament and is further revealed in Christ. A consequence of belief in a liberating and saving God is that there has grown an eschatological completion of reality. Neither extermination camps nor nuclear weapons can destroy this perspective; on the contrary, they make it even more necessary. If God saves humanity, he must save it especially from such a horrifying destruction, and not in a tentative and partial way, but finally and totally[12].

In this perspective, Christian theology after Auschwitz and Hiroshima can contribute to the rediscovery and reinterpretation of the symbols of immortality. But in what way, then, can the Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ give meaning to our contemporary context (theological mode)? We consider the belief of Christians in the resurrection as a particular confessional way to integrate the scattered and implicitly lived modes of immortality in a more conscious and anthropologically founded and religiously grounded way. This concept uncovers the conviction that the Christian theological representation of the 'afterlife' is not an esoteric theory reserved for a limited group of insiders. Rather, it is deeply rooted in a universally accessible human experience of existence that is further interpreted and experienced in a

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[12] R. BURGGRAEVE, *De bijbel geeft te denken*, Leuven, Acco, 1991.

religious way. In other words, the theological mode is no alternative or clashing interpretation of the belief in immortality but brings in the various anthropological modes and takes them up to a living reality and a living person, namely, Christ.

The theological notion of the 'communion of saints' can be understood as an image of the sociobiological mode. We are part of one big human community, and our death stands for the definitive admission into this community of the deceased and future generations. This implies that our relationship with the dead can never be destroyed. That is the reason why Christians pray not only *for* the deceased but also *to* the deceased. After Auschwitz and Hiroshima, this link is crucial from a Christian perspective: we stay in a lived connection and community with the victims of mass murder. We do not just remember them; we belong to the same community of the living.

Especially in the Catholic tradition of Christianity, emphasis is put on the close relationship between the 'here and now' and the 'hereafter'. In fact, this closeness implicitly affirms the value of our earthly works (creative mode). Our actions on earth are not futile occupations but have far-reaching consequences, even in the afterlife. In process theology, this idea is even clearer: our actions on earth influence the being of God himself. After Auschwitz and Hiroshima, Christians can recognise all acts of goodness that were done in favour of and by the victims of mass destruction as meaningful in God's eyes. They never get lost. Previous in this work[13], I have shown how forgiveness of the perpetrators of mass destruction is in no way possible without justice, punishment, and repentance. Faith in life after death is, for believers, the ultimate guarantee that no injustice will remain unpunished. Evildoers repent or disappear into nothingness.

The theological image of 'a new heaven and earth' points to the Kingdom of God that comprises creation as a whole (mode of nature). Redemption for Christians is not just the redemption of the human soul but the redemption of the whole of creation. In Chapter Seventeen[14], it became clear how the Nazis not only attacked the Jewish people, but also attacked and destroyed nature, not only as a concept but also as a physical reality. The consequences of nuclear weapons on nature are even more dramatic. From a Christian perspective, God entrusted creation to His people so that His Kingdom of peace and

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[13] See Chapter Ten: *Ethics and the Unforgiveable After Auschwitz.*
[14] See Chapter Seventeen: *A Post-Holocaust Theology of Creation.*

justice could expand. Therefore, God can also not let go of His creation. For this reason, from a Christian perspective, nature will be recreated together with the human person into an incorruptible and complete reality.

To conclude, the Christian conviction of the resurrection of the body points to the Christian belief in salvation for human beings as a whole, not just as a merely abstract spirit. This promise of the ultimate completeness of humanity, averse to every inhuman dualism, implies the promise of a definitive transcendent experience of healing and salvation. Of course, this is the most difficult aspect to understand after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, given the attack on the body through mass destruction. How can this salvation of the body be conceived? A person is only fully human when his or her body is not just a means, an object, or an instrument (*un corps objet*) but if his or her body co-constitutes his or her subjectivity (*un corps sujet*). For this reason, based on their belief in God's promise of the salvation of humanity, Christians can only believe in the salvation of the total person, and this means also in the person's personal, corporal integrity. Of course, the body as object (*corps objet*) can be destroyed and exterminated, but Christians believe in the restitution of the body as subjectivity and personality (*corps sujet*), especially the flesh and bone of the persecuted and exterminated person.

The promise of the final or eschatological completion of humankind is no more than the consequence of the core of the Christian message that God is love. It relates to the human person as a social being, as a moral being, as a being in connection with nature, as a being with physical integrity, and as a being with a transcendent capacity and goal. Reaffirming this belief in light of Auschwitz and Hiroshima is a powerful response to the destructive powers in the world. It is the only thing a Christian can do and live for.

V. Can the Abyss the Holocaust Opens in Our Belief in Immortality be Bridged?

The abyss created by the Holocaust in our desire for immortality is very deep. This point can be illustrated by the way the Nazis themselves tried to use and to pervert the modes of immortality, at least four of them.

Concerning the ecological mode, the Nazis had a great respect and admiration for nature. Nazism claimed to have a close relation with nature, even glorifying 'blood and soil' (*Blut und Boten*). It celebrated

the contact of the German people with the land, and it saw an almost mystical bond between the German land and the German blood. It was through bloodlines and natural space that the Aryan race would gain eternal life.

In relation to the sociobiological mode of immortality, the Nazis were obsessed by the intergenerational continuation of the Aryan race. At the centre of Nazi ideology was a social politics of Nazi eugenics directed not only against the Jewish people but also against all those seen as unworthy of life including homosexuals, the feebleminded, the degenerate, the idle, the insane, and the weak. The central idea was to take these people out of the chain of heredity to guarantee the healthy, sociobiological continuation of the Aryan people.

The Nazis also tried to use the creative modus to guarantee the eternity of the German Reich. Nazism hoped to create a thousand-year Reich that would result in a cultural rebirth of Germany. This rebirth would become clear in Nazi architecture, Nazi sports, paintings, sculpture, music, film, theatre, and cinema. At the same time, the German Reich tried to free Germany of "degenerate art" which was to be purged from German culture.

It is not difficult to see in Nazism the transcendental mode also at work. Many adherents of National Socialism felt intuitively drawn to the Nazi worldview and its powerful allure. For many seekers, the primary motivation behind a (Nazi) conversion experience was a desire for transcendence, a wish to search beyond themselves to find meaning and purpose.

In *To Mend the World*, Emil L. Fackenheim argues that the foundation to live out the 614th commandment—"You shall not give Hitler posthumous victories"[15]—today receives a grounding (*Boden*) in the ontic reality of the Holocaust itself. The resilience of victims during the Holocaust testifies of the possibility of authentic thinking and acting during the Holocaust. Therefore, such thinking and acting is also possible for us after the Holocaust and, as far as possible, is also compulsory. To apply this to the issue of immortality, the way the victims during the Holocaust authentically experienced and lived out the modes of immortality is not only a basis to resist the Nazi misuse of the concepts of immortality, but it is already a part of this resistance.

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[15] E. FACKENHEIM, *The Jewish Return into History: Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem*, New York, NY, Schocken Books, 1978, p. 22.

In other words, the bridge over the abyss is already built by the victims of the Holocaust themselves and the way they dealt, however fragmentary that may be, with the modes of immortality, even in the most difficult circumstances.

During the Holocaust, nature was for the victims not only a source of additional pain and suffering, but also often a source of comfort, hope, and even religious experiences, giving a unique expression to the ecological mode of immortality[16]. As Viktor Frankl made clear in his analysis, many victims survived the Holocaust because of the enormous desire to be connected with the previous and future generations, continuing the (sociobiological) chain of life and to let their survival mean something to others. The quantity and quality of art generated by victims of Nazism witnesses the indestructible creativity of persons, even in the most terrible circumstances. Many victims could momentarily escape the suffering of the Holocaust in transcendent experiences by sharing stories, telling jokes, enacting rituals, singing songs, or finding friendship and love.

Therefore, in my view, the Holocaust shows both the vulnerability and the resilience of our perceptions of life after death: the abyss and the bridge over the abyss.

What about the role of the theological mode in all of this? The most decisive observation is that the only mode of immortality not (mis)used by Nazism was the theological mode, since the Nazis did not believe in any theological reality beyond itself (even if we also know "theologians under Hitler"!)[17]. As the papal encyclical *We Remember* argues:

> The National Socialist ideology (…) refused to acknowledge any trans-cendent reality as the source of life and the criterion of moral good. Consequently, a human group, and the State with which it was iden-tified, arrogated to itself an absolute status and determined to remove the very existence of the Jewish people, a people called to witness to the one God and the Law of the Covenant[18].

From this perspective, the ultimate answer to the evil of Nazism, especially its manipulation of the mode of immortality, is to be found in the theological mode. If there is no reality that transcends our human constructions and actions, then, ultimately, the Holocaust will remain

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[16] V. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning. With a New Foreword by Harold S. Kushner*, Boston, MA, Beacon Press, 2006.

[17] R. Ericksen (ed.), *Theologians under Hitler*, New Haven, CO, reprint, 1985.

[18] John Paul II, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*, The Vatican, Commission for the Religious Relations with the Jews, March 16, 1998.

relative to history and its victims lost completely and forever. That was exactly the wish of the Nazis in their reaction and even their hate *vis-à-vis* every theological, in particular monotheistic, belief. And already during the Holocaust, victims continued to pray to God, to discuss with God, to trust in God, to put trust in his condemning or redeeming power. The theological modus of immortality gives a foundation to this hope that trust in a God of justice and mercy is not in vain. Perhaps this hope is therefore the most ultimate answer to the Holocaust, a hope that finally the evil of the Holocaust will not have the last word, not only in the future but also in relation to the past. It was exactly this hope that the Nazis tried to destroy, but victims resisted.

Of course, theological life after death has also been terribly misused in the course of history, especially as an excuse to be blind to the concrete suffering of people in the here and now. The theological modus made it easy to underestimate or even neglect the pain of victims of social injustice using the 'comforting' idea that later victims will have a good life in heaven. In this sense, even the theological modus can be used and perverted by evildoers. But the bad use of an idea does not falsify its more original good intention. In the Catholic tradition, there is a very strong connection between life before death and life after death. This afterlife is an idea that supports social activism *rather* than immobilises it. Those people who have been indifferent or even responsible for the suffering of the other cannot put hope for themselves in an authentic theological mode of immortality. On the contrary, the Nazis hated the theological mode of immortality and tried to destroy it. In this sense, re-establishing faith in immortality after the Holocaust can be for believers a strong act of resistance against the evil of the Holocaust[19].

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[19] A previous version published as D. Pollefeyt, *Auschwitz and Hiroshima as Challenges to a Belief in the Afterlife: A Catholic Perspective*, in S.K. Pinnock (ed.), *Facing Death: Confronting Mortality in the Holocaust and Ourselves*, Seattle, WA, University of Washington Press, 2016, pp. 141-155.

Closing Reflection

The White Crucifixion (Marc Chagall)

The front page of this book is illustrated with a painting of the famous Jewish artist Marc Chagall (1887-1985): the *White Crucifixion* (Art Institute of Chicago)[1]. The artwork is known as the favourite piece of art of Pope Francis. It brings together many aspects of this book and it resonates well with the theological approach of the Holocaust developed here. Christ is in the centre of Chagall's work. But he is clearly presented as a Jew. Chagall painted this work in Paris as a reaction to the terrible events of the 'Night of Broken Glass' (*Kristallnacht*) in Nazi Germany in 1938. For any Christian looking for Christ in the context of Nazi persecution, Chagall himself is quite clear: he is with the Jewish victims. The traditional order is reversed: the cross, so often used as a sign of Christian triumphalism over Judaism, here symbolises the suffering of the Jewish people. Christ's head is adorned not with a crown but with a scarf, his face covered with a beard. The cloth which so often in representations drapes around his waist here bears the distinctive markers of a *tallit*—the Jewish prayer shawl. Absent at his feet are Mary, Mary Magdalene and St. John, replaced instead with the Jewish menorah (remarkably with six branches). In Jesus, we see human suffering, but exemplified in the strongest way through Jewish suffering. A green figure on the lower right —who appears in several of the works of Chagall— carries a pack and is (in one interpretation) the Jewish wanderer, a mythical figure symbolising the theological rejection and socio-political homelessness of the Jewish people. Chagall sets the scene on the cross in the context of the Holocaust at a moment that the drama still has to develop itself in full. The cross is 'recontextualised' through the interaction with the persecutions of the Jewish people in the twentieth century. We see the violence on the buildings set ablaze: houses and a synagogue both. The perpetrator desecrating the synagogue is clearly a Nazi (even if the swastika on his armband was later removed by Chagall). Not only buildings, but human beings are also under attack: a dead, unburied man in blue is labelled as '*Ich bin ein Jüde*'; a woman in grey clutches a crying infant in her arms; distressed refugees flounder helplessly at sea: where are they going? The solitary oar declares escape to be quite clearly out of

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[1] See http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/59426.

their grasp, their fates sealed. Later, Chagall will paint over the label '*Ich bin ein Jüde*', perhaps as a safety measure, but potentially also opening up Jewish suffering to all suffering in the world. It is unclear what the communist soldiers and the red flags of communism refer to. Do they promise liberation or do they add extra suffering from another ideological system that destroys people? There is also a Lithuanian flag in the upper right hand of the painting, referring to Chagall's Lithuanian roots. The ladder shows how Christ connects the horizontal and the vertical, man and God, suffering and hope. Above Jesus' head is the Latin inscription, INRI: J(I)esus, Nazarenus, Rex J(I)udaeorum; followed by the Aramaic Yeshu HaNotrzri Malcha D'Yehudai, written in Hebrew characters. Chagall's spelling of "HaNotrzri" implies 'Jesus the Christian' more than 'Jesus the Nazarene'. In this way, Jesus "the Christian" (subtitle) and "King of the Jews" (title) belong to both faiths. The figures above Jesus are three biblical patriarchs together with Rachel, the matriarch, all mourning the death of their children. And then, there is that overwhelming white light radically interrupting the painting from above, an intervention from another dimension, a call from heaven, otherness breaking open sameness, putting the body of Christ in a white light. The light of the cross connects clearly with the light coming from the menorah. The light is not halting the persecution, but offering comfort to the persecuted: the face of Christ is not suffering anymore. It is peaceful and in total harmony. Nobody can finally touch the Jewish victim except the light which comes from elsewhere, a light that keeps Jesus in a safe place, a light that can never be destroyed, not even by history's most hideous crimes. In the fore of the painting, also in the light, a Jewish figure is dressed in dark blue, walking away with a scroll of the Torah carefully kept in his arms, almost hugging it. It is as if the painter is saying: Judaism will survive this suffering and its legacy of the Torah will be passed on to the next generations. The man has only one shoe left. That small detail reveals everything: men can live without shoes but will not survive without the Torah.

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