

FINAL SUMMATION

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Judging by today and the dinner on Wednesday night, as well as by the various reports I've received, this has been an extraordinarily successful conference and it has truly repaid the vision of the planners of the conference, especially Professor Miles. I would like, in the few minutes that I have, to make a few remarks which may be perverse or counter-intuitive, but which I think should be made, nonetheless, given the tenor of a lot of what I've heard.

First of all, and perhaps there will be no disagreement after the conversation that we have had, by comparing all of the events to the Holocaust the uniqueness of the Holocaust has actually been in some fundamental way accepted by all the participants who have spoken in this conference. That is to say, through the act of scholarly comparison you establish the distinctiveness of the Holocaust. There is no other event that I can think of around which you could organize a conference such as this. For example, you couldn't do it around the Gulag, and you couldn't do it around the Armenian tragedy of World War I. There is something about the Holocaust that speaks to a universal kind of concern, that raises truly fundamental questions. Every kind of important issue, from political issues to metaphysical issues, from theological issues to ethical issues, needs to be re-examined after Auschwitz.

Secondly, I would point out that what created and sustained the Holocaust was a uniquely modern drive to recreate the world in a kind of Promethean way. That is, it was driven by the belief that there are no limits to what human beings can do. Prior murders, mass murder, and Christian antisemitism, always understood that there was a God, and therefore not everything was possible. But as Nietzsche knew a hundred years ago, in the modern era God is dead and all is possible. So the fundamental shape of the modern - of technology, of bureaucracy, of the power of the state, of the total disregard of the claim that human beings have some inherent rights - indeed the whole metaphysical vision of what it is to be human has been reconceptualized in, and through, the Holocaust. That is one of the fundamental facts about its power.

There is a fundamental distinction that, at times, has been lost at times in our discussion and which I would urge should be respected. I refer to the distinction between the Holocaust itself and the quite separate issue of the scholarship and debate regarding the implications of the politics of the Holocaust. Again, there is a second distinction that I would call to attention: that between moral judgments and phenomenological analysis. That is to say, we have talked about many, many morally evil events over the past 24 hours. So, for example, we have discussed the immorality of what occurred in Ethiopia, and the morally appalling circumstances in Cambodia, Guatemala, Armenia, Rwanda, and in the Gulag. And in each case, I would argue that there is no moral distinction to be made between being murdered in any of these (and other) conditions, nor as regards the immorality of the killers. At the same time, however, there are phenomenological distinctions that need to be drawn between the shape of these events. For example, in analyzing each case one has to ask questions about the operative ideology that was influential while in comparing cases one has to inquire about the difference (and similarities) between the ideologies that played a role in the different cases.

Consider, for example, that the Communist ideology that tried to remake Cambodia as a primitive utopia, and therefore identified various groups within the state in certain negative ways, still allowed, as a consequence of the governing ideology of the Khmer Rouge, for re-education of certain kinds, i.e., not all “enemies” needed to be murdered. Alternatively, the murder of the indigene in Guatemala is necessarily related to the long and pernicious history of colonialism and the “liberal” state efforts, following national independence in the early 19th century, to remake the indigene into workers. So you rob them of their unique communal status. You take away the traditional Spanish governing model of a special community of the Indians. You grant them rights only so that you can exploit them. But always you need their labor. Therefore, in Guatemala where you have five to six million Mayan Indians, despite the violence of the 1980s (and earlier) the actual number of indigene who have been murdered is relatively small. This contextual analysis doesn’t make the violence against the aboriginal community any more justifiable, but it begins to explain its causes and the limits of the violence and murder involved. Moreover, it becomes clear that what happened here has a shape totally different from that involved in the rounding up of all the Jews of Lithuania and sending them to factories of death like Treblinka where the only thing produced was corpses. There is something fundamentally important about noticing this phenomenological difference.

As a result of this symposium, I have become acutely aware of the things I don’t know about Cambodia and Rwanda and Mauritius and South Africa and all the other tragedies (and locations) discussed. As I listened to what was said, I also realized that, in addition, there are plenty of gaps in my knowledge of things I do know something about. And this once again made me realize how much we need to know to do comparative study and research, and especially to do it in a way that is precise and intellectually convincing.

So, for example, we need to know why in the Chinese experience the Taiping Rebellion and the Maoist Cultural Revolution were not the same thing and again why they were, each in their own way, very different from the struggle of the Mayan people in Guatemala. Again, we need to understand why the Pol Pot Khmer regime in Cambodia was not the same as the criminal regime in Sudan. And why, despite some important commonalities, the Gulag is not the Holocaust, and why the tragedy in Armenia in World War I is not, either. In other words, we all need to go home and study history. I especially say this to my friends who are social scientists and are historically challenged. They need to go and study history. History, historical sources and documents, provide the data on which we have to depend. It is not sufficient to say we construct the narrative. There is, I believe, such a thing as the persuasive power of facts. This may not be fashionable today among deconstructionists, certain social scientists and literary people who think it's all a matter of feeling, or “prejudice,” but facts are critical in this conversation. For academics facts are morally, politically and academically important.

I would also like to say that the papers given and the discussion that has taken place have raised many questions for me to think about. Some I have thought about before. Some are totally new for me. In this connection I am reminded of the statement that is attributed to a great German historian, that “all history is contemporary history.” For example, in this last discussion we saw how the Israeli conflict is tied up with accounts of the Holocaust from each side. And we saw the same thing this morning in other presentations.

I would also say a word about the Jewish issue. Someone earlier made a joke about 1 percent of the world's population, the Jews, occupying the minds of 99 percent of the world's population. There is something very peculiar that came to the surface this morning along those lines. The actual percentage of the Jews in the world is, of course, far less than 1 percent. It is a fraction of a fraction of 1 percent. I'm not sure its even one quarter of 1 percent. If we have 4 or 5 or 6 billion people in the world, and 13 million Jews - depending on how you count them - that is quite a disparity. However, numbers aside, there is a mythic quality to the notion of "Jews" and "Jewishness" in Western consciousness which, as the West has become dominant all over the globe, has now been universalized. So, for example, as Prof. Kissi told us, people are asking "Who is a Jew in a special locally defined African sense in Ethiopia and Ghana." Now, of course, some people today are trying to answer this question through recourse to DNA. And you may know that there are efforts to show through DNA tests that certain African groups - and even the Japanese - are actually segments of the "lost tribes" of Israel. But, whatever the approach, there is something that transcends historical and empirical evidence when one seeks to discern the meaning of "Jewishness" and when one is dealing with Jewish matters.

In light of what I have just said it is not surprising that the state of Israel is also thought of in mythic terms. By this I mean to refer to the notion regarding the size of Israel, the power of Israel, and the power of Jews in the United States in support of Israel. The Holocaust, the subject of this conference, should be evidence that Jews do not have all that much power. While Hitler was ranting about Jewish power, in the summer of 1944, he was killing 10,000 and 17,000 thousand Hungarian Jews a day in his extermination camps.

Our decision has also raised many interesting questions about representations of the Holocaust. What about films that relate to the Holocaust? In teaching a course on the Holocaust do you show films that are fictional creations? Do you show *Schindler's List*? Or *Life is Beautiful*? Do you read Elie Wiesel in a course on the Holocaust if what he's written is classed as fiction? And what about *Maus* which works as a cartoon? Then you get into the problems of autobiography [such as] Primo Levi's. That is to say, autobiography is not always reliable. Really, the best thing is to read historians. Historians have a meta-view. They don't have the partial view. The person who was at Auschwitz does not know what happened at Treblinka. The person who was at Treblinka doesn't know what happened with *Einsatzgruppen*. But Raul Hilberg knows the facts about all three matters. So, you are probably better off reading Raul Hilberg - but then he has his own interpretive premises and values. So, this becomes a very complicated methodological issue.

This talk about myths and methodology encourages me to say another word about a widespread myth that has been repeated at this conference and which must be corrected. I refer to the claim, made in the last discussion, that before the advent of modern Zionism and the creation of the state of Israel, Jews and Arabs lived in harmony. This is a very common view. Here, in particular, there is a widespread myth about a "Golden Age" that existed in medieval Muslim Spain. But there never was such an age. It is simply not true that it was wonderful in the past for the Jews in Muslim countries. There was a category in Muslim law that defined Jews as *dhimmis*. There is still a category in Muslim law that deals with *dhimmis*. According to Muslim law, Jews are not equal - they are *dhimmis*. Christians are also not equal, nor are Zoroastrians. *Dhimmis* are communities of faith that have an authentic, but inferior,

revelation and, accordingly, they are not equal to Muslims or Islam. The whole history of the relations between the Jews and Muslims is affected by the Koranic-based idea of the *dhimmi*, of *dhimmi-tude*. In no Muslim society, including medieval Spain, were Jews anything but third-class members of the society, i.e., *dhimmis*.

You all know the name of Maimonides, the greatest Jew of the medieval era who was born in Muslim Spain in 1140. He is usually taken as the apotheosis of the Jewish-Muslim synthesis in Spain. If you go to Cordoba today, you will find a statue of Maimonides. But if you know the life of Maimonides, you know that Maimonides' family was forced to leave Spain and flee to North Africa because the Almohade Muslim regime was forcing everyone to become Muslim. So he ran away. Of course, he found refuge in another Muslim regime in North Africa, in Cairo. But even there, he was not allowed to live at the court; he had to live in the equivalent of the ghetto and to ride home every night on a donkey, because Jews were not allowed to ride horses. I would remind you of Maimonides' own view of the Jewish-Muslim relationship in the medieval era:

“You know, my brethren, that on account of our sins God has cast us into the midst of this people, the nation of Ishmael, who persecute us severely, and who devise ways to harm us and to debate us. This is as the Exalted had warned us: ‘Even our enemies themselves being judges’ (Deuteronomy 32:31) No nation has ever done more harm to Israel. None has matched it in debasing and humiliating us.’

I do not raise these historical issues to be polemical, but, rather, to emphasize that these issues are very complex. The historical issues - not only about the Arab-Israeli conflict — but about Biafra, Rwanda, colonial Mexico in the 1850s, Cambodia, and so on, all require close examination and deep learning if they are not to be turned into caricatures.

Perhaps I will just close with a comment made years ago by my friend Irving Greenberg who observed: "After the Holocaust, any group you belong to, you should be ashamed of." That was a very profound remark. If you belong to the Red Cross, you should be ashamed of it. You all know the Red Cross did terrible things in World War II. If you are a citizen of any of the European states, you know the history, i.e., the role each of these nations played in the Holocaust. If you are a citizen of the United States, you know that America essentially shut off immigration just as Jews needed the doors to America to be open so as not to be murdered. If you are an Israeli, you know that the Zionists did not always act as they should have, though their record is better than most. If you are a religious Jew, you know that very costly mistakes were made by the orthodox rabbinic leadership. Thus, all of us, each in our own way, should take reflecting on the Holocaust as a profound opportunity to meditate on the need for judgment built on truth, the need for study that is as unbiased, open and as non-apologetic as we can make it, and the need for a real ethical commitment. Above all else, the one thing that should come out of this conversation is the awareness that we can make a difference.

In death camps, people about to die, people sick with typhus, people faint with hunger, came to the aid of their fellows and sometimes saved their lives. People resisted even though they may have been at the doors of the gas chambers. Alternatively, there was the whole world of the “bystanders” who chose to turn away and thus become complicit, if only as a consequence of their inaction, in the evil that was done. Which is to say: individuals really can make a

difference. That's the essential lesson, especially for young people in the university setting, of a conversation such as we have been engaged in for the past two days.