

The Holocaust

Lessons, Explanation, Meaning

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Just as standing upon sacred ground requires us to remove our shoes, and those entering the Holy of Holies remove any golden garments, so do I feel myself obligated, when writing about the Holocaust, to, so to speak, remove my academic robe—and declare that I am not speaking in the name of any academic discipline, but purely in terms of my own most intimate feelings, in the sense of “things that come from the heart.”¹

The focus of the present study is theological. But in order to present my arguments fully, I shall first need to situate my views vis-à-vis the broader Jewish discussion of the Holocaust. In my opinion, an understanding of this subject requires that we confront ideological and cultural categories and frameworks. I shall divide this preliminary discussion into three foci, which I will refer to by the brief and simple rubrics of “lessons,” “explanation,” and “meaning.”

Zakhor: Remember

I do not think that it would be incorrect to say that the initial religious Jewish reaction to history is to remember. I am not referring to an academic or sterile remembrance but to a free, existential remembrance that penetrates to the innermost part of the human being. Memory sanctifies the historical dimension. Even though nature is not absent from it, the Bible teaches us the centrality of history. Nature and history are intermingled within the Jewish year. But this mingling connects two different concepts of time. Natural time is cyclical; historical time is linear and cannot

be turned back. It does not repeat itself; hence, it is dominated by forgetfulness. The first commandments that Israel was given upon leaving Egypt are thus related to the need to preserve this singular historical experience. The Paschal sacrifice and the festival of unleavened bread, and in their wake the family Seder as known to us, are an attempt to preserve the historical heritage. "To remember the exodus from Egypt" is thus the first mitzvah. This is the archetypal memory that influences all other remembering.

But the cause of forgetting is rooted not only in the nonrepeatable nature of time and the uniqueness of historical events but also in the transience of human existence. One generation goes and another generation comes. Beneath the external facade of stability, the nation and the society change their essence after only a few years. Individual memory cannot be the guarantor for the possibility of collective memory. Collective memory is not a natural phenomenon but a cultural and educational imperative.

"When your son shall ask you tomorrow" provides the surety of collective memory. But the opposite thesis—namely, that the Torah speaks of four different types of sons—indicates that memory depends upon the existential identity of the inquirer and of the one remembering. Even prior to memory there must be a certain identification that determines whether what we are remembering is in fact our own memory. In the archetypal memory, we must ask whether we are in fact the successors of that same generation that went out of Egypt. The answer is found in the call in the Haggadah: "In each generation a man person must see himself as if he went out of Egypt, as is said, 'And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, Because of this the Lord did for me when I went out of Egypt.'" The Haggadah emphasizes that even after many generations the father must say "for me." Memory is thus inextricably connected with the issue of identity that transcends history. I remember in the first person—both my own memories and those of my people. Before I remember I must know myself and my identity, what is mine and what is not.

One of the central elegies recited on the Ninth of Av is built upon the contrast between "when I went out of Egypt" and "when I went out of Jerusalem." "Remember what Amalek did to you" intermingles with "remember the exodus from Egypt." The memory of the Holocaust is another archetypal memory: "In each generation a person must see himself as if he is part of the seven remnant, in the sense of, 'You shall tell your son on that day, saying: "the Lord did this for me when I went out of Auschwitz." For, "If I had been there then, I would not have been

redeemed.”” Here too, as we shall see, the question of identity is a crucial issue.²

Memory is based upon identity, but it also creates identity. This brings us to the second component of memory. Not the “for me,” but the “what.” What do we need to remember? And how? We do not remember an inchoate event. Before remembering it, we need to give it a structure.

I will not go into the philosophical question of the method of “constructing” events. Nor shall I relate to the school of the classical historians, trained on and guided by scientific objectivity, nor that of the new historians, who think, like Nietzsche, that “no facts exist, but only interpretations.”³ Yet for us there is no meaningful difference.⁴ Even if we agree that a purely historical realm does exist, we must state that this “construction” of the historical event is in our case problematical. This brings us to the issue of the “lessons” and their pitfalls.

Lessons and Dangers

From the outset, I must say that I “derive” a Zionist “lesson” from the Holocaust, but I am prepared to forego it. In retrospect, I refuse in the deepest and most existential way to “derive” lessons from the Holocaust altogether. I shall attempt to explain my reasoning and arguments.

Let us begin with the initial point to which I alluded above. The lesson derived from the Holocaust is often, though not always, a function of the worldview of the person deriving the lesson. However, there is no doubt that the Holocaust left behind it an imperative that is the collective lesson of the Jewish people, which is the legitimacy and need for Jewish politics. First of all, worldwide Jewish politics—the establishment of the Jewish state—that led to the construction of a political entity that not only returned the Jewish people to the stage of political activity but also gave it the prerogatives of power insofar as possible. But more than that: the Holocaust gave legitimacy to the Jewish politics of Jewish communities in the Diaspora, wherever possible—and this notwithstanding the danger of dual loyalty.⁵

This returns us to another claim made at times, in my opinion unjustifiably. According to this argument, we have committed a sin—sin in a certain sense, but sin nevertheless—in repressing the awareness of the Holocaust during the first years following the war. The harsh initial shock was followed by a period of repression during which any significant con-

frontation with the traumatic experience of the Holocaust was absent. This description is both incomplete and factually incorrect. The Shoah experience in all its seriousness broke out within the life of the Jewish people. The rendering of accounts with those that served as Kapos in the death camps and the Kastner trial—that dealt with issues arising out of the murder of Hungarian Jewry—are only a few examples. But there is undoubtedly a deeper reason. The initial period after the Holocaust was guided by the awareness that we needed to devote ourselves to creating a practical answer to the Holocaust—to resolving the fundamental problem that enabled the Holocaust to take place as it did—by the establishment of the state of Israel. Precisely the thought that we were able to return to “normality” was the strongest Jewish reaction following the Holocaust. Just as the Jews in the Holocaust discovered a new significance to resisting the enemy, so did the Jewish people instinctively understand that there was meaning to the struggle for life—that biological existence bears ideological significance. Now, decades later, we can again ask about the meaning of the trauma, since we also enjoy the perspective of the state. The return to the search for meaning thus derives from both reasons.

So we stand and ponder our relationship to the Holocaust. Seemingly, matters are quite clear. The differences that separate and divide all of us, including thinkers and scholars, into different camps, are erased in moments of grace, in light of the memory of the Holocaust. The Holocaust is the symbol and the event that unites all of us. All of us were candidates for Auschwitz. But we are witnesses to a terrible phenomenon: that at times the lessons of the Holocaust not only fail to unite us but even divide us among ourselves—that they are harnessed to horses that gallop in different and at times opposing directions. The respect due to the Holocaust, to the saving remnant and the memory of the martyrs, obligates us, in my opinion, to refrain from any use of this symbol in arguments and disputes having a political component and practical contemporary implications. Let us leave the lesson of the Holocaust on the individual level, as something of profound existential meaning, but refrain from drawing political conclusions, be it in the negative or the positive sense.

What is meant by refraining from this positive step? I again emphasize that deep within my heart of hearts, I would prefer without hesitation to derive from it the Zionist lesson, primarily because Zionism spoke in a vague way of the danger of such a catastrophe from its very inception.⁶ But despite all this it seems to me that, even within this Zionist context, the use of the symbol of the Holocaust demands that we engage in deeper

thought. We often begin our Zionist information with the Holocaust. The visit of a foreign personality to Israel begins with a visit to Yad Vashem, or a Zionist educational film may begin with modern anti-Semitism and the horrors of the Holocaust. In my opinion, such a connection between the Holocaust and Zionism entails a certain degree of distortion of the contents, as well as a tactical error.

I call it a distortion and an error, for if the Holocaust provided a strong impetus to the struggle to establish the state, our Zionism does not begin with the Holocaust: it did not set out to solve the European Jewish problem by creating a problem in the Middle East, as is frequently emphasized by the Arab propagandists. Zionism is not sustained by the Holocaust. Moreover, even the connection between Zionism and anti-Semitism is in my eyes problematic. Zionism is none other than our generations-old struggle to return to our homeland. In light of all this, it seems to me that we are closer in our approach to the classic harbingers of Zionism than we are to the Zionism that was born in the wake of modern anti-Semitism. This was the stance of those people who felt that, just as Rome was liberated, so does Jerusalem need to be liberated. Sadly, one might also say the opposite: that we as Zionists live in the land of Israel and will continue to live here, notwithstanding the fact that, in the words of the late Yeshayahu Leibowitz, the land of Israel is evidently the most dangerous place for Jews to live.⁷ Our state is not a giant refugee camp, but the birthplace of a people struggling for its national liberation who are "fed up" with living under foreign rule.

Thus far we have been regarding the "positive" side in the remembrance of the Holocaust. However, one may easily demonstrate that at times the consciousness of the Holocaust can be specifically negative. This may be exemplified by two illustrations. During the Lebanon War the identification between the Holocaust and our own destiny worked against us. Without going into a discussion of the problem per se, I may exemplify my words through two contrasting incidents that embody the problematics of which I am speaking. It seems to me that underlying the attitude towards the Maronites in Lebanon there was a conscious or unconscious sense of identification: a sense that we, as the victims who during a time of destruction did not enjoy any help from an apathetic world may not stand aside when others find themselves in a similar situation. On the other hand, there seems no doubt that the reaction to that war of many of the nations of the world was guided by the desire to prove that, when they have the power, the children of the victims are no better than the hang-

men. Sabra and Shatilla were understood as a kind of purification of the acts done at Auschwitz. The true atonement was attained through the acts of the former victim, who played the part of the hangman. By way of analogy, one might say that the traumas of the children of those saved troubles our collective "I." We are guilty for having survived. We need to be different from everyone else, purer in our politics, without any marks or stains, for if not, what right do we have to complain about the Holocaust?

But the distortion does not only derive from the outside, from the world of the nations. A striking example of this may be found, for example, in Yehoshua Sobol's play "Ghetto."⁸ Nazism was not only an external circumstance but also an inner one. Kittel, the Nazi commander, tells Weisskopf, the organizer of the Jewish labor brigades in the ghetto, in the name of Nazism,

You have made yourself productive. I only created for you the proper conditions, allowing an unknown side of your Jewish nature to be revealed. . . . The painful, but so fruitful, combination between the German soul and the Jewish soul will yet do great things. (p. 41)

Another hero, the Nazi Dr. Poll, tells us that to "the Zionist Jews in Israel . . . aggressiveness . . . is not alien to them... Is this the death impulse, that we have finally succeeded in infusing from our own souls into the Jewish soul?" (p. 93). And so too the Bundist, Kruk, director of the ghetto library, tells Gens, the head of the ghetto, "the true Jewish patriot and nationalist,"

Kruk: It's a shame that Dr. Paul isn't here. They succeeded more than they imagined to themselves.

Gens: What? what are you talking about?

Kruk: Nationalism inspires nationalism.

Gens: What are you trying to suggest? That I'm influenced by the Germans?!

Kruk: Understand it as you wish. (p. 84)

The message conveyed by these things, in my opinion, is that a terrible process occurred in the Zionist state, whereby the victims internalized the aggression of their executioners. Such a use of the Holocaust is not new. It may have originated with Arnold Toynbee, who drew a parallel between, in his view, what the Nazis did to the Jews of Europe and what the Israelis did to the Palestinian Arabs.

Toynbee is of course aware of the quantitative difference, but this does

not prevent him from drawing the parallel: While every increase in numbers brings about an increase in human suffering, it is impossible to be more than 100 percent evil. Whether I kill one man or one million, I am a murderer.

This is the decisive question. There is a clear distinction between murder and genocide, just as there is, in my opinion, a difference between genocide and the Holocaust. In any event, these remarks of Toynbee illustrate the significance of a new definition of a crime beyond the far "weaker" or more "moderate" crime of murder. It is obvious that any legal or conceptual difficulty arising from such an attempt is not a rebuttal, but rather a sign of intellectual poverty of the one who is taken aback by this difficulty. This is not only a matter of quantity creating quality, but that we find here a new, essential quality of evil and of crime revealed before our eyes.

The sophistication of such an accusation does not in any way detract from the injury and insult felt when we consider these things in our memory and in our consciousness. And to this insult is added as well a feeling of sacrilege. It is interesting to note Toynbee's response to this insult:

I have been surprised at the vehemence of the reaction to it in the Jewish community. I have wondered myself why, if it [the comparison between the acts by the Nazis and those of the Israelis] is a preposterous suggestion, as you obviously felt it to be, you haven't said: "Here is a silly man, saying this silly thing. Why bother about it? If it is so silly we should leave it alone." But the reaction has not been like that. It was been, as we know, very vigorous. . . . I would say that, inadvertently, in this comparison I have drawn, I have given the Jewish people a piece of what psychologists call "shock treatment."⁹

Toynbee evidently forgot that, following acts of such a "crazy" coloration, we are more sensitive to dangerous "stupidities" and unable to ignore them. True, "shock therapy" once more presents us with the terrible dilemma in which we find ourselves. Because we have been victims of a satanic politics, we are now unable to conduct realistic politics. If it is at all permitted for us to return to history, we must live a humane or even utopian politics; anything less than that is a crime that is forbidden for us—and only for us—to perform. If we become like all the nations, we will be Nazis. It is not redundant to emphasize that, of course, international ethics obligates us as well. But the voice of this obligation is not the voice

of neurotic ethics that comes from the Holocaust, but a sane voice coming from elsewhere. For us, believers and sons and daughters of believers, it is the voice of the Holy One, and blessed be He who speaks to us by means of His prophets and through our own conscience. We hear other voices from the Holocaust. The other nations, who have not been judged for their actions nor for their failures, should not be our judges and should not deal with this trauma of ours!

In light of all these things, and many others of a similar ilk, the demand, perhaps quixotic, to refrain from use of the memory of the Holocaust becomes self-evident, in any event within the context of our internal political disputes. We can learn the Zionist humanistic lessons from other pages in our long history. For the Zionist lesson it suffices to remember the Kishinev pogrom, while for the humane (not humanistic!) lessons we may make use of any of the myriad examples from the history of harsh persecution that we have suffered over the course of many generations. Examination of any page in the history of totalitarianism and fascism will suffice for us to repudiate them.¹⁰

Nor would I wish to connect the struggle against racism with the Holocaust. I do not think that the Holocaust is identical to racism; moreover, it does not begin with racism, but long before that. It begins with the rape that takes place before our eyes in the streets, it begins with human beings turning their fellow human beings into instruments. The Holocaust was unique in that it synthesized all the varieties of evil together and in that each one of them may be exemplified from within it. But despite that, it entailed something new. It was more than garden-variety evil. The very substitution of the specific noun "Holocaust," or "Shoah," by the general noun "genocide" is an unforgivable sin.

But despite my instinctive tendencies, I am almost forced to cease using the Holocaust as a weapon, that which we use almost daily to shoot at one another. I refer to the ongoing struggles between the two principle "lessons" derived from the Holocaust: the Zionist and the humanistic.¹¹ These are perhaps ideological battles, but the stances of the thinkers are also reflected in the street. Against the background of social tensions we occasionally hear such unfortunate expressions as "the job that was not finished." In certain neighborhoods one can hear cries of "Nazi" used against the police. Advocates of certain policies are called "Judeo-Nazis" by their sharp-tongued opponents. It does not help to invoke talk about a common enemy nor descriptions of the dangers of destruction that confronted Oriental Jews. Such words simply need to be uprooted from

our lexicon, for the sake of the spiritual and social hygiene of our environment.

I learned from my teacher, Prof. Shoshani, of blessed memory, that the difference between objects used to perform a mitzvah and objects that are sacred (*tashmishei-mitzvah* and *tashmishei-kedushah*) lies in the following: one must continue to treat sacred objects with reverence after one has used them. That is, they are not merely instrumental. By contrast, after one has used a *lulav* and *etrog*, even if one has recited a blessing upon it, one may do with it as one wishes. By contrast, sacred objects must be hidden away, because they are in a certain sense an end in themselves. Unfortunately, it is clear that the politics that surrounds us on all sides will not agree to a “moratorium,” to a “sabbatical year” on the instrumentalization of the memory of the Holocaust. From a religious viewpoint, I wish to say that the memory of the Holocaust is also “holy” in my eyes! The testimonies and experiences of the survivors, their cries and their testaments, are holy. But the studies of the experts, the theories of the thinkers, and the lessons learned by politicians are the most profane of the profane, if not less than that.

Explanation and Its Lack

Let us leave the political message and turn to the question of its religious meaning. Here too, it seems to me, a kind of moratorium on theories is called for. The various religious positions have been surveyed and analyzed any number of times, and I do not wish to add here to what has already been written. I will only say that at this stage we confront a mystery that has no theological explanation. Of course, this stance sounds apologetic by its very nature but, in my opinion, it is not so. This is so because of the thesis in which I believe and that I shall present without making any attempt to confirm it—a thesis that, notwithstanding the problematics involved, seems to me to be correct: namely, that there is no explanation for the Holocaust—neither a religious explanation nor a scientific explanation.

The Holocaust was an historical event, and like any historical event it requires explanation. Why did it take place, and how was it at all possible? In order to explain the above thesis, I wish to argue that we are mistaken when we offer the same explanation for anti-Semitism and for the Holo-

caust, as they are two entirely different phenomena. One is of course based upon the other, one is the sequel of the other, but they are not identical. For our purposes, there is a fundamental difference between them. I am able to “understand” and possibly even to agree with the psychological, sociological, economic, and even historical explanations of anti-Semitism, but I am unable to understand the Holocaust. We find ourselves confronting a unique and strange phenomenon, which has neither parallel nor explanation. Regarding this issue, we do not even have “retroactive hindsight.”¹²

This is a question that thinkers and scholars—whose greatness is beyond doubt—have attempted to answer. They may have succeeded in explaining its background and the operation of its mechanism, but they have not given an explanation of the Holocaust itself, of the absurdity of the why and wherefore. The central lesson that emerges after reading their works is that many—if not the vast majority, or even all of them—have not derived any new “lesson” from the Holocaust, but continue to use accepted theories and categories in order to understand it.

Because of this claim, I expose myself to harsh accusations of mystification and even mythologization of the Holocaust. I shall discuss these concepts further on but, if you wish, I accept the accusation. This is precisely my claim. And I shall formulate things even more sharply: The claim that we are dealing with an embodiment, an incarnation of the devil in the person of Hitler, may his name be obliterated, seems more rational, and in a certain sense truer, than any other explanations that have been offered.

True, various solutions have been offered to resolve the enigma of explaining the Shoah. The most extreme explanation, in my opinion, is the argument that we are dealing here with a collective insanity. The use of this sort of language indicates that this presents a particularly severe problem for the psychologists, and the transition from personal pathology to collective pathology is to my mind extremely problematic. But the real problem lies elsewhere. The father of modern psychology succeeded in finding the key to understanding this “insanity” and in explaining phenomena that seemingly have no meaning whatsoever. He found reason in insanity, thereby creating a science. But the use of insanity in our context is no more than verbal manipulation. True, the term “insanity” is used in everyday language to designate phenomena that have no rational explanation. But here the talk of collective insanity serves the opposite purpose: to obscure, rather than to explain. The same holds true of other terms and

concepts taken from the realm of psychology that are likewise unsatisfactory if we do not assimilate the unique nature of the Holocaust, one that was expressed in a tragic way by the term "a different planet."

Is there in fact a historical explanation for the Holocaust? Are psychologists and sociologists able to explain the facts? My answer is negative, and I will give several examples. One striking example is to be found in the approach of Bruno Bettelheim, which we may attempt to understand by way of comparison with another similar approach: the sociological position of Hannah Arendt.¹³ The central thesis of both these thinkers may be understood as an attempt to explain the Holocaust as an episode in the struggles of authoritarian regimes to control the world. But this is not all. Bettelheim attempted to explain the camps, where he was "privileged" to live for a certain period. His position may be summarized by saying that he viewed the camps as an attempt on the part of the Nazis to find the means by which it would be possible to change and to influence the masses. Bettelheim saw himself as a laboratory animal in an experiment, in which there was tested in miniature a system that was thereafter to have been applied to the general public, a system based upon total supervision of human beings. Bettelheim thought, as did his teacher Freud, that he had found the logic within the absurd.

He lived in the camp and tried to render an account of his experiences, which belonged essentially to the initial period of Nazi rule. According to his description, an attempt was made in the camp to return the prisoner to the situation of a child, for whom others decide what is permitted and what is forbidden, regarding even the smallest details of life. The purpose of the experiment was to bring him to a state of total loss of his free will as a human being. This was a laboratory intended to accomplish the ultimate goal of Nazism—the transformation of humankind as a whole into a great automaton, who acts, without protest, according to the will of the Führer.

The most important aspect of Bettelheim's interpretation is the assumption that the persecution of the Jews may be seen as one chapter in a global struggle in which they were merely guinea pigs. This idea is particularly striking in Hannah Arendt. She sought to describe the mechanism of totalitarianism and of authoritarianism. Totalitarianism is built upon three circles, in which responsibility is confined to a very small group of people who belong to the innermost circle. In the second circle were those people who happened to be SS members, of whom Eichmann was a prime example. Beyond them were the German people as a whole, with their masses. The paradox in this explanation is that not only the dead martyrs

were victims of authoritarianism but also the hangmen themselves, whom the system caused to lose their individuality and make them into part of a mere bureaucratic system. Arendt's application of this principle to the Eichmann trial and the basic comparison she draws between the murders and the victims was deeply hurtful, in a way that was almost unforgivable. But Arendt's statements were not intended as a personal reaction to the trial, nor as a historical polemic concerning what happened, but as the application of an ideology that explains the phenomenon and why it took place. The key to her explanation lies in the fact that this was not a uniquely Jewish phenomenon, but that the Jews were merely a small and marginal factor within a far more fundamental experiment.

These explanations are not correct, in my opinion, because there is no continuity between xenophobia and anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust. Moreover, that which may have been true concerning the initial expressions of Nazism experienced by Bettelheim does not necessarily hold with regard to its later manifestations. There is no single "great" ideology that encompasses within it the possibility of explaining what happened in the Holocaust. It is an empirical fact that there is no narrative to the Holocaust.

Moreover, in the cases noted above, and in many others, the explanation offered is no more than a kind of misleading and "theft" of the Holocaust. This is the same "theft" that, in a less sophisticated manner, finds expression in monuments to the memory of the victims in which their Jewishness is not mentioned; it is the same "theft" as is committed by those who proclaim Edith Stein to be a Christian saint, notwithstanding the fact that she died because of her being "Jewish"; it is the same "theft" that is performed by others on the ideological level.¹⁴

I now wish to return to the concept that I mentioned above. In the abovementioned discussion, Prof. Yehudah Bauer refers to a semantic question: "'Mystify' is defined by the dictionary as 'to envelope in excessive secrecy; to obscure or obfuscate.'"¹⁵ One can agree with this lexicographical comment, but there is a decisive difference between "to envelope in excessive secrecy" and "to obscure." When we seek an explanation we find ourselves confronting an alternative. One may attack the approach of those thinkers who emphasize the unique and demonic nature of the Holocaust as "mystification," but the alternative is, in my eyes, banalization—banalization, not of the crime, but of the explanation: the marshalling of the explanation of the Holocaust to support every ideology in the world. What we have seen regarding the "lesson" of the Holocaust

reappears in our discussion of its explanation. When we speak of uniqueness, we do not mean to deny other tragedies, nor to claim that this is the greatest human tragedy of all times. Indeed, there are more than a few examples of genocide. But no other genocide is the Holocaust. It is unique because of its nature, because of its absurdity, because of its belonging to a "different planet." The perception of the Holocaust as unique is not offered in the place of scientific historiography, nor does it refuse to learn the history of the tragic events. However, it does unconditionally refuse to accept pseudo-explanations that are recruited to ideologies or scientific approaches.

There is no doubt in my mind that, as in the case of the "lesson," a clear correspondence may be drawn between the explanation and the guiding ideology, and even between the explanation and the Jewish identity of the one offering the explanation. For example, Hannah Arendt's attempt to prove that the victims of the Holocaust were killed not because they were Jews but because they represented democracy and liberalism in the eyes of those who developed a regime of dictatorship and authoritarianism is rooted in Arendt's *a priori* political philosophy. This is an inauthentic reaction, in my opinion, of people who were confronted anew by their Jewishness only by the Holocaust, in a very tragic manner, without finding any meaning to what befell them. The historical Jewish identity, and even the most fundamental categories that related to anti-Semitism and that accompanied this identity, were alien to them. We find here a phenomenon that reappears repeatedly in different guises and reincarnations, the stealing of the Holocaust. As the result of a certain identity, ideology, or philosophy, such thinkers steal the Holocaust from their Jewish brethren, and even from themselves, by erasing the victims' own identity as Jews.¹⁶

Meaning

The quest for the explanation of the Holocaust exposed us to the cunning of philosophy. What I say here is not intended, heaven forbid, to cast aspersions upon the important work of scholars and researchers who have enriched our knowledge in this field. Historical science has doubtless succeeded in elevating itself to a high level of objectivity. But once we abandon the "empirical" realm and turn from knowledge of facts and processes to a deeper understanding and to questions of meaning and significance, we continue to read the same old philosophy as of yesteryear. Indeed,

when we seek the moral and explanation in the third generation after the Holocaust, there appears a figure characterized not only by distortion but also by ugliness: the person who utilizes the Holocaust in order to learn a lesson and who consciously or unconsciously attempts to harness it to his or her own petty or "lofty" interests.

But perhaps, as we said above, a third level to our discussion also exists. The work of the Jewish psychologist Victor Frankel likewise draws upon the experience of the Holocaust, and especially upon his own years in Auschwitz. He learned there, in his words, that people are capable of living even with total lack but that if one takes away from them one fundamental thing—meaning—then they are lost and are condemned to death. But this is not included among those things that sociologists and psychologists have researched so assiduously. The Holocaust also reveals to us the person seeking meaning, who in his or her own private realm confronts these questions, which at times "cannot be uttered by the mouth."¹⁷ The quest for meaning repeatedly confronts us with the religious question.

The Holocaust in all its horrors confronts us with a world in which God's face is hidden. The last commandment in the Torah is to teach the children of Israel "the Song." A day will come, we are told there, when "I will hide My face from them, and they will be devoured; and many evils and troubles will befall them, so that they will say on that day, 'Have not these evils found us because God is not among us?'" (Deuteronomy 31:17). The Song referred to there is the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32; known in Hebrew as *Ha'azinu*), which attempts to teach us to hold fast onto faith even in light of a reality in which "our enemies shall provoke us" and to say that "the Lord has not wrought all this" (32:27). I will not enter into an analysis of this chapter but shall merely note that it points out the consciousness of the religious problematic of history. Despite the way things seem at first glance, Jewish thought, certainly postprophetic thought, did not speak of the history of our people in categories of reward and punishment. It saw the tragedy of history subject to the hand of evil and attempted to teach that there is meaning even in the face of despair. As Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, hinted in his essay, "The Voice of My Beloved Knocks," history is a marvelous wall carpet interwoven with pictures of rare beauty, but we look at the carpet from the wrong side.

These teachings imply, in my opinion, a warning to whoever presumes to understand the secrets of history and of providence. But this is true not only with regard to ourselves, as believing human beings, but also with

regard to science. This is so because the Holocaust does not constitute a mystery from the religious, theological perspective alone. Scientists are also unable to explain what happened. Human understanding, to which everything is lucid and comprehensible, cannot cope with the Holocaust. We can understand evil that is done for some economic or political interest. We can "understand" the dastardly Polish peasant who betrayed a Jew because he wanted his boots. But it is impossible to understand what might be called absolute evil, the foregoing of one's own interest simply in order to do evil: evil as an end in itself. At times we hear the claim that Nazism was a collective insanity. This is precisely the confession of the litigant of the impossibility of answering the question. In this "other planet," absolute evil is satanic evil!

And despite all this, the call for meaning cries out to us from hell. And precisely in the wake of this, there is something that speaks to us even from within this terrible Holocaust. One of the conflicts that arises from time to time in relation to the site of Auschwitz relates to determining the nature of the place. Here one must ask a very simple question, to which we have already alluded above. Why did the Communists insist on not mentioning that those murdered at Auschwitz were Jews? Why, to this very day, do monasteries strive to establish a foothold in Auschwitz? These questions were a riddle for me, until one day I understood that perhaps the people who insist upon this themselves do not understand their own demands and their own acts.

Were we able to return to Mount Sinai and to see the *Shekhinah* (Divine Presence) descend and declare, "You are My beloved," we would be able to say that we are the chosen people. Our souls were at Mount Sinai, but we ourselves did not merit this. However, our generation saw something else. We saw Satan descend upon earth and declare of us, the Jewish people, "You are my enemies." And the enemies of Satan are the chosen people.

This is an absurd but true jump, and it is understood by every honest and intelligent person. I have often heard directed towards me the covert or overt expression, "Too bad that the Nazis didn't finish the job." There are anti-Semites in the world, but there are also decent and ethical non-Jews, and they understand that one who was not a candidate to go to Auschwitz does not constitute a spiritual option for humanity. So one needs to invent Christian martyrs that the Nazis murdered, and their presence in the valley of destruction.

What can I tell my son, my daughter, or my students? I am not able to

free you from the fears or from the nightmares that afflict me as well from time to time. I can only say that I am proud of two things. One is that we are the children of those who were murdered and not, heaven forbid, the children of the murderers, or even the children of those who looked on apathetically, or the collaborators. But more than that, Satan appeared and pointed to us as his enemies—not because of our political affiliation, or because we were a threat to him but only because we are Jews, even infants or elderly people who could not possibly do any harm. This is the unique significance of the Holocaust that many people try to deny. Indeed, Satan properly identified his enemies. This is the voice that we hear over and beyond the tragedy and the pain: “They are loathed as absolute evil by absolute evil. In this manner they are indeed the chosen people.”¹⁸

There is no doubt in my eyes that my remarks about Satan will sound bizarre and even outlandish to rationalistic ears who will rightly demand an explanation. I do not wish to explain them. I wish the reader to relate to them at this stage, not as philosophical claims, but as *aggadah*. I also ask of my reader to consider another possibility, namely, that throughout the darkness of the Holocaust, it may be that the world can be explained only by means of *aggadah*, and not by philosophical systems.

The Holocaust and Philosophy

But perhaps, nevertheless, the meaning that I wish to find is no more than mystification? After all, other groups were also persecuted. But we must also take note of the difference. If we were indeed perceived as a biological danger, like the gypsies, why did they persecute Judaism? Why did they desecrate Torah scrolls and all sancta of Israel? If, indeed, the war was waged against an inhuman subspecies, how are we to understand acts of cruelty against parchment scrolls? The war was conducted against a people whose very existence was a symbol and a source of ideas that were diametrically opposed to those of Nazism. Otherwise, we cannot at all comprehend the struggle against Judaism, the ban on Jewish prayer, the war against the symbols of Judaism, against its holy books, against Jewish faces adorned with beard and *payot*. There was something here that goes beyond an economic, historical, or even biological struggle.

To understand the essence of the Holocaust means, first of all, to discover our own Jewish identity “by way of negation,” namely, to discover that this was a war against Judaism. Nazism killed us because we were

Jews. The second stage is to discover the second war, that which was declared against Judaism. The Holocaust was not only a biological or political battle: it was a religious and philosophical war.

A profound attempt to deal with this confrontation may be found, in my opinion, in the sermons for *Parshat Zakhor* and Purim of the saintly Rabbi Kalman Kalonymus Shapira.¹⁹ Elaborating an earlier Hasidic idea, the Rebbe of Piaseczno relates to the conflict with philosophy. *Amalek* is "that which chanced upon you on the way"—that is, which presented a path, a way of thought, that was an alternative opposed to faith. To this classic motif, another dimension is added. The alternative presented to us is that of human autonomy, namely, "the wisdoms and intellectual structures that they invented . . . from their hearts." The conflict with such autonomy finds tragic expression in the festival of Purim:

It states in the holy *Tikkunei Zohar* that Purim is compared to Yom Kippur. This may also allude to the fact that, just as on Yom Kippur a person does not perform the fasting and repentance of that day only if he wants to do them, but whether he wants to or not, he fulfills them because such is the edict of the Holy One blessed be He, so too is it the case regarding the rejoicing on Purim: not only if the person is himself in a state of joy, or in any event in a state where he is able to make himself feel joyful, must he rejoice, but even if he is in a state of lowliness and broken-heartedness, when his mind and his entire body are downtrodden, it is nevertheless the law that he must bring some spark of joy into his heart.

These religious notions relate to what the Rabbi of Piaseczno said on *Shabbat Zakhor* concerning the confrontation of the Jews with philosophy—doubtless alluding to German philosophy, even if he did not know it in its full breadth and depth. He describes Judaism as "the commandments and laws of God, whether or not a person may also understand them with his intellect. . . . One who learns it and fulfills it becomes attached to it with all his body and vitality, spirit and soul, until he also sees their goodness a little bit." The same confrontation is expressed in the confrontation between Nazism and Judaism:

They can preach beautifully, but within themselves be filled with filth and corruption. And when they need to or simply wish to do so, just as they had previously invented wisdoms and intellectual constructions to preach about the beauty of good character, now do they invent wisdoms and intellectual

constructions to preach about theft, robbery, murder, and other corrupt things, that these are good things.

The rabbi concludes his words by saying that, just as on Yom Kippur “the day itself atones, even if a person had not completed his repentance,” so too does the day of Purim have an effect upon the Jew, “even if a Jewish person was not in a state of joy as he should have been.” This is an extraordinary case, the service of God in a liminal situation. The greatest test is the possibility of redeeming joy from one’s enslavement.

The rabbi of Piaseczno saw Nazism as the final chapter in a philosophic tradition, whose central expression—we may complete his words thus by way of conjecture—was found in the teaching of Emmanuel Kant. This leads us to a much broader question that is not without theological importance. What is the place of the Nazi “philosophy”? Or, to give a more specific example, do Nazism and the Holocaust, which was its sequel, constitute an offspring of Christian anti-Semitism, or do they perhaps have a different pedigree?

I do not wish to fix any rules here concerning this matter. An alternative answer to that of the rabbi of Piaseczno may be found in various attempts—for example, in the studies of the late Jacob Talmon. According to this approach, we may take a further step by understanding Nazism as a high point in the development of a certain direction in European thought. The intellectual pedigree of Nazism begins with various modern approaches, the most outstanding of which is a social Darwinism that turned into violent and unrestrained racism.

But this explanation is only partial. I have no doubt that Nazism is to be seen as a revival of paganism in its renewed struggle against Judaism and its influence upon the Western world. But the most striking example, albeit one based upon a number of different motifs, is to be found in the work of Richard Wagner.²⁰ Teutonic mythology must be the option that will bring the world to redemption from the forces that have subjugated it.²¹

One of those who anticipated this tragedy in a general way was Rabbi A. I. Kook, who saw the beginning of a rebellion against “the Judeo-Christian oppression.” On the one hand, Rav Kook blamed Christianity for truncating and distorting healthy Judaism; on the other hand, he discerned a profound gap between the collective psychology of certain peoples and the principles of ethics that were imposed upon them by Christianity from the outside, and to a certain extent even by the power

of the sword. These peoples were not yet prepared to accept the reign of ethics. The counterrevolution is yet to break out. A poetic expression of these ideas was given by Uri Zvi Greenberg in his poem "Rehovot Hanahar":

And from the day that pagans of the generation of Abram
 Until the generation of the Crusade
 Received from us knowledge of the One God. . . .
 We know not any refuge from the fury of the nations
 Their blood cries out for their primeval idol
 And they return to the ancient paths
 Covered with hyssop
 Bringing with them our blood, as a new gift offering to him.²²

I have no doubt that Sigmund Freud, at the end of his life, also understood things in this manner. The Jewish people has been portrayed by many people, and justly so, as a kind of collective "superego," and the Holocaust as none other than an act of patricide. It seems likely that Freud's last and highly problematic book, *Moses and Monotheism*, is none other than a desperate, and possibly also vain, attempt to break the connection between the image of the father and Judaism. This was accomplished by means of a theory that claims that Moses, who was really responsible for the covenantal tablets of ethics, was not a Jew, and that the Jews killed him. The sin of the Jews was thus that they attempted to deny this universal sin. The Gentiles took the consequences of that sin upon themselves and atoned for it by the Christian myth of the death of the son—which does not exist in Judaism.

I do not wish to enter into an analysis of the historical basis of Freud's arguments. However, the book must be catalogued, not only among the works of science fiction but also among the documents of Jewish reaction to the Holocaust. This brings me to Freud's remarks in another work when, in the wake of the First World War, he discovered that the world is dominated not only by the libido (sexual urge) but that alongside it there also exists another force of tremendous potency—Thanatos, the death urge. Freud thought then in terms of the urge to suicide that is transformed into the murder of others. But the Second World War has taught us, to my mind, the opposite model. What was revealed then was that the impulse to murder may be transformed into that for suicide. This was the discovery of the satanic Other Side.²³

The “Satan” thus revealed is the embodiment of evil for its own sake, and not for any political, economic, geographical, or social benefit—not murder for the sake of desire, but the desire to murder for its own sake, as an end in itself. It is clear that this was done by human beings of flesh and blood. I do not know what is meant by “responsibility” or “justice” in a context in which all legal and ethical categories are destroyed, but I know that the final testament and command of those killed was to wage relentless war against the murderers and to bring them to justice. Recognition of the absurd, satanic quality of Nazism does not exempt the German people from responsibility for the Nazi regime. The Holocaust is not isolated from its historical context; it flourished against a particular human, social, and ideological background that bears the blame, but it cannot be explained by this background alone.²⁴

But not only the Nazi “philosophy” but all philosophies stand on trial. Could they have opposed Nazism? This is the question that is being asked today, in the third generation after the Holocaust. The example of Heidegger is the most striking example. And indeed, as the Rabbi of Piaseczno thought, *Amalek* is more than just a political concept. In the words of Yoss’l Rakover, in a conversation with his Creator:

God hid his face from our world and thereby brought people closer to their wild urges. I therefore think that, unfortunately, it is quite natural, at a time when urges are dominant in the world, that all those within whom there lives the Godly, pure [instinct], should be its first victims. . . .

And if you are not my God—then whose God are You? The God of the murderers?

If all those who exterminate me, murder me, are so dark, so evil—What am I, if not the one who carries within himself something of Your light, of Your goodness?²⁵

History as Theater

One of the foci of the lifework of Yeshayahu Leibowitz was the attempt to separate Judaism from history. History is not relevant from a religious viewpoint—neither the tragedy of the Holocaust nor the heroism of the establishment of the state of Israel.

At first glance, Leibowitz’s position seems opposed to the classical Judaic assumption according to which history expresses and realizes a divine

plan. There is a certain truth to this basic assumption, but it also involves no little reservation. In any event, the divine plan does not need to be that portrayed by a certain part of classical Jewish theology, that which relies upon the principles of reward and punishment.

As we shall see below, among the approaches that negate this approach is that of the Maharal of Prague. In his book *Netzah Yisrael*, the Maharal teaches us that while it is indeed true that punishment was the cause of the Destruction, there was also a cause for that cause, a second-level cause, which is not at all related to sin. Maharal's approach is very radical, and we shall relate to it further on. Here I wish to briefly discuss the approach of the Ramhal, R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto. And this because it seems to me that the things that we have observed thus far are in a certain way close to his approach. In his mature thought, which found expression in *Da'at Tevunot* and in *QL"H [138] Pithei Hokhmah*, he sees the Kabbalah, in its Lurianic formulation, as a system that requires deciphering. The answer to this is found in history: the question of the sufferings of the righteous, of the unjustified suffering of the Jewish people. Luzzatto explains the entire complex system of Lurianic teaching on this basis.

Rav Yehudah Amital, for whom the Holocaust made it impossible to accept the innocent and optimistic position of Rabbenu Saadya Gaon, according to whom the rational mitzvot of religion are based upon the principle of gratitude, once said to me, "The intellect requires us to duplicate every good act"²⁶—that is, to repay Him good for good, whether by doing good deeds in return or by giving thanks. From this tragic comment one may infer, in my opinion, two things. The questioning of the intellectual or rational mitzvot expresses the fact that rationalism is lost. On the other hand, one of the central motifs in theology, the meaning of the creation, the idea that the world was created for humanity's benefit, is also impossible.

Here, in my opinion, is to be found the central focal point in Ramhal's mature thought. The first approach, the Maimonidean, reached its full philosophical development in the generation of Ramhal in the thought of Leibniz. This world is the best of all possible worlds. Offhand, this approach is close to the classical rabbinic assumption according to which God builds worlds and destroys them. Those that were destroyed were destroyed, it would seem, because they were insufficiently perfect. But my teacher, Prof. Shoshani, of blessed memory, taught us that Ramhal in fact taught the exact opposite. The good worlds were rejected. The world that

God chose to create was an incomplete world, not only in the absolute sense—i.e., as compared to the perfection of the Holy One blessed be He—but even relatively, in comparison to the perfection that could have been our lot. Herein lies the significance of the idea of *tzimtzum*, the act of divine contraction.

This approach of the Ramhal indeed finds expression in the emendation that he makes to his earlier views. He now thinks that, in addition to the idea of gratitude, the idea of unity lies at the focus of the creation. God's unity must find expression in the negation of opposites. Illusions—metaphysical, religious, and moral—need to be created that seemingly negate the principle of unity.

According to Ramhal the playwright, history is thus in fact a kind of play in a cosmic theater, a theater of the absurd, in which an illusion is created in the eyes of the viewers, but the play must end with the fact that evil itself announces its own negation.

These things are developed further in Hasidic mysticism. The theater is not real. The most extreme expression of this view finds expression in the metaphor of the dream. One of the harshest things ever said about the Holocaust was the testimony of Katzetnick, who heard his neighbor groaning during a nightmare. He did not want to awaken him, because he was certain that reality was harsher than any nightmare he could be having. According to Hasidic belief, reality itself is considered to be on the order of a dream, and redemption means that we are able to awaken from it. The words of the psalmist, "we were as dreamers," do not refer to the redemption, but rather to the exile. The exile is a nightmare, and the only answer to the question posed by the Holocaust is that at some time we shall awaken and feel that it had been no more than a nightmare.

Ramhal did not give reality a mystical interpretation of this sort. But he thought that history would create the possible horrors when they are needed to contradict themselves. Satan himself must announce its nullification.

History as Riddle

I have discussed Ramhal's approach, which touches upon history, albeit only in a fragmentary manner. Among the numerous questions connected with the discussion thus far, there remains open the question, to which I

wish to relate here, that lies at the focus of the attitude to history. In my opinion, there is a basic debate within Jewish thought, whose two fundamental options are represented by the Maharal of Prague and Rav Kook.

In my opinion, the approach of the Maharal of Prague teaches us the doctrine of estrangement. The Jewish people needs to be in this world, despite the fact that it belongs to another world. In absolute contrast to Arnold Toynbee, who thought that the Jewish people are a fossilized people from the past, the Maharal views them as a representative of the future thrust into this world. But this incompatibility carries in its wake alienation and suffering. This is the meaning of exile. Of course, the redemption will ultimately take place, but it will be the result of catastrophic and apocalyptic change. The Maharal thinks that there is a kind of ontological necessity in the existence of the Jewish people in the world. It is a divine mission, but one involving suffering and pain.

As against that, Rav Kook thought that history has significance, and it is that which will bring us to the redemption, to the world that is entirely good. Rather than the revolutionary and destructive change of which Maharal spoke, Rav Kook believes that there is a continuity to the process of redemption. R. Judah Halevi had restored the historical outlook to Jewish life in exile.²⁷ Rav Kook continues this approach and brings it to its ultimate conclusions. Zionism is the return to history. On the face of it, this return means that we are again taking our destiny into our own hands. But this is only one stage: the return to history is guided by a more positive conception, of the possibility of history and of its power.

The works of all the philosophers constitute an attempt to read the secrets of history. The rebirth of the state of Israel supported the interpretation of Rav Kook. Indeed, on the face of it the Holocaust erased history from Jewish theology. The rise of the state of Israel restored it. This restoration was seen as significant, not only for Jewry and Judaism but also for other religions. Christianity, with all its factions, is the most striking example. It is this connection that gave the Holocaust an apocalyptic character. This is the first time that apocalypse has validity and significance.²⁸

But despite this, the history of the state of Israel shows that it, which was expected to bring normality to Jewish existence, lives a life of alienation, this time not on an individual but on a collective level. We have seen in our brief political history the shadows of the Holocaust, during the days of waiting prior to the Six-Day War and during the opening days of the Yom Kippur War. But there too we felt that a political solution could not

resolve the deeper existential questions, questions that are a function of "Jewish destiny." The meaning of that history has not yet been determined, and without doubt constitutes the greatest riddle of our lives.

In Face of the Absurd

Thinking about the Holocaust means confronting the absurd. Do we have the strength to gamble on meaning after the absurd? I would like to conclude my remarks by quoting something said by Prof. A. J. Heschel in one of his conversations, as they were recorded by Robert Alter: "A father cannot educate his son as a Jew after the Holocaust, except with the recognition that he is bringing his child into an eternal covenant with God."²⁹

These are cruel words, expressing the dilemma of the Jew in certain situations, but its very presentation teaches us a great deal. First of all, it teaches us that there can be destiny even without a covenant of destiny. They teach us that, beyond the covenant of destiny of the Holocaust, we need to gaze upon the horizon of the covenant of purpose. The religious perspective on the Holocaust, the question that is asked in the theological discussion of the Shoah, is the question of the existence of such a perspective. But perhaps it is specifically so. Perhaps even the destiny itself has meaning. A religious response to the Holocaust means faith in meaning beyond the absurd. The absurd means opening a frightening door to our own Jewish essence.

NOTES

1. On the historian's approach, see the important interview with Prof. Yehudah Bauer, "A Historian's Viewpoint" [Hebrew], *Shores* 2 (Nissan 1983), and also Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rotenstreich (eds.), *The Holocaust as Historical Experience* (New York, 1981).

2. In this fact is rooted, of course, the critical difference between Jewish memory and that of the nations. The nations of the world can identify with the memory of the martyrs; in a deep sense, we are those that identify with them.

3. *The Will to Power*, sect. §481.

4. It is interesting to analyze the ideological zigzags used by the new historians in their discussions of the Holocaust. Application to the Holocaust of the method they use with regard to Zionism would entail approval of historical revisionism

and legitimization of Holocaust denial. As we shall see below, in this respect too the Holocaust is a turning point that casts doubt upon philosophies and upon methodologies.

5. There are those who point towards the attitude of the Jewish people towards the Jews of the Soviet Union as one of the results of the new consciousness that was born after the Holocaust. But this argument is in my opinion not valid. The process to which I refer is illustrated well by the organizations of American Jewry, albeit there one finds a fortuitous coinciding of interests. For example, the struggle on behalf of Soviet Jewry advanced the interests of the Jewish people, but since the processes against which they struggled occurred on the soil of the main political and ideological adversary of the United States, it was popular not only as a Jewish cause but also as suitable to the American identity of those engaged in the struggle. We can easily imagine a different scenario in which, God forbid, the meaning of the struggle would be put to a more serious test. The same holds true regarding the attitude toward the state of Israel.

6. The comments of the late Prof. Jacob Katz as to the impossibility of anticipating the Holocaust are irrelevant in this context. Jabotinsky's remarks about Bartholemew Night were more than prophetic, and were sufficient to awaken us to a Zionist lesson. The same is true of the words of other Zionist leaders. See Jacob Katz, "Was the Holocaust Predictable?" in Bauer & Rotenstreich, *The Holocaust* (op. cit., n. 1), 23–41.

7. Leibowitz's struggle to separate Zionism from the Holocaust, even though it was in my opinion a justified struggle, prevented him from properly seeing the rebirth of anti-Semitism literally before his eyes.

8. The page numbers are based upon the Or-Am edition, 1984.

9. Quoted in Yaacov Herzog, *A People That Dwells Alone* (London, 1975), 26–27.

10. The humanistic moral underlay the soul-searching of Buber conducted in 1939, in the Hebrew essay "Them and Us," one year after the riots in Germany: see his *Teudah ve-Yi'ud* (Jerusalem, 1961), vol. II, 296 ff. Buber called upon people not to "serve the god of Hitler after calling him by a Hebrew name" (ibid., 300) and promised in the name of a hidden providence that "he who performs the act of Hitler—will be obliterated together with him." It is interesting that Buber offers an economic explanation for what happened to our people in Europe: "The problematic of the relationship of Jews to the economy of the dominant peoples . . . whose participation therein usually begins not on the ground level but on the second storey" (ibid., 298). According to him, the responsibility does not fall upon the German people but on "the German state," that is, the organization that the German people establishes for itself or agrees to, or "on those forces that it places over itself or that it suffers, and not on the German people itself" (ibid., 296). Again, that which may have been true regarding the stage before the war is not correct regarding the Holocaust itself. The tragedy of this moral from what occurred in Europe is that the desire to build a nonexilic society in Israel led us,

without a doubt, to turn our mind away from the fact that the primary goal, cognitively, was saving Jews, in the simple literal sense.

11. I will not attempt to analyze these arguments here but wish to emphasize one side of the problem: that there is a fundamental difference between the two lessons learned. The Zionist lesson is descriptive, while the humanitarian lesson is normative. The Zionist lesson is derived from reality itself, while the ethical lesson is concerned with norms—it engenders values. Failure to understand this difference stands out in a grotesque way, when one reads the attempts made at times to prove that, because Nazi Germany was undemocratic and unethical, it failed to win the war. Before our eyes there has been woven a new theory of neo-providence that assures that the just, the ethical, and the democratic will be victorious in the final analysis: “In the final analysis the free world defeated the Nazi monster not only by power, but also by spirit.” This stance is either naive or absurd. We were not freed because we were in the right, as may be seen by the vain struggle of Spartacus and the slaves who were not freed. From the Exodus we learn of the Passover, but the proper attitude to the stranger and the alien is learned, not from the Exodus, but from the memory of our enslavement. The values of the good and the ethical are not instrumental, and obligate us even if they are not successful from a utilitarian viewpoint. The confusion, rooted in cruel reality and that teaches us, quite rightly, that we are surrounded by wolves, requires that we also allow room for faith, in which the norm will be rooted.

12. I shall allow myself to state, with all due reservation and reverence, that ultimately not even fascism or Nazism are to be identified with everything that pertains to the Holocaust. See on this Saul Friedlander’s article, “On the Possibility of the Holocaust: An Approach to a Historical Synthesis,” in Bauer & Rotenstreich, *The Holocaust* (op. cit., n. 1), 1–21.

13. We shall ignore the problematics of her approach to the Eichmann trial in her book on the subject (*Eichmann in Jerusalem: The Banality of Evil* [New York, 1961]) and the political implications of this stance, and concern ourselves here only with its philosophical implications. See on this Gershom Scholem, “Letter to Hannah Arendt” [Hebrew], in *Devarim bego* (Tel Aviv, 1976), 91–95. Deserving of quotation in this context are Scholem’s remarks concerning “the love of Jews, no trace of which I find in you, dear Hannah” (92). Her stance derives from her own sense of identity, which included an intense hatred of Zionism. This hatred found expression in her words about Eichmann, who “became a Zionist.” However, it may be that there is another, “suppressed” side to her personality, which finds expression in the testimony of her biographer (Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *For Love of the World* [New Haven, 1982]) concerning her reactions to the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War.

14. The church faced, in my opinion, two valid options: to canonize a “gentile” who was killed for his assisting of Jews; or to transform into a saint an “honorary” Christian, a Jew who died as a Jew. But when they canonized a Jewess who had

converted, who died because of her Jewishness, they stole her after her murder. The death of Edith Stein was a central point in the play by Rolf Hochhuth, "The Deputy." His criticism, in this case, did not receive a suitable response.

15. *Hashoah: hebetim histori'im* (Tel Aviv, 1982), 71.

16. In Emil Fackenheim's thought, the Holocaust serves as a turning point that returns the individual to his or her lost Jewish essence. In the earlier approach, Fackenheim emphasizes that beyond the 613 commandments there is a 614th commandment embodied in the Holocaust—that which prohibits us from giving Hitler any posthumous victories: i.e., the disappearance of the Jewish people. Such disappearance is a dangerous option that confronts us, even if it will be a "death of the kiss" through assimilation or insufficient birthrate. In his later writings, Fackenheim notes the philosophical significance of the Holocaust: the idea of the 614th commandment teaches us that the Shoah, which seemingly erased all meaning, in a radical way gave new meaning to the biological existence of the Jewish people per se. In the Warsaw ghetto, Zionist leader Rabbi Yitzhak Nissenbaum coined the term "sanctity of life": "Previously our enemies demanded our soul, and the Jew sacrificed his body to sanctify the holy Name; now the enemy demands the Jewish body, and the Jew is required to protect it, to defend it." See G. Eck, *Ha-to'im bedarkei hamavet; havai vehagut beyemei hakilayon* (Jerusalem, 1960), 73.

17. For a survey of personal balance sheets of this type among Holocaust survivors, see the excellent work by Reeve Robert Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors* (New York, 1980). And cf. Yehoshua Eibeschutz, *Bi-kedushah uve-gevurah* (Tel Aviv, 1976); Mordecai Eliav (ed.), *Ani ma'amin: Eduyot al hayyei-hem ve-emunatam shel anshei emunah beyemei hashoah* (Jerusalem, 1969); Rabbi E. Oshri, *She'elot u-teshuvot Mima'amakim*, 3 vols. (New York, 1949–69); and the collection (no ed.), *Emunah ba-Shoah; Iyyun be-mashma'ut ha-Yehudit datit shel ha-Shoah* (Jerusalem, 1980). The reader may find analysis and comprehensive bibliography on this topic in the M.A. thesis of Moshe Werdiger, "The Holocaust as Theological Turning Point" [Hebrew], Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan U., 1996.

18. In the wonderful words of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who prophesied unknowingly. Quoted in *Yesodot ha-Antishemiut u-gevulot ha-ne'orut*, a collection from the Frankfurt school (Tel Aviv, 1993), 279.

19. *Eish Kodesh* (Jerusalem, 1960), 29 ff.

20. In my opinion, this brings us closer to the truth in another respect as well. Various attempts have been made, particularly in Germany, to interpret what occurred in the Nazi era as a chapter in the struggle between two Germanys: that of Lessing and Goethe, which draws upon a deep and complex culture, against that of Hitler and Goebbels, which utilizes Teutonic myth. I do not know if it is correct to see things thus, but it seems clear to me that the Holocaust gave expression to a struggle between ideologies and philosophies and was not merely a struggle for political rule or economic dominance. As we have seen, one must say

here, quite simply, that there was a struggle against Judaism—but one that was not only biological.

21. From this perspective, the thought of Richard Rubenstein and his struggle to return Judaism to pagan pantheism constitutes, to use E. Fackenheim's words uttered in another context, a posthumous victory for German paganism.

22. U. Z. Greenberg, *Arba'ah Shirei Binah: Sefer ha-Idalyot vеха-koah* (Jerusalem, 1972), 32.

23. Arthur Cohen, the late American Jewish thinker, wished to see the Holocaust as an expression of the *tremendum* (attribute of judgment), in my view incorrectly. This is a central category in Rudolph Otto's philosophy of religion. Using traditional Jewish language, one might formulate things thus: In the Holocaust we did not encounter the Sefirah of *Gevurah* or *Middat ha-Din*, but the *Sitra Ahara* (the Other Side in kabbalistic terminology; the satanic reality). See Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum: A Theological Reinterpretation of the Holocaust* (New York, 1981).

24. I cannot concur with the criticism of Yermiyahu Yovel, "The Holocaust as a Component in Our Self-Image" [Hebrew], *Ha-Aretz*, 8 April 1975. The Holocaust was not "an unequivocal human event." The task of history is not measured through the creation of subjective consciousness. This is a legitimate and necessary task, but it is also called upon to explain events. In this task—that of explanation—history has failed.

25. This text, written after the war by Zvi Kolitz, was published a number of times. See *Ani ma'amin*, ed. Eliav (op. cit., n. 17), 302 ff.

26. *Emunot ve-De'ot*: III.1.

27. It seems to me that this is the root of the lack of interest in history in the world of the sages. When history does not express divine providence, it is no longer significant: "that which was, was." These words have a double meaning. On the one hand, it expresses the impossibility of changing the past (*B.T. Nazir* 23a), "And what could he do? That which was, was." As Rashi comments at *B.T. Yoma* 37a: "That which was, was'—it is already past, and it is impossible to go back." Similarly R. Obadiah Bertinoro (*M. Berakhot* 9.3) says, "One who prays concerning that which has already happened, engages in vain prayer, for that which was, was." But this concept also means that there is a past from which one cannot learn, and therefore its description is of no significance (*B.T. Yoma* 8b): "How did he dress them? How did he dress then? That which was, was. Rather, How will he dress them in the future." Thus the rabbinical sages spoke of a prophecy that is needed for future generations, and a prophecy that was made for its time alone.

28. I will allow myself to make use of the beautiful idiom of David Novak, in the opposite direction. Indeed, the apocalypse claims that "Post hoc ergo propter hoc."

29. Robert Alter, "Deformations of the Holocaust," *Commentary* (February 1981), 48–54.