GENOCIDE AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL THEORY: OBSERVATIONS ON THE EXCLUSIVITY OF COLLECTIVE DEATH

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The subject of genocide in general and the Holocaust in particular threatens to become a growth industry in the Western cultural apparatus. Books, plays, and television dramatizations on the subject pour forth relentlessly. Sometimes they are presented soberly, other times scandalously; but all are aimed at a mass market unfortunately more amazed than disturbed by their implications. There is danger in this massification of Holocaust studies. Western culture is inclined to adopt fads; even Holocaust studies may become a moment in commercial time—interest in them may decline as well as grow, and even peak out, leaving in its wake a void. The residual debris will probably be summarized in musical comedy; we have already seen examples of this in The Lieutenant (Lieutenant Calley) and Evita (Eva Peron) on Broadway. Peter Weiss' play The Investigation led one commentator to suggest that the major character in the play, in order to elicit shock from the audience, read lines "as if he were saying: 'Let's hear it for genocide.'" This may be a sign of things to come.

One of the least attractive features of post-Holocaust studies is the effort of a few to monopolize the field. As a consequence, a linguistic battle looms among survivors over which exterminations even deserve the appellation "holocaust" (the total physical annihilation of a nation or a people). Such a bizarre struggle over language remains a grim reminder of how easy it is for victims to challenge each other and how difficult it is to forge common links against victimizers. I do not wish to deny Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust the uniqueness of their experience. But there are strong elements of continuity as well as discontinuity in the
process of genocide, in the evolution of life-taking as an essential dimension by which state power can be measured in the twentieth century.

Writing with compelling insight, Elie Wiesel personifies the mystic vision of the Holocaust. Those who lived through it "lack objectivity," he claims, while those who write on the subject but did not live through it must "withdraw" from the analytic challenge "without daring to enter into the heart of the matter." More recently, it has been suggested that "for Jews, the Holocaust is a tragedy that cannot be shared" and "it may be unrealistic or unreasonable or inappropriate to ask Jews to share the term holocaust. But it is even more unreasonable and inappropriate not to find a new name for what has taken place in Cambodia." Since what took place in both situations is a holocaust—from the demographic point of view—we need not invent new terms to explain similar barbaric processes. Those who share a holocaust share a common experience of being victim to the state's ruthless and complete pursuit of human life-taking without regard to individual guilt or innocence. It is punishment for identification with a particular group, not for personal demeanor or performance. These are not theological, but empirical criteria. To seek exclusivity in death has bizarre implications. The special Jewish triumph is life. All too many peoples—Jews, Cambodians, Armenians, Paraguayans, Ugandans—have shared a similar fate for victims to engage in divisive squabbles about whose holocaust is real or whose genocide is worse.

Those who take an exclusive position on the Holocaust are engaging in moral bookkeeping, in which only those who suffer very large numbers of deaths qualify. Some argue that the 6 million deaths among European Jews is far greater than the estimated 1 million deaths among Armenians. However, the number of Armenian deaths as a percentage of their total population (50 percent) is not much lower than the percentage of Jewish losses (60 percent). Others contend that the deaths of Ugandans or Biafrans are too few to compare to the Holocaust; yet here, too, tribal deaths in percentage terms rival the European pattern of genocide. In certain instances high death rates (approximately 40 percent of all Cambodians, or 3 million out of 7 million) are indisputable; then one hears that such deaths were only random and a function of total societal disintegration. Yet it has been firmly established that such deaths were targeted against intellectuals, educators, the foreign-born, and literate people—in short, the pattern was hardly random; anyone who could potentially disrupt a system of agrarian slave labor flying under Communist banners was singled out and eliminated. Even making the definition a matter of percentages risks creating a morality based solely on bookkeeping.

There is need to reaffirm the seriousness of the subject. The problem of genocide must be rescued from mass culture. It must not be returned to academic preserves, but it must be made part and parcel of a general
The positions which I would like to discuss, examine, and criticize perhaps have been articulated best by theologian Emil L. Fackenheim and sociologist Leo Kuper. In some curious way they represent the extremes that must be overcome if an integrated approach to the study of genocide is to become a serious subject for scientific analysis. On the one hand Fackenheim speaks with a thunderous theological certitude that approaches messianic or at least prophetic assuredness. On the other hand is Kuper, who is extremely modest in his approach, to the point where some fundamental distinctions between severe strife and mass destruction are entirely obliterated. This is not to suggest that the truth lies somewhere in the middle but rather that the need for a social scientific standpoint in the study of genocide may convince all to move to a higher ground in this area—an area of research that has truly replaced economics as the dismal science.

Fackenheim's propositions have come to represent the main trends in the theological school of Holocaust studies. They carry tremendous weight among mass culture figures for whom theological sanction provides legitimation to their endeavors and respite from critics. Fackenheim does not remotely intend his views to become part of mass culture. Quite the contrary. His eight propositions distinguishing the Holocaust in particular from genocide in general represent a tremendous effort to transcend journalistic platitudes, to move beyond an articulation of the banality of evil and into the evil of banality. This deep respect for Fackenheim registered, it must also be said that an alternative perspective—a social science framework—is warranted.

Fackenheim presents his eight propositions with direction and force. A general theory of genocide and state power, which accounts for the specifics of the Holocaust, can have no better baseline.

One: The Holocaust was not a war. Like all wars, the Roman War against the Jews was over conflicting interests—territorial, imperial, and religious—waged between parties endowed, however unequally, with power. The victims of the Holocaust had no power. And they were a threat to the Third Reich only in the Nazi mind.

The Holocaust was a war; but a modern rather than a medieval variety. Earlier wars redistributed power by military means. Genocide redistributes power by technological as well as military means. Robert Lifton recently stated the issue succinctly.

The word holocaust, from Greek origin, means total consumption by fire. That definition applies, with literal grotesqueness, to Auschwitz and Buchenwald, and also to Nagasaki and Hiroshima. In Old Testament usage there is the added meaning of the sacrifice of a burnt offering. That meaning tends to be specifically retained for the deliberate, selective Nazi genocide of six million Jews—retained with both bitterness and irony (sacrifice to whom
for what?). I will thus speak of the Holocaust and of holocausts—the first to convey the uniqueness of the Nazi project of genocide, the second to suggest certain general principles around the totality of destruction as it affects survivors. From this perspective, the holocaust means total disaster: the physical, social, and spiritual obliteration of a human community.8

The precedent for this war against the Jews was the Turkish decimation of the Armenian population. Like the Nazis, the Ottoman Empire did not simply need to win a war and redistribute power; it had an overwhelming amount of power to begin with.9 A war of annihilation is a war. To deny the warlike character of genocide is to deny its essence: the destruction of human beings for predetermined nationalist or statist goals.

The Holocaust is also modern in that it is an internal war, waged with subterfuge and deception by a majority with power against an internal minority with little power. Here too the Armenian and Jewish cases are roughly comparable. Although one can talk of genocide in relation to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, genocidal conflict involves internal rather than external populations. But this is an unambiguous point on the nature of war rather than a denial of the warlike nature of the Holocaust per se.

The victims of the Holocaust did have a certain power: they represented a threat to the Nazi Reich. The Jew as bourgeois and the Jew as proletarian represented the forces of legitimacy and revolution in Weimar Germany. They had modest positions in universities, in labor, and in industry. Regarding state power itself, where there were scarcely any Jews, they were powerless. Jews were locked out from the German bureaucratic apparatus much as the Turkish Beys locked out Armenians from the Ottoman administrative apparatus, except to use them in a Quisling-like manner. The Jews posed a threatening challenge to the legitimacy of the Nazi regime.

Two: The Holocaust was not part of a war, a war crime. War crimes belong intrinsically to wars, whether they are calculated to further war goals, or are the result of passions that wars unleash. The Holocaust hindered rather than furthered German war aims in World War II. And it was directed, not by passions, but rather by a plan devoid of passion, indeed, unable to afford this luxury.

This argument rests on a peculiar and misanthropic rendition of the Hilberg thesis. The Holocaust did hinder the Nazi war effort in the limited sense that troop transportation took second priority to transporting Jews. But in the longer and larger perspective, there were advantages. Slave labor was itself an advantage; unpaid labor time was useful. The expropriation of goods and materials was an economic gain for the Nazi Reich. People were liquidated at marginal cost to the
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system. The gold taken from extracted teeth became a proprietary transfer. Fackenheim questions whether war goals were furthered by the Holocaust; this is not answered simply. As a mobilizing device linking military and civil sectors of the population, war ends were enhanced by the conduct of the Holocaust. The Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews was motivated by passion, as evidenced by the fact that troop movements to the Russian front took second priority.

Raul Hilberg makes clear the direct collusion of the German Wehrmacht and the German Reichsbahn with respect to the systematic deportation of Jews and the front-line servicing of the armed forces. The management of the German railroad illustrates how irrationality can become rationalized, how a "true system in the modern sense of the term" was employed for the unrelenting destruction of human lives. As Hilberg notes, to the extent that the technification of mass society was exemplified by the transportation network, such human engineering considerations cannot be viewed as ancillary.

It illuminates and defines the very concept of "totalitarianism." The Jews could not be destroyed by one Führer on one order. The unprecedented event was a product of multiple initiatives, as well as lengthy negotiations and repeated adjustments among separate power structures, which differed from one another in their traditions and customs but which were united in their unfathomable will to push the Nazi regime to the limits of its destructive potential.

The question of passion is a moot point at best; undoubtedly there was a collective passion undergirding the conduct of the Holocaust. It was not simply a methodical event.

Fackenheim and many other theologians overlooked parallels in the pursuit of a genocidal state following defeat. After the Turkish defeat at the hands of Bulgaria in 1912, the most massive genocide against Armenians occurred. After the Nazi defeat at Stalingrad in 1943, the most massive destruction of Jews ensued. Whatever the vocabulary of motives—fear of discovery, of reprisal, or of judgment—the use of state-sanctioned murder to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat is evident.

The largest part of European Jewry was destroyed after Germany had in effect lost the war. When the major object of the war, defeat of the Allied powers, was no longer feasible, the more proximate aim, destruction of the Jewish people, became the paramount goal. War aims have manifest and latent elements. The manifest aim was victory in the war, but the latent aim was defeat of the internal "enemy," the Jews. The near-total destruction of the Jewish population might be considered the victory of the Third Reich in the face of the greater defeat they confronted by the end of Stalingrad.
Three: The Holocaust was not a case of racism, although, of course, the Nazis were racists. But they were racists because they were anti-Semites, not anti-Semites because they were racists. (The case of the Japanese as honorary Aryans would suffice to bear this out.) Racism asserts that some human groups are inferior to others, destined to slavery. The Holocaust enacted the principle that the Jews are not of the human race at all but "vermin" to be "exterminated."

Here Fackenheim represents a considerable body of thought. But the Holocaust was a case of racism. It is not a question of which comes first, anti-Semitism or racism; that philosophical dilemma is secondary. Assignment of special conditions of life and work to Jews implies what racism is all about: the assumption of inferiority and superiority leading to different forms of egalitarian outcomes. Ultimately racism is not about institutionalizing inferiority or superiority, but about denial of the humanity of those involved. Jewish vis-à-vis Aryan physical characteristics were studied by German anthropologists to prove that there was such a thing as race involved. These stereotypes were the essence of European racism, as George Mosse has fully documented in a recent work.

Racism had taken the ideas about man and his world which we have attempted to analyze and directed them toward the final solution. Such concepts as middle-class virtue, heroic morality, honesty, truthfulness, and love of nation had become involved as ever against the Jew: the organs of the efficient state helped to bring about the final solution; and science itself continued its corruption through racism. Above all, anthropology, which had been so deeply involved in the rise of racism, now used racism for its own end through the final solution. Anthropological studies were undertaken on the helpless inmates of the camps. Just as previously non-racist scientists became converted by the temptation to aid Nazi eugenic policies, so others could not resist the temptation to use their power over life and death in order to further their anthropological or ethnographic ambitions.¹²

The fact that American racism has a clear-cut criterion based on skin color does not mean that the physical and emotional characteristics attributed to Jews were less a matter of racism than the characteristics attributed to American blacks. To deny the racial character of the Holocaust is to reject the special bond that oppressed peoples share, the special unity that can bind blacks and Armenians and Jews. To emphasize distinctions between peoples by arguing for the uniqueness of anti-Semitism is a profound mistake; it reduces any possibility of a unified political and human posture on the meaning of genocide or the Holocaust. The triumphalism in death implicit in this kind of sectarianism comes close to defeating its own purpose.
Four: The Holocaust was not a case of genocide although it was in response to this crime that the world invented the term. Genocide is a modern phenomenon. For the most part in ancient times human beings were considered valuable, and were carried off into slavery. The genocides of modern history spring from motives, human, if evil, such as greed, hatred, or simply blind xenophobic passion. This is true even when they masquerade under high-flown ideologies. The Nazi genocide of the Jewish people did not masquerade under an ideology. The ideology was genuinely believed. This was an "idealistic" genocide to which war aims were, therefore, sacrificed. The ideal was to rid the world of Jews as one rids oneself of lice. It was also, however, to "punish" the Jews for their "crimes," and the crime in question was existence itself. Hitherto, such a charge had been directed only at devils; Jews had now become devils as well as vermin. And there is but one thing that devils and vermin have in common: neither is human.

Here Fackenheim has a problem of logical contradiction. First we are told that the Holocaust is not a case of genocide, and then we are reminded of the Nazi genocide of the Jewish people. But more significant is the contradiction within this framework, an inability to accept the common fate of the victims. Whether they are Japanese, Ugandans, Gypsies, Cambodians, Armenians, or Jews, their common humanity makes possible a common intellectual understanding. Insistence upon separatism, that the crime was Jewish existence and that this makes the Jewish situation different from any other slaughter, whatever its roots, contains a dangerous element of mystification. It represents a variation of the belief in chosenness, converting it from living God's commandments into chosenness for destruction. This approach is dangerously misanthropic. It misses the point that being chosen for life may be a unique Jewish mission, but being selected for death is common to many peoples and societies.

The description of Jews as devils was not the essence of Nazi anti-Semitism; it was only the rhetoric of Nazism. The Ayatollah Khomeini and other Iranian clerics constantly refer to Americans as devils. The essence of the Jewish problem for Nazism was the Jew as a political actor, and beyond that, the Jew as a cosmopolitan, universalistic figure in contrast to Fascist concepts based on nationalism, statism, and particularism. The Jewish tradition of social marginality, of reticence to participate in nationalistic celebrations, makes anti-Semitism a universal phenomenon, as characteristic of France as of the Soviet Union. The special character of Jewish living cannot be easily converted into the special nature of Jewish dying. Dying is a universal property of many peoples, cultures, and nations.

Five: The Holocaust was not an episode within the Third Reich, a footnote for historians. In all other societies, however brutal, people are punished for
doing. In the Third Reich, "non-Aryans" were punished for being. In all other societies—in pretended or actual principle, if assuredly not always in practice—people are presumed innocent until proved guilty; the Nazi principle presumed everyone guilty until he had proved his "Aryan" innocence. Hence, anyone proving or even prepared to prove such innocence was implicated, however slightly or unwittingly, in the process which led to Auschwitz. The Holocaust is not an accidental by-product of the Reich but rather its inmost essence.

Response to this proposition must acknowledge the basic truths of the first part of the statement. The Holocaust was not merely a passing moment within the Third Reich. It did not occur in other Fascist countries, like Italy, for example, where death itself was alien to the Italian culture, where not only the survival of Jews but the survival of Communists was tolerated and even encouraged. Antonio Gramsci's major works were written in a prison that had been converted into a library by his jailers. The nature of national culture is a specific entity. The Italian people, the Turkish people, the German people all had a distinctive character. Social analysts do not discuss this kind of theme in public. It is not fashionable; we have become even a bit frightened of the concept of national character. Any notion of national character as that advanced by Fackenheim carries within itself the danger of stereotypical thought. But how else can we understand these phenomena? How can we understand the character of reaction, rebellion, and revolution in Turkey without understanding Turkish character, especially the continuity of that kind of character in the moral bookkeeping of development?

Ascribing guilt through proving innocence fits the framework of the Nazi ideology. But to construct a general theory of historical guilt may have pernicious consequences, in which the sins of the fathers are bequeathed to the children and further offspring. That the Holocaust was an "inmost essence" makes it difficult to get beyond phylogenetic memories, beyond a situation in which a society might be viewed as having overcome its racism. When guilt is generalized, when it no longer is historically specific to social systems and political regimes, then a kind of irreducible psychologism takes intellectual command and it becomes impossible to stipulate conditions for moving beyond a genocidal state. The Holocaust becomes part of a rooted psychic unconsciousness hovering above the permanently contaminated society. To be sure, the Holocaust is the essence of the Third Reich. However, such an observation is not necessarily the core question. Does the destruction of the Jews follow automatically upon a nation that is swallowed up by the totalitarian temptation? In which forms of totalitarianism does a holocaust or genocide take place? Is anti-Semitism the essence of the Soviet Union as is now claimed? Does the existence of anti-Semitism prove a theory of totalitarian essence?
The uncomfortable fact is that genocide is the consequence of certain forms of unbridled state power. But whether anti-Semitism or other forms of racism are employed depends on the specific history of oppressor groups no less than oppressed peoples. States which demonstrate their power by exercising their capacity to take lives may be termed totalitarian. Totalitarianism is the essence of the genocidal process. This in itself provides an ample definition. If the Holocaust is unique to the Third Reich, the question of genocide loses any potential for being a general issue common to oppressive regimes. It is parochial to think that the Third Reich somehow uniquely embodied the character of the Holocaust, when since then we have seen many other societies adopt similar positions and policies toward other minorities and peoples.

Six: The Holocaust is not part of German history alone. It includes such figures as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, who successfully urged the Nazi leaders to kill more Jews. It also includes all countries whose niggardly immigration policies prior to World War II cannot be explained in normal terms alone, such as the pressure of the Great Depression or a xenophobic tradition. Hitler did not wish to export national socialism but only anti-Semitism. He was widely successful. He succeeded when the world thought that "the Jews" must have done something to arouse the treatment given them by a German government. He also succeeded when the world categorized Jews needing a refuge as "useless people." (In this category would have been Sigmund Freud, had he still been in Germany rather than in America; Martin Buber, had he not already made his way to the Yishuv [Palestine].) This was prior to the war. When the war had trapped the Jews of Nazi Europe, the railways to Auschwitz were not bombed. The Holocaust is not a parochial event. It is world-historical.

Curiously there is no mention of any other kind of history. Is, for example, the genocide of the Armenian people part of world history or is it simply part of Turkish history? This is a very complicated point; at the risk of sounding impervious to moral claims, one has to be history-specific if anything serious is to emerge. If one blames the whole world for what took place at Van, one can construct such a theory. But it is more pertinent, more appropriate, more pointed, to blame the Turks and not the universe, and to blame the Germans and not the whole world, including the Grand Mufti. The issue is implementation, not rhetoric. The issue is neither the Grand Mufti nor the insecurities of Ambassador Morgenthau.

Fackenheim's idea that Hitler neither exported national socialism nor wished to do so represents a special reading of events. As Gideon Hausner reminds us, as late as April 1945, when the Soviets were penetrating Berlin for the final assault and Hitler was imprisoned in his bunker, his last will and testament concluded by enjoining "the government and the people to uphold the racial laws to the limit and to
resist mercilessly the poisoner of all nations, international Jewry." Hausner makes it plain that national socialism was an international movement whose linchpin was anti-Semitism. Fackenheim presumes that World War II was all about anti-Semitism, but at a more prosaic level it was about conquest. There was a Nazi government in Rumania; there was a Nazi government in Yugoslavia—all these regimes were exported. The idea that Hitler was not interested in exporting national socialism is curious. It would be more appropriate to note that wherever national socialism was exported, so too did anti-Semitism follow. However, in conditions where the Jewish population was not a factor, Nazism still sought to establish a political foothold, either with or without direct military aggression. The relation between national socialism as an ideology and anti-Semitism as a passion is one that the Nazis themselves were hard put to resolve. The linkage between the ideology and the passion, which seems so close in retrospect, was far less articulated policy than felt need in the earlier states of the Nazi regime.

Fackenheim slips in a subtle point that Jews were "trapped" in Europe. But Jews were not trapped in Europe. They were of Europe and had been of Europe for a thousand years. One of their dilemmas is one rendered in almost every history where those who are to be exploited or annihilated overidentify with their ruling masters. The Jews of Europe were entirely Europeanized. Only a small fragment remained outside the framework of Europeanization. The great divide of German and Russian Jews was participation in European nationalism, identification with enlightenment. Fackenheim's idea that the Jews were trapped in Europe is a clever misreading of the facts. The added horror of the Holocaust is that it happened to a people who were endemic to that part of the world.

Seven: The Jews were no mere scapegoat in the Holocaust. It is true that they were used as such in the early stages of the movement. Thus Hitler was able to unite the "left" and "right" wings of his party by distinguishing, on the left between "Marxist" (i.e., Jewish) and "national socialism" (i.e., "Aryan") and, on the right, between raffendes Kapital ("rapacious," i.e., "Jewish" capital) and schaffendes Kapital ("creative," i.e., "Aryan" capital). It is also true that, had the supply of Jewish victims given out, Hitler would have been forced (as he once remarked to Hermann Rauschning) to "invent" new "Jews." But it is not true that "The Jew [was]... only a pretext for something else." So long as there were actual Jews, it was these actual Jews who were the systematic object of ferreting-out, torture, and murder. Once, at Sinai, Jews had been singled out for life and a task. Now at Auschwitz, they were singled out for torment and death.

The difficulty with this exclusivist formula is that while Jews were singled out, so too were Gypsies, Poles, and Slavs. Hitler's appeal was to state power, not to unite left and right; not to unite bourgeoisie and
proletariat, but to make sure that the bourgeoisie and the proletariat of Germany were purified of Jewish elements. If one considers the national aspects of the Third Reich rather than the mystical aspects of Jewish destruction it becomes a lot easier to fathom. German Jewish concentration points were the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, in leftist socialist politics and in high bourgeois economics. Liquidation of the Jews enabled the German bureaucratic state to manage the bourgeoisie and the proletariat of Germany without opposition. The destruction of socialism was attendant to the destruction of the Jews. Without socialist opposition, the German proletariat was an easy mark for Third Reich massification. The first two legislative acts of the Third Reich were bills of labor, work, and management. The liquidation of the Jewish population, within both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, permitted the Nazis to consolidate state power. The Holocaust, from a Nazi standpoint, was an entirely rational process, scarcely a singular act of mystical divination. It was the essential feature of Nazi "domestic" policy in the final stages of the Third Reich.

Eight: The Holocaust is not over and done with. Late in the war Goebbels (who needless to say, knew all) said publicly and with every sign of conviction that, among the peoples of Europe, the Jews alone had neither sacrificed nor suffered in the war but only profited from it. As this was written, an American professor has written a book asserting that the Holocaust never happened, while other Nazis are preparing to march on Skokie in an assault on Jewish survivors. Like the old Nazis, the new Nazis say two things at once. The Holocaust never happened; and it is necessary to finish the job.

On this point, Fackenheim is on sound ground. Still, the point that he does not make and that requires emphasis is that the Holocaust did happen and could happen again, but is now more likely to happen to people other than Jews and Armenians. It was more likely to happen to Ugandans, and it did; to Cambodians, and it did; to Paraguayans, and it did; to Biafrans, and it did. It is correct to say that the Holocaust is not over and done with. But it is not over and done with because there are other peoples victimized by the very model created by the Turkish and Nazi genocides.

It is important not to fit peoplehood into theories; theories must fit the realities of people. If the restoration of human dignity is to become a theme for social research, it becomes imperative to understand the unified character of genocide, the common characteristics of its victims, and ultimately the need for alliances of victims and potential victims to resist all kinds of genocide. To insist on universalism, triumphalism, or separatist orientations is self-defeating. If there is to be any political consequence of research into genocide, and if victim groups are to do more than pay for annual memorials and remembrances, understanding of the
unity needed to confront state oppression must be made paramount; otherwise little will have been accomplished and nothing will have changed.

Although my analysis has sharply demarcated theological from sociological viewpoints, it should be appreciated that Jewish religious thought is itself far from unanimous on the special nature of the Holocaust. Orthodox segments in particular have cautioned against an overly dramaturgical viewpoint, urging instead a position in which the Nazi Holocaust is but the latest monumental assault on the Jewish people—one that is neither to be ignored nor celebrated, but simply understood as part of the martyrdom of a people. In a recent essay, William Helmreich has finely caught the spirit of this "strictly orthodox" view—which may be shared by larger numbers than either the mystifiers or the celebrationists may recognize.

He notes that this orthodox wing rejects paying special homage by singling out the victims of the Holocaust on both philosophical and practical grounds.

In their view, the Holocaust is not, in any fundamental way, a unique event in Jewish history, but simply the latest in a long chain of anti-Jewish persecutions that began with the destruction of the Temple and which also included the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, attacks on Jews led by Chmielnicki, and the hundreds of pogroms to which the Jewish community has been subjected over the centuries. They do admit that the Holocaust was unique in scale and proportion but this is not considered a distinction justifying its elevation into a separate category.

Helmreich goes on to note that the ethical problem, in view of orthodox believers, is the same if one Jew is murdered or if 6 million meet such a fate. Since Judaism is a Gemeinschaft ("a community of fate"), the sheer volume killed, while awesome, does not in itself transform a quantitative event into a unique qualitative phenomenon.

The significance of this minority theological report is to call attention to the fact that in the problem of the Holocaust, while there are some strong clerical-secular bifurcations, there are also cross-cutting patterns across disciplinary boundaries. For example, certain sociological lessons can be drawn from the Holocaust: the breakdown in egalitarian revolutions of the nineteenth century, the subtle abandonment of the Palestinian mandate after the Balfour Declaration, the lofty assertion followed by a total revocation of Jewish minority rights in the Soviet Union. For orthodoxy the Holocaust is more a function of the breakdown of Jewish solidarity than of any special evils of the German nation or the Nazi regime.

The sociological view attempts to transcend sectarian or parochial concerns and develop a cross-cultural paradigm that would permit placing the Holocaust in a larger perspective of genocide in the twentieth
century rather than seeing the former as entirely distinctive and the latter as some weaker form of mass murder. For example, with the liquidation of roughly 40 percent of the Cambodian population, even the quantitative indicators of the Nazi Holocaust have been approached in at least one other situation. In the past, it has been argued that genocide of other peoples—Armenians, Ugandans, Paraguayans, Indians—has been too random and sporadic to be termed a holocaust. It has also been claimed that the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were highly selective and refined military targets and not efforts at the total destruction of a people. Whatever the outcome of such contentions, the Cambodian case would indicate the risks in vesting too much intellectual capital in the sheer numbers involved—although it is clearly a factor to be contended with.

Having argued thusly, let me note that qualitative differences do exist which distinguish the Jewish Holocaust from any other forms of genocide. First, there is the systematic rather than random or sporadic nature of the Holocaust: the technological and organizational refinement of the tools of mass slaughter which ultimately reduced all morality to problems of human engineering—development of the most effective methods for destroying and disposing of large numbers of people by the fewest cadres possible in the shortest amount of time. Second, there was an ideological fervor unmatched by any other previous variety of genocide. So intent were the Nazis in their policy of extermination of the Jews that they dared contact other nations, especially Axis powers and neutral countries, to repatriate Jews back to Germany to suffer the ultimate degradation. Third, genocide against the Jewish people represented and rested upon a national model of state power: the purification of the apparatus of repression by a total concentration of the means of destruction in a narrow military police stratum unencumbered by considerations of class, ethnicity, gender, or any other social factors affecting Nazi response to non-Jewish groups. The liquidation of plural sources of power and authority made easier, indeed presupposed, the total liquidation of the Jewish population.

With all these inner disputations and disagreements accounted for, there are still those who—too guilt-ridden to face the monstrous consequences of the Holocaust against Jews in particular and victims of genocide as a whole—have chosen the path of evading reality. An isolated voice like that of Arthur R. Butz\textsuperscript{16} is now joined in a quasi-intellectual movement, with all the paraphernalia of historical scholarship,\textsuperscript{17} denying this massive crime. Denials of gas chambers, rejection of photographic evidence, equation of indemnification of the victims with Zionist beneficiaries are all linked to the rejection of the Holocaust’s occurrence. The Nazi "revisionists" dare not speak of Nazism, but of national socialism; not of Germany under Hitlerism, but of a Third Reich. The Nazi epoch is even spoken of in remorseful terms: "Over-
whelming British, American, and Soviet forces finally succeeded in crushing the military resistance of a Germany which they accorded not even the minimum of mercy."\(^{18}\) Pity the poor victim!

Even the New Nazi "intelligentsia" does not deny mass murder, but only the numbers murdered.\(^ {19}\) If it is not 6 million, then what number is it? No matter, those massacred were Zionists, Communists, or a hyphenated variety of the two—Jewish-Bolsheviks—any euphemism for Jews other than the admission of a special assassination of Jews as a people. The need for exacting scholarship—the sort that has begun to emerge—with respect to all peoples victimized for their existence is not simply a matter of litanies and recitations, but of the very retention of the historical memory itself. The scientific study of genocide is not a matter of morbid fascination or mystic divination, but of the need to assert the historical reality of collective crime. Only by such a confrontation can we at least locate moral responsibility for state crimes even if we cannot always prevent future genocides from taking place.

With all due weight given to the different traditions involved in the theological and sociological arguments concerning genocide, they do have a strong shared value commitment to the normative framework in which greater emphasis is placed on the protection of life than on economic systems or political regimes.\(^ {20}\) Both traditions are committed, insofar as their dogmas and doctrines permit, to the supreme place of life in the hierarchy of values. This is no small matter. Nazism witnessed the breakdown of religious and scientific institutions alike; and those that could not be broken down were oftentimes simply corrupted, as in decadent and exotic notions of a Teutonic Church and the equally ludicrous belief in an Aryan Science. In the larger context of world history and in the wider picture of centuries-old barbarisms, we bear witness not to a warfare of science versus theology but rather to a shared collapse of any sort of normative structure in which either could function to enhance the quality or sanctity of life.

Leo Kuper, born and banned in South Africa, is professor emeritus at the University of Southern California and the author of several excellent monographs in social stratification and race relations in African contexts. He is a good man writing about an awful subject who has produced, unfortunately, a mediocre book. The author of *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* manages to skirt just about every major issue which has arisen in the field of investigation: the relationship between the Holocaust and genocides in general; the relationship between civil conflict and state destruction; and the reasons for the ineffectiveness of international peace-keeping agencies in reducing genocide. The last omission is particularly glaring since Kuper describes this as an essential task.

On a different level, however, it is an excellent basic text, especially for individuals who are not familiar with the subject of genocide.
Definitions are invariably fairminded and essentially sound; the appendices, especially on United Nations resolutions and areas of backsliding (such as its attitude toward the Turkish genocide against Armenians), are particularly revealing. The role of the United Nations, or its lack thereof, has been discussed often but understood rarely. At such descriptive levels the book provides a welcome contribution. The selected cases are for the most part helpful and demonstrate a keen sense of the magnitude of the problems of genocide. When we talk in terms of roughly 800,000 Armenians, 6 million Jews, and 3 million Cambodians, we have clear-cut examples of an enormous portion of a national population decimated by the authorities, giving a sober reminder that our century hovers dangerously between creativity and destruction.

The book's problems are less those of sentiment than of method. Equating such phenomena as civil strife between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland with the destruction of German Jewry or the destruction of urban Cambodia just does not work. Even the author acknowledges that in Northern Ireland, victims have been numbered in the hundreds over a long stretch of time, whereas in most clear-cut cases of genocide the numbers destroyed are in the millions. Then there is the too simplistic equation of civil war and genocide. Equating the Nigerian Civil War or even the struggle against apartheid in South Africa with cases of undisputed genocide blurs and confuses rather than clarifies what genocide is about—namely, the vast, near-total destruction of large numbers of noncombatants innocent of any specific crime. Furthermore, burdening the United Nations as the source of the failure to control genocide is unconvincing since, as Kuper explains at length, this organization is primarily a composite of nations and not in itself a sovereign power. Underneath the demand to strengthen the United Nations is an implicit assumption that nationalism should be weakened—something that clearly has not taken place, nor is likely to take place, certainly not under the aegis of the United Nations.

In the balance of this critique, let me take up some of the thornier issues. The problem of genocide is not a new one, and the need for a scholarship to move beyond horrors and into analysis becomes increasingly critical. It is risky to equate genocide with arbitrary death. Two examples which Leo Kuper has given illustrate a problem rather than indicate a solution. He raises, for example, the case of India during the partition. Hindus and Moslems constituted majorities in different parts of the country, each with the capacity to engage freely in what he calls reciprocal genocidal massacre. However terrible and tragic that mutual destruction was, to speak of it as genocidal in the context of religious competition and conflict risks diluting the notion of genocide and equating it with any conflict between national, religious, or racial groups. This error also appears in his analysis of Northern Ireland, where Protestants and Catholics engage in the meanest and most dangerous
kinds of assaults on one another. If one were to tally the numbers of deaths since 1920, they would total about 10,000, surely a terrible human loss and an indicator, according to Kuper, of the risks involved in the removal of the British presence in Ulster before a political solution is achieved. One might indicate, as have many leaders from both the Catholic and Protestant camps, that the British presence is itself a source of violence and that the removal of the occupying power would overcome a major obstacle to resolution of the civil conflict. Whether this belief is correct or not, we are dealing within the realm of political tactics and international relations, but surely not with genocide—unless we reduce the term to a fatuous notion of the cultural elimination of certain groups and ideologies.

Kuper also confounds legal identification between apartheid and genocide in South Africa with the empirical problem: the place and condition of the blacks within South Africa. As the author himself well appreciates, there is a demographic restraint to annihilation. The black African population in South Africa grew from roughly 8 million in 1945 to 19 million in 1980. The Asian population grew from 285,000 to 765,000; and the white population from 2.4 million to roughly 4.4 million. The demographics alone indicate that genocide simply has not occurred. What may have happened is the fragmentation of the African population and the consequent denial of blacks' citizenship rights. South Africa is also a classic case of exploitation of the majority by a racial minority, in a very specialized context. But it does not benefit the victims or anyone else to present South Africa as a case of genocide—which implies the absolute destruction of a people, if not completely, then in such large numbers as to affect their future survival potential.

Relativizing the issue of genocide particularly damages efforts to understand the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews. The major problem in such relativizing is that it completely fails to distinguish between the systematic, total, scientific engineering of death, and the more random occurrences that are characteristic of other events. If others were to operate under a veil of anonymity such as the Nazis did, they might also attempt a kind of "final solution." But whether that is so or not, the notion of the final solution, the sources and consequences of the Nazi destruction of the Jews, is absent in the work of Professor Kuper. While I myself have argued against celebrating the exclusivity of death, one must consider seriously differences between the almost total destruction of a population, reducing it to a remnant, and the selective, random elimination of political or religious opposition. The very concept of the Holocaust as something unique fails to appear in Kuper's work and is mentioned only in relation to a book title. It is as if the author were consciously and deliberately attempting to relativize the Jewish case as one of many, and consequently disregarding the specificity and peculiar characteristics involved in the Nazi Holocaust. This undermines not
only the moral basis of Kuper's work but also weakens his appreciation of the full meaning of the Turkish assault on Armenians. The latter was not merely an event that took place in the Ottoman Empire but is characteristic of the Kemalist democracy that followed. The genocide against Armenians, like the Holocaust against Jews, was special in its totality as well as in its movement beyond the boundaries of nationalism and rationalism. Both cases are not characteristic of any others—until we get to Cambodian communism.

Underlying his failure to distinguish between genocide and civil strife on the one hand, and genocide and total destruction such as the Holocaust on the other, is a peculiar inability to distinguish between theory and action and, more specifically, an unwillingness to deal with German and Turkish cultures. Kuper, along with others, has dedicated a great deal of futile time to problems of ideology. There is sufficient confusion within Marxism and Fascism to make one wary of this line of approach. Perhaps Marxism, in its acceptance of a theory of class polarization, yields to a Manichean vision of a world torn apart; but even a Marxism predicated on guilt by social origin may or may not translate into genocidal behavior. It certainly does in terms of the Gulag Archipelago and the years of Stalinism; it certainly does not in such places as Yugoslavia. Likewise, even with Fascism there seems to be no doubt that the Nazis analogized European Jewry to a cancer which had to be excised and identified Jews with world conspiracy. Fascism in Italy did not have the same genocidal potential. When Jewish enclaves in Asia came under Japanese dominion during World War II the genocidal pattern did not follow. Any comprehensive analysis of genocide must deal seriously with cultural canons which permit or forbid genocidal behavior. This total absence of cultural analysis—of both those who were and were not given to genocide—seriously weakens Kuper's book. Ideology rather than culture is held responsible and accountable for genocidal behavior. This is a difficult thesis to prove. The republican developmentalism of Ataturk in Turkey is absolutely at odds with imperial notions derived from the Ottoman Empire, yet both republican and anti-republican forces within Turkey carried on genocide against the Armenians. The peasant egalitarianism of the Khmer Rouge did not spare us a major genocide. Wherever one seeks an answer based on ideology the same kind of confusion presents itself, issues which Kuper unfortunately does not address.

Kuper charges the United Nations with having done much less than it should have. He argues that its capacities to curtail genocide, much less prevent or punish atrocities, have been blunted. He gives several reasons for this laxity: first, the punitive procedures of the United Nations are weak; second, the United Nations is committed to the sanctity of state sovereignty; and third, the United Nations has established commissions to deal with complaints about human rights violations which are them-
selves highly politicized and controlled by a clique of powerful nations whose vested interests are in stilling the voices of opposition. One could hardly argue with Kuper's analysis of the weaknesses of the United Nations, but from an analytical point of view, it is an extremely thin reed on which to hang an analysis of the problem of genocide. The sources of genocide are certainly not in the United Nations. The limits of the organization are well understood by most. Kuper might then have analyzed different kinds of national cultures as well as how punishment and law emerge in various countries.

There is now a burgeoning literature on just these subjects. It might be possible to develop an early warning signal, a concern about problems of law and democratic order, that might limit the possibility of future genocides taking place. But if the genesis of the problem is not in a world organization, then it is hard to believe that the solution will be found there. As Kuper knows quite well, the United Nations is itself the source of so much amoral self-righteousness that its very existence strengthens nationalism and the national ideal.

The treatment of the Holocaust as a dialogue between God and Golem, as ineffable and unspeakable, serves to return the matter of death into the antinomic and Manichean tradition of original sin versus original goodness, or, as it is more fashionably called, historical pessimism versus historical optimism. On the other hand, the treatment of genocide as a problem for the United Nations makes it a rather tepid organizational affair, denying to this "dismal science" its full meaning and significance.

If social science is to make its own serious contribution to Holocaust studies, it must get beyond the mystery of silence or the silence of mysteries. However limited the clinical analysis of collective death may be, we may at least be spared the repetition of some forms of genocide. To incorporate in the Jewish psyche the phrase "never again" requires an antecedent commitment to explain why genocide happened in the first place. Theologians must not presume an exclusive monopoly on meaning by insisting upon the mystery and irrationality of taking lives. The task of social science remains, in this area as in all others, a rationalization of irrationality. Only in this way can the victory be denied to Golem and the struggle against evil be understood as a task God assigns to humanity. This is far greater than standing in silent awe at the tragedies that have befallen our tragic century.

NOTES


7. For a fuller version of what has become the dominant and most widely respected Jewish viewpoint on the Holocaust, see Emil L. Fackenheim, God's Presence in History (New York: Schocken Press, 1972), pp. 70-73.


15. For a full discussion of the orthodox (minority) viewpoint on the Holocaust in the context of Yeshiva life, see William Helmreich, "Making the


19. The most authoritative estimate of the number of Jews killed by the Nazis—5,978,000 out of a prewar population of 8,301,000, or 72 percent—is contained in Leon Poliakov and Josef Wulf, eds., *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden: Dokumente und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Arani, 1955), p. 229.

20. For an articulate statement of legal and social issues at an individual level which have direct relevance to our discussion at the collective level, see George Z. F. Bereday, "The Right to Live and the Right to Die: Some Considerations of Law and Society in America," *Man and Medicine* 4 (November 4, 1979), pp. 233-56.