



The Degradation of Ethics through the Holocaust

Paul E. Wilson

palgrave
macmillan

The Degradation of Ethics Through the Holocaust

Paul E. Wilson

The Degradation of Ethics Through the Holocaust

palgrave
macmillan

Paul E. Wilson
Shaw University
Raleigh, NC, USA

ISBN 978-3-031-30918-2 ISBN 978-3-031-30919-9 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-30919-9>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2023

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

CONTENTS

Part I	The Genocidal Priming Phase of the Holocaust	1
1	Introduction	3
	<i>Shades of Nietzsche and Heidegger in the Holocaust</i>	5
	<i>The Holocaust as One Way Hatred Grows</i>	7
	<i>Genocide is a Process</i>	11
2	Antisemitism is a Vicious Racism	17
	<i>Introduction</i>	17
	<i>Jews, Christians, and Antisemitism in Supersessionism</i>	18
	<i>Antisemitism is a Racism</i>	21
	<i>The Insidious Side of Institutionalized Racism</i>	22
	<i>Antisemitism as Hate</i>	27
	<i>Conclusion</i>	31
3	Denial of Rights as a Prelude to Entitlement	35
	<i>Introduction</i>	35
	<i>Personal Property Laws and Racism</i>	36
	<i>Genocide and Deprivation of Victim's Rights</i>	37
	<i>How Individuals Come to Be Bearers of Rights: A General Account</i>	39
	<i>A Conceptual Framework for the Expansion and Contraction of Rights</i>	44

	<i>Contraction of Rights: The Slippery Slope of Jews' Loss of Personal Property rights in German</i>	46
	<i>Ghettos and the Right to Personal Liberty</i>	51
	<i>Denial of Rights and Statelessness</i>	52
	<i>Conclusion</i>	53
4	Propaganda for Genocide	57
	<i>Introduction</i>	57
	<i>Who Were the Propagandists?</i>	64
	<i>Hitler as a Propagandist</i>	66
	<i>Gerhard Kittle</i>	67
	<i>Joseph Goebbels</i>	68
	<i>Walter Grundmann</i>	70
	<i>Julius Streicher</i>	71
	<i>Heinrich Himmler</i>	72
	<i>What Shadows of Propaganda were Cast?</i>	74
	<i>The German Propaganda Diet</i>	75
	<i>Effects Upon the Prisoners in the Cave of Ignorance</i>	77
	<i>Conclusions</i>	78
5	Self-Entitlement for the Chosen Few	83
	<i>Introduction</i>	83
	<i>A Protocol to Distinguish the Us and Them in the Holocaust</i>	85
	<i>When Rights become a Matter of Life and Death</i>	88
	<i>Anatomy of a Mass Murder</i>	91
	<i>Historical Convergences and Logical Intersections</i>	94
	<i>License to Kill</i>	96
	<i>Conclusion</i>	98
6	The Case of the Aryan Jesus Dogma: Enlarging Entitlement through Propaganda	103
	<i>Introduction</i>	103
	<i>The Religious Appeal of an Aryan Jesus</i>	105
	<i>The Theological Support of an Aryan Jesus</i>	107
	<i>An Aryan Jesus Creed Reconstructed</i>	109
	<i>The Efficacy and Logic of the Case for an Aryan Jesus</i>	114
	<i>Conclusion</i>	117

Part II	The Peak Phase of Genocide in the Holocaust	119
7	The Holocaust and the Ideal of Purity	121
	<i>Introduction</i>	121
	<i>The Definition of Genocide</i>	123
	<i>The Scale of Genocide</i>	124
	<i>The Failure of Purification as the Ideal of Genocide</i>	126
	<i>Crafting Moral and Practical Responses to Genocide</i>	128
	<i>Conclusion</i>	130
8	Resistance and Neighborly Aid	133
	<i>Introduction</i>	133
	<i>Becoming Targets of Genocidal Violence</i>	135
	<i>Resistance for Dignity's Sake</i>	137
	<i>Heroic Resistance that Dignifies Human Rights</i>	148
	<i>Assessing the Utility of Resistance</i>	150
	<i>The Practicality and Justice of Resistance</i>	153
	<i>Conclusion</i>	158
9	The Case of the Muselmänner: A Study in the Loss and Reclamation of Dignity	161
	<i>Introduction</i>	161
	<i>How the Dignified Should be Treated</i>	162
	<i>Who the Muselmänner Were</i>	163
	<i>Denial of Needs and Deprivation of Dignity</i>	166
	<i>Measured Satisfaction of Needs for the Reclamation of Dignity</i>	168
	<i>Conclusion</i>	170
10	Ethical Gray Zones in Genocidal Killing Camps	173
	<i>Introduction</i>	173
	<i>The Emergence of Ethical Gray Zones</i>	174
	<i>Entrapment in an Ethical Gray Zone</i>	175
	<i>Ethics in the Gray Zones</i>	177
	<i>Return from the Gray Zones</i>	184
	<i>Transformations</i>	184
	<i>Conclusion</i>	186

11	Bystanders to Genocide	191
	<i>Introduction</i>	191
	<i>Bystanders and Complicity</i>	194
	<i>Martin Niemöller 's Courage and Regrets</i>	196
	<i>A J. Topf & Sons: Manufacturing Hygiene</i>	198
	<i>Complicity of the Swastika Bedecked German Church</i>	202
	<i>Complicity of the Silent Neighboring Nations</i>	207
	<i>Conclusion</i>	210
12	Cry Genocide!	213
	<i>Introduction</i>	213
	<i>When and Why to Give the Cry: "Genocide!"</i>	216
	<i>The Choice to Give the Cry: "Genocide!"</i>	218
	<i>Some Risks in Raising the Cry of Genocide</i>	223
	<i>Conclusion</i>	226
13	Postscript	229
	Works Cited	233
	Index	243

PART I

The Genocidal Priming Phase of the
Holocaust



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Degradation Ethics Through the Holocaust is a morality story that examines the process within a genocide. Hard core Holocaust deniers claim that the Holocaust as a single event never happened. To recognize that the Holocaust like other genocides is a process is to recognize that it was a complex historical event unfolding over time and involving thousands of moral actors making thousands of moral decisions. At each stage

I would like to thank the Faculty Resource Network (FRN) of New York University for granting me an FRN Remote Scholar Fellowship for Fall 2021, Spring 2022, and Fall 2022 to continue research on this manuscript. Resources in the Bobst Library enabled me to reply to comments and suggestions offered on the project. Administration at Shaw University have been supportive of my research by granting me time in my schedule for research while still teaching and acting as a school administrator. The Walter Clinton Jackson Library of Greensboro, North Carolina, has granted me an area teacher library card for research. I am grateful to reviewers and colleagues who have commented during the writing and revision of essays and chapters that now appear in this book. Thanks go to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum for inviting me to attend Programs on Ethics, Religion and the Holocaust (PERH) Summer Seminars in 2016 and 2021. In addition, I would like to thank Editor Amy Invernizzi for choosing to review my work for publication with Palgrave Macmillan.

moral actors were making ethical decisions that would further or stymie the process leading up to the mass murder of people. Viewed individually the impact of a decision just to engage in racial stereotyping can be underestimated. In combination these decisions to act in specific ways did culminate in the mass murder of over six million Jews and others. What Primo Levi said of the Holocaust is a truth of the morality story of genocide: It happened before, so it could happen again.

If there is a banality within the process of the Holocaust, it seems to lie in the banality of moral decisions that contribute to a genocide or that fail to halt progress toward it. The decision to stereotype members of other ethnic groups or the decision not to condemn that practice may seem trite in comparison to the decision to persecute or even kill a member of another ethnic group. In a genocide the former decision becomes a causal condition that contributes to the outcome.

On December 29, 1972, Edward Lorenz posed a question for the American Association for the Advancement of Science: “Does the flap of a butterfly’s wing in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?”¹ Briefly stated, Lorenz, a meteorologist, surmised that there was a strong possibility that an event in Brazil could be a causal factor contributing to an event in Texas. Others like Norman Gladwell have called attention to the monumental effects that can follow from slight changes.² This volume examines in context the ethical decisions of individuals, collectives and states that happened through the stages of the Holocaust.

When we begin an in-depth analysis of events in a genocide like the Holocaust, we see persons resolving their ethical dilemmas by harming others. Or we find persons forced to react to the harm intended for them. We may have read the same history script so often that we have become desensitized to wrongdoing it recounts. Rather than have our moral hackles raised, we may respond, “So what? How often must one repeat that killing is wrong and is to be condemned?” I believe victims and survivors of genocidal violence have one answer: Repeat that mass killing is wrong. Repeat it until it stops.

SHADES OF NIETZSCHE AND HEIDEGGER IN THE HOLOCAUST

The next chapter of this study investigates antisemitism as a pervasive moral issue in the twentieth century. In the opening chapter of his book, *“Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century,”* the philosopher Jonathan Glover argues for the abiding influence of Friedrich Nietzsche on modern ethics.³ Here I shall not attempt to engage with the philosophical arguments of Glover regarding Nietzsche. I take Nietzsche to be a philosopher who presents a philosophical vision in the tradition of Parmenides, Plato, or Hegel and other continental philosophers. Nietzsche does not proceed with his philosophical discourse as an analytical philosopher. I respect Nietzsche for his analysis of the human condition and his value theory, but I join those who take issue with his world view and its implications for normative ethical theory. In Nietzsche’s world view ethical values are relativized and traditional ethical theories like deontology or consequentialism can become expressions of an ancient will to power. Nietzsche says, “good and evil that are not transitory, do not exist.”⁴ From my reading of Nietzsche I shall call attention to two points only.

First, Nietzsche offers us a naturalistic vision of the condition of the world that is beyond good and evil. Nietzsche writes, “For all things have been baptized in the well of eternity and are beyond good an evil; and good and evil themselves are intervening shadows and damp depressions and drifting clouds.”⁵ That said, in Nietzsche’s view the value judgments we make regarding good and evil in a world of eternal recurrence become very anthropocentric. For my part I am persuaded of another world view, a panentheistic world view wherein there are absolute values of good and evil. Hence, I assume everyday notions of duty, consequences, and virtue are not relativized but still make sense as values.

Second, within Nietzsche’s world view there is a respect of power for the sake of power. This will-to-power has intrinsic and extrinsic value insofar as it elevates the power of the one who exerts it. Also, will-to-power furthers the ends of those who would exert power over nature and others. Nietzsche says, “what the people believe to be good and evil, that betrays to me an ancient will to power.”⁶ I surmise that will-to-power is compatible with hatred but not compassion. I suppose compassion to be a virtue, not a vice.

Glover also includes in his discussion of twentieth-century philosophy a detailed account of the philosophy and lifestyle of Martin Heidegger. American philosopher and ethicist, John Roth commented that philosophers bear a great weight of responsibility for not subjecting to philosophical and ethical scrutiny their role in the forces that give rise to genocide or the Holocaust.⁷ It is possible to overlook the glaring inconsistencies and harmful tendencies in the behavior of some philosophers, but that oversight can represent a serious lapse of moral judgment. Glover's discussion of Heidegger's Nazi membership seems to provide the evidence that Roth is right. Heidegger was responsible for failing to condemn the racism and cruelty that Nazis were engendering. Heidegger embraces his membership in the Nazi party, and his lifestyle and associations conform to the ideal of Nazism. For instance, as a loyal Nazi Heidegger rejected associations with his own mentor, Edmund Husserl.⁸ This was not an insignificant social faux pas. Rather it was a choice of Heidegger to uphold the values of the Nazis. Some philosophers take refuge in the obtuse, while they ignore their responsibility to speak out for social justice or the good. Later in the next chapter I shall speak of first and second grade racism. If one supposes Heidegger's is a borrowed, second grade racism, it only confirms his willingness not to engage reflectively with his social and political commitments. It is no complement to say that a philosopher, a reflective thinker, would forego his own reflection upon such a monumental social issue as antisemitism, but it appears that Heidegger did so. If I am correct in my understanding of Glover, I suppose he would agree.

Heidegger has been faulted by Roth for his failure to rise to the occasion and denounce the Nazis as perpetrators of genocide. I see that as a clear omission of his moral obligation. Only a passing observation can be offered here regarding the substance of Heidegger's philosophy. I take Heidegger to be offering the academy an elaborate ontology where individual existence is situated within the common or herd. This philosophy was challenged by Emmanuel Levinas on several points. In his essay "Is Ontology Fundamental?" Levinas invites thinkers to consider the ethical relation to the other to be foundational.⁹ Unlike Heidegger Levinas recognizes this otherness as a starting point for morality. The philosopher Edith Wyschogrod says, "It is the Other whose face means "thou shalt not kill" that provides the objective criterion for all moral action."¹⁰ While this work is not offered as a phenomenological treatise, it does make sense to me that my ethical obligations extend to persons who are like and unlike me.

THE HOLOCAUST AS ONE WAY HATRED GROWS

In his book, *Mass Hate*, Neil Kressel investigates the personality of perpetrators. In Kressel's view social forces like authoritarian regimes may create an environment where mass hate can flourish. Authoritarian personalities may arise in these circumstances to commit crimes of initiation, and sympathizers may willingly commit crimes of submission. Kressel is skeptical that programs of education and sensitivity training will reach those who are primed to commit atrocities and mass murder. He supposes the two most effective methods for addressing this moral and social problem are: (1) the prosecution of perpetrators and (2) the promotion of democratic governments where all people have a voice.¹¹

Mass hate is not a social or individual problem that can be ignored since it can fuel mass atrocities and genocides. While I need not agree with Kressel that educational programs aimed at the reform of some personalities are ineffective, I can agree with Kressel that the two steps cited earlier should be high on the list of ways that a society can proactively address the problem of mass hate and the atrocities and genocides it generates. A critic familiar with Kressel's work may agree that educational programs are largely ineffective. The critic may then ask why I write. What is the point of offering another book that recounts the moral problems of the Holocaust, if the way forward is evident? By calling attention to the stages of genocide I am acknowledging that mass atrocities and genocides do not suddenly happen. Rather there is a process that leads to mass murders. If we can better understand how individuals make choices depending on the stages they are in, then we can better judge the moral weight of those choices. Likewise, we may be able to identify ways that actors could choose otherwise.

Seeing the Holocaust and genocides as processes enables one better to avoid the problem of hasty generalizations in response to the question: "Why?" I am sympathetic with the "ordinary men" explanation for why.¹² At least one conceivable way to understand the ordinary men explanation for killing in the Holocaust is to see this as an instance where persons are responding to authoritarian commands to act violently toward others. Claudia Card recognizes the importance of the Milgram experiments, and she is supportive of this as a causal explanation for why persons do follow authoritarian commands.¹³ I would agree with Card that the Milgram experiments identify how persons do respond to authoritarian commands in a laboratory, and I would agree that Christopher Browning has shown

historically that many individuals under the influence of peer pressure and authoritarianism will act violently toward others. I would not call this a hasty generalization; however, I would suggest that the causes of why persons responded as they did to authoritarian commands in the Holocaust are far more complex. Moreover, I would point out that the ordinariness of the choice to harm or not harm another in no way lessens the gravity of the decision.

I have chosen to begin this work by looking at historical instances of ethical decision making in the context of the Holocaust rather than launching into an analytical argument *per se*. In so doing I am not insensitive to the enormity of the question: “Why?” Questions of the cause or the origin of the Holocaust and genocide are valid questions, but I want to ask a complementary question, “Why not?” I take this to be a prescriptive question rather than a descriptive question. The question of why is historical, and the application of analytical thought to a historical question leads one to search for first causes. However, the question has serious pragmatic implications. The Holocaust was not the last genocide. Genocide could happen again unless certain values are upheld. Or it could happen again unless certain non-sufficient and non-necessary causes are stymied in the process.

I assume that the Holocaust is a token of a type of historical phenomena known as genocide. I assume that genocide is a process, and as a process it is composed of stages. I accept Dr. Stanton’s ten stages as the best description of the stages of a genocide. In the Holocaust the stages of genocide act as necessary and non-sufficient causes in the historical process. Since it is a historical process, I draw heavily upon the historical accounts of the Holocaust to make my points. The history of the Holocaust demonstrates how these stages converge with moral values and moral behavior to produce the process that reaches its climax in mass killing and its anticlimax in denial and transitional justice. This convergence can be represented by a Venn diagram with three classes of phenomena—stages of genocide, moral values, and moral behavior. For the identification of a stage of genocide we consult history. For the identification of moral values, we may rely upon descriptive ethics, and for the identification of moral behavior we may rely upon normative ethics. For example, prior to November 1938 Jews experienced discrimination but were not necessarily persecuted. This phase of history represents the discrimination stage of genocide. The discrimination describes a negative valuation of the race that is targeted. The discrimination gives rise to use of denigrating

language or denial of social privileges that normative ethics would count as blameworthy behaviors.

To discuss ethics through the stages of the Holocaust I am obliged to inform the reader of my usage of the terms descriptive and normative ethical discourse. When I have offered a brief discussion of those ideas, I shall examine ethical decision making in the context of the Holocaust.

Descriptive ethics and normative ethics I take to be types of ethical discourse to be distinguished from metaethics. I suppose descriptive ethics is discourse that identifies values and actions as right or good. Some action is right, and a contradictory action is wrong. I suppose normative ethics to be discourse that is not only descriptive but also prescriptive. Something ought to be done or not, or some character should be developed or not. In their article, "Virtue Ethics" Rosalind Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove identify virtue ethics as one of three normative ethical theories.¹⁴ The remaining two normative theories I shall refer to are deontological ethics and consequential ethics. Each of the three varieties of ethical discourse offer its theoretical description or prescription for character or action to promote the good. Each of the three varieties of ethical discourse make possible the judgment that some behavior is wrong or blameworthy. Thus, in this work I am taking a multi-valiant approach to normative ethics.

Through the work I take the right to life of individual humans to be a fundamental right. This right may be grounded in the metaethical theory of intuitionism. Thus, the right to life may be regarded as self-evident.¹⁵ It is consistent with the three varieties of ethical discourse, namely teleological ethics, deontological ethics, and virtue ethics. I suppose that they each support the notion that the right to life is a basic good. Rule utilitarianism, natural law theory, divine command theory, the Jewish Torah, the Christian Golden Rule, and the Buddhist Silver Rule all recognize an individuals' right to life, and each condemns wanton murder that is committed in genocides.¹⁶

Suppose someone denies the self-evident principle that all persons have a right to life. I suppose they are not affirming the contrary, namely, that no persons have a right to life. That universal negation is a nihilistic proposition. The suppressed premise they affirm is the particular affirmation: Some persons have the right to life. Or they may assert the particular negation as the Nazis did: Some persons have the right to life, and some do not. The implication requires a defense of their existence over and above the existence of others or the environment. In practice those who deny all a right to life too often become the oppressors of those whom they would

exclude. Why should the oppressors have an exclusive right to life? We shall discuss in Chap. 2 the faulty binary reasoning that racists rely upon to defend their existence to the exclusion of others. Frequently the defense of an exclusive right to life is a thinly veiled claim to power, that is, an appeal to brute force. The oppressors believe they should exist, since they wield the power to exist.

How may we understand ethical decision making? I assume that ethical decisions are part of a practical reasoning process that is comprised of background beliefs and leads to practical activity. Polish officers knew what values they deemed reliable and had practical knowledge about their ordinance and about their enemy, the Jews, when they decided to kill Jews.

It is no trite matter to say that throughout the stages of genocide actors are called upon to make significant ethical choices shaped by knowledge and societal values associated with those stages. One finds in the writings of Nietzsche, Jean Paul Sartre, and like Existentialists a description of an existential crisis. The choices of a Jew living in Poland or even Berlin before 1939 are not the choices of a Jew who was confined to the Warsaw ghetto in 1940 before the uprising. Each actor faces their own existential crisis. In the moment of crisis, one must choose, and not to choose is likewise a choice. Actors caught in the drama of an unfolding genocide confront the existential choices that each stage presents. During the stage of classification, one must make choices regarding racism. The choices made by oneself and one's peers at that stage will impact the choices that follow during subsequent stages like the stage of organization. As we recount the unfolding of these stages it will be important to ask repeatedly: What can and what should the actor choose to think, say, or do? Descriptive ethics speak to what actors can think, say, or do; and normative ethics speak to what actors should think, say, or do. Prescriptions of normative ethics promote behaviors that uphold the right and the good.

When we approach denial as a comprehensive term reserved for the conclusion of the Holocaust, it lends support to the notion that genocide or the Holocaust is an event rather than a process. I am exposing my bias when I say that genocidal denial is an attempt to falsify an interpretation of an event. The denier says either the event did not happen or the event was not what the person supposed. So, I maintain denial happens not only at a late stage in the process of genocide or the Holocaust but also in earlier stages. Yes, there are some who deny that a genocide or the Holocaust happened. Also, there are persons who deny that the stages of genocide or the Holocaust were happening. We return to the question: Why repeat

well-worn accounts of genocide or the Holocaust? In repeating these accounts, we expose denial. It is important to expose denial in situ. That can enable us to expose denial among us now. Exposing denial enables us to see if and when the stages of genocide may be erupting in our generation or our community. When a racist joke is accepted as good humor, the joker who regales in the humor has set the standard for what is socially tolerated and approved in his or her circle of influence. The individual proceeds as if the behavior was harmless or good. This is a subtle denial that racial discrimination is happening or that it will lead to anything worse.

I am aware some readers may want me to say that genocide is a moral atrocity. This follows from the careful work of Claudia Card.¹⁷ I would agree with Card that genocide cannot be excused by a resort to metaphysical excuses. Perhaps it is conceivable that genocide could be set in a distinct moral class like war. Then philosophers could hold forth on just acts in genocide and unjust acts. I am not so persuaded. I am also aware that other readers may want me to side with the “ordinary men” scholars who want to say that it was ordinary men and women under extraordinary circumstances who were responsible for the wrongdoing of the Holocaust. I am not prepared to say that the Holocaust or other genocides represent collective madness, and I am not prepared to say that the Holocaust or other genocides are a process of population control. These are quick and fast generalizations I do not want to indulge here. What I do want to say is that at every stage of the Holocaust ethical decisions were being made that resulted in an undeniable ethical disaster. To understand that we need to consider the stages of genocide within the Holocaust. Likewise, we need to anticipate how the descriptive and normative dimensions of ethical discourse may apply to the choices actors make in those stages of genocide.

GENOCIDE IS A PROCESS

The ten stages of genocide identified by Gregory Stanton are posted on the Genocide Watch website. When I refer to discrete stages of genocide, I am using Stanton’s catalog as a reference. Stanton’s stages are: 1 classification; 2 symbolization; 3 discrimination; 4 dehumanization; 5 organization; 6 polarization; 7 preparation; 8 persecution; 9 extermination; and 10 denial. (Stanton <http://www.genocidewatch.com/>).

In her article, “Genocide is a Process, not an Event,” Sheri Rosenberg discusses how treating genocide as an event can be misleading.¹⁸ One

would be mistaken to believe that the Holocaust is a single event that happens as a response to the “final solution.”¹⁹ That would unfairly represent the many persons whose lives were lost as a result of being shot or being worked to death in slave labor camps. In addition, it fails to capture the many contributing causes that are subject to moral judgment.

I take Stanton’s list to be representative of the stages of genocide and not exhaustive. The stages can be seen as sequential stages, but I do not see them following one another in invariable, lockstep fashion. The stage of persecution could precede organization, and it could follow dehumanization. Careful readers can find all stages represented in the Holocaust. The Jewish Museum of Milwaukee has a page demonstrating how a reader can find in Rywka Lipszyc’s diary all the ten stages represented.²⁰

Since I have chosen not to develop a stage-by-stage description of the Holocaust, I shall refer to genocide as a process having two phases: (1) the genocidal priming phase; and (2) the peak genocide phase. This distinction I borrow from the Anthropologist and Genocide Scholar Alexander Hinton.²¹ I take seriously the notion that Stanton’s stages one to eight are contributing causes to stage nine, when mass killing happens. However, I do not suppose they happen in sequential lockstep. Depending on how one defines stage eight, persecution, one can see it happening as early as stage one. What I take to be an important observation is that the ethical choices happening throughout the two phases of the process are not inevitable choices. Individuals can choose not to stereotype others, and individuals can choose not to dehumanize other persons. Likewise, individuals can refrain from murder.

Part I consists of Chaps. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6—the genocidal priming phase of the Holocaust. This includes Stanton’s stages of the process of genocide that precede the peak phase of mass killing, that is, stage nine, extermination. Prior to the peak phase Stanton’s stage one of classification, stage three of discrimination, and stage four of dehumanization are becoming more widespread. Some murders may be taking place, but those are localized murders rather than mass murders. In genocidal priming victims may be persecuted and some may be murdered, but mass murder has not yet taken place.

“Part II—The Peak Phase of Genocide in the Holocaust” examines the ethical choices and actions that bring about the mass killing we associate with the Holocaust. What I identify as the peak phase of genocide is inclusive of all the previous stages of the genocide process as well as Stanton’s ninth stage, the stage of extermination. It represents the stage where

perpetrators' hands are bloodied from mass murder. In the peak phase of genocide actors are identified as perpetrators, victims, or bystanders largely on the basis of their role during the mass murders. The mass killing happening in the peak phase cannot occur without the support of some of the preceding stages such as organizing. Denial is discussed only insofar as it constitutes a part of the first nine stages of the Holocaust.²²

NOTES

1. Peter G. Baines, "Deterministic Nonperiodic Flow," *Journal of the Atmospheric Sciences* 20 (1963): 130–41.
2. Norman Gladwell. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2002).
3. Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2012).
4. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 228.
5. Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 278.
6. Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 225.
7. John Roth, *Ethics During and after the Holocaust: In the Shadow of Birkenau* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 161.
8. Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, 370.
9. Emmanuel Lévinas, "Is Ontology Fundamental?" *Philosophy Today*, 33 (Summer, 1989): 121–29.
10. Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).
11. Neil Jeffrey Kressel, *Mass Hate: The Global Rise of Genocide and Terror (First Edition)* (New York: Plenum, 2002), 277.
12. For an extended discussion of the "ordinary men" explanation see: Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the final solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial 2017).
13. I have assumed readers have some familiarity with the famous Milgram Experiment that aims to inform people of the ability of authority figures to compel persons to obey orders even if they are inclined to do otherwise. Readers unfamiliar with the Milgram Experiment may consult the resource: [What was the Milgram Experiment?](#) The experiment is cited as an explanation of why soldiers or police killed Jews in the Holocaust. The philosopher Claudia Card believed that there was a disanalogy between the subjects of the experiment and the perpetrators like Adolf Eichmann. I agree that there is a disanalogy at work, though I may not necessarily see the same disanalogy. See Card's book, *Confronting Evils: Terrorism,*

Torture, Genocide (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 11. I refrain from invoking the Milgram Experiment as the singularity that explains killing in the Holocaust. Why? My own short version of the experiment follows: Psychology professors on a college campus designed a controlled experiment to test the willingness of persons to obey orders to harm others. In the controlled experiment subjects are asked to force upon victims electric shocks that are mild, intense, and so severe they could produce a fatal reaction. In response to the command of authority subjects can or cannot not give victims shocks so severe that they could produce a fatal reaction. Subjects did give persons near fatal shocks. [Note: the delivery of real fatal shocks would not be allowed on any college campus by an IRB board.] Hence, subjects do demonstrate a willingness to follow superior orders to harm others. From this some would like to conclude: All persons under superior authority will harm victims if they are ordered to do so by their superior authority. I reject the Milgram Experiment as a singularity that explains the behavior of perpetrators in the Holocaust. First, I reject the experiment as a disanalogous example. I could be wrong, but I find the artificial environment of a college psychology lab with college co-eds as controlled subjects pressing buttons to be disanalogous to a field of battle where military police or soldiers under commanding officers are told to press triggers to kill Jews. The level of coercion is disanalogous. In the military dissenters may be shot on the spot. Since I could be wrong about the disanalogy, let me concede the point. Let us say that the Milgram Experiment does prove that persons succumb to the suggestions of superiors to inflict harm on others. The subject of persons who succumb is vague and lacks quantification. My second objection is that the claim is non-falsifiable. The experiment has the aura of falsifiability, but it leads to a non-falsifiable generalization about the power of authority to control subordinates. The hasty generalization I reject is: All subordinates are subject to the manipulation of their superiors. For the term “superiors” one could substitute any authority figure including metaphysical powers. If the Milgram Experiment is a falsifiable scientific experiment, the hasty generalization is unsound. Likewise, in the context of the Holocaust, if the generalization is fallacious, then some civilian and military subordinates would not succumb to the dictates of the Nazi inner circle whose aim it was to kill all Jews. In fact, some soldiers refused to serve in the killing squads, and some civilians refused to obey the Aryan laws and sheltered Jews at the risk of their own lives. The soldier who loads bullets into the magazine of his or her weapon knows what effect the ordinance will produce upon a human body when fired at the body at close range. They are not pressing buttons to await an uncertain outcome. See Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2017).

14. Rosalind Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove, "Virtue Ethics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition).
15. When the right to life is seen as self-evident it is descriptive of a fundamental good. Declarations of this right are seen as descriptive. Thus, the right functions as a description rather than a stipulation within the "Declaration of Human Rights."
16. For the Declaration of Human Rights see Jack Donnelly, *International Human Rights* (Berkeley, California: Westview Press, 1993).
17. Card, *Confronting Evils: Terrorism, Torture, Genocide*.
18. Sheri P. Rosenberg, "Genocide Is a Process, Not an Event," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 7, 1 (April 2012): 16–23. Following Genocide Watch these stages are presented as ten stages. For an alternate view of the number of stages Mukimbiri, J 2005, "The Seven Stages of the Rwandan Genocide," *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, 3, (4,2005): 823–836.
19. Sheri P. Rosenberg, "Genocide is a process, Not an Event," 19.
20. See <https://jewishmuseummilwaukee.org/10-stages-of-genocide/>.
21. Alexander Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?: Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 44.
22. Regarding denial and the distinction between hard and soft denial see Deborah Lipstadt, *Denial: Holocaust History on Trial* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005). See also Berel Lang. "Six Questions on (Or About) Holocaust Denial." *History & Theory* 49 (2, May 2010): 157–168.



CHAPTER 2

Antisemitism is a Vicious Racism

INTRODUCTION

It is naïve to say antisemitism explains the Holocaust. The history and the ethical commitments discoverable in the Holocaust are not reducible to a single issue such as antisemitism. Yet, antisemitism precedes the Holocaust, shapes the Holocaust, and outlives the Holocaust. Antisemitism provides a cultural and ethical underlayment for the stages of genocide identifiable in the Holocaust. Thus, we may begin our reflections on ethics through the phases of the Holocaust by examining antisemitism as a vicious racism.

To understand antisemitism better, we may analyze it as a racism and a hatred. To say antisemitism is a racism is to distinguish it as a single racism. To say antisemitism is a hatred is to recognize that hate can and does have many targets, and Jews are simply one target of hate. Both relations must be discussed in greater detail.

As we begin and continue our investigation of ethics through the Holocaust, we are confronted with the question: Why? That should not be asked without asking the complementary question: Why not? This study will call attention to the necessary and nonsufficient historical causes of the Holocaust. It is not an attempt to offer a single answer to the question of why the Holocaust happened. So, it will not satisfy the researcher who expects to find a defense of a Goldman-like thesis that a society devoted to authoritarianism was the sufficient condition for the Holocaust, nor will it

satisfy the researcher who is looking for another Browning-like thesis that ordinary individuals responding to peer pressure and to superior orders caused the Holocaust to happen. The ethical issues that arise before, during and after the Holocaust are not new. They are subtle issues, and they must be confronted where they appear in society and practices today.

The search for causes is often a search to identify where and how it all began. A pragmatic investigation may ask: Where does it end? I respond that the processes giving rise to genocide have not ended. This chapter on antisemitism, racism, and hate identifies an underlying social and ethical condition that continues to this hour. Speaking metaphorically antisemitism like other racisms is an ember that remains alive in the post-Holocaust era. It can still be fanned into a raging fire. I draw this inference from my understanding of the phenomenon of antisemitism and the judgment that it does represents a vicious racism. Where racism and hate converge, they can become a social norm, and in those cases I would contend that one finds a surrender of rationality and autonomy and a cultivation of vice. I shall maintain that the hatred in vicious racism is an affront to a responsible exercise of autonomy and the cultivation of the virtue of care.

JEWES, CHRISTIANS, AND ANTISEMITISM IN SUPERSESSIONISM

Antisemitism targets Jews for their ethnic and their religious views. Some scholars have taken pains to distinguish antisemitism from anti-Judaism. The former is seen as an opposition to Jews as an ethnic group, and the latter is seen as an opposition to formal Jewish religion and customs. While Christianity is historically intertwined with Judaism, some of the strongest opposition to Jews has come from Christianity. The doctrine known as supersessionism both explains that opposition and provokes that opposition.

Chapters nine, ten, and eleven of Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans discuss the relation of Jews and Gentiles under the new covenant. Like so many sacred texts these writing admit various interpretations. From these chapters one can conclude that the Jews were rejected in favor of Christianity, or one can conclude that the favor of God is something that God never rescinds. In the latter view Jews are still favored by God in the Christian era. This gives rise to two doctrines of supersessionism—an exclusive doctrine that denies Jews access to God and heaven, and an inclusive doctrine that recognizes Jews as God's chosen people in the Christian era and beyond.