Embracing the Other

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RESCUE, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND MORALITY

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1. MORALITY AND MODERNITY

Can our moral theory help us illuminate the darkness of the holocaust? This remains a disturbing and haunting question for those of us who have been educated in philosophy, psychology, and sociology departments in the 1950s and 1960s. This central event in the history and experience of Western culture has largely been passed over in silence. Our prevailing moral theories, still largely shaped within a Kantian or utilitarian tradition, have continued to present themselves as viable, even if they seem powerless to illuminate what seems most important to us. The period of Nazi rule and the extermination of European Jewry has in large part been treated as an aberration—as a sustained moment of madness—that could not be grasped in the prevailing language of reason. It was a period of irrationality that has to be explained in historical terms. In this deeper and more pervasive sense there has been a denial of the holocaust at the heart of our postwar intellectual culture. It has failed, as Saul Friedlander has pointed out, to shift the terms of intellectual, moral, and political discussion, as did the slaughter of the first world war for generations to follow. To repeat, in large part it has been passed over in silence.

This has not always been an easy silence. Auschwitz has found its place in the deeper unspoken recesses of European consciousness. It remains a challenge to the visions of humanity and progress that are part of an Enlightenment tradition. It questions the very terms of modernity and of the philosophical tradition that has in large part sustained this tradition. At the close of the 1980s, when
the dream of science and progress begins to fade and as we become more aware of the injuries that we have done to the planet in their name, there is more talk about the “crisis of modernity.” There is even a lot of vague talk about “postmodernity” and a radical shift in cultural and intellectual sensibility. But it is the holocaust that provides the crisis for a modernity that has been organized according to the principles of Enlightenment rationalism. It is a crisis in our prevailing moral and political traditions that we face when we meditate upon those who rescued Jews during the painful days of the holocaust.

In large part our moral theory remains tied to assumptions that were set by the Enlightenment. We tend to accept in the moral theory of Kant and in the social theory of Durkheim a “dualistic” vision of human nature. We inherit Protestant assumptions that are presented to us in secular and universal terms. The fundamental notion is that “human nature” is radically evil and that left to ourselves individuals would be selfish and egoistic. This Hobbesian vision is at the source of our Enlightenment rationalism. It means that individuals have to be saved from themselves, for we cannot find redemption from within our “natures.” For Kant it is crucial to separate our “reason” from our “natures,” for it is only as rational beings that we can rely upon an independent and autonomous faculty of reason to discern the duties and principles that are available to us within an “intelligible realm.” This is the source of both our freedom and morality. It is only if we act against our “inclinations”—our emotions and desires that would seek to determine our behavior from the outside, externally—that we can find freedom through following the inner voice of reason. Kant’s vision has been crucial in defining an inherited sense of morality and freedom.

Put crudely, this means that we cannot find freedom and morality by listening to our “natures.” We have to deny these parts of ourselves that would interfere with our capacity to follow the path of reason and morality. What is crucial is the way that “reason” is set against “nature” in such a complete and radical manner. This helps form a particular sense of rationality and a notion of the self as a “rational agent” that has become central to liberal moral and political theory. It tends to identify the moment of freedom with the moment of choice. It tends to see emotions and feelings as essentially “selfish” and “irrational” and so tends to present moral education as a denial of our emotional lives. Our
inner lives can only be occupied by reason alone, for our emotions and feelings are presented as essentially external—as determining our behavior from the outside and so being forms of unfreedom. It is crucial to recognize that Kant identifies the inner life with the realm of reason so that freedom, as an inner quality, can be guaranteed by reason alone. So it is that our relationship to our emotional lives is essentially an externalized relationship that plays no part in our dignity or transcendence as individuals. It is only as “rational selves” that we can know ourselves as individuals. So it is that the realm of emotional life is separated from the sphere of morality. It is only as rational/moral beings that our lives have dignity. It is only by separating ourselves from our “animal natures” that we can find dignity and self-respect as moral beings. These assumptions have set the terms for the pervasive framework that sets “egoism” in opposition to “altruism” and that takes the central task of moral theory to provide “reasons” for why people should act altruistically towards others. It is assumed that left to our natures we will act selfishly and egoistically.

2. RESCUE AND SILENCE

We have come to know those people who helped to save Jews from the Nazi plans for extermination as “righteous gentiles.” These were people who helped to save Jews at considerable risk to themselves, often of torture and death. They took these grave risks at no benefit to themselves. It is important that their actions be honored by the Jewish community at large, as at Yad Vashem. At the conference “Remembering for the Future” at Oxford in 1988, Dr. Mordecai Paldiel spoke in a moving way about his work at Yad Vashem. In meeting many of the rescuers he was struck by just how “ordinary” they often were and how far removed from our image of “righteousness.” They did not want to be thought of as anything special and often felt that they simply did what “had to be done” in the situation.

This connects to the fact that it was not education that characterized those who took the risks of rescue. This is supported by the work the Oliners did on “the altruistic personality.” It was often the professionals who turned a blind eye to what was going on and who sometimes colluded in Nazi rule, especially in Germany. How many doctors and lawyers protested loudly at the treatment of their fellow Jews? This question touches on the ef-
fectiveness of a Kantian morality of duty and principle for which such a morality could sustain individual voices of conscience, and we have to be struck by how few they were. If this was not part of Kant’s intention, it has to be recognized as a consequence within the broader moral culture. In Germany this had to do with the notion of “citizenship” and the ways that it connected to the authority of the state. As reason was to be the faculty with authority over our “natures,” so the state as the impartial voice of reason could be seen as having authority in relation to citizens. In both cases it legislates principles and laws that we supposedly give to ourselves. Crucial questions about the relationship of “citizenship” to “morality” emerge when people learn to be “good citizens” by learning to “obey the law” and often to do this without questions.

Within the liberal-democratic state citizenship can serve as a guarantee of morality. People learn that they “can do no wrong” as long as they do not break the law or as long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others. So it is that law is identified with justice. People do not have to feel care and concern for the sufferings of others, for they can feel free to pursue their own interests, knowing that the welfare state will look after the well-being of those less fortunate than themselves. With Hitler’s rule in Germany, the suffering of the Jews was thought by many to be a small price to pay for returning Germany to its former glory among the nations. It was assumed that Hitler knew what he was doing. The Jews were dispensable. It was crucial that when the Jews were deprived of their rights as citizens they were deprived of their humanity within a moral culture that identified respect for the person with respecting the rights of others. It is only our rights that stand as a guarantee of our dignity as human beings. Our natures are bereft of any dignity within a Kantian tradition.

It could be argued that the Jews in Germany had disempowered themselves by learning to separate themselves from any specific Jewish history and culture. This is the sacrifice they had made for emancipation, unclear that it might mean presenting themselves as “other” than they are. It is as if they could only be accepted as equal citizens to the extent that they learned to minimize and marginalize anything that would draw attention to their specificity as Jews. But this was part of an Enlightenment trap, for it made Jews susceptible as a community to the charge of “hiding” who they were. It was as if the liberal notion of citizenship was flawed within European cultures that insisted upon assimilation into the
dominant culture as the price of acceptance. It is only as "citizens" that we can be "free and equal." This made the Jews particularly vulnerable, for it was as if they could not be accepted as Jews, but only to the extent that they would betray themselves.

A similar tension is highlighted in the relationship between Catholics and Jews in Poland. In his article "Poland and the Jews" Abraham Brumberg quotes Jan Blonski's article, "A Poor Pole Looks at the Ghetto":

"We accepted Jews into our house, but told them to live in the basement. When they wanted to enter the rooms, we promised them admission if they ceased to be Jews, if they became civilized, as they used to say in the nineteenth century, and not only in Poland. . . . There were some Jews who were ready to accept this condition. Then talk began about the invasion of Jews, the dangers posed by their entrance into Polish society! We began ... to post conditions, such as stipulating that only Jews who would cooperate in limiting Jewish influences would be accepted as Poles. That is—to put it plainly—only those who would turn against their own kind, or against their parents! Eventually we lost our house and the new occupants began to kill Jews. Did we show any solidarity by offering help? How many of us asserted that it wasn't our business? . . . We didn't even manage to respect and welcome the survivors, however embittered, lost, or even irritating they might have been." (19)

In a liberal moral culture our dignity as human beings is invested in a vision of rights. But as Simone Weil (1952) argues, this notion is inadequate to the tasks that have been placed on it. Nazi Germany showed that if Jews could be deprived of their rights, it could turn them into "nonpersons"—they could be talked of as "vermin." If people no longer had rights then they were removed beyond the realm of reason and humanity. It was difficult to withdraw from the dominant culture and begin to find meaning, dignity, and self-respect in a Judaism that an Enlightenment culture had so long derided as a throwback to an earlier time. That culture shared with orthodox Marxism the idea that religion—if not spirituality—would wither away with the state. It had served its historical purpose so now it was doomed. This was a version of an older Christian myth that said Judaism was superseded by Christianity, so having outlived its purpose. I am thankful that we are beginning to identify such functionalist arguments and question the vision of progress that they embody.

The impersonality of reason gives it a confidence in its own decisions. So it is also that a language of rights teaches us that we
Respect others by leaving them alone. We learn not to infringe on their legal and political rights. In some way we learn to leave others to their fate unless they call for our help. We become wary of showing care and concern for others lest this be misinterpreted as interference. It is significant that it has been feminist writers who have talked of an ethic of relationships that has to do with care and concern. Within an Enlightenment tradition that has identified masculinity with reason it was easy to silence the different voice of women, as Carol Gilligan (1982) has called it. This care and concern for others grows out of the involvement and relationships of women. It is a sensitivity to hurt and injury in relationships that men are often less sensitive to (see Seidler 1989). Traditionally, we show our care and concern for others within a liberal moral culture by respecting their rights. So when Jews are denied legal and political rights, this removes them beyond the pale of care and concern. We have lost any other sense of their dignity as human beings. We need a different basis for an ethic of care and concern.

Why did so few stand up against the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany? This question still haunts our moral and political theory. It brings into question the Christian rhetoric of “love thy neighbor,” which has been rationalized within a Kantian tradition that wanted love to be a rational and universal feeling separated from our relationships and feelings for concrete others. It is difficult to develop a more embodied notion of love within a philosophical tradition that had insisted, as did that of Descartes, on separating mind from body. It is only as rational beings that we have identities. Our emotions and feelings locked into our bodies can be no part of our identities. As Kierkegaard recognizes, unless we can love another person in the right way our love for others is empty. He was suspicious of an empty universalism that was an integral part of an Enlightenment tradition that would teach us to love humanity in the abstract, without helping us with the difficulties of loving those we know (see my Moral Limits of Modernity: Love, Inequality, and Oppression). He is critical of an abstract altruism that talks about others as “rational selves” because it is unable to illuminate the hurt that people do to each other. It is a great strength of Freud to bring into focus the hurt and pain that individuals can do to each other in their personal relationships. He helps us to question the pervasive notion, as does feminism, that because it is “personal” it does not matter. It is an insight our moral theory has yet to learn, trapped as it is within a moral
psychology, as Iris Murdoch indicates in *The Sovereignty of Good*, that is yet to come to terms with Freud and Marx.

3. ALTRUISM AND MORALITY

How should we account for the behavior of those “righteous gentiles” who saved Jews at considerable risk to themselves? Seeing it in terms of an altruism as selfless behavior encourages us to envision moral behavior as a matter of fulfilling our duties regardless of the emotional costs to ourselves, for to act against our “inclinations” is somehow to prove the moral worth of our actions. It fails to illuminate the difficulties that the rational self has in understanding the importance of individuality and integrity. It is difficult to reinstate the importance of individuals being true to themselves, which involves trusting their deeper feelings. To put our feelings aside to pursue goals that have been set by reason alone can involve a form of betrayal of the self. But this involves breaking with the Kantian vision of the self as the rational self and allowing a space for our emotions as well as our thoughts, our feelings as well as our beliefs. Sometimes it has been religion that has been able to sustain a connection between truth and politics, as we can learn from Simone Weil or from Josef Tischner’s *The Spirit of Solidarity*. But this has to leave us wondering about the place of a language of altruism within a renewed moral theory.

Mordecai Paldiel’s article “The Altruism of Righteous Gentiles” (1988) argues that “altruism in its variant forms is an innate human predisposition.” He thinks that the situation of the righteous gentiles shows that altruism “can be aroused to dominance over our behavior for short spells of time.” It is as if this “altruistic disposition” takes over in quite “normal people” to allow them to act courageously in relation to others for “short periods.” This helps Paldiel explain why these people can seem so “normal” when you meet them years later. Yet for Kant it is difficult to make sense of altruism as “an innate human predisposition” since he sees our natural dispositions as essentially selfish and egoistic. It is only through the *external* intervention of reason that we can develop a moral sense at all. Deprived of a rational faculty, we are deprived of our capacity for morality.

The Oliners’ study *The Altruistic Personality* (1988) senses the weakness of a moral tradition that would educate us into morality in terms of impartial and universal principles. They look towards
an ethic of care and concern, recognizing that some of the rescuers who were interviewed had friends drawn from groups other than their own. It could be that their experience of relationships with others from different backgrounds gave their caring a more substantial reality. It was not simply an abstract caring for others in conformity with universal principles. Tied to this is a recognition that rescuers were less susceptible to stereotypical forms of behavior, and tended to have worked out for themselves an individual ethic. Crucially, this has to do with individuality and the tension with a Kantian notion of a rational self. If people are keen to be accepted by others to assuage feelings of inadequacy that are deeply structured into a Protestant ethic that regards our natural feelings as selfish, they are often keen to conform to prevailing social obligations. It is a structured anxiety to prove ourselves adequate or worthy in the eyes of others that is continually subverting a language of individuality. It is difficult to define our individuality if we are brought up feeling that some of our emotions are unacceptable so that they have to be hidden from others, even ourselves, if we are to sustain the ideal of self that we have set for ourselves.

Much of our inherited moral theory is structured by the idea that those who rescued Jews at great risk to themselves went beyond what we could rightly expect from people. But this is to separate “righteous gentiles” into a sphere of “saintliness” that is denied by many of those involved, who felt that they were only doing what had to be done in the circumstances. Sometimes they did not like the people they saved but said, “What else could I do?” “Would you not have done the same?” “These people were in grave danger and it was only natural to save them.” It is sentiments like this that help Paldiel to think that “altruism” is a natural human response in people. It is not something that has to be “rationally justified” and “argued for” as it must be within moral traditions that assume that individuals are self-seeking and so require “reasons” so as to be able to overcome their selfish natures. But as Paldiel recognizes, we can care for others without having to engage in a struggle against our inner natures. This is the weakness of the language of altruism tied as it is to a Christian/Kantian mode of thought. It tends to blind us to the very different responses people can have to the suffering of others.

In *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, Philip Hallie reflects upon the story of the village of Le Chambon and how the Protestant com-
munity organized itself to rescue so many Jews. He follows the experience of André and Magda Trocmé, who in the presbytery in Le Chambon helped to organize resistance against German orders and Vichy laws. Though they worked closely together, there were significant differences in their approach to what they were doing. This is how Magda Trocmé summarized to Hallie what the work meant to her at the time:

"I have a kind of principle. I am not a good Christian at all, but I have things that I really believe in... I try not to hunt around to find things to do. I do not hunt around to find people to help. But I never close my door, never refuse to help somebody who comes to me and asks for something. This I think is my kind of religion. You see, it is a way of handling myself." (153)

As Hallie describes it, "her 'principle' did not involve abstract theories, but only a feeling of responsibility to particular people—first of all to her husband, and next to anybody who happened to come to the door of the presbytery" (153). As he says, "this feeling is not one of overflowing affection; it is practical and abrupt, like Magda herself" (153).

Hallie reminds us that in Deuteronomy, a city of refuge takes responsibility for the lives of refugees who come to its gates. Its members do not leave those gates to look for the oppressed; rather, they stand at the gates ready to accept the responsibility people place upon them by coming to the city. Deuteronomy 19:10 reads, "I command you this day to [protect the refugee] lest innocent blood be shed in your land... and so the guilt of bloodshed be upon you." Magda Trocmé thinks in terms of people in trouble but she is reluctant to use the word love when talking about her work with the refugees, as she is reluctant to use words like good and saintly. She distrusts a language of theology that would separate deeds of high ethical value. She does not believe that there is such a thing as moral nobility that separates off some people—the saints—from others—the common, decent people.

It is important to give space to set out how Philip Hallie contrasts the ethic of Magda Trocmé with that of her husband. There is something unsettling about the way that the contrast is set out that demands to be thought about further. It throws into relief not simply different personalities, but different ethical sensibilities that are still very much with us.
Magda Trocmé believes that something is evil because it hurts people. Hers is an ethic of benevolence: she needed only to look into the eyes of a refugee in order to find her duty.

But her husband had a more complex ethic. He believed that something is evil both because it hurts somebody and because it violates an imperative, a commandment given us by God in the Bible and in our particular hearts. He had to look up to some authority beyond the eyes of the refugee to find that commandment, but having found it, his duty, like hers, lay in diminishing the hurt in those eyes.

Magda’s ethic can be called a horizontal one: she recognized no imperative from above; she saw only another’s need, and felt only a need to satisfy the need as best she could. . . . He did what he did because he wanted to be with Jesus. . . . He wanted to be close to Jesus, a loving disciple who put his feet in Jesus’ s footprint s with stubborn devotion.

There was verticality in his ethic, an allegiance to a supernatural being, but there was also in him powerful affections, “almost erotic” feelings for the people around him. . . . He worked and cared for the well-being of the “oppressed and the weak,” as he described the refugees, as much as did Magda Trocmé, but he never stopped striving to be close to Jesus and, in Jesus, to God. For him, ethical demands had a vertical axis and a horizontal one, like the cross. (Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed, 101–2)

The Trocmés shared a commitment to worldly decency and to human dignity that brought them together in the caring for others. This was the crucial dimension that brought harmony to their relationship. Magda felt a simple responsibility to help a person whom “God or chance” had brought to her door. André had a religious conviction that gave shape and direction to his actions as much as did his own warm temperament. The people of Le Chambon came to agree with Trocmé’s response to Prefect Bach, who had just reprimanded him for not seeing that the Jews were corrupting the West and must be gotten rid of: “We do not know what a Jew is. We know only men” (160). They saw, in Hallie’s words, “only human beings who were valuable enough to be saved from humiliation, torture and death” (161).

Under the moral leadership of André Trocmé and Édouard Theis, as Hallie describes it, “the people of Le Chambon would not give up life for any price—for their own comfort, for their own safety, for patriotism, or for legality. For them, human life had no price; it had only dignity” (274). This formulation echoes Kant but it is crucial that for Kant human dignity is set against our “animal natures.” This undermines, I would argue, the sense of the pre-
ciousness or dignity of human life for it means that our emotions, feelings, and desires cannot serve as sources of human dignity. It also means, as we can hear, that there is some tension between being able to save others as human beings and being able to honor and treasure their dignity as Jews. It is a tribute to the rescuers in Le Chambon that they did not try to get Jewish children to convert but respected their Judaism, encouraging Jewish children to observe their own holidays. They recognized that help must only be given for the benefit of the people being helped, not for the benefit of some church. As Hallie describes it, "the life and the integrity of the person helped were more precious than any organization" (55).

André Trocmé had grown up in a family in which, in the end, there was only one prayer: "Teach us to do our duty." Theirs was a religion of duty towards a distant God. The words were clear but the feeling was not there. As Hallie has it, "'Teach us to do our duty' became a formula that kept the individuals in the household from communicating their own feelings to each other, or seemed to make it unnecessary to do so" (55). It was as a member of the Union of Saint-Quentin, a Protestant organization of young people, that he learned about the intimacy of friendship as they prayed aloud, often in tears, to be saved from lying or from sexual impurity. He learned that only in intimacy could people save each other. Le Chambon would provide another intimate community of people praying together to make the Protestant idea of a "priesthood of all believers" work.

Aside from the distinction between good and evil, what was crucial to the ethic of rescue in Le Chambon was the distinction between giving things and giving oneself. As Hallie describes it,

When you give somebody a thing without giving yourself, you degrade both parties by making the receiver utterly passive and by making yourself a benefactor standing there to receive thanks—and even sometimes obedience—as repayment. But when you give yourself, nobody is degraded—in fact, both parties are elevated by a shared joy. When you give yourself, the things you are giving become, to use Trocmé's word, féconde (fertile, fruitful). What you give creates new, vigorous life, instead of arrogance on the one hand and passivity on the other. (72)

This giving of oneself is an utterly personal action, because each self is a unique person. This can be in tension with a language of altruism that sees the necessity of putting the self aside in order
to help others. It is the impersonality and detachment that is so often part of a Kantian tradition that can make it hard to recognize that caring for others is in its depths personal.

In the intimacy of a household, people want to understand each other in ways that their public lives can never reveal. Magda Trocmé, who worked no less hard for the refugees than did her husband, was more lenient with her children. Hallie says insightfully that "she looked into their eyes and saw needs her husband could not see, needs that she allowed them to satisfy even though doing so sometimes caused pain to her husband" (146). She was far more aware of their feelings so that they never saw her as "hard to take." At the same time her powerful indignation against laziness or ineptitude struck fear into her husband and children whenever it was aroused. There was the constant strain of too much work. But her sensitivity to the feelings of others was also part of her caring. It is part of her care and concern. A sensitivity to feelings and emotions can be part of a recognition of the preciousness of human life. It can help with what Hallie called "an imaginative perception of the connection between the preciousness of my life and the preciousness of other lives" (277).

"Universality" in moral theory can stand in the way of recognizing the different moral qualities that people have and the different relationships we have towards moral duties and responsibilities. We become blind to the plurality of moral traditions as a language of rational moral agency has presented itself as universal and available to all. Often this means that moral thinking involves abstracting ourselves from the concrete realities and contradictions of the situations we find ourselves in. It is a vision of moral purity and moral action that is untainted by the everyday relationships of life. We have all—Christians, Jews, or Moslems—learned to see ourselves through these Christian eyes, so failing to recognize the integrity of different moral traditions. The Enlightenment affirmation of "spirituality," "humanity," and "universalism" meant in André Lacocque's (1972) terms that "the language of speculation replaced the language of events" as Christians sought timeless truths and high spirituality, wishing to divorce themselves from the paradoxes and concreteness ("materialism") of the Old Testament—the Hebrew Bible:

Within such a perspective, it was not without frowning that pious and moral Christians read the records of men too "human" for their taste.
Jacob the liar, Moses the murderer, David the adulterer, Solomon the idolatrous.... The concept of God's intervention in human history is so desperately materialistic and the people's feeling of being elected and chosen so particularistic, that it is really hard to "spiritualize" this Jewish book in order to match it with a truly Christian religiosity. (62)

This fear of people "too human" is structured into a Kantian moral tradition that could distance ourselves from our emotional lives. This is part of the "spiritualization" of our moral language that makes us less sensitive to the injuries that we do to ourselves as well as to the miseries and sufferings of others. As we learn to separate from our own emotions and feelings we learn to displace and project onto others emotions and feelings that we cannot accept in ourselves. Freud made this central to psychoanalytic understanding, going some way to grasp it as an inheritance within a Western culture that denied the existence of sexuality, the body, and emotional life. We inherit a tradition in which we are more concerned with our moral salvation than with the sufferings of others. We learn to seek principles and we become self-critical for failing to live up to them. It is in this context that a language of altruism is so easily identified with selflessness. We are trapped into resentments for we seem to be constantly comparing ourselves with others and failing in our own eyes to live up to idealized standards we set for ourselves.

4. RIGHTEOUSNESS AND MORALITY

The idea that "the righteous are not exempt from evil" can be understood differently within a Jewish tradition that does not conceive of "moral purity" as the suppression or denial of impulses, feelings, and desires. These are not aspects of an animal nature that have to be denied if we are to respond to the clear light of reason but are part of our condition as human beings and so integral to our moral experience. It is a matter of acknowledging our feelings so that we can come to terms with them. Similarly, it is not a matter of putting our interests and desires aside so that we can act selflessly in the interests of others. It is in this sense that the language of altruism is tied to a Kantian/Christian tradition of selflessness. The words of first-century Rabbi Hillel have echoed through the generations, calling for a different relationship between self and other, between individual and community:
“If I am not for myself, who is for me?
“If I care only for myself, what am I?
“If not now, when?”

If I cannot accept and respect myself, including my feelings and desires, how can I expect the love and respect of others? And yet it is a difficult task to know one’s feelings in any situation so that we can be more open and honest with ourselves. Often we have grown up within a moral culture that teaches us that goodness has to do with conforming to the expectations of others—our parents and teachers—rather than being true to ourselves. This language of integrity so often seems dangerously empty within a culture in which we learn that if truth is not an objective standard that exists beyond history, then it has to be relative. We lose the connection between goodness and truth.

The children of Le Chambon did not seem to share Magda Trocmé’s anguish that they would have “to unlearn lying after the war, and ... could, perhaps, never again be able to understand the importance of simply telling the truth” (126). This is to see morality as a matter of principles that have to be obeyed. Truthfulness has a different source in our lives and it connects to the heart and the importance of learning to speak from the heart. This cannot be learned as an issue of will and determination alone for I cannot “decide” to be truthful with myself, though the intention can be important in putting me on the right path. People in Le Chambon were doing what they felt to be right in the situation. They were being true to their beliefs. Magda’s daughter, Nelly, pointed out to Philip Hallie that as far as she knew the children never had the problem of unlearning lying. As Hallie describes it, “what the children saw was what the rest of the Chambonnais saw: the necessity to help the shivering Jew standing there in your door, and the necessity not to betray him or her to harmdoers. In this way of life the children were raised, and—at least according to Nelly—they did not feel their parents to be guilty of any wrongdoing” (127). For children it is crucial for parents to live out what they believe, rather than to say “do what I say, not what I do.” This is a precious gift the value of which is not appreciated within a culture that sees morality in terms of abstract principles. We learn from who our parents are, rather than simply from what they had to say.

Hallie records how difficult it was, for instance, for Madame Eyraud to understand what he was getting at in his insistent questioning about why she put herself in such danger to bring refugees
into her house. He was looking for reasons because within a Kantian tradition we assume that to act egoistically requires no reasons, as it is taken to be "natural"—though as Albert Hirschman (1977) shows in *The Passions and the Interests*, this vision of a foundation for ethics that is laid within reason has had a pervasive hold on our moral theory. But Madame Eyraud was having none of it, as Hallie learned while under her spell, as he says, "her big, round eyes stopped sparkling in that happy face, and she said, 'Look. Look. Who else would have taken care of them if we didn't? They needed our help, and they needed it then.' For her, and for me under the joyous spell she casts over anybody she smiles upon, the spade was turned by hitting against a deep rock: there are no deeper issues than the issues of *people needing help then*" (127).

Most people looked away and European Jewry was largely abandoned to its fate. This is part of a painful history that we cannot put aside unless we are prepared to come to terms with it. This is a powerful insight in Claude Lanzmann's (1985) *Shoah*—that anti-Semitism will be sustained as a way of dealing with the unresolved guilt at what was not done to help the Jews. This will allow people to feel justified in doing so little. A rationalist moral psychology fails to illuminate the weight of our histories and of the compromises that we have made to our integrity. We tend to believe in a liberal moral culture that says that only if we are caught will we be made to suffer. We are blind to the power of the inner suffering for our misdeeds. In this sense every action has a consequence, though we are blind to it. The perpetration of atrocities—be it in the Nazis who were responsible for "the final solution" or the American soldiers who were responsible for the massacre at My Lai in Vietnam—has consequences that must be lived with. It is not as easy to put the past behind us as we are often led to think. It has the power to return to haunt us.

At some level truthfulness is connected to individuality. A striking feature of Nechama Tec's (1986) interviews with people who rescued Jews in Poland is the individuality of the people concerned—they were very much their own persons. People were acting out of their own beliefs and feeling for what is right, regardless of what the official church was preaching in Poland. They had to be ready to stand against the insistent authority of the church to rely upon their own meaning of Christian love and charity. This could be difficult to sustain because it was not a matter of individual moral actions but of sustained, often dangerous, difficult,
and frustrating relationships over a considerable period of time. This took considerable moral resources. How can such a sense of moral individuality be sustained? To what extent does it involve separating individualism from egoism and a tradition of possessive individuality? For me, this involves learning to take responsibility for our feelings as much as our thought as we learn to define ourselves more clearly.

We have learned to be suspicious of the truth and to doubt any language of authenticity. Too often it has become an empty jargon, and authorities have claimed to have the monopoly of truth. Orthodox Marxism has suffered from the connection between truth, history, and power. It seems better to give up claims to truth completely. This tendency is given intellectual form within a postmodernist tradition that would separate itself from any linear conception of reason, science, and progress. But this would also deny truth to ourselves, for we are simply left with different constructions of our experience and so with no way of deepening our connection with ourselves.

Those who failed to respond as their neighbors were being dragged off to the concentration camps have to live with the darkness that entered their souls. It is not that they failed to act altruistically and so to accrue moral worth that could have been available to them. This presents the situation too neutrally, for people have to live with both what they do and what they fail to do. People and communities who failed to respond became less than they could be as they compromised their humanity and themselves. This is an issue that is bound to resonate loudly in Poland, and it can be no surprise that a film such as Shoah called forth such strong reactions. It is an inescapable historical process, for the holocaust has left a profound mark on both Jewish and Christian cultures. It brings into question some of the deepest claims and aspirations of Western culture.

History is not arbitrary, nor is it simply a construction reflecting the interests of the present, as poststructuralist theories tend to have it. For in coming to terms with our histories we are coming to terms with ourselves. An Enlightenment tradition has largely failed to grasp this connection, thinking that freedom and self-determination involve putting our histories behind us so that we can learn to act independently of them. But this has been a dangerous dream that has disempowered those like blacks, Jews, and women, whose integrity and dignity lies partly in honoring
and remembering their separate histories and the pain and suffering of slavery, the witch burnings, and now the holocaust. If this is part of our ancestral history, it is part of ourselves. We have come to terms with it in whatever way we can and with the pain it carries as part of regaining our lost dignity and integrity. It is more importantly not something that others can do for us, but something that both individually and collectively we have to do for ourselves.

We all have to accept our histories if they are not to return to haunt us. At the same time it is crucial to make moral distinctions, as Primo Levi (1988) insists in The Drowned and the Saved. It is crucial not to end up blaming the victims for what befell them or to perpetuate myths that somehow it was Jewish passivity that brought Jews to their fate. Jerzy Turowicz’s “Polish Reasons and Jewish Questions” (1990), disavowing some of his earlier views, rejects the equation of “the fate of the Jews with those of the Poles” on the grounds that “we, too, were being murdered.” As Brumberg (1987) reports it, he demolishes one myth after another—about Jewish “passivity”; about Polish wartime attitudes; about the pre-war church and the doctrine of Jewish “deicide,” rejected rather belatedly, he suggests, by Vatican II. As Brumberg has it, “he is unambivalent; the discussion of Polish-Jewish relations is not an indulgence or masochism: it is a challenge to which Poles must respond without hesitation, if only for the sake of their collective conscience” (87).

We all have to take responsibility for our lives. The rescuers provide a challenge to their “ordinariness” in their refusal to be treated as anything special. They are clear that what they did others could have done. They do not want to be placed on some kind of pedestal as “righteous gentiles.” That is to miss the point. To treat them as moral heroes is to deprive the rest of us of the responsibility for what we do and fail to do in our everyday lives. To remove those who rescued into a separate moral sphere is to avoid crucial issues of individual guilt and responsibility. It is the other side of the same coin that would see the Nazis as monsters or as akin to the devil. This is part of a polarized vision that is deeply embedded within a Western Christian tradition given a secular form within Enlightenment rationalism. It insists on dividing the world into autonomous and independent spheres of “good” and “evil.” In contrast, the strength of a Judaic tradition is its refusal to polarize. This can help us recognize both “rescuer”
and "Nazi" as being part of "our" moral universe in the West. We
cannot reject Nazism as an aberration, but it is crucial to come to
terms with it, as Simone Weil (1952) grasps in *The Need for Roots*,
within the terms of power and greatness that we inherit within
Western culture. This is a task that has barely begun.

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