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The Shadow of the Shoah

A Review Essay

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Sarah K. Pinnock. *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Continental Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

Massimo Giuliani. *Theological Implications of the Shoah: Caesura and Continuum as Hermeneutic Paradigms of a Jewish Theodicy*. American University Studies Series VII, 221, New York: Peter Lang, 2002.

Marc H. Ellis. *Revolutionary Forgiveness: Essays on Judaism, Christianity, and the Future of Religious Life*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2000.

[1] These three books all focus on Jewish (and Christian) responses to the Holocaust. They do so from very different perspectives, drawing on a diverse range of sources and asking a variety of questions about the future of reflection on the Holocaust. Pinnock's and Giuliani's books are both publications of their doctoral dissertations. While Pinnock introduces reflection on the Holocaust through an analysis of a well-chosen sample of liberal Jewish and Christian thinkers' approaches to the question of theodicy, Giuliani takes his readers on a panoramic tour of Jewish responses to the Holocaust. Ellis's volume is not a systematic study of aspects of Jewish responses to the Holocaust. Rather, he takes his readers on a journey through the development of his thought on the Jewish situation today and its future. Inspired by reflections on the Holocaust and the theological treatment of this subject in Jewish thought, Christian liberation theology and the struggle of the Palestinian people for political self-determination, Ellis's book is an intellectual autobiography. As such it goes beyond the scope of Pinnock's and Giuliani's books with their much more closely defined focus, and points to further topics of investigation.

[2] The Holocaust has occupied Jewish and Christian philosophers/theologians repeatedly since the end of the Second World War. In particular in Europe, the meaning of the Holocaust for contemporary religious life of Jews and Christians remains an important topic informing theological inquiry. Pinnock focuses directly on the European context while Giuliani and Ellis broaden the scope to include reflection on theological developments in the United States and Israel. While Pinnock and Ellis cover new ground and thereby push the debates about the interpretation of the Holocaust further, Giuliani makes a contribution through a thorough survey of, by now, classical Jewish thought on the Holocaust.

Beyond Theodicy

[3] In *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Continental Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust* Pinnock analyses Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber, Ernst Bloch, and Johann Baptist Metz's approaches to suffering after the Holocaust. Dedicating the four main chapters of the book to each of these scholars respectively, she begins with an overview of the study of theodicy. Pinnock proposes that practical approaches to theodicy are preferable to theoretical ones, since these have the advantage of being tested and applied in a particular context, even if they lack logical coherence. She defines theodicy

as any approach to the issues of evil and suffering that attempts to explain or justify the relationship between God and evil. Theodicy is a discourse that promotes the rational plausibility of theism, whether in a defensive or explanatory mode (3).

While theoretical theodicies justify God and thereby the suffering of human beings and have consequently been rejected as scandalous and immoral by the four existentialist and political philosophers/theologians discussed in this book, practical theodicies do not necessarily exclude such justification per se, but by focusing on the suffering rather than God they offer an alternative vantage point for the examination of the problem of evil and suffering. A concern they share is the practicability of the (anti-) theodicies they develop and their illumination in intellectual frameworks that further our thinking about the relationship between God and evil and its implications for our own lives.

[4] By comparing Jewish and Catholic works on post-Holocaust theodicy (although the authors, Marcel and Buber in particular, do not necessarily see their responses as theodicies that take direct account of the Holocaust), Pinnock seeks to stress the shared concerns of these Jewish and Christian authors. For that purpose she has grouped them together as two pairs, Marcel-Buber and Bloch-Metz. These authors have been chosen because they "are innovators who forge distinctive philosophical perspectives" (7) and Marcel, Buber, and Bloch are of the same generation, born at the end of the nineteenth century, whereas Metz is a generation younger, his formative years being the 1930s and 1940s. Because Pinnock favors practical theodicies, her analysis focuses on the points where the authors are proposing answers that are not acceptable to those who suffer and which can be criticised from the position of the victims themselves. Rarely are the victims cited as Holocaust victims. The Holocaust appears more as a backdrop to the analysis, signifying a situation in which theodicy was most sharply thrown into relief, rather than as a historical, social or political focus of the analysis itself. Pinnock's analysis concludes with two chapters that seek

to draw out the implications of her approach, engaging "more recent authors who take a 'contextual' approach to theology and theodicy issues" (9).

[5] Common to all four authors Pinnock surveys the notion that suffering cannot be assigned a meaning that is external to the sufferer. Nobody but those who suffer have the right to propose an interpretation of their suffering. Thereby, the sufferer is safeguarded from theodicies that assign meaning to suffering on a global scale or contend for its necessity in the drama of (salvation) history. However, the implications of this shared assumption are articulated differently by each of the authors. Marcel focuses largely on private suffering and tries to highlight the ability of individuals to accommodate their suffering in their self-understanding and interpret it creatively. In fact, assigning meaning to suffering is the responsibility of the suffering individual, which leads to maintaining a relationship with God in the experience of suffering. Suffering becomes a trial which challenges the resilience of the individual. However, this interpretation of suffering by the individual does not mean that the trial is sent by God, nor does it provide reasons for the occurrence of suffering. Hence, while the acceptance of suffering is an act of responsibility of the individual which is active - in contrast to passive endurance - and signifies heroism, resistance to suffering is not encouraged as a response. Pinnock criticises Marcel's approach to suffering as rooted in a white, Western, middle-class setting, hardly able to broach more complex situations of suffering such as the Holocaust. Based on the assumption of a well-adjusted individual with an ability to maintain interpersonal relations, Marcel's model for responding to suffering does not grasp situations in which the dehumanization of the victim does not allow for "postures of availability and hope, which enable meaning-making" (37). Similarly, Marcel's "confidence in the indestructibility of the bonds of relation and love between individuals, a hope that reaches beyond history to a transcendent realm . . . deflects attention from evaluating and protesting the causes of suffering in history and society" (37). Pinnock suggests that this practical approach to suffering is appropriate in some situations of an individual's suffering, but not sufficient to tackle larger social manifestations of suffering.

[6] Buber situates responses to the suffering of an individual in the I-Thou relationship with God that is found in biblical texts. By entering into the texts of the Bible, human beings today can become part of the stories and own the responses to suffering embodied by the biblical characters, such as the protest of Job. Finding meaning in one's suffering is possible in the form of prophetic prayer, where the relationship between God and individual and the responsibility of establishing and maintaining relationships between human beings is understood through the notion that human "suffering can be interpreted as part of the redemption process, consisting of the mending of human relationships and the reuniting of God and the world" (49), an idea that is part of Hasidic thought. By focusing on the responsibility of the individual to take part in human relationships and community building, Pinnock suggests that Buber is better able than Marcel to address the historical contextuality of suffering. Buber has, though, repeatedly been accused of not responding adequately to the Holocaust, retreating into a position where God's absence remains unexplained while the responsibility is placed on humanity to work through the eclipse of God by affirming suffering as a necessary part of redemption and maintaining a firm hope in the reappearance of God. However, "the fundamental level of coping and responding to socially caused suffering is interpersonal" and as such "what is missing or underdeveloped is reflection on

the socio-political causes of suffering, especially the suffering of oppressed groups and the faith imperative of resistance" (54).

[7] Bloch and Metz are both influenced by Marxist theory and hence focus, more than Marcel and Buber, on the social dimensions of suffering. Bloch affirms concrete hope in a "communist classless society" that "is not an end in itself but 'a condition for a life in freedom, life in happiness, life in possible fulfillment'" (69). Hence, suffering must be protested and is seen as an unacceptable social condition. The vision of the classless society is the "*Ultimum*" that "acts as a critical standard for discerning injustice and socially caused or exacerbated suffering in the past and present" (69). Having outlined Bloch's interpretation of suffering and an ideal society, Pinnock discusses a Christian application of this model of hope in Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* and his interpretation of suffering in *The Crucified God*. This analysis leads to the following chapter on Metz who disagrees strongly that Moltmann's suggestion that divine suffering in any way alleviates the questions posed by theodicy or aids an interpretation of human suffering.

[8] Metz's political theology demonstrates that faith and suffering are not necessarily contradictory. Learning from the victims of the Holocaust, Metz concludes that protest against suffering is an appropriate response, while at the same time faith is proper too, since prayers were articulated in Auschwitz. According to Metz, the Trinity is not helpful for a representation of the history of human suffering, since it involves speculating about the inner history of the Trinity, and because, in contrast to much human suffering, Jesus' suffering was freely chosen. Thus, for Metz, the stories about Jesus become "a source of hope as well as critical memory" (88). The memory of suffering serves a twofold purpose. Firstly, it reminds us that suffering is part of the human condition and that it cannot be ignored. Secondly, the remembrance of suffering should lead us to "analyze the causes of suffering, a step necessary for developing political strategies of resistance" (91). Hence the memory of suffering is dangerous memory because it prompts resistance and social change.

[9] Pinnock concludes her analysis of these (anti-) theodicies with four "guidelines for philosophical and theological approaches to evil and suffering" (139). Firstly, she suggests "epistemic humility," meaning that we ought to be cautious about whether and how we may speak about "God's nature, acts, and purposes" (139), hence "theodicy, which explains or justifies God's permission of evil and suffering aims at an unreachable goal" (140). Secondly, she proposes "moral sensitivity" towards the suffering. This guideline cautions against assigning meaning to suffering that is not developed by the victims themselves and thereby responds to concerns of theodicy. While it is now acknowledged that not all evil has direct causes in individual lapses of morality, suffering caused by social and political systems cannot be interpreted in moral terms unless one is prepared to act morally towards the victims and aid resistance to their suffering. The third guideline relates to "religious practice" and suggests that responses to suffering should be sought in faith positions that emulate positions of protest and action that are "prophetic and moral postures" (141). "Narrative memory" is the title of the final guideline that involves "reflection on the stories of persons who face severe suffering" (142) and thereby opens up further dimensions for understanding the situations of those who suffer. Pinnock concludes: "To take these four guidelines seriously is to affirm that the plausibility of faith in God must not be defended at the price of

concealing the unresolved practical and conceptual tensions between faith and suffering" (144).

[10] Pinnock's study of post-Holocaust (anti-) theodicy is a useful discussion for students and scholars alike. As a comparative study, this book is an important contribution to Christian-Jewish relations, explicating the convergence and difference of Jewish and Christian (anti-) theodicies. By not remaining on the level of theoretical reflection only, the analysis of the practicability of responses to suffering should inspire the reader to investigate the practical implications of any theoretical-theological reflection, thereby encouraging the pushing of boundaries of faith, thought and action.

Theological Implications of the Shoah

[11] In contrast to Pinnock, Massimo Giuliani's book, *Theological Implications of the Shoah: Caesura and Continuum as Hermeneutic Paradigms of a Jewish Theodicy* is interested primarily in theoretical hermeneutical concerns. His approach to theodicy and the Holocaust in Jewish thought is decidedly theoretical-philosophical. The four main chapters of his book take the reader through philosophical, literary, critical and theological works on the Holocaust. As such, the book does not introduce new material. The interest here is a panoramic view of post-Holocaust Jewish thought, uniting religious and non-religious perspectives in a single analytical framework. Thus, Giuliani is able to show that Jewish responses to the Holocaust are linked through the categories used by religious and non-religious contributions.

[12] In the introduction Giuliani sets out his analytical parameters that bridge philosophical and historical hermeneutics. He interprets the Holocaust as a unique event which takes on particular meaning and significance on the theological level of discourse, since it is the theological dimension which determines the identity and destiny of the Jewish people. Giuliani contends that Jewish identity and the Holocaust are interlinked as follows:

- a) the Jewish people understands itself with and communicates through theological categories that emerge from a religious tradition founded on a revelation (Sinai); it therefore has, from its point of view, a theological meaning;
- b) the Shoah, as a historical, event, is the most serious catastrophe that hit the Jewish people because it was the most radical attempt scientifically to annihilate this people; it is therefore understood as a "Jewish catastrophe," a *churban*;
- c) therefore the Shoah - by virtue of the communication principle of the term "Jewish" (the Jewish people, Jewish catastrophe) - takes on a theological meaning, that is, it shares the same theological meaning that the tradition attributes to all Jewish history (11).

[13] The aim of this book is "to show that the Shoah . . . escapes any attempt of direct comprehension but is able to be grasped indirectly through testimony, metaphor, and the image in which (*qua*) the Shoah was developed by thought in crisis and by consciousness" (220). Consequently, chapters 1, 2 and 3 discuss the implications of this theological dimension of the Holocaust in three areas of representation of the Holocaust: theodicy,

linguistics and theology/philosophy. Chapter 4 forms the conclusion, summarising the argument and suggesting a synthesis that allows the understanding of the Holocaust as both, *caesura* and *continuum*. The flow of the argument is interrupted by three "Interludes" that summarize the argument of the preceding chapter and forge the link to the next.

[14] Chapter 1 investigates theodicy and concludes that all attempts at theodicy after the Holocaust rely on a definition of the event as either redeemable evil or unredeemable evil. Both positions are able to hold on to the understanding of the Holocaust as unique. In order to hold the notions of God and evil together, both Jewish and Christian thought has resorted to storytelling and the creation of myths. Giuliani finds the most appropriate rendition of the mutual relationship between God and evil in the myth of the *Chaoskampf* in which God, rather than reconcile with evil, is lodged in a battle against evil that encompasses the whole of creation. In order to achieve justice God needs humanity's help in this fight against evil. According to Giuliani, the Holocaust introduces the *Chaoskampf* with new force, since the dimensions of the onslaught on the Jewish people pose the question whether this evil is redeemable or not. He concludes that Orthodox and non-Orthodox theodicies after the Holocaust divide on this question. This divide does not indicate a preference of the author for one or the other. Rather he sees Orthodox and non-Orthodox theodicies as different possibilities on a theological spectrum of ideas. Orthodox "theodicies . . . , 'the justifications of evil in order to defend God' that are not worth any confutation, are those that require, for the believer, adherence, by religious assent, to an explanation of the Shoah 'as a direct act of providence, namely a Divine punishment for very grave sins'" or assume the "position of a believer who decides to continue - always as an act of faith - to believe in God and observe the *mitzvot* despite the counter-testimony (testimony against God) that comes from the existence of the Shoah" (61). They thereby maintain that the evil of the Holocaust can be redeemed - albeit in ways unknown to humanity. The opposing position is held mostly by the non-Orthodox and contends, "The Shoah constitutes the historical reality and the theological symbol of this irredeemable because no God can pretend that the Shoah did not happen" (63). Hence, "Faith is a consciousness that the irredeemable exists but also that God continues to fight against evil" (64).

[15] Chapter 2 explores the representation of the Holocaust and the effects that has on the understanding of language. Taking a Wittgensteinian approach - what we are able to convey with language is not identical with our experience and what we are able to communicate is not identical with our capacity to comprehend - Giuliani suggests that these patterns of our linguistic ability are multiplied by the incommunicability of the experience of the Holocaust to such an extent that "the language . . . was destroyed in Auschwitz" (135). However, since human beings are dependent on language it is necessary to "turn to the mythical, symbolic religious language of the tradition in order to be said and understood. It must turn to midrash. In this way the event can be understood as a rupture or continuity" (135). As in chapter 1, the conclusion is a "both/and" of the redeemed and irredeemable, the rupture and continuity of language that has traditionally been captured in myth and midrash and escapes the strict definitions of philosophical and theological categories.

[16] This conclusion links with the content of chapter 3 where Giuliani discusses post-Holocaust Jewish theologies, all of which explore questions of theodicy and representation of the Holocaust. All theologians/philosophers discussed here (Fackenheim, Rubenstein,

Maybaum, Greenberg, Wasserman, Berkovits, and others) reconsider Jewish identity (election and covenant) in light of the Holocaust and conclude with a ruptured continuity of Jewish identity and mission in the world, discussed largely between the poles of the redemptive categories of Messianism and Zionism. Giuliani presents his analysis as an inversion of Rosenzweig's model of Jewish identity found in *The Star of Redemption*, so that the Shoah is defined as the "star of irredemption": "At Auschwitz, God is at stake because the very existence of Israel is at stake; and as an inevitable corollary, Israel is at stake because the justice and the reliability of God are at stake" (219).

[17] Thus Giuliani concludes his hermeneutical reflections in chapter 4 by suggesting that the paradigm of the "star or irredemption" captures the conflict between the different theological interpretations of the Holocaust: "The root of the conflict of theological interpretations is not found at the level of the different theologies that faced the Shoah but at the pre-theological level of the recognition that the historical consciousness of the believer is at the base of every act of faith and its rethinking"; hence, "we are addressing a different way to understand the relationship between faith and history, and to think and live the tradition: either as *continuum* that can truly be interrupted or as a chain formed by thousands of little *caesurae* held together precisely by this constant discontinuity" (277). Consequently, "the Shoah is certainly a *novum* in Jewish history, but its interpretations, albeit contradictory and mutually excluding, are all part of the hermeneutic tradition of Judaism and none of them have the right to exclude the other nor to deny them legitimacy of having a Jewish quality" (238).

[18] Limiting his analysis to the well-trodden ground of Jewish responses to the Holocaust Giuliani is not pushing the scholarly debate into new directions. In fact he misses out the discourses of post-structuralist philosophy which have more recently pushed the boundaries of discourse on history, tradition and text. Rather he reiterates in needlessly complex philosophical language what had been apparent for some time now: that the Holocaust can be understood as a rupture of reality and thought or as one event in a continuous line of Jewish history and thought, depending on how the relationship between history and tradition is defined and the "uniqueness" of the Holocaust is inserted into the theological discourse. The conclusion Giuliani does not draw but which is implicit in his analysis, is that the responses to the Holocaust are not so much responses to the Holocaust as they are responses to modernity. The relationship between history and tradition and the rewriting of tradition came to the fore with renewed strength after the Holocaust, but the debate was already prefigured in the conflicts brought about by the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment in the eighteenth century). However, the value of this study lies in its synthetic character which provides a panoramic view of the first generation of Jewish responses to the Holocaust.

Revolutionary Forgiveness

[19] An entirely different book is Ellis's *Revolutionary Forgiveness: Essays on Judaism, Christianity and the Future of Religious Life*, a title taken from one of the essays of this volume. This collection of previously published and specially prepared essays is an intellectual biography that addresses students and newcomers to Ellis's thought alike.

[20] The essays are divided into three thematic blocks that are roughly coinciding with the chronology of Ellis's biography. "A Jew Among Christians" primarily addresses Ellis's

student and post-doctoral days, which were spent largely at universities and institutions with a pronounced Christian ethos, such as the Catholic missionaries at Maryknoll. Ellis's experiences as a somewhat isolated Jew in a Christian world, his encounter with liberation theology which proved to be a formative theological experience, are augmented by reports on his travels abroad and meetings with his theological teachers such as Thomas Merton, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Gustavo Gutierrez.

[21] Part 2 "On the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century" moves the reader quickly into Ellis's work on Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations in the light of the Holocaust and Zionism. His thought on the future of Israel and Jewish statehood form the core of this part. In particular the notion of "Constantinian Judaism," which parallels "Constantinian Christianity," symbolising the dangers that arise for Jewish identity, theology, and politics when a nation settles for a state with religious and military institutions, is at the heart of these essays.

[22] Part 3 "The Future of Ecumenical Religiosity" holds together essays on diverse topics. Some contributions are furthering the ideas developed in part 2, while others directly discuss individuals such as Dorothy Day and Christian-Jewish relations. Further discussed are the spiritual journeys of George Steiner and the philosopher Gillian Rose who came close to, or led to, conversion to Christianity, and the impulses taken up by Ellis from Martin Buber, and A. J. Heschel. Finally, there are essays on the Vatican document *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* and the future of Jewish identity after the Holocaust. The collection closes with an article about Jewish leadership which examines the function and status of a rabbi.

[23] This publication provides a panoramic view of Ellis's thought to date and as such can serve well as an introduction to his work. Readers of his books will be disappointed, since there is nothing in this collection that they have not been able to read elsewhere. However, this collection serves well as a single volume shortcut to Ellis's work and as such is a worthwhile book for libraries and institutions teaching courses on post-Holocaust Jewish thought.

[24] Altogether these three books advance our understanding of the theological implications of the Holocaust. Pinnock and Ellis further the debate on the Holocaust by introducing broader topics for reflection. As such their work enhances the discussion and stimulates new insight. Giuliani elaborates well-trodden ground, but does so in a philosophical context. While he does not contribute new insights the value of his book may lie in opening up discussion of the Holocaust for a non-Jewish audience of philosophers.