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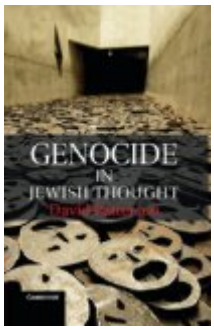
David Patterson. *Genocide in Jewish Thought.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. xi + 252 pp. $95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-01104-5.



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Drawing from his earlier works, including *A Genealogy of Evil: Anti-Semitism from Nazism to Islamic Jihad* (2011) and *Open Wounds: The Crisis of Jewish Thought in the Aftermath of Auschwitz* (2006), and integrating the themes of German philosophy's ramifications for Nazism and connections between Christian and Muslim theologies and genocides dealt with by others (for example, Edith Wyschogod, *Spirit in Ashes: Hegel, Heidegger and Man-Made Death* [1985] and Richard Rubenstein, *Jihad and Genocide* [2010]), David Patterson presents a convincing case for the correlation between abstract thinking and genocide. According to Patterson, once abstract thought became blended with being itself, it became blinded to the "other" and made genocide possible. In Germany, abstraction involved eclipsing the transcendent God by human experience and the autonomous self--leaving the Nazis to do with the Jews as they liked. Religious thought that abstracted itself from concrete reality and tied itself to an exclusivistic creed treated the stranger as a threat that had to be overcome. For its part, Christianity's abstract God allowed for the exclusion of the flesh and blood human being from its creedal abstraction, and leaving it to oblivion. Islamic Jihadism collapsed God into the human being, deeming those outside its creed to be worthy of death.

Against this pattern, Judaism, with its concrete orientation, affirmed the flesh-and-blood human being and the value of concern for the other. Drawing from Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Abraham Heschel, Emanuel Levinas, and Emil Fackenheim, Patterson joins Judaism to the concepts of creation, relation, particular name, revelation, concrete reality, heteronomy, justice, the holy, and the other-than-being. Judaism's goal was not to enter the kingdom of heaven, but to transfer this kingdom into a heavenly dwelling place for God. Jewish thought did not dwell on the hereafter; the understanding of the afterlife was rooted in the understanding of life in time (*Tikkun ha'olam*). Reason did not provide the highest truth (Patterson removes Baruch Spinoza, Moses Mendelssohn, and Hermann Cohen from his list of Jewish thinkers); the mode of

thought was concrete, and involved the tie of each human being to the other. The soul was not abstracted, but manifest concretely; it had a physical dimension, a "face." The Bible knew nothing of either a soul-body dichotomy or a body-soul-spirit trichotomy. According to Judaism's concrete mode of thought, the relationship between one human being and the other was metaphysical; each ***Nefesh*** was tied to every other ***Nefesh*** and connected to all of creation.

Patterson joins systematic thought to the doctrines of causation, isolation, universal essence, deduction, abstract concept, autonomy, freedom, the good, and being. Systematic thought equated thought with being, and freedom with self-legislating autonomy. God became a projection of the psyche, so that divinity vanished in the process of internalization, to be swallowed up into the self. That is, philosophical speculation's egoistic abstraction led to an eclipse of God. Words became reduced to culturally fashioned systems of signs, which were torn from transcendent, absolute meaning. Divine revelation disappeared behind autonomy, as rooted in human reason. In particular, the divinely commanded prohibition against murder was something superfluous--leaving power to become the only reality. Once Sinai revelation was out, philosophy was left without the absolute prohibition against genocide. Similarly, good and evil became abstractions of speculation, leaving humanity divided into the damned and the saved as determined by what was in a person's mind or heart. Systematic thought produced an ego in isolation, blinding the I to the fellow human being. It tore sanctity away from the other and reduced it to flesh or blood alone, or etherealized the other into mere spirit. Once the actual face of the other human being was eclipsed, murder was no longer prohibited.

Drawing from the work of Elaine Scarry and Jean Amery, Patterson maintains that once ideology lay claim to the totality of the human being's life, torture followed. It was the material outcome of the philosophical, theological, and ideological tearing of the soul from the body; abstract thought inevitably negated the flesh and blood of the other. Torture began when the torturer's being became situated in thought, and appropriated the human-being-as-other. The boundaries of the body coincided with those of the self, whereby the spirit of the fellow man was extinguished, as the torturer expanded into his body--the assault on the soul began with penetrating the body. By crushing the other human being, created in God's image and likeness, the torturer turned the victim into a devouring void. For example, during the Spanish Inquisition, which sought to have Jews truly believe in the Christian creed, torture dissolved the boundary between the inside and the outside. Once the boundary between the inside and the outside collapsed, the belief hidden in the body, the voice of the tortured soul, was appropriated. Drawing from the work of Holocaust survivors Giorgio Agamben and Primo Levi, Patterson shows how the same ideology that was behind genocide also led to creating hunger and homelessness. While torture annihilated the soul from without, hunger annihilated the soul from within.

As characterized by Soloveitchik, for German thinkers from Georg Hegel to Ludwig Feuerbach, God was no more than an infinite ideal to which one aspired. Their philosophical religiosity was anthropocentric and anthropocratic. The point of departure was not God as such, but the universal experience of God, considered creative, redeeming, and inspiring, the maximum ***bonum*** of mental life. Rather than believing in a transcendent God, one became absorbed in one's own self, as noted by Soloveitchik.[1] Patterson characterizes the path from Kantian dualism to Heideggerian existentialism as one of freedom, autonomy, self-legislation, will to power, and nihilism--as over-against heteronomous Jewish thought, where absolute authority was embraced as it became known through concrete commandment.

Under the leveling glance of the philosopher of being (i.e., Martin Heidegger), the author maintains, the extermination of the Jews appeared as but another event--and anything could be replaced by anything else, according to one's desires. Nazism assaulted God by a transmutation of the self into God. It crushed the human being who was created in God's image under the weight of darkness (which the divine spark would otherwise overcome), consuming the body of the other's soul, leveling human beings to the status of animals. Nature, for Nazism, was at one with the Aryan, a oneness that transcended the contamination of nature by the rest of humanity. The worship of nature spiritualized and abstracted nature into the essence of the soul--as over-against the earth-centeredness of concrete Jewish thought. Nazi ideology reunified body and soul. As Jews were a disease that threatened the ecosystem, they had to be destroyed. Patterson observes that for Heinz-Peter Seraphim, "Sachverstaendiger fuer Juden" (expert on Jews) at the Krakow Institut fuer Deutsche Ostarbeit, National Socialism was grounded in an all-encompassing philosophical outlook. He also notes that there were Nazi Kantians (Bruno Bauch, Max Wundt, Hans Heyse, and Nicolai Hartmann); Hegelians (Theodor Haerung); and Nietzschians (Alfred Bäumler and Ernst Krieck).

To the extent that it slipped into abstractions that precluded thinking in terms of concrete relations (both human-to-human and human-to-divine), religious thought paralleled abstract philosophical thought. While egoistic abstraction of philosophical speculation led to an eclipse of God, the theological presumption that anyone outside the creed was eternally damned entailed a usurpation of God. The stranger posed a threat to one's freedom and to one's salvation. Once the stranger fell outside the circle of belief, what happened to the body was a matter of indifference. Accordingly, whenever a tradition insisted on its own theological abstractions to the exclusion of others, it found a theological imperative for murder and genocide. A creed-based religion that allowed no place for the nonbeliever in the world to come excluded him or her from this world, unless there was a conversion. In the end, by setting out to save souls, the creed-exclusive religion led to the destruction of bodies.

While some lines of the Christian worldview included God while excluding the human being, with Islamic Jihadism the divine collapsed into the human, which appropriated God (Hamas). There was more concern for the stranger's belief than for his or her body, such that once the stranger fell outside the parameters of the belief, whatever happened to the body was a matter of indifference. To begin with, there was a fundamental contempt for the body, for the flesh and blood reality of the human being. Ultimately, the theological abstraction provided a theological warrant for genocide.

Over-against Judaism's goal of ***Tikkun ha'olam***, Christianity spoke of ***contemptus mundi***, which included contempt for concrete, physical reality. With the incarnation of God, flesh and blood became an obstruction, Jesus became less and less flesh and body, and more and more the abstract messiah--humanity became an etherealized essence. Once the Inquisition removed Mt. Sinai from the world, Christianity could become deaf to the questions posed by the Shoah about the physically real human being--who would become nothing more than the ***Musulman***. For its part, the Quran treated the world as an illusion. Islamic thought, Patterson contends, was egocentric and negated flesh and blood as vile. Death was glorified, paradise abstracted--and the afterlife became a great focus. For Jihadist Islam, martyrdom meant death so the stranger could be murdered to glorify God. The Jihadist martyr glorified the ego made into Allah--which in effect neither glorified God nor sanctified life. The Jihadist did not offer the flesh to save the life of the other, but obliterated the flesh, for which there was contempt, in the hope of murdering the other--who

was but a faceless abstraction. The true martyr, by contrast, died rather than commit murder, so as to sanctify life. This was enabled by the presence of the divine within the human, and sanctified God. Fackenheim observed that the Nazis murdered martyrdom by torturing the divine out of the human; drained of the divine, the capacity for martyrdom was no more.

Patterson has no tolerance for totalitarian creed-ism in either Christianity or Islam, or from German idealistic philosophy, as if it could be extricated from the consequences of its abstractions; and this will make him the target of criticism from all directions. This courageous book, the epitome of a lifetime of research about the Holocaust and Jewish thought, and about the speculative thrust to philosophy and religion, challenges those in these fields of work to consider the serious, even genocidal consequences to abstract systems and creeds. Genocide did not appear out of nowhere; it came out of the context of philosophy and religion. Patterson's contention that Judaism crystallized the stance for heteronomy and concreteness left it to become the target of those for whom the real "other" had no positive meaning. He challenges Jewish thinkers to objectify the quandary and--possibly--find a way to transcend the antithetical role into which history has placed it.

Note

[1]. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, ***Halakhic Mind*** (New York: Seth Press, 1986), 78.