

Racism, Anti-Semitism and the Concept of Evil

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I.

Racism is an exceedingly complex, tricky, and confusing phenomenon. This is so because racism is often indiscriminately extended and applied to nonbiological and nonracial groupings - nations, linguistic groups, ethnic or cultural groups. For example, Jews are not a race and anti-Semitism was not expressed in the language of racism until the 19th century, but the religious and political expressions of anti-Semitism that roll through Western Civilization like a mighty and polluted river are racist.

Racism is chameleon-like, and takes on the appearance of ethnocentrism, social discrimination, liberalism, conservatism, or Marxism. But this is because prejudice and discrimination look almost identical whether the object is a race or ethnic group.

Racism is also difficult to unmask because it can also wear the camouflage of ethnocentrism. Theoretically, ethnocentrism alleges inferiority, disabilities, and negative traits to an outgroup on the basis of culture. Racism ascribes negative definition on the basis of biology. In reality, however, the differences are not clear. This is why anti-Semitism can be cultural in one instance, religious in another, and racial in yet another. Further confusing matters is the fact that ethnocentrism is universal. Members of practically every culture regard their way of life as superior to that of their neighbors.

But regarding one's way of life as superior is not the same as crowning one's race as superior. Sometimes, however, it is difficult to perceive a difference in a group's attitude toward its way of life and its attitude toward itself.

Racism and ethnocentrism are not, then, mutually exclusive. But while racist societies are almost invariably ethnocentric, the reverse is not true. While nearly every group is proud of its cultural accomplishments and derogates those of their neighbors, the idea that a group is superior to another because of genetic makeup is not widespread. The startling historical fact is that, in its origins, racism is the creation of Western Civilization. Where racism exists outside the West, it is "mostly an outgrowth of the rationalizations of slavery and colonial expansion," according to Professor Louis van den Berge. "Far and away the most widespread, enduring, and virulent form of racism and the costliest in terms of human suffering has been that which developed in western Europe and its colonial extensions in Africa, Asia, Australia, and the Western Hemisphere." He concludes that "The Netherlands and Great Britain were responsible for the growth of the most racist colonial societies that the world has ever known -namely, South Africa, the United States, and Australia."

Racism is not then intrinsic to human nature. It is a product of history, the result of decisions made in the course of human events. Thus, racism is not an irrational phenomenon, nor does it proceed from the minds and souls of people acting irrationally.

To consider racism irrational, to deem it a social aberration is to dismiss it. The failure or refusal to see that racism is rational is to evade taking responsibility for our civilization and the horrors it has wrought all too often.

It would be comforting to believe that the Holocaust, the most extreme expression of racism, had its sources in an irrationality with roots in the farthest reaches of insanity. We are allowed no such comfort. The executioners, the active and passive ones, were rational men and rational women acting rationally.

Something in us may want to reject this. We want to believe, may even need to believe that rational people do not conceive and execute a program of genocide. Higher education glorifies the use of reason, extolling it as the royal road to a greater tomorrow. Thus, we are almost compelled to believe that reasonable men and women would not participate in and sanction, actively and passively, the murder of one-third of the Jews in the world.

Higher education assumes that reason is intrinsically moral, that, by definition, it partakes of the good and shuns evil. It does not. Reason is only a tool of the intellect. As such, it is the servant of morality, not its avatar. "Nothing is so lest thinking make it so," wrote Shakespeare. We can think anything and rationalize any justification for it. That reasonable people murdered six million Jews should not surprise us because reason justified a morality with racism for a matrix. If one accepted the matrix, if one believed the Nazi premise about Jews, the extermination of the Jews was a theological and reasonable conclusion.

To understand any society or civilization, it is necessary to uncover the principles around which that society organizes itself. Anti-Semitism and racism are two of the organizing principles of Western civilization. Under Naziism, anti-Semitism and racism came together in a horrifying conflagration which demands that we take responsibility for this world in ways our predecessors on this planet did not.

What, then, is racism? It is "the theory or idea that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and certain traits of personality, intellect, or culture and, combined with it, the notion that some races are inherently superior to others." Racism is a race's idealization of itself, not only in the society but in the very cosmos. Racism confers, then, religious identity in secular garb. George Mosse, in his *Toward The Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, describes racists as having a particular set of values, namely, "a certain concept of beauty [which is] white and classical....middle class virtues of work, of moderation and honor." It follows logically, then, that a racist society will designate the Other as inferior because it lacks beauty and middle-class virtues. "All evil was blamed upon the restless inferior races, who lacked appreciation of a settled order of things."

Racism establishes Order for the racial or national majority. It provides the majority with a cohesive and beneficent collective identity, an identity based on the exaltation of the majority - its physical endowments, its civic virtues, its morality. In other words, racism gives the majority an image of the Good, the True and the Beautiful, and that image is itself.

By default, then, Evil is projected onto those who were not created in the image of the Good.

Order is the greatest imperative of any society. Without Order a society falls into chaos. Of course, there are many components to Order -economic, political, social, etc., - but these rest on the foundation posts of a deeper order which is spiritual, i.e. not only is it necessary for the individual to be given a place of security in the society, but the society must serve as a microcosm and reflection of security in the universe itself. Thus, the atheism of communist countries, the anti-religious premise of Naziism, are statements of spiritual order which convert politics into religion.

When a group idealizes itself as the apotheosis of humanity, it automatically creates an Other, a Them. Richard Grunberger in *The Twelve Year Reich: A Social History of Nazi Germany* writes:

The white outline of the German's image of themselves - in terms of character no less than of colour - acquired definition only via the moral and physical darkness of its Jewish anti-type. Metaphysically as well as materially, the roots of the German heaven were deeply embedded in the Jewish hell....the majority of Germans accepted Jew-baiting...as an integral part of a system beneficial to themselves.

Racism and anti-Semitism benefit a group by satisfying, in George Mosse's words "a longing for coherence, for community and for an ideal in the face of a changing world....[Racism is] part of the drive to define man's place in nature and of the hope for an ordered, healthy and happy world....the racist outlook fuse[s] man's outward appearance with his place in nature and the proper function of his soul."

Thus, racism must exist because it creates Order for Euro-American civilization. George Mosse writes: "Scientific accomplishment, a Puritan attitude toward life - the triumphant middle-class morality, Christian religion, the ideal of beauty as symbolic of a better and healthier world were all integral facets of racism....Such noble ideals as freedom, equality and tolerance would become reality only if the race were preserved and its enemies defeated....Racism defined utopia against its enemies." Many still consider a white and Christian Western Civilization to be that utopia.

II.

To unravel the origins of racism, we must go back to the year 1452 and the words of the Italian humanist, Gianozzo Manetti: "For everything that surrounds us is our own work, the work of man: all dwellings, all castles, all cities, all the edifices throughout the whole world, which are so numerous and of such quality that they resemble the works of angels rather than men. Ours are the paintings, the sculptures; ours are the trades, sciences and philosophical systems. Ours are all inventions and all kinds of languages and literary works, and when we think about their necessary employment, we are compelled so much the more

to admiration and astonishment."

One hundred fifty years later Shakespeare expressed the same sentiments more succinctly and eloquently in *Hamlet*: "What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!"

The celebratory words of Manetti and Shakespeare are the culmination of changes whose beginnings go back at least to the 12th century, to that time of which Henry Adams wrote, "Church and State, Soul and Body, God and Man, all are one." He exaggerated, but did not falsify because life in the Middle Ages had a cohesion which, in retrospect, gives the time a deceptive unitary quality. As Andrew MacCall observes in *The Medieval Underground*

...feudalism restored some semblance of stability to Christian Europe...the new feudal social structure came to be seen as the divinely-designed means of promoting an Ideal Order, in which the forces of evil at work in the universe would be vanquished, and harmonious relations between man and God assured, by the obedience of each and every member of the feudal hierarchy to the law.

The price of this Order was a conformity difficult for us to imagine. Everyone and everything had its place on the Golden Chain of Being. As long as everyone and everything remained in its proper place and performed its ordained function, Order, divine and human, existed. But when cooking pots and swords fell from shelves or hooks for no apparent reason, they were brought to trial for refusing to remain in their places. In 1474 in Basel, a chicken was sentenced to be burned alive for "having so forgotten its proper function" to lay an egg. At Laon, a pig which killed a child was tried, found guilty and hanged.

It was a time when man was merged with nature and could separate from it only to the degree that he invested it with sanctity. St. Bernard said that "Stones and trees will teach you a lesson you never heard from masters in the school." In his *The Gothic Cathedral* Otto von Stimson observes, "For medieval man, the physical world...has no reality except as a symbol," which is exemplified in the words of the 9th century Scholastic, Erigena: "We understand a piece of wood or a stone only when we perceive God in it." In other words, a rose is not a rose is not a rose.

Change begins in the 12th century when Peter Abelard, the first modern man as we might understand that, sought to reconcile reason and faith using Aristotelian logic. This indicated that the Golden Chain of Being as a metaphor for Order was declining. "It was futile," wrote Abelard, "to utter words which the intellect could not possibly follow...nothing [can] be believed unless it [can] be first understood." He claimed that "The first key to wisdom is assiduous and frequent questioning. For by doubting we come to inquiry, and by inquiry we arrive at the truth."

St. Bernard of Clairvaux saw clearly that Abelard threatened the foundation of Order: "Abelard is trying to make void the merit of the Christian faith when he deems himself able by human reason to comprehend God altogether. He sees nothing as an

enigma, nothing as in a glass darkly, but looks on everything face to face.”

To look on things "face to face" is to know that a rose is indeed a rose and not a surrogate for the Almighty. Abelard was using reason to separate man from nature and even, if need be, man from God so that man might see himself.

Abelard was not alone in this effort to look on "everything face to face." At the monastery of Saint-Denis, where Abelard was a monk for a period, statues of Jesus with the face of human being were being carved. This was the first time Jesus was depicted other than as an abstraction representing the Eternal. The art that decorated Saint-Denis glorified, in the words of Georges Duby, "not God's transcendence, but his incarnation." By humanizing the image of Jesus, it is as if man himself is being born, and this humanization is symbolized in 13th century Italy where Francis of Assisi erects the first *creche*.

There is a paradox here: By depicting Jesus with the face of a human being, by concretizing in human form the birth of Jesus, it appears that religious faith and piety are being affirmed. The means for doing so, however, actually bring man to the threshold of discovering and asserting the secular. To look on things face to face is to assert the secular over the sacred, is, eventually, to make the secular itself sacred.

A dramatic expression of this came at the beginning of the 15th century when a young French woman was ordered by the Church to repudiate the voices of angels she claimed to hear. She refused, saying that while she acknowledged the Pope's authority in matters of faith, her obedience to her voices was a matter only God could judge. This was heresy and Joan of Arc was executed.

What is secular in Joan of Arc is precisely what is secular in Abelard, namely, the assertion of the validity of looking on things face to face, the assertion that the individual is the ultimate judge of reality. In Abelard it is through reason; in Joan of Arc, it is through the insistence on the truth of individual experience. This insistence makes her a harbinger of Protestantism. It is a mere 25 years from the execution of Joan of Arc to the words of Gianozzo Manetti where the assertion of man as existing for himself is fully-developed.

Secular man has been born and is astonished and enthralled with himself: "How beauteous mankind is!" rhapsodized Shakespeare. "O brave new world/That hath such people in't."

Who are the people populating this "brave new world?" They are not the monks, clerics and knights of the medieval world. These are explorers returning from exotic lands with commodities like sugar, introduced into England in 1456, with avocados, papayas, tomatoes, chocolate, vanilla, and turkeys, brought to Spain in 1527. These are artists and composers who are so audacious as to sign their names to their creations, to say to the world, "I created this." These are men like the 14th century Florentine banker who had his portrait painted for his tomb, men like Piero d'Medici who, in 1453, commissioned a portrait of himself.

European man has recognized that he exists as a creating being, that he creates paintings, builds castles and cities, and thinks the thoughts of science and philosophy, that

he can change and shape the world instead of being a passive and abstract occupant on the Golden Chain. To know that one can change something is to know that one possesses not only reason but, equally important, the energy to use and direct that reason - namely, the will. "It is better to will the good than to know the truth," wrote Petrarch, a father of the Renaissance.

To believe in the will is to believe that by one's own efforts and energies, one can take charge of himself and the world. Pico della Mirandola put it succinctly when writing about the child: "To him it is granted to have whatever he chooses, to be whatever he wills." He also wrote:

This is the culminating gift of god, this is the supreme and marvelous felicity of man...that he can be that which he wills to be. Animals..[and] angels are from the beginning...what they will be forever. But God the Father endowed man, from birth, with the seeds of every possibility and every life.

Such optimism is astounding, but why shouldn't Pico have been filled with exuberance? Three events of the 15th century ushered in a new world that could not help but make it appear that God had endowed man "with the seeds of every possibility and every life." Those events were: The invention of printing, the Protestant Reformation, and the European discovery of Africans and the Americas. Any one of these events would have transformed the West. That all three occurred in the same century is almost beyond belief. The medieval definitions of Order were inadequate to nurture secular man who was now born full grown, it seemed, from the head of Zeus.

The invention of printing was a democratizing force which broke the Church's control over the masses of people. When people could read for themselves, they could think for themselves. In 1450, there were less than 100,000 hand-written manuscripts in all Europe; in 1500 there were nine million printed books. Many of those books were Greek and Roman classics, the jewels of paganism, which represented a new kind of knowledge, a new way of thinking about and experiencing the world. With the rediscovery of secular learning, Christianity was no longer the vessel of absolute Truth. The invention of printing also led to translations of the Bible from Latin into the vernacular. The Church had most of Tyndale's translations of the New Testament burned. Martin Luther's translation of the New Testament into German created the German language by giving that language a legitimacy it could not have as long as Latin was the only written tongue. The same was true for the translation of the New Testament into French.

Medieval Order was further destroyed by the Reformation. Protestantism established the authority of the individual over the authority of priest, bishop and Pope. "The Christian man must examine and judge for himself," said Luther, echoing Abelard.

The third event, the explorations of Africa and the Americas, brought the discovery of a trade routes to India as well as African slaves to Europe. Suddenly, the world seems filled with opportunity, even for peasants, and a new economic mode, capitalism, comes into

being. This is made official in 1517 when the Fourth Lateran Council overturns the Christian ban on usury. Money is needed to outfit ships and for trade. Using capital to make capital becomes the way of life.

It is important to mention one other invention that enabled European man to seize control of his world. In 1511, there is the first reference in print to a new and amazing thing: the watch. The watch gives man control over the flux of life. Life will no longer be lived in relation to the rising and setting of the sun and the cycle of the seasons. Time is created as a way of measuring life. Life itself can now be controlled. The watch is the symbolic representation of the will.

In the 15th and 16th centuries the world becomes secular. Never before and never since has man so experienced himself as if he were a god, as if there were no limits on what he could do and who he could be, and there was little doubt that all that man could do, all that man could be would be good.

Rabelais (1490-1533) wrote that "free men, well-born, well-educated, conversant in honest company, have by nature an...impulse which always pushes them to do the good and to withdraw from vice." Thus, freedom, prosperity and education are all that's necessary for men to do good and not evil. Something in us would like to believe still that was right, that education, art, music, literature humanize the world and because they do, the good must prevail.

That is not so and it was never so. Looking on things face to face does not mean becoming enraptured by an idealized reflection of one's self. In fact, looking on things face to face means you cannot see the shadow looming behind, and it is in the shadow of the Renaissance that we must stand if we are to see ourselves today.

This shadow side of the age of humanism can best be described through a 90-year chronology beginning in 1441, eleven years before Manetti wrote his paean to man:

- 1441 Africans brought to Portugal as slaves.
- 1442 Pope Eugenius gives Church sanction to African slavery.
- 1446 Women burned as witches in Heidelberg.
- 1448 Over 900 African slaves have been brought to Portugal.
- 1452 Leonardo da Vinci born.
- 1469 Erasmus born.
- 1475 Michelangelo born.
- 1483 Martin Luther born.
- 1485 Pope Innocent VIII issues a papal bull proclaiming that witches are to be burned.
- 1489 *Malleus Maleficarum*, a manual on witches is published.
- 1490 Rabelais born.
- 1492 Jews expelled from Spain and eventually from Western Europe.
- 1516 The first ghetto for Jews created in Venice.
- 1519 Cortez begins the destruction of the Aztec Empire.
- 1531 Pizarro begins destruction of Incan Empire.

In a 90 year period, Africans are enslaved, the burning of women as witches begins, Jews are expelled from Spain and segregated into ghettos and non-white cultures exterminated in this hemisphere. Why this unholy wedding of humanism with the degradation and murder of Africans, Jews, women, Incans and Aztecs?

The answer is in the word, man. European man has created a cohesive secular identity for himself: He is man and he is good.

What, then, did it mean to be man? The answer can be found by looking at what it meant not to be man, i.e. by looking at what European man condemned in women, Jews and Africans.

III.

H.R. Trevor-Roper writes, "There can be no doubt that the witch-craze grew, and grew terribly, after the Renaissance...we have to admit that, in one respect at least, the Dark Age was more civilized." That is so. In 643, King Rothar decreed that no foreign serving maid or female slave was to be killed as a witch, "for it is not possible, nor ought it to be at all believed by Christian minds that a woman can eat a living man up from within." Saints Boniface and Agobard denounced belief in witchcraft as sinful and ridiculous. Under Charlemagne it was a capital offense to execute anyone for witchcraft and Pope Gregory VII Hildebrand forbade inquisition to be made of anyone as to the cause of storms or plagues.

The unwillingness of the medieval Church to condemn women as witches did not go far enough, however, because the Church's attitude and teachings about the body and sex remained negative. The Augustinian view prevailed, namely that "the lust that excites the indecent parts of the body" could no longer be controlled by the mind, because lust assumed power "over the whole body" and if lust was gratified there was "an almost total extinction of mental alertness." The Church sanctioned sex for procreation only, but considered women to be extraneous to the process, because during intercourse, the male deposited a little person in the woman. The person stayed inside her for nine months but acquired nothing from her. St. Thomas taught that children should honor and love their fathers but not their mothers.

By the time of the witch burnings the Church had espoused hatred of sexuality for more than a thousand years. *Malleus Maleficarum* - "The Hammer of Witches" - is a compendium of that hatred. Early in the manual they write: "The power of the devil lies in the privy parts of men." If a man locates the power of the devil in his "privy parts," such hatred of his sexuality must lead to either celibacy, castration, or hatred of those most likely to make him aware of that hated sexuality.

What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an unescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colors!

...she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations....it is a natural vice in them not to be disciplined, but to follow their own impulses without any sense of what is due....a woman will not be governed but will follow her own impulse even to her own destruction....a woman is beautiful to look upon, contaminating to the touch, and deadly to keep. [Woman is] more bitter than death, because that is natural and destroys only the body; but the sin which arose from woman destroys the soul by depriving it of grace, and delivers the body up to the punishment for sin All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in woman insatiable.

These quotes are male autobiography and tell us that, for European men, sexual desire could eat a living man up from within, that sexuality was so powerful it could be experienced only as evil, that sexuality could not be controlled and could destroy a man, that sexuality was beautiful, contaminating and deadly and that sexuality was insatiable.

In other words, the sexual instinct was a force more powerful than reason. Most dangerous of all, it existed independent of reason and will and could overwhelm both. In 1554, an officer of the Inquisition said that in the preceding 150 years, 30,000 witches had been burned and if they had been allowed to live, they would have brought the world to destruction. Sexuality was the nuclear energy of the 16th century.

Women were also considered dangerous because they were healers. The Church said: "If a woman dare to cure without having studied she is a witch and must die." The important word is "studied." To control the world it is necessary to control knowledge and access to knowledge. Women knew how to heal from practical experience. If men were to control, practical experience could not be given legitimacy as knowledge. Knowledge was legitimate only if acquired through proper study and certification was given by a university, another invention of the Renaissance. Men called themselves doctors; women were denigrated as healers.

It is especially significant that in its condemnation of witches, the Church also condemned "good witches which do not hurt but good, which do not spoil and destroy, but save and deliver....It were a thousand times better for the land if all Witches, but especially the blessing Witch, might suffer death." What is being condemned, then, is not the effect of women's healing, but any power associated with women. The power to do good is to be man's alone.

Jews were not damned for sexuality but for something more chilling - being Jews. In the 15th century religious anti-Semitism was given a racial character for the first time. In 1414, the University College of San Bartolome in Salamanca, Spain banned anyone who was not of "pure blood." This was aimed at the *conversos*, indicating that conversion to Christianity was no longer enough to eradicate a Jew, indicating that nothing could eradicate Jewishness. In 1449 Toledo banned anyone of Jewish descent from holding official office,

because Jews were infected with *male sangre*, bad blood. *Limpieza de sangre* - purity of blood - became the standard. For the first time, being Jewish became a racial identity, and a negative one.

It is also in the 15th century that Europeans first encounter Africans. The earliest work on Africa was written in 1447 by an Italian, Antonio . In it he said that Africans “are in carnal acts like the beasts: the father has knowledge of his daughter, the son of his sister. They breed greatly, for a woman bears up to five at birth. Nor can it be doubted that they are eaters of human flesh.”

The equation made between the devil and women, and the devil and Jews was extended to include Africans. One English traveler equated the color of Africans with what he called their "condition" which was little other than Devils incarnate. “...the Devil...has infused prodigious Idolatry into their hearts, enough to relish his pallat and aggrandize their tortures when he gets power to fry their souls, as the raging Sun has already scorct their cole-black carcasses.”

Such quotes could be multiplied but the import is evident. When man celebrated himself as Man, he distorted human reality. It is an inflated image of man we hear in the words of Gianozo Manetti, a childish one in those of Picodella Mirandola. When European man celebrated himself, he equated the totality of human reality with reason, creativity and will. By this inflation of a fragment of himself, there was no alternative but to degrade that which seemed to threaten reason, creativity and will. Through anti-Semitism, misogyny, and racism, European men found in others what they "found first but could not speak of in themselves," as Winthrop Jordan suggests in his *White Over Black*. He continues to say that European man "tended to set Negroes over against themselves, to stress what they conceived to be radically contrasting qualities of color, religion, and style of life, as well as animality and a peculiarly potent sexuality."

Racism became a cornerstone of modern Western civilization because by suppressing Africans, women and Jews, European man suppressed in himself the human attributes which most threatened that brave new world he was building, a world in which the economic mode changed from feudalism to capitalism. George Rawick observes that

Capitalism required a new ethic to justify new forms of behavior and to repress the older ones. While part of this new ethic was the growth of democratic forms and processes, the other main ingredient was the separation of one human activity - work - from all others. Work was taken from its context as an organic part of life and subordinated to other social processes, becoming an abstract commodity....This kind of work required new personalities: men and women who could tolerate few periods of rest and relaxation, who could adjust to working steadily and at high speed without rest, who could repress the desire to quit and relax. It required the repression of man's nonrational desires and his subordination to rationalized work and more work, accumulation and more accumulation.

This immense economic reorganization of Western society required an equally enormous change in human psychology. According to Michel Foucault, a definition of

insanity came into being which linked insanity with irrationality, and sanity with rationality and self-control. Sanity became synonymous with the repression of the emotional and instinctual in the name of the rational.

Racism in its historical beginnings does not automatically and inevitably lead to the Holocaust. However, the seed was planted, because racism is the act of separating and devaluing other human beings as a lesser humanity, if not a less-than-humanity. In the West, racism is the exaltation of whiteness as the only humanity. Such an exaltation removes blacks and Jews from humanity. It is only a short step from that declaration to removing them from life.

IV.

Racism is evil. It is not a social problem that will gradually disappear through education and legislation. These alleviate the symptoms, but no more than that. The only cure is in understanding that evil is real.

In the words of Jeffrey Burton Russell,

The essence of evil is abuse of a sentient being, a being that can feel pain. It is the pain that matters. Evil is grasped by the mind immediately and immediately felt by the emotions; it is sensed as hurt deliberately inflicted. The existence of evil requires no further proof: I am; therefore I suffer evil.

The definition implies two things: One, that every human being suffers evil. Two, every human being inflicts evil. Thus, the essence of the human condition is in how we live with our evil.

Of necessity, then, evil has two faces - one is individual, the other is collective. That we as individuals will and do commit evil is unavoidable. Our efforts not to do evil, however, need the support of a collective, i.e. a society that not only recognizes evil but condemns it.

In contemporary America, we are in the agonizing process of seeking to learn how to create such a society. Despite the despair and frustration about the intransigence of racism, what is being attempted in this country has not been attempted in Western Civilization. We are trying to articulate a new definition of Order that will have as its premise the concept of a common and shared humanity. This is a dream that has been a part of the Western air only since the American Revolution. It is a dream which seeks to establish that the means by which humans will be measured will not be race, gender, or religion but merely the fact that we are human and our humanity makes us civic equals.

In her Gifford lectures, Hannah Arendt said:

As citizens, we must prevent wrong-doing because the world in which we all live, wrong-doer, wrong-sufferer, and spectator, is at stake; the City has been wronged....We could almost define a crime as that transgression of the law that demands punishment regardless of the one who has been wronged....the law of the land permits no option because it is the community as a whole that has been violated.

America is struggling to reach a consensus that racism violates the community as a whole. It cannot do so as long as blacks are still excluded from a sense of community.

Blacks have no doubts or questions about their humanity and thus are made to suffer evil, an evil that is still not obvious to the white majority. Racism is an act of evil but white people do not hear the moaning of the wounded or the death rattles of the dying.

The evil of slavery, the evil of the Holocaust are written large. So much so that many are in danger of thinking that these cataclysms are the only ways in which racist evil expresses itself. That is why it is both ironic and maddening that so many blacks equate anti-Semitism only with the Holocaust and thereby conclude that because they would never condone the extermination of Jews they are not and could not be anti-Semitic. Non-blacks are equally culpable when they equate racism solely with acts of violence.

Because our perception of evil is limited to the dramatic, we have lost the capacity to recognize it. Evil has become so prosaic in appearance, manner and style that it is now woven into the fabric of the normal like smog, acid rain and K-mart. Hannah Arendt maintained that the horror of evil in the Third Reich was that it had "lost the quality by which most people recognize it - the quality of temptation." The racist evil of contemporary America is as charismatic as an empty can of cat food. In her Gifford lectures, Hannah Arendt attempted again to describe the figure of Adolf Eichmann and what had so horrified her about him:

I was struck by a manifest shallowness in the doer that made it impossible to trace the incontestable evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots or motives. The deeds were monstrous, but the doer...was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous. There was no sign in him of firm ideological convictions or of specific evil motives, and the only noble characteristic one could detect in his past behavior as well as his behavior during the trial...was something entirely negative: it was not stupidity but *thoughtlessness*....It was this absence of thinking - which is so ordinary an experience in our everyday life, where we have hardly the time, let alone the inclination to *stop* and think - that awakened my interest. Is evildoing (the sins of omission, as well as the sins of commission) possible in default of not just "base motives"...but of any motives whatever, of any particular prompting of interest or volition? Is wickedness, however we may define it...*not* a necessary condition for evil- doing?

What Arendt saw in Eichmann is true of American society. This is not a country of wicked white people imbued with a virulent racism based on some principle or other. What exists is far more distressing. Racism has become a psychological habit, a habit many wish to dislodge, but it is so ingrained that they do not know where to begin. It is imperative,

however, that they look, for as Goethe wrote in *Wilhelm Meister*, "every sin avenges itself on earth."

Where they must look is in themselves. Whites cannot feel the pain of blacks, Jews and women until they feel the pain they inflict on themselves by passively accepting a definition of Order that crowns whites as racially superior beings. I do not know why whites do not feel the evil they inflict on themselves because I see the evil of racism taking its revenge on a drug-addicted white society which did not care forty years ago when drugs appeared in black slums. If America had been able to feel then that black life is human, if America had been able to feel that racism is a silent evil inflicting pain as murderous to the human spirit as any weapon is to the body, it would have been alarmed and moved to alleviate the conditions that made drugs appear to be a viable alternative. If America had been able to conceive that black life is human life, thousands of white and black lives would not have been destroyed, literally and psychologically, since drugs entered white American society. I do not understand why white America cannot understand this simple principle: Everything white people do to black people, they will eventually do to each other.

The ultimate evil of racism is not in its effects, but in the inability of white people to recognize themselves in black people. This evil will continue until white people take responsibility for that which they wish was not within them, namely, evil.

Ultimately, we must accept that evil is, that it is not something out there but something in here. It cannot be expunged because our humanity lies as much in our capacity to evil as in our capacity to good. Evil is. Our humanity is found in the effort to live close to our evil, to make our capacity for evil an intimate, because, you see, if I keep my evil close to me, then I will not see it in you.

What this means for white people is staggering. It means relinquishing the definitions of Order by which they have lived. As long as whites cling to racism as the keystone of Order, they cannot know what it means to be human, despite all the books they write proclaiming that they do know. But whites cannot know what it means to live as human beings until they lose their superiority and accept my humanity. Only by accepting the humanity of Blacks, Jews and women, can humanity itself survive.

My humanity teaches me that to be human is to live with the tension of the opposition of good and evil. This means refusing to be seduced by the temptation of thinking we can resolve the tension by choosing what we perceive as the good. This can never be a resolution. To choose the good makes an orphan out of evil and leaves it to wander through the world, alone, unloved, abandoned and angry. It then assumes the form of a Them - Jews, blacks, women, Arabs, Chinese - and what is, in reality, an inner tension becomes projected into society where it must be enacted through social unrest and racial antagonisms on the national level, and through war on the international.

But, that is the logic of racism. The world tolerated the decimation of Africa by the slave trade; the world tolerated the further decimation of Africa by colonization, when the Boers exterminated the Hottentot tribes, when the population of the Congo was reduced

from 20 to 40 million people to 8 million; the world tolerated the destruction of one-third of the Jews in the world.

The logic of racism is such, however, that once its evil is unleashed, it will not care or even notice if one day the people being exterminated happen not to be black or Jewish. It will not notice if, indeed, the people happen to be white. Racism may appear to be opposition to black life or Jewish life. The reality is that racism stands in opposition to life itself. In the final analysis, racism is white self-hatred and the ultimate act of self-hatred is self-destruction.

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