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CONFRONTING THE HOLOCAUST

A Mandate for the 21st Century

Edited by

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Chapter 6

AUSCHWITZ OR HOW GOOD PEOPLE CAN DO EVIL: AN ETHICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE PERPETRATORS AND THE VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST IN LIGHT OF THE FRENCH THINKER TZVETAN TODOROV

Didier Pollefeyt

Introduction

The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration and extermination camps brought us once more strongly face to face with the horrible and striking pictures of genocide by the Nazis. Once again we were confronted with perplexity and dismay by the shocking archive films, the moving testimonies and the nearly unbelievable "statistics of death" of the Holocaust. Now that the official addresses are over and the world media refocus their attention on the pressing moral issues of our time, the question presents itself whether and in which respect this commemoration has also urged us to draw vital ethical conclusions as to how to organize our individual and social life in a more thought-out manner. There is indeed a danger that we might tremble in a very sincere way in the face of the evil of Auschwitz, but that after our initial moral indignation, we shake our heads powerlessly and continue our lives just as before, as if such a moral catastrophe could never (again) happen to us. In so doing, and in spite of all our good intentions, we risk forgetting that the Nazi genocide was a product precisely of *our* Christian and modern

civilization.¹ If we are not searching for the roots of this moral catastrophe in our individual and political way of life today, then we do not have reason to be confident about the impossibility of such evil in the future. Reflection upon the violent and even genocidal mechanisms of evil is not a luxury in the contemporary socio-political context; new forms of extreme intolerance, antisemitism, nationalism and racism are rearing their ugly heads again. Indeed, democracy is undergoing a profound crisis. The regeneration of right-wing political parties is a widespread phenomenon in Europe. At some universities revisionism is even being defended in the name of so-called "academic freedom." The tragedies in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia teach us that the danger of genocidal violence never definitively belongs to the past.

In this contribution we explore the question of what Auschwitz can teach us about the origins of human evil.² The answer to this question will be of importance for the way in which we will socially organize the prevention of evil in the future. Through this quest it will become clear how we always implicitly use a particular anthropology, a specific portrayal of humanity. Are we human beings fundamentally unethical beings whose egocentric dynamic should be under the strict supervision of a rigorous ethics? Is not every one of us being directed towards evil, and is not each of us potentially capable of inhumanity and racism? Or are we humans essentially orientated towards the good, and is it this human goodness that can disappear under the fragments of our own fears and brokenness, our socio-historical conditions and the finitude of our own lives? Furthermore, is it possible to reconstruct an ethics for a humanity that has been so deeply undermined by its own destructive potential? Should such ethics be built on a moralizing struggle against evil? Or should it first of all be orientated towards an honest application of human creativity in the good?

These reflections will critically examine the answers to these questions as found in the French anthropologist and ethicist Todorov,³ especially as he has developed them in his recent and insightful ethical study on Nazi genocide, *Face à l'extrême* (Paris, 1991, 2^e revised ed., 1994), and secondarily in his *Au nom du peuple: témoignages sur les camps communistes* (Paris, 1992), *Une tragédie française: été 44: scènes de guerre civiles. Suivi de souvenirs d'un maire* (Paris, 1994) and *Les abus de la mémoire* (Paris, 1995). In answering these questions we will distinguish two different perspectives: that of the perpetrators and that of the victims. In the first part of this article we ask ourselves the question of whether the perpetrators of such evil should be seen as moral monsters or as human beings. We argue with Todorov in favor

of the humanity of the perpetrator and ask how human beings like you and I can become such terrible criminals?

In the second part we pose the even more difficult question of whether human beings who have lost, or been stripped of, the thin cloak of civilization display their "real" identity by becoming "wolves" (Hobbes) to each other? With Todorov we demonstrate that the victims of the camps were not only ruled by the "law of the jungle," but that even "*face à l'extrême*" the human concern for what is good, true and beautiful could never be completely destroyed. Finally, based on this double perspective, we attempt to summarize our answers to the anthropological and ethical questions of this introduction in our conclusion.⁴

1. Human or Inhuman Character of the Perpetrators? *The Perpetrator as Moral Monster*

When people describe the Nazi perpetrator, we mostly get an extremely moralizing and diabolical representation. Morally considered, Nazis were completely perverted beings; they were moral monsters, sadists or barbarians.⁵ Yet according to Todorov, this interpretation is founded on a pessimistic anthropology (37-39 & 133): in each of us sleeps a dangerous, unethical beast that awakes when the cloak of civilization becomes threadbare. The Nazi is paradigmatic of this ethically derailed human. In this popular point of view, the Holocaust is not a result of our modern culture, but a regressive moment or an *accident de route* in the line of our civilization and is apart from the ascending of humanity. Herein Nazis appear as moral savages, beasts who strive after evil for evil's sake.⁶ In this commonly held point of view, the Nazi is sometimes called the incarnation of evil or the modern embodiment of the devil. An argument for this interpretation is sometimes based on the *Kristallnacht* (1938) when the whole German population seems to have been in the spell of a "spontaneous" surge of antisemitic hatred, and the beast rose to the surface.

There are, however, some very convincing arguments against this dehumanizing interpretation of the perpetrators (149-170). The testimonies of most of the survivors indicate that only a minority of the perpetrators can be considered as sadistic or monstrous.⁷ Instead of diabolic personalities, most of the perpetrators appears in this literature as very average and even petty officials. Furthermore, the proposition of the monstrosity of the perpetrators is incapable of explaining how thousands of simple and even well-educated people (such as doctors,

industrials, educators, lawyers, philosophers, etc.) could collaborate in the destruction of the Jewish people for more than a decennium without stopping to see themselves as ethical human beings. Nor can it explain how the executioners once again became "decent" and well-functioning citizens after the war. There were undoubtedly monsters among the Nazis, but they were not enough in number to be really dangerous by themselves.

One of the basic points of our exposition will be that in circumstances such as the Holocaust, the greatest danger actually arises from normal people like you and me.⁸ *Kristallnacht* can not be used as an argument to prove the monstrosity of the Nazis. If the murder of the Jewish people were carried out at the rate of the *Kristallnacht* (i.e. 100 murders per day), then the Nazis would have needed 140 years, instead of five years, to kill as many Jews as they did. Hate per se is a very inefficient means for the successful completion of such large-scale enterprise.⁹ Nor should we forget that the Nazis did not violate the ruling social contract of their time by killing the Jews; by their participation in this genocide, Germans did not break the law of their country, but on the contrary were obedient to it. From this, we can see that people who apply the law can be more dangerous than people who disobey it. Perhaps the perpetrators had better followed more their human intuitions and less the prevailing decrees (133). Finally, we can learn from psychology that there is a physical boundary to the amount of people one can kill out of hate, fanaticism or sadism.¹⁰ These critics on the monstrosity of the perpetrators form an invitation to search for other explanations of human evil, especially in its genocidal form.

The Perpetrator as Victim of the Political System

In the beginning of the 1960s the Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote a book on the trial against Adolf Eichmann under the subtitle *The banality of evil*.¹¹ Through her analysis it became clear that although the evil he did was undoubtedly horrible, the Nazi Eichmann was not a sadistic monster, but an ordinary bureaucrat. In this Jerusalem trial, the opposition between the banality of the criminal and the evil for which he was responsible became clear. In Arendt's view, Eichmann was not a perverted being,¹² but "terribly normal." Speaking about the "banality of evil," however, was not accurate since she actually thought that the criminal was banal, not evil itself. She never did, nor would, call the evil of Auschwitz itself banal. On the contrary, she meant that

precisely because evil is such an ordinary human ability, we can never banalize it, but should always take it seriously as a universal human possibility.

In Arendt's view, moreover, the evil of Auschwitz was not a consequence of the violation of the law, but rather a result of the total obedience to it. The Holocaust, then, was possible because people complied with bureaucratic prescriptions and rules without thinking any further. According to Todorov, this interpretation is founded on a more optimistic anthropology:¹³ the evil of Auschwitz is not the result of giving free rein to a monstrous desire for evil, but stems from a restriction of human commitment towards the good (135). Auschwitz is neither a tragic *accident de route* nor an unexpected moment of regression, but a logical consequence of our modern civilization with its anonymous, bureaucratic structures.¹⁴ To understand this restriction of human involvement towards the good, in the view of Todorov (134-142), we should not look at the (monstrous) character of individuals, but at the political and social influences that made the transformation of human beings into criminals possible,¹⁵ especially the totalitarian system that ruled in Germany and influenced the moral behavior of its citizens in three very typical ways.¹⁶

First of all, totalitarian systems are always manicheistic:¹⁷ they split human beings in two radically different categories (based, for example, on race or class). In such dualistic interpretations, the world is unambiguously divided into (wholly) good people and (wholly) evil people. Herein, every action undertaken against evil people is morally acceptable and even praiseworthy.¹⁸ Moreover, a totalitarian state always tries to replace human conscience by appointing itself as the ultimate source and measure of good and evil. Consequently, in such regimes an individual can concentrate on the means and no longer need ask difficult questions about the (un)ethical goals or consequences of social life. A totalitarian system can ask its citizens even to realize unethical, instrumental tasks without affecting the private moral infrastructure of the individual. Even in the camps the perpetrators were able to distinguish good from evil. The Nazis, however, believed that the cruelties against the Jews were necessary because the State was commanding these things of them. The perpetrators, then were not stripped of every ethical concern, but had a new kind of (professional) ethics. Finally, a totalitarian system controls the totality of society; the entire social midfield (trade unions, youth movements, etc.) is destroyed. Because every individual is isolated, effective ethical protest becomes impossible or involves great risk of life (165).

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

It is of course much more comfortable to think that the evil of Auschwitz is something outside ourselves, that we have nothing in common with these inhuman "monsters of Auschwitz." If we choose to forget Auschwitz, it is usually out of fear of the fact that Auschwitz is not something strange to humanity. For the most part, choice for the thesis of the monstrosity of the perpetrators is inspired by the fear of a confrontation with ourselves.¹⁹ The dividing line between good and evil, however, is not running between non-Nazis and Nazis, between "we" and "they," but through the heart of every human being. People very easily choose for the monstrous interpretation of evil because this is very comforting, especially in the context of the Nazi genocide. The idea that human beings who murder every day are not fundamentally different from us, is very threatening for our own identity. It is very comforting if we can say that such criminals are sick, extremely racist, sadistic or possessed by the devil. In this way, we very carefully locate evil outside ourselves, thereby enabling us to condemn it in a moralistic manner in the other. If we have no resemblance to the monstrous image of evil, then we need not ask ourselves difficult questions about our own ethical functioning and we can confront ourselves with the Nazi genocide, full of indignation, but with a quiet conscience.²⁰ Therefore, we often find the belief that such Nazi genocide is a "typically German" phenomenon. Evil then becomes the guilt of the Other, the immoral individual, the extreme antisemite, the supreme antagonist. The Other is doing evil for evil's sake, whereas we know ourselves by experience: we long for goodness, integrity and authenticity. We can thus so aestheticize perpetrators in their inhumanity that we create a safe manicheistic distance between ourselves and them. In this way we can strategically absolve ourselves of every possible evil and reorganize our own identity without blemish in confrontation with Auschwitz.

A final argument against the monstrousness of the perpetrators is that this presentation bears a remarkable resemblance with the demonization that the Nazis themselves used; with the diabolicalization of the perpetrators, we risk reproducing the Nazi *Weltanschauung* itself. The Nazis attributed precisely those characteristics to the Jews that they

feared most in themselves: the Jews were the incarnation of the devil, sexually perverse, avaricious, bloodsuckers, unreliable, murderers of God, etc.²¹ Every form of racism is in fact a cowardly way to deal with one's own fears. When we externalize evil in the demonically dangerous Nazi, we risk falling into the same dualistic scheme. By combatting evil only in the other, we risk rendering evil permanent in ourselves. Instead of fighting evil, we unconsciously imitate it. If we do not want to give the perpetrators a "posthumous victory" (Fackenheim) by becoming like them, we must be careful not to internalize evil. One of the problems of humanity has always been that it only tries to eliminate evil in the other. Using the manicheistic categories of good and evil, Germans and Jews, *Übermenschen* and *Untermenschen*, the Nazis did likewise; the Jew was the incarnation of absolute evil and as such was *unpardonable*.²² And the only solution for radical evil, is a final solution, an *Endlösung*.

Evil as a Universal "Daily Vice"

A honest confrontation with the evil of Auschwitz demands that we unmask the manicheistic, "nazistic" mechanisms of defense that we spontaneously develop in confrontation with evil and which consists in our seeing evil only in the other. Perhaps we should be most careful when indignant about the moral offense of others. The acceptance of evil as a possibility in each one of us would seem to be the first, very difficult but crucial step in the development of an authentic understanding of evil. Without being beasts or monsters, we all possess some universal characteristics to do evil. It is only when we recognize this potential for evil in ourselves, that we can also effectively understand and combat evil. The Dutch Jewess Etty Hillesum has shown us from her experience in the camp of Westerbork that one of the biggest problems of humanity consists in that people always want to destroy in the other, precisely what they dare not recognize first of all in themselves.²³

Like Todorov, we introduce here the idea of evil as "daily vice" (*vice quotidienne*), as the human capacity that is not born out of an unambiguous choice of evil for evil's sake, but that arises in a silent and subtle way, step by step, in the "little wickedness" of the every day (165-170). We will examine three "daily vices:" fragmentation, depersonalization and enjoyment of power. We do so because they were basic conditions that undergird the realization of Auschwitz, but yet are general human attributes that can be found on a smaller scale in

our own social life as well.²⁴ Our plea to understand evil as a universal human possibility does not, of course, mean that we no longer distinguish wrongdoers from the wronged, perpetrators from innocent victims. One must, however, distinguish between the capacity to act and the act itself, lest we mistake anthropology (human nature) for jurisprudence (human acts).

Fragmentation

The behavior of most of the Nazi perpetrators looks very incoherent; both humane feelings and cruelty can easily be found in one and the same person (170-189). The commandant Kramer of Bergen-Belsen, for example, wept with emotion listening to his favorite music, but could mercilessly kill a Jew who did not obey his orders. Kramer declared in his trial that "he did not feel emotions during these crimes."²⁵ This disunity or "doubling" (Lifton)²⁶ in the lives of most of the perpetrators points to a radical discontinuity in their inner lives between the public and the private. During the day in the camps they did the cruelest of things, but in the evening in their rooms they wrote very romantic letters to their spouses. Their minds seem to have been compartmentalized like the waterproof bulkheads of a submarine. On Christmas night 1943 the *Einsatzkommando IIb* received an order to kill 3000 Jews and Gypsies in Russia. The order was executed doubly quick in order to enable the soldiers to go to Midnight Mass (180). During the Nuremberg trials, the Nazi criminal Speer declared that "on the affective level he only had sentimental reactions, but on the level of decisions only rational principles count for much."²⁷ Such fragmentation is the creation of a difference in the inner life between various spheres of life, so that human compassion can no longer interfere with public work (genocide), while the private life remains intact. On the basis of fragmentation it becomes clear how normal human beings can become mass-murderers and how a member of a totalitarian system can (try to) reconcile his submission to immoral orders with the preservation of his private moral self-respect.

This fragmentation is not "typically German," as is sometimes argued referring to the specifically Lutheran distinction between the rational, public life on the one hand, and the private, religious life on the other. This manicheistic and defensive reasoning tries to escape from the idea that fragmentation is in fact a common and widespread modern phenomenon.²⁸ Due to the growing complexity of professional tasks, modern society is characterized by an increasing specialization. In

modern society people are forced to restrict themselves to very specific and highly technical duties, while losing sight of the totality of the process of production. Eichmann himself had a purely technical view of his job. Wiesenthal once stated that if Eichmann would have been ordered to kill all people whose name began with a "p," he would have performed this task just as zealously and accurately.²⁹ In the Jerusalem trial, Eichmann declared that he had nothing to do with the executions of the Jews: "I did not kill one Jew."³⁰ He merely saw himself as one link in a complex process and tried to avoid conflicts with other departments. The result of such fragmentation was that ultimately no one feels responsible for the whole. In short, fragmentation leads to the shutdown of conscience. Since in Auschwitz only the *Sonderkommando* and some Nazis effectively saw the extermination, responsibility could always be attributed to an other (unseen) link in the process of destruction, while in the meantime the crimes could occur more readily.

Fragmentation, then, is the preservation of an inner disunity to maintain essential moral principles in some spheres of life, while at the same time one does evil in other spheres. In this fragmentation one becomes a "double" with a "double-conscience." This phenomenon is not restricted to Germans; indeed, we all need a certain degree of fragmentation in order to survive psychologically in the modern world. Everyone has his or her limits. Fragmentation makes the emergence of evil easier, but is not evil in itself. Sometimes fragmentation is the only possibility to maintain oneself (e.g., soldiers, priests, policemen, doctors, etc.). In a similar sense where a fever is not only a part of the illness, but already a defense against the illness, fragmentation is not only part of evil, but in fact also already a defense against evil. Fragmentation becomes a part of evil, however, just as the fever becomes a part of the illness (187). The question then arises at what point does fragmentation become criminal (*see also below*).

Depersonalization

For totalitarian ideologies human beings are never considered as goals in themselves (philosophically) nor as images of God (theologically). Individuals are always thought in terms of a bigger cosmic project (such as Hitler's thousand-year Reich) in which they themselves are of no importance. For Todorov, one of the goals of totalitarianism is depersonalization (190-211): the reduction of individuals to merely ingredients of an enormous project that completely

transcends them (191). The camps were the first and foremost place to experiment with this process of depersonalization.³¹

Yet the transformation of human beings to non-humans is not immediately evident, requiring the overcoming of a great deal of inner moral resistances. Therefore the Nazis used (modern) techniques to neutralize the "appeal of the face of the other" (Levinas)³² thereby wiping out the humanity of the other.³³ These techniques might be illustrated with some examples that make clear how the evil of Auschwitz was more the result of depersonalization than of sadistic monstrosity (190-201). "The road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved with indifference" (Lifton).³⁴ A first technique was the deprivation of victims of their clothing just prior to killing them. Normally we do not see naked people in groups. Since clothing is an expression of humanity, by stripping victims of their clothes, it became much easier to consider them non-human. This technique made it more difficult for the perpetrators to identify with the victims and easier for them to kill with a clear conscience. Another technique was to make people live in their own waste without food or sanitation, so that they became completely unrecognizable and, like animals, preoccupied only with food. After the war, the journalist Sereny asked commandant Stangl why it was necessary to humiliate people so much when they would only be killed afterwards. Stangl answered her: "to make the work of the executors easier."³⁵ A third technique consisted in the reduction of persons to numbers tattooed on their arms.³⁶ In this way, a person loses his or her name, the first indication of his or her being human. One could give many other similar examples of this depersonalizing use of language by the Nazis.³⁷ A fourth technique was the continuous use of large quantities. It is more difficult to kill two persons than to kill two thousand. A last technique was the avoidance of direct confrontation with the victims. It is well-known that Himmler became sick during his two visits to Auschwitz. Precisely to avoid this kind of "moral nausea," the gas chambers were created so that the machine could take over the human work and that every personal contact with victims could become superfluous. Once again, this depersonalization is not "typically German," but a feature of modernity and modern war. It has become psychologically much easier to drop a bomb on a city that kills 20,000 people than to shoot one child who stands before you.

Totalitarian systems are reducing every human being to an element of a larger cosmic project. Because the perpetrators renounced their free will, they might also in some way be seen as victims of this system

(197-201). They, for the most part, were not aware that their obedience to the immoral rules of the regime also meant their own depersonalization.³⁸ In fact they accepted becoming means and no longer ends in themselves. It is not surprising that after the war for a lot of them obedience (*Befehl ist Befehl*) was a real excuse. "We only obeyed" as if this would dismiss people from their responsibility. In Jerusalem Eichmann declared: "my guilt was my obedience."³⁹ Eichmann referred to the categoric imperative of Kant that requires one to do one's duty. Perhaps it was not very efficient of the prosecuting attorneys to try to prove that the SS were working on their own initiative. Blind obedience is clearly an important feature of totalitarian regimes. As we have already pointed out, depersonalization is not "typically German," but a characteristic of modern life. The extreme circumstances of the camps only brings to light the worst consequences of this general human phenomenon. Today, our way of life is full of moments of depersonalization; people sometimes obey certain systems, regimes or ideologies without thinking.

Enjoyment of Power

A third characteristic of the anthropology of the perpetrator is the enjoyment of the exercise of power (*Schadenfreude*).⁴⁰ This is a kind of depersonalization in which the other is reduced to only a means, while the power-holder remains an end (212-227). This enjoyment of power was already known by Freud as *Bemächtigungstrieb* or *libido dominandi*;⁴¹ to enjoy the submission of the other to one's own arbitrariness. Of course, one can also enjoy making someone else happy. There is, however, an asymmetry between the effects of making someone else happy and unhappy. By making someone else unhappy, one receives a much stronger proof of one's power over that person. But when one makes someone else happy, one can never be sure that this person's happiness is not also thanks to his or her own will. When one makes someone else unhappy, one can be more certain about the effectiveness of one's power, because normally no one wants to be unhappy (213). Killing the other is the absolute proof of my power over that person (but at the same time the absolute limit of my power!). Yet it is not the suffering of the other itself that causes my enjoyment, as in sadism, but the consciousness of having had power over the other.⁴² Instead of sadism, then, it was the enjoyment of power that was the central passion behind the evil of Auschwitz. There are not many proofs for this claim in the biographies of perpetrators because

most of these were written with apologetic purposes. We can nonetheless see that perpetrators in camps became angry when, for example, an order was not executed quickly or the victim risked to look into the eyes of the executioner.⁴³ What was new for the camps was that this enjoyment of power was no longer limited by any legal or moral boundary. The only boundary left was the death of the other person.⁴⁴ The desire to exercise such power over the victim was for the most part the consequence of the perpetrator's own restriction of freedom within the system. Many perpetrators within the totalitarian system were tyrants to those below because they were slaves to those above (215).

Enjoyment of power is not a phenomenon restricted to Nazis. Todorov refers to the story of the president of the Jewish Council in Lotz, Chaim Rumkowski, who behaved as master and king of the ghetto during the war.⁴⁵ Due to his tyrannical attitude he implicitly created within the ghetto a mini-totalitarian state on the Nazi model. But then neither is the enjoyment of power "typically Jewish." In all social relations, people like to enjoy of the power they possess over others (policemen, teachers, parents, children, etc.).

Fragmentation as Self-Deception

The most significant daily vice is fragmentation. This fragmentation could be used to exonerate the perpetrators of every guilt. In some cases, deculpabilization on psychological and social grounds might be appropriate, but not always. We have indicated that fragmentation always happens as a kind of protection against evil. Yet there are always gaps in the bulkheads of fragmentation so that there always remains a certain level of consciousness of one's own fragmentation.⁴⁶ Fragmentation is always characterized by self-deception.⁴⁷ This idea, however, is missing in the thought of Todorov.⁴⁸

Generally, people do not explicitly choose evil for evil's sake, but do evil while deceiving themselves. In self-deception the evildoer is simultaneously deceiver (active) and deceived (passive), perpetrator and victim.⁴⁹ The self-deceiver knows that he or she does wrong, but tries to convince him or herself with (pseudo-)ethical arguments that this is not the case. For the most part, perpetrators are not "adherents of evil"; they are not conducting a crusade against the good. Each human being - including the perpetrator - tries to remain an ethical being, even when doing evil. Even in the most extreme forms of evil, a person does not abandon his or her engagement towards the good. On the contrary, in

such situations the attempts to avoid guilt and shame become even greater. A normally socialized moral person feels very uncomfortable when continuously violating his or her own moral principles.⁵⁰ The human desire to be good and consistent is very strong. Self-contradiction, inner conflict and ambivalence are sources of pain and fear. It is the anxiety of disintegration in the light of the immoral character of one's existence that makes one cling to self-deceptive strategies. In other words, every human being has an "inhuman" desire for self-justification. One will think oneself good, even if one does evil. One can reach this state by psychologically manipulating one's inner and outer reality. Is it remarkable, then, that human beings can (mis)use ethics? Ethics can become a means by which human beings try to justify themselves.

The Nazi "ethic"⁵¹ (Haas) was such a closed "ethical" system with very clear descriptions of good and evil. The Nazi very rigorously and anxiously obeyed these rules out of fear that his protest might cause total rejection by others and by him or herself. Anxiety was thus the foundation of this Nazi "ethic." Everything that called into question the safe and closed system, especially the stranger, could only be seen as a threat. Out of fear of real ethical provocation, people closed themselves off from everything that might call into question their secure and unquestionable "ethical" existence.⁵² It is anxiety that causes self-deception, and through self-deception perpetrators create a *Weltanschauung* (Fackenheim)⁵³ that closes them off from the ethical appeal of the vulnerable and suffering victims of evil.

II. Are We Wolves to Each Other (Hobbes) or Are We Each Other's Keepers (Genesis)? About the Victims of the Holocaust

Now we concentrate on the victims of the Nazi genocide. The camps reveal a very hard reality, namely that in extreme circumstances every trace of ethical life disappears, and human beings become beasts in a merciless struggle for life (37-50). In a certain ideological literature, the camps are sometimes used to demonstrate that in humanity "the law of the jungle" ultimately reigns, that every ethical law crumbles and brute power rules. To substantiate this, we can find illustrations in some testimonies of survivors about the terrible indifference that victims had for the suffering of their co-prisoners.

Todorov demonstrates that in the camps there were many matters of conscience among the victims, indicating the elementary possibility of free choice and therefore of moral life (37-50). For example, Ella

Lingens-Reiner, a physician in Auschwitz, had the choice of using a single medicine for one very ill person or for several less ill persons. Should the newborn babies in the camps be killed in order to increase the chance of survival of their mothers or not? There are many similar examples that demonstrate how camp life was not only ruled by "the law of the jungle."

The notion of "war of all against all" is not specific to camp life, but can also be found in a certain philosophical literature of the two latest centuries, for example, in the work of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. While the camps may have been created in a Nietzschean spirit, this does not mean that they demonstrate the perfection of this ideology. One should distinguish the philosophy that was the basis of the camps and the philosophy that one can deduce from a study of their victims. It is evident that with very extreme means one can destroy the ethical attitudes that exist between people and reduce human beings to a bundle of animal instincts. But this does not mean that morality is only a superficial convention that loses its truth very quickly under unfavorable circumstances. For Todorov, Auschwitz teaches us that morality is always present and can only be destroyed by very extreme and violent means. Auschwitz is not simply a proof for animality as the ultimate truth of human nature. The so-called natural inclination of human beings for immorality is not so natural. The "war of all against all" has to be imposed through very violent means. When social Darwinists use Auschwitz to prove the correctness of their pessimistic ideology, are they not raising the factuality of Nazi ideology to a moral truth?

For Todorov, the difference between camp life and normal life is not the respective absence and presence of moral life. In daily life we do not notice the contrasts between morality and immorality so easily since egocentrism is usually better camouflaged. In the camps one sometimes had to choose between losing one's bread or losing one's human dignity. For victims, then, the camps sometimes became a purification of their conscience (e.g., Hillesum), sometimes a total destruction of it, but for the most part were something in between. The direction of this ethical evolution was mostly dependent upon the moral starting point victims had before the war. The camps project on large scale what is mostly hidden from view in daily life. Precisely because of this, one thinks one can draw general lessons of immorality from the camps, while egoism reigns unnoticed in daily life.

Goodness as a Universal "Daily Virtue"

It would seem that the most important lesson to be learned from the study of the victims of the Holocaust is that although evil was inevitable in these circumstances, goodness was not completely absent. And even if there are only a few testimonies illustrating this insight, they still show how human beings *can* be stronger than the tragic destiny imposed upon them. Sometimes evil among the victims is seen as the most relevant and sensational aspect of the life in the camps. Yet it was the moments where victims developed "daily virtues" (*virtus quotidianes*) in these extreme situations that were in fact much more spectacular. Like Todorov, we base this claim on the analysis of three important ethical attitudes, attitudes which could be seen at work in the life of the victims in the camps and which each of us -- without being superhumans -- can develop in our lives today: dignity, care and creativity.

Dignity

Dignity is understood by Todorov as the capacity to act through one's own will (66-77). In difficult situations one is dignified insofar as one tries to influence one's environment through one's own initiative. In extreme situations this can be by transforming a deterministic situation into a reality of freedom. In the camps one sees that this final freedom could never be completely suppressed. At times, however, dignity was only possible at great risk of life. In Ravensbrück, for example, Milena Jesenska systematically refused to line up correctly in rows of four. She never hurried carrying out an order. She sometimes sang a melody, which not only roused the anger of her supervisors, but also of the co-prisoners who had completely internalized the ruling order.⁵⁴ Dignity depends on such little actions with no apparent effect, but that nonetheless keep the human spirit alive.

At times, in the extreme circumstances of the camps, this affirmation of human dignity could only exist in the following of an order "as if" with one's own free will. Gradowski, a member of a *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz-Birkenau, tells in a manuscript, buried next to the crematoria, how victims walked with pride (and dignity) to the gaschambers "as if" they walked to life.⁵⁵ In such situations, even suicide can be a final expression of one's dignity. Olga Lengyel always carried poison with her and declared after the war that being the ultimate master of her own life represented her last freedom.⁵⁶ The

perpetrators knew that for the victims the choice of the moment and manner of their own death was a final affirmation of their own freedom, while the camps aimed at the destruction of this freedom. In the camps suicide was therefore "forbidden." When Mala Zimetbaum tried to commit suicide just before her execution in Auschwitz, the SS who discovered her, was furious; killing was *their* job. Todorov gives the example of a hunger strike that broke out among the prisoners of a Russian concentration camp where the guards forced the victims to eat, even though their death was otherwise of no importance. Within the limits of their situation, these people tried to use their freedom as optimally as possible. They chose to have hunger, rather than undergo hunger passively. They knew that even worse than death was a total alienation from their own will.⁵⁷ With this dignity they implicitly reacted against the process of fragmentation they saw at work in the perpetrators, as they became unfree by following the inhuman ideology of their superiors.

Another attempt at saving one's dignity was trying to keep oneself clean, even in miserable circumstances of the camps. By so keeping their self-respect, victims would sometimes even raise their chances for survival.⁵⁸ Other victims systematically refused to follow a logic of pure self-interest and immediate self-profit. Some of them tried to be interested in others, not humiliating them in confrontation with their superiors. They sometimes refused a favor they did not deserve. Dignity does not always serve the struggle for survival! Others enjoyed the work they did, not because it was ordered, but out of professional love. It was precisely because of this that the Nazis imposed so many meaningless tasks, work one could never do without losing one's self-respect.

Acts of dignity, however, can never be automatically called moral acts (75-77). We also need to consider the function and the ethical or unethical consequences of these actions for others. Even for the professional builder, constructing a good wall around a concentration camp cannot be considered a moral good.⁵⁹ Indeed, were there not also Nazis who knew love for their work? Hoess called himself obsessed by his work. The subordination of other human beings to the perfection of one's own work is immoral. Neither is cleanliness always moral. Were not Nazis also obsessed by neatness? We can, indeed should, distinguish moral from immoral self-respect. Dignity alone does not suffice. We must always consider whether the well-being of our fellow human being is not violated through the manifestation of our dignity. This brings us to a second daily virtue: care.

Care

Every survivor of the Holocaust will remember how he or she was once helped, saved or encouraged by a co-prisoner (78-98).⁶⁰ So also mothers soothed their children by singing songs or caressing them, to the very doors of the gas chambers. Mala Zimetbaum became a very strong symbol of this helping human hand in Auschwitz. She used her privileged position as interpreter to establish contact between families, to smuggle medicine, to change working lists, etc.⁶¹

Todorov, however, distinguishes care from certain forms of solidarity that exist among people of the same group (89-92). In such kinds of solidarity one always automatically helps those who are in one's own group, but does not feel responsible in the same way for those who are outsiders. This kind of solidarity is for Todorov merely a quantitative extension of the principle of self-interest. Egoism is replaced by "nosism" (egoism of the *nous*). This form of solidarity excludes the outsider; the stranger cannot but be the victim of such "nosism." In the camps, for example, newcomers were frequently the victims of the solidarity of the group that was already formed and that feared losing its privileges. Solidarity with one group in this case sometimes means the death of the others. In caring one is not acting automatically on the basis of the other's nationality, language, job, etc., but only on the basis of the other's humanity. Solidarity can nevertheless function as a kind of school for learning more universal care. Yet care also differs from a charity that excludes no one (92-93). A typical example of charity is the giving of alms to an anonymous beggar. Such charity always happens within an asymmetric relation and can thus be very humiliating for the person who undergoes it. Care, for its part, engenders care again (i.e., children-parents, parents-children). Care is likewise different from self-sacrifice (93-94). In care one is not losing time and money, but one is devoting oneself to the other and draws intrinsic happiness out of that. In care one is never poorer but ultimately richer. In the offer of charity and self-sacrifice one is sometimes frustrated because one is not rewarded for the effort; care, however, bears its reward in itself.⁶²

The famous Jewish psychiatrist and camp survivor Viktor Frankl claimed that caring for the well-being of others was an important factor for survival in the camps.⁶³ Through experience in the camps he learned that prisoners who had a purpose beyond their own self-preservation had a greater chance to withstand the very hard circumstances of camp life. Victims found more vitality when they

could orient themselves towards a goal, a life value outside themselves, than when they were only occupied with their own survival. Of course, care for the other also carries risks: one becomes more vulnerable because in addition to one's own suffering, one is also bearing the suffering of the other. In this sense one is better protected when fighting for an idea because the suffering and death of an individual can be relativized in the light of one's ideal.

Care stands opposed to the daily vice of depersonalization, just as dignity stands opposed to fragmentation. In care the other person is an end in him or herself, while in depersonalization the other is reduced to a means. Care likewise stands opposed to the daily vice of enjoyment of power. In the care I am a means and the other is the end; in the enjoyment of power the other is a means and I am the end.

Creativity

A further possibility for retaining their integrity in the camps was the human capacity to be creative (99-126). Creativity is related to experiences of truth and beauty. In one of his works Viktor Frankl tells how a sunset in the camp brought him an extraordinary aesthetic experience (99). In such experiences one leaves one's direct preoccupation with survival and contemplates what is true and beautiful. The experience of creativity can also take the form of reading books, reciting poems, exchanging ideas, writing stories, drawing, making music, dancing, praying, etc.⁶⁴ And in this search for meaning barbarity is combatted.⁶⁵

Creativity, however, does not automatically generate goodness. Sometimes aesthetics and crimes coincide. Some Nazis, for example, read poetry after their duty. We should always ask ourselves what are the consequences of our creative activities. Creativity can be perverted! The famous violist Alma Rose, who was the *Kapellmeister* of the women's orchestra of Auschwitz, was prepared to "offer up" some of her musicians to improve the quality of her orchestra's music.⁶⁶ When creativity and care are in conflict, care should always take precedence. No matter how impressive human creativity might be, it should never foster the depersonalization of the persons who surround the artist or scholar.

Conclusion

Our analysis has shown how, for self-protective reasons, people in confrontation with extreme forms of evil very easily choose strategies of diabolization. They look to Auschwitz as into an aquarium, i.e. as into a very well-delineated and fascinating world populated with beings who are completely different from themselves. In the approach we developed here, Auschwitz is not presented in a comforting way as an extra-human reality. With the notion of daily vices, we have tried to hold Auschwitz up as a mirror in which we can see the features of our own faces. The daily vices of fragmentation, depersonalization and enjoyment of power demonstrate how the evil of Auschwitz was not a demonic reality, but an extremely enlarged version of an universal human possibility which finds a very receptive ground in modernity. The daily vices combined with the notion of self-deception reveal how "good" people can do evil without stopping to see themselves as ethical beings.

The study of the daily vices can save us from a contra-productive discourse about evil and destructiveness. These vices teach us that we should not fixate ourselves only on (or better: not let ourselves be dazzled by) the excessive apex of human destructiveness, as the camps were, but that we should also and especially concentrate on the first steps, the little, daily processes that lead us to that point. Such an approach is no longer comforting because it confronts us with our modern way of life and our subtle and daily manipulations of good and evil.

In the second part of our reflections we showed how even in extremely violent circumstances human commitment to the good can never be completely destroyed. This is indeed a very hopeful perspective: in every system there always remains *espaces de liberté* (False) which can be sought and broadened by ethically sensitive human beings. The choice for the good in the camps mostly happened in neither a very noisy nor heroic embrace of "the Good,"⁶⁷ but rather in thousands of little and unseen daily virtues. We have analyzed three of these daily virtues based on the so-called "structure of intersubjectivity" (110-111). Human dignity is based on the relation of the subject with itself (the first person: I to I); interpersonal care is orientated by the relation of the subject with the other (the second person: I to You); creativity is always developed in relation with more people, here and elsewhere, today and tomorrow (the third person: I to They). With the development of the daily virtues in the midst of the

Holocaust, the victims already formulated an implicit answer to the daily vices they saw at work among the perpetrators. With human dignity they criticized the processes of fragmentation; with human care they condemned the depersonalization of victims; with their constructive creativity they resisted the misuse of art by the perpetrators. In short, their choice for the good in Auschwitz is the foundation for our possibility of the good after Auschwitz.

In spite of and in the vulnerability of their existence in the camps they carried this very rich treasure through this dark period in history, a treasure they offer us as a valuable legacy and of which we unfortunately do not always realize the worth and the fragility. In this sense we cannot only speak about the "banality of evil" (Arendt), but also about the "banality of good,"⁶⁸ that is, about goodness as a universal and daily human possibility, also today. This conclusion is not simply optimistic. We need only recall that in Auschwitz many very ethical victims did not survive.⁶⁹

Moreover, today we see how some victims of crimes against humanity, based on their very deep injuries, react to their suffering by diabolicalizing the perpetrators. This reaction is very understandable from their (defensive) point of view. In the coming years the question will become of major importance how people who are divided by very serious evil (on micro-, meso- and macro-levels) can live together in the future, without forgetting evil, but with and in memory of the victims of this evil. The theme of authentic reconciliation cannot but be a question of crucial significance in the beginning of the next millennium.

Notes

1. See F.H. Littell, *Ethics after Auschwitz. A Covenant Between Christians and Jews*, in H.J. Cargas (ed.), *When God and Men Failed. Non-jewish Views of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 38-50, pp. 43-44: "Six million Jews were murdered efficiently and scientifically by baptized Christians in the heart of Christendom."
2. For a more extensive investigation of this topic, see our doctoral dissertation D. Pollefeyt, *Voorbij afschuw en verschoning. Een antropologisch, wijsgerig en ethisch onderzoek naar verschillende paradigmatische benaderingen van het kwaad van Auschwitz als aanzet tot een "be-vreemdende" theologie van het heilige*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation in Moral Theology, Louvain, 1995, vol. I: lxxxix+170 p.; Vol. II: pp. 171-412; Vol. III: pp. 413-629.

3. Tzvetan Todorov was born in Sofia (Bulgaria) in March 1939. He studied at the universities of Sofia and Paris. He is Doctor in Language and Literature. At the moment he is a Director of Research of the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* of France (Paris). He is married and father of three children. Some of his most important works are *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Seuil, 1970); *Littérature et signification* (Paris: Larousse, 1977); *Théories du symbole* (Paris: Seuil, 1977); *Les morales de l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1991); *La conquête de l'Amérique: la question de l'autre* (Paris, Seuil, 1991); *Nous et les autres: la réflexion française sur la diversité humaine* (Paris: Seuil, 1992); *Au nom du peuple: témoignages sur les camps communistes* (Paris: Editions de l'Aube, 1992); *Une tragédie française: été 44: scènes de guerre civiles. Suivi de souvenirs d'un maire* (Paris: Seuil, 1994); T. Todorov, *La vie commune. Essai d'anthropologie générale* (La couleur des idées) (Paris: Seuil, 1995). First published in 1991 (Seuil: Collection La couleur des idées), his work on the nazi genocide *Face à l'extrême* was revised in 1994 (Seuil: Collection Points 295). In this text the numbers between brackets refer to this new edition. There is also a German translation of this work *Angesichts des Aussterbens* (Munich: Fink, 1993, 348 p.) and in 1996 will appear also the First American Edition *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996).
 4. I wish to thank Dr. John Ries for proofreading this text.
 5. For a more philophic foundation of this view, see, for example, G. Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes towards the Re-definition of Culture*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1971) p. 111.
 6. See the view of B. Lang, *Act and idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 32: "(...) the Nazis implemented the policy of genocide at least in part because it was wrong: wrongdoing has assumed for them the status of a principle."
 7. Ella Lingens-Reiner cited by G.M. Kren and L. Rappoport, *The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behavior*, New York, Holmes & Meier, 1980, p. 100 (footnote 33) from B. Naumann, *Auschwitz: A Report on the Proceedings Against Robert Karl Ludwig Mulka and Others before the Court of Frankfurt* (London, Pall Mall Press, 1966), p. 91.:
- I know of almost no SS man who could not claim to have saved someone's life. There were few sadists. Not more than 5 or 10 percent were pathological criminals in the clinical sense. The others were all perfectly normal men who knew the difference between right and wrong.

8. W.K. Thompson, *Ethics, Evil and the Final Solution*, in A. Rosenberg and G.E. Myers (eds), *Echoes from the Holocaust, Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1988) pp. 181-197, p. 184: "ordinary people can commit demonic acts."
9. S. Sabini and M. Silver, *Destroying the Innocent with a Clear Conscience: a Sociopsychology of the Holocaust*, in J.E. Dimsdale (ed.), *Survivors, Victims and Perpetrators. Essays on the Nazi Holocaust* (New York: Hemisphere, 1980), pp. 329-358, pp. 329-330.
10. H. Askenasy, *Sind wir alle Nazis? Zum Potential der Unmenschlichkeit* (Frankfurt & New York: Campus Verlag, 1979) pp. 35-36.
11. H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press 1st ed., 1963; new edition: Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984).
12. See the view of G. Hausner, *Eichmann and His Trial. The Full Story of the Nazi Who Murdered Six Million Jews. How the Gruesome Evidence Was Collected Against Him and How He Was Convinced*, in *Saturday Evening Post* November 3, 11, and 17, 1962 and more extensive in G. Hausner, *Justice in Jerusalem. The Trial of Adolf Eichman*, (London & Beccles: William Clowes & Sons, 1966).
13. For a discussion between optimistic and pessimistic anthropologies, see T. Todorov, *La vie commune. Essai d'anthropologie générale* (La couleur des idées) (Paris: Seuil, 1995).
14. The same idea can be found in Z. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).
15. See also the thesis of F.E. Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil: A Report on the Beguillings of Evil* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993).
16. See also H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism. New Edition with Added Prefaces* (Harvest book 224) (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, 5th ed., 1993).
17. For a description of "manicheism:" R.M. Wilson, *Mani and Manichaeism*, in P. Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967) 8 volumes, volume 5, pp. 149-150, p. 149:

Evil stands as a completely independent principle against Good, and redemption from the power of Evil is to be achieved by recognizing this dualism and following the appropriate rules of life.

18. H. Kaplan, *Conscience and Memory: Meditations in a Museum of the Holocaust*, (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 49:

Declare that you have an enemy and he will become the enemy.
 Declare a people to be of inferior race and you will soon write the scenarios that will fulfill your theory. This was Hitler's effort and his success. He defined Jews and made them become, through methodic abuse and torment, the proof of his definition.
19. H. Ofstad, *Our Contempt for Weakness: Nazi Norms and Values - and Our Own*. A translation from the Norwegian original by C. Von Sydow (Gothenburg: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1991), p. 75.
20. A.J. Herzberg, *Eichmann in Jeruzalem* (Den Haag: Bert Bakker, 1962), pp. 14-15.
21. Hitler in *Mein Kampf* in L. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), p. 21: "Two worlds face one another," said Hitler, "the men of god and men of Satan! The Jew is the anti-man, the creature of another god. He must have come from another root of the human race. I set the Aryan and the Jew over and against each other."
22. See, for example, these two citations of Hitler in E. Jäckel, *Hitler idéologie*. A translation from the German original [*Hitlers Weltanschauung: Entwurf einer Herrschaft*] by J. Chavy (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1973), p. 71: "Il n'y a aucun pacte possible avec les Juifs, mais seulement l'implacable eux ou nous," and p. 72: "Je crois donc aujourd'hui agir selon l'esprit du Créateur tout-puissant: en me défendant des Juifs, je combats pour l'oeuvre du Seigneur."
23. E. Hillesum, *Etty. De nagelaten geschriften van Etty Hillesum* (1941-1943). Edited by K.A.D. Smelik (Amsterdam: Balans, 3rd revised ed., 1986), p. 254.
24. The difference between "une usage littéraire" et "une usage exemplaire" of the *Shoah* is carefully analyzed in T. Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire* (Collection Violet) (Paris: Arléa, 1995), pp. 28-33, p. 31.
25. Cited in G. Tillon, *Ravensbrück* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1988), 3rd ed., Part II, p. 209: "Je n'ai ressenti aucune émotion en accomplissant ces actes."

26. R.J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 418: "the psychological principle I call 'doubling,' the division of the self into two functioning wholes, so that a part-self acts as an entire self."
27. M.K. Billson, *Inside Albert Speer: Secrets of Moral Evasion*, in *The Antioch Review* 37 (1979), pp. 460-474, p. 473.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 427.
29. A citation from H. Askenasy, op. cit., p. 24.
30. In an interview with Captain Avner Less in 1961: P. Joffroy and A. Less (eds), *Eichmann par Eichmann*, (Paris: Grasset, 1970), pp. 339-340.
31. H. Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and the Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust*, (New York: Free Press, 1979), p. 8:

But leaders could not have chosen annihilation (rejecting assimilation) had not the victims been previously defined as basically of a different species, outside of the common conscience, and beyond the universe of obligation, this was the precondition.
32. D. Pollefeyt, *The Trauma of the Holocaust as a Central Challenge of Levinas' Ethical and Theological Thought*, on Marcia S. Littell, et al., [CD-Rom] *The Holocaust, Remembering for the Future II* (Stamford: Vista InterMedia Corporation, 1996), and D. Patterson, *Subjectivity and Responsibility: Wiesel per Levinas*, in *Cahiers Roumains d'études littéraires* 4 (1987) 130-144.
33. H.C. Kelman, *Violence without Moral Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanization of Victims and Victimizers*, in *Journal of Social Issues* 29(4) (1973), pp. 25-61.
34. F.H. Littell, *The Credibility Crisis of Modern University*, in H. Friedlander and L. Milton, *The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy and Genocide* (The San Jose Papers) (New York: Kraus International Publications, 1980), p. 274.
35. See G. Sereny, *Into That Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder* (London: Deutsch, 1974) and (New York: Random House, 1983), p. 101.
36. P. Levi, *Is dit een mens?* A translation from the Italian original by F. De Matteis-Vogels (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1987), pp. 31-32.

37. D. Le Breton, *L'homme défiguré. Essai sur la sacralité du visage*, in *Les temps modernes* 44 (510) (1989) pp. 99-112, p. 100: "Si le visage est le signe de l'être de l'homme, la négation de l'homme passe par celle de son visage."
38. E. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World. Foundations of Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), p. 237:

As for the Third Reich, its heart and soul was the aim to destroy just this principle - by no means only in the case of Jews ... but also, and perhaps above all, in the case of the "master race" itself.
39. H. Arendt, op. cit., p. 179.
40. P. Levi, *De verdronkenen en de geredden. Essays*. A translation from the Italian original by F. De Matteis-Vogels (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1991), p. 104.
41. S. Freud, *Gesammelte Werke: Chronologisch Geordnet* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 5th ed., 1972) part V (*Werke aus den Jahren 1904-1905*), pp. 93-94 (of *Drie Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, pp. 29-145):

Die gründliche psychologische Analyse dieses Triebes ist bekanntlich noch nicht geglückt; wir dürfen annehmen, daß die grausame Regung vom Benüchtigungstrieb her stammt und zu einer Zeit im Sexualleben auftritt, da die Genitalien noch nicht ihre spätere Rolle aufgenommen haben.
42. See J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse* (Paris, P.U.F., 11th ed., 1992), pp. 364-367 ("*Pulsion d'emprise*") p. 364:

une pulsion d'emprise qui n'aurait pas originellement pour but la souffrance d'autrui, mais simplement n'en tiendrait pas compte (phase antérieure aussi bien à la pitié qu'au sadisme); elle serait indépendante de la sexualité.
43. See, for example, E.E. Cohen, *Human Behavior in the Concentration Camp*. With a New Preface by the Author and a Foreword of Dinora Pines. A translation from the Dutch original by H.M. Braaksma (New York, 1st ed., 1954; London: Free Association Books, 1988), pp. 246-253 and A.J. Herzberg, *Amor fuit. De aanhandelijheid aan het lot. Zeven opstellen over Bergen-Belsen*, (Amsterdam: Querido, 1977), pp. 11-12.

44. A. Pawelczynska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz: A Sociological Analysis*. A translation from the Polish original by C.S. Leach (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 19.

45. See the story in P. Levi, *De verdronkenen en de geredden*, pp. 62-65.

46. A good illustration is this citation from A. Speer, *Inside the Third Reich. Memoirs*. A translation from the German original by Weidenfeld & Nicolson (London: R. & C. Winston, 1970), pp. 112-113:

Hitler's hatred for the Jews seemed to me so much a matter of course that I gave it no serious thought. I felt myself to be Hitler's architect. Political events did not concern me.... Today it seems to me that I was trying to compartmentalize my mind.... It is ... true that the habit of thinking within the limits of my own field provided me, both as architect and as Armaments Minister, with many opportunities for evasion.... But in the final analysis I myself determined the degree of my isolation, the extremity of my evasions, and the extent of my ignorance.

47. S. Hauerwas and D.B. Burrell, *Self-Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer's Inside the Third Reich*, in S. Hauerwas, R. Bondi, and D.B. Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), pp. 82-98.

48. An extraordinary elaborated alternative is D.J. Fasching, *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz. From Alienation to Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 97-105. See also his monumental *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Apocalypse or Utopia?* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

49. J.-P. Sartre, *L'ère et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 25th ed, pp. 85-111 (Chapter 2: "La mauvaise foi"), pp. 87-88.

50. S. Callahan, *In Good Conscience: Reason and Emotion in Moral Decision Making* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991), pp. 143-170 (Chapter 6: "Moral Failure and Self Deception").

51. See the very renovating study of P.J. Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz: The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 1st ed., 2nd ed., 1991.

52. T. Todorov, *Au nom du peuple: témoignages sur les camps communistes*. A translation from the Bulgarian original by M. Vrinat (Paris: Editions de l'Aube, 1992), p. 18.

53. E. Fackenheim, Nazi "Ethic," *Nazi Weltanschauung and the Holocaust. A Review Essay in The Jewish Quarterly Review* 83(1-2) (1992), pp. 167-172.

54. See F. Kafka, *Brieven aan Milena*. A translation from the German original by W. Haas, (Amsterdam: Querido, 1974), 2nd ed.; M. Buber-Neumann, *Milena* (Points. Actuels 95). A translation from the German original by A. Brossat (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

55. P. Müller, *Eyewitness to Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers* (New York: Stein & Day, 1979), p. 46 and D.G. Roskies (ed.), *The Literature of Destruction* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 557.

56. O. Lengyel, *Souvenirs de l'au-delà* (Climats). A translation from the Hungarian original by G. LADISLAS, (Paris: Editions du bateau, 1946), p. 40: "La certitude qu'en dernier ressort on est maître de sa propre vie représente la dernière liberté."

57. Based on Ratouchinskāa, *Grise est la couleur de l'espoir* (Paris: Plon, 1989), p. 128.

58. P. Levi, *Is dit een mens?*, pp. 44-45.

59. P. Levi, *De verdronkenen en de geredden*, pp. 119-120.

60. A. Pawelczynska, op. cit., p. 121.

61. See I. Gutman, *Zimetbaum, Mala (1922-1945)*, in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan, 1990) 4 volumes, p. 1735.

62. T. Todorov, *Une tragédie française: été 44: scènes de guerre civiles. Suivi de souvenirs d'un maire* (Histoire immédiate) (Paris: Seuil, 1994), pp. 155-156.

63. V.E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: an Introduction to Logotherapy* (New York: Pocket Books, 1963).

64. I.J. Rosenbaum, *The Holocaust and Halakiah* ("The library of Jewish law and ethics") (New York: KTAV, 1976), pp. 47-59 (Chapter 3: "Prayer, Study, and Martyrdom"), and G. Greenberg, *Foundations for Orthodox Jewish Theological Response to the Holocaust: 1936-1939*, in A.L. Eckardt, *Burning*

Memory. Times of Testing and Reckoning (Holocaust series) (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993), pp. 71-94.

65. See an example of E. Wiesel, *Night*. A translation from the French original by S. Rodway (New York: Avon Books, 1969), pp. 107-108 in P. Yancey, *Concentration Camps part II. One Lesson Stands Out: Justice Must Come from the Outside*, in *Christianity Today* 23 (5) (1979), pp. 26-30.

66. F. Fenélon, *Sursis pour l'orchestre* (Paris: Stock, 1976), pp. 172-188.

67. For the difference between "une éthique de responsabilité" et "une éthique de conviction" see T. Todorov, *Une tragédie française*, p. 149 and also J.-P. Sarrre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Nagel, 1970), pp. 41-42.

68. Z. Bauman, *The Banality of the Good*, Review of T. Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (Paris, 1991), in *Times Literary Supplement* 13 (4602) (1991), pp. 12-14.

69. See the important critic against Frankl: L.L. Langer, *Versions of Survival: the Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), p. 74:

In contradiction to those who argue that the only way of surviving was to cling to the values of civilized living despite the corrupting influence of the deathcamps, Lingers-Reiner insists that those who tried to salvage such moral luggage imposed fatal burdens on themselves.

Chapter 7

HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND THE MEDIA: MISUNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF TRUTH

Deborah Lipstadt

Thank you, Dr. Rubenstein. I am here today to talk to you about experiences that I have had in the past two years since the publication of my book *Denying the Holocaust*. The book did strike a chord, much more than I ever imagined would be the case and in fact, I was just reminding Yehuda Bauer, a few moments ago, that he, together with Israel Gutman, were the people who approached me and urged me to write on this topic. I remember saying to both of them, "Do you really think anyone would be interested in reading about it?" And so, if you think I'm smart in having picked such a relevant topic, that story will tell you the truth.

I want to talk to you about the meaning of the truth and how truth is perceived or not perceived. How much of the world has a cloudy perception of what truth is. This is particularly true of the media which translates so much of what we do for wider audiences. While I shall speak today of Holocaust denial, please keep in mind that if this truth, the truth of the Holocaust, can be assaulted, then any truth can be assaulted. If this truth is vulnerable, any truth is vulnerable. Therefore, though I speak from the confines of the study of the Holocaust and while many of you are involved in so many ways with this field, I think it is important to remember that we speak of all types of scholarship. Moreover, rather than speaking of communication with the media, I want to speak about some of the glaring problems I observed in the media's grasp of this difficult issue.

Let me begin, however, by reading to you a letter I received shortly after the publication of *Denying the Holocaust*. It came from a