

Foreword: The Crisis of the Disciplines after the Holocaust

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This issue is the fruit of an outstanding cooperative effort among scholars from diverse disciplines who were asked to think about how the Holocaust affected writing, research and scholarship in their respective fields. The participants were asked to analyze the topic through the lens of crisis and to consider the following questions: Was the Holocaust a crisis that led to a rethinking of old methods of research and study and to the emergence of a new path? In the wake of the Holocaust, were new methodologies forged? Were new areas of research and scholarship created? Did interdisciplinary fields develop? What was written out of the canon and what was retained?

Looming above the discussions was Theodor Adorno's well-known dictum, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." Is this a rhetorical statement meant to emphasize the uniqueness of the Holocaust in human history? Or perhaps, in a retrospective survey of the development of the disciplines after the Holocaust, can we corroborate the thesis that there was a crisis of representation after the Holocaust? This question is especially important for scholarly disciplines that must grapple, each in its own field, with the difficulties associated with subjecting the Holocaust—as a unique historical event—to methods of research and thought based on general and comparative standards.

This issue was produced in several stages. In the first stage, the authors submitted rough drafts of their articles, which were read by the other contributors. In the second stage, they all met at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute for two intensive days of discussion, during which outside criticism of each article was presented. This was followed by a roundtable of all the participants. In the third stage, the participants watched *A Film Unfinished* with filmmaker Yael Hersonski. This was followed by a colloquium on the film, published here with an introduction by **Yuli Novak** and **Yaniv Ron-El**.

During this cooperative process, the question of whether the "crisis" perspective is relevant to a discussion of the development of academic thought and research

in the second half of the twentieth century arose several times. Even so, it seems that the use of the term “crisis,” as well as the critical and skeptical take on this idea, in fact generated fascinating questions and insights into how the Holocaust is viewed by academia and about the effects of and relationship between the public perception of the Holocaust and the treatment of the Holocaust by scholarship. Two main questions arose here: First, can the use of terms that describe crisis provide an account of developments in various disciplines, developments that do not seem to be crisis-related in any way? Second, assuming that it is appropriate to speak of crisis, was it the Holocaust or World War II that produced the crisis—or was it rather World War I or the rise of modernity? Some of the articles in the issue suggest that acceptance of the view that the crisis is the crisis of modernity does not negate the importance of the Holocaust as an aspect of this crisis in the discipline in question. Others, by contrast, show that, in some disciplines, other manifestations of the crisis of modernity had a far more significant impact than did the Holocaust on the course of research and writing.

Three articles in this issue were written from the angle of historiography; all of them deal with the disconnection between the perspective of the perpetrator of the crime and that of the victim, and with the possibility that this divide may be reflected in the creation of separate bodies of knowledge, or by the division of labor among separate academic disciplines. In “The Crisis of Little Consequence: Jewish History Unchanged,” **David Engel** highlights the ongoing separation between Holocaust studies and the study of Jewish history and discusses the price exacted by the lack of integration between the two. Similarly, in “An Integrated History of the Holocaust: Possibilities and Challenges,” **Saul Friedländer**’s point of departure is a critique of the longstanding disconnection between the writings of German historians and Jewish historians on the Third Reich. This is manifested by a distinction between world history and Jewish history, and between studies of decision-makers and their activities in contrast to historical studies that take the perspective of the victims of the Third Reich. Friedländer asserts that this methodological divide has led to a distorted view of the victims as passive agents; it has also contributed to the “normalization” of a history from which victims’ voices are excluded. In face of this decades-long development, the author calls for the development of an integrated history of the Third Reich. By contrast, in “The Holocaust and History: Disconnections in a Postmodern Age,” historian **Amos Goldberg** addresses the difficulties posed by such an integration, including the danger of the banalization of the victims’ voices.

“In our culture,” he writes, “the victims’ voices have lost their revolutionary ethical, epistemological and ontological status. They have, in essence, turned into aesthetic means and function [...] to supply us, consumers of Holocaust imagery, with the expected and most ‘normal’ image of the unimaginable.”

These three articles present the responses of different disciplines to the question of whether the Holocaust was a crisis and of its link with the crisis of modernity. In Engel’s opinion, many Jewish historians are suspicious of the use of the Holocaust by scholars in other disciplines to expose the dark facets of modernity and have resolved to minimize its role in the overarching narrative of modern Jewish history. That is, Jewish historiography, being an essentially modernistic project, finds it difficult to grapple with the Holocaust, Engel says, precisely because the Holocaust is a manifestation of the crisis of modernity. Friedländer, for his part, addresses the crisis of the Holocaust and the problem of including it in the discipline of modern history by incorporating the victims’ voices into the historical narrative while preserving the sense of distrust that they evoke. Whereas the goal of historical knowledge is to domesticate this distrust and explain it, Friedländer would like to write a historical study without eliminating or domesticating the initial sense of distrust. Goldberg, as mentioned above, casts doubt on this solution. He believes that although the discipline of history has been strongly impacted by discussions of a postmodern nature, that is, by the crisis of modernity, precisely those for whom Holocaust studies were a major component had a relatively minor influence on this development.

Another issue that arose in the discussions was the migration of disciplines as a result of the Holocaust and the influence of this movement on scholarship. In “Psychoanalysis as a Weapon: Nazism on the American Couch,” **José Brunner** analyzes the emigration of leading psychoanalysts from Germany to the United States. He points to the surprising fact that neither the Holocaust itself nor the dramatic change in the political, economic and social situation of the leading psychoanalysts produced a crisis in the field. On the contrary, they rejuvenated the discipline and helped it flourish in its new center in the United States. How can this flowering be explained? Was it a repression of the Holocaust by the psychoanalysts who found themselves refugees, forced to flee their homeland, cut off from their roots? Unlike earlier scholars, who maintained that there was a “conspiracy of silence” about the Holocaust between analysts and patients who were survivors, Brunner emphasizes the analysts’ extensive theoretical writings that center on the

phenomenon of prejudice. According to this explanation, the analysts' written work addressed Nazism and its motives and analyzed the perpetrators' psyche, but not the severe traumatization of their victims. They were able to explain the extreme event as an individual expression of a general psychic mechanism. Thus they too, like the Jewish historians described by Engel, failed to introduce substantial changes to the basic outline of their discipline in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

"Heidegger in Jerusalem: A Chapter in the History of a Local Philosophy," by **Hagi Kenaan**, **Shmuel Rottem** and **Dana Barnea**, also deals with emigration. Here, though, it is the emigration of Jewish-German philosophers to Mandatory Palestine. The authors examine the way in which the émigré philosophers contended with the ambivalent legacy of Martin Heidegger in the 1930s and 1940s. Heidegger identified the crisis of reason and meaning experienced in Europe in the wake of World War I, but disappointed many by his support for the Nazi regime. How did Israeli philosophy grapple with Heidegger's problematic legacy? What did it take from his philosophy and where did it cast it aside? How can the Jewish thinkers' debate about Heidegger's ideas help us understand the formation of the local philosophical discourse in Israel? **Ronit Peleg**, too, looks at the link between philosophy and morality, but she brings the perspective back to the Holocaust as a crisis that demands a disengagement from the building blocks of modern thought. In "After Auschwitz: The Moment When Moral Philosophy Was Knocked off Its Axis," following Lyotard, she discusses the radical change that philosophy must undergo in order to grapple with the meaning of Auschwitz. Peleg writes that an authentic treatment of the issue requires a deep reckoning with one of the fundamental elements of philosophical thought: Hegelian speculative thinking exemplified in the idea of the "beautiful death." Has moral philosophy fulfilled this obligation? Can it do so without losing one of its major underpinnings?

Emigration and ethics are also the theme of "Bioethics in the Shadow of the Holocaust: A Comparative Perspective," by **Rakefet Zalashik** and **Nadav Davidovitch**, which deals with the development of the new discipline following the Holocaust. They compare the development of the field in three centers, Germany, the United States and Israel, and look closely at how its practitioners grappled with the problematic heritage the Holocaust bequeathed to the medical profession. The authors maintain that by limiting the problem to "Nazi medicine," the medical profession avoided a serious self-examination of the sort called for by Peleg. "For many decades after World War II," they assert, "most of the medical profession

distinguished between the Nazis' medical crimes and its own practice of medicine." A critical approach, the article maintains, demands a look at the continuity between Nazi medicine and "normal" medicine, instead of insisting on the distinctions that blur and conceal the continuity of problematic practices.

Similarly, "Between the Brown and the Green: Nazism, Holocaust, Ecology," by **Boaz Neumann**, investigates the continuity in a new field of research—ecology and green thinking. This discipline, which was born in the 1990s, seems at first glance to be the antipode of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* and, perhaps, even a response to it. Neumann, however, illustrates the worrisome line of continuity between the new discipline and the "green" Nazi legacy. Yet, in contrast to earlier studies that merely noted the points of similarity and difference between the green movement and Nazism, this article goes one step further: It examines how it might be possible to reverse the process and see ecology as a paradigm and methodology for advancing Holocaust studies. In this sense his article, like those by Engel, Friedländer, and Goldberg, calls for a new integration among fields that had been isolated by ideological lines, because their combination can help develop a critical view of Holocaust studies and an understanding of its far-reaching implications for other disciplines.

Finally, the articles by **Rivka Brot** and **Lawrence Douglas** examine the implications of the Holocaust for law. Douglas examines the Nuremberg trials and the Eichmann trial to paint a panoramic view of the way in which the law dealt with atrocities. Brot, on the other hand, compares the Eichmann trial to the trials of Jewish collaborators in the 1950s, in order to scrutinize the methods employed by Israeli law to deal with the grey area of collaboration. A legal system that relies on precedents faced a formidable challenge when it had to judge the Nazis' unprecedented crimes. Indeed, the attempt to find precedents in international law in order to provide legitimate grounds for criminal proceedings against the senior officials of the Nazi regime led the architects of the Nuremberg trial to focus on war crimes and the crime of conducting a war of aggression instead of the newly defined category of "crimes against humanity."

In "Crimes of Atrocity, the Problem of Punishment and the Situ of Law," Douglas asserts that this legal framework was conservative in nature and proved incapable of dealing with the genuine challenge posed to criminal law by the crimes of the Holocaust. In order to successfully grapple with the atrocities of the Holocaust, law must overcome the barrier of state sovereignty and define a new category of "crimes

against humanity” in which the sovereign turns against its citizens. Douglas further asserts that even though it defined new categories of crimes, overcame the bounds of sovereignty and freed itself of statutes of limitations and the rules of territorial jurisdiction, the law has yet to contend with the most significant challenge that the Holocaust presented it: the need to rethink the classic goals of criminal law—retribution and deterrence to include didactic goals such as the study of history and shaping of collective memory as legitimate goals. These goals have been traditionally identified with the gravest danger to a liberal concept of law, namely the peril of political show trials.

If the main goal of the Holocaust trials was didactic, what type of history is shaped in a court that operates under the rules of criminal procedure? This is the question that Rivka Brot addresses in “The ‘Grey Zone’ of Collaboration in Court.” The article examines how the historical representation of collaborators changes as a function of the goals of the trial. Brot maintains that criminal law was not able to free itself of the binary thinking that classifies people as black or white, and thus missed the many hues of grey of collaboration with the Nazi regime—a topic with which historians have dealt extensively in recent years. Does the difference between law and historical research stem from the tension between understanding and judgment? Does a historical understanding require the suspension of judgment? Does judgment entail the suspension of understanding at a certain point? For instance, does law need to continue to hold on to the basic assumption of freedom of choice even in the harsh conditions of terror and existential danger? Is it possible to assume that even under a fascist or totalitarian regime, a universal moral conscience survives that can identify a *prima facie* unlawful order? Perhaps the true challenge that the Holocaust poses for law is the attempt to combine historical understanding with uncompromising judgment.

These thoughts bring us back to Hannah Arendt’s famous book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, first published in 1963 (but not translated into Hebrew until 2000). In retrospect, and after the waves of the political storm stirred up by the book’s publication had subsided, Arendt’s question rises again: How is it possible to judge someone who failed in his moral judgment? Or, more acutely, does the restriction of the problem to the domain of law hide the deeper crisis in judgment that we must confront in the aftermath of the Holocaust—the crisis of our power of judgment as law-abiding citizens? Arendt realized that hiding behind the legal precedents on which the court relied there was a deeper crisis of judgment

and attempted to identify its philosophical sources. In her journey, though, she soon arrived at the very questions that the law, beginning with the Nuremberg trials, had tried to avoid: What was the role of law during the Holocaust? Can one consider *Auschwitz* to be part of the “rule of law”? In a broader sense, what is the function of the principle of obeying the law for the perpetrators of these crimes? This dilemma stands in the center of Arendt’s *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophies* (recently translated into Hebrew). In these lectures, she returns to Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* in order to deal with the modern crisis of judgment. She raises questions such as: How is it possible to make judgments outside existing principles, beyond the provisions of the law or the sovereign’s decree? And what is the connection between the individual’s faculty of judgment and the community’s point of view, otherwise known as “common sense” or *sensus communis*? These questions, as many of the articles in this issue illustrate, do not relate only to the individual or the citizen, but arise frequently and even more powerfully in the scholarly disciplines that have sought to come to grips with the Holocaust.

It seems, then, that beyond a critical examination of each discipline and its particular method of coping with the Holocaust, we need an integrated discussion to expose the reciprocal links among the disciplines. The contributors to this issue were invited to participate in a colloquium of this sort and discuss the highly acclaimed *A Film Unfinished*, by Yael Hersonski (Israel, 2010), which is based on the raw footage for a Nazi propaganda film on the Warsaw ghetto that was never completed. Here I would like to focus on the main point that came up in the discussion: the responsibility of the “bystanders” and, more specifically, of the indirect participants in the crime—all those modern experts—the photographer, the banker, the architect—who cooperated with the regime in one way or another and alleged the ethos of professionalism in order to evade the ethical discussion. The debate became more acute when it addressed the scene from the Nazi film that shows Jewish women naked in a mikveh. What is the responsibility of the movie director who wants to use the Nazi propaganda film as a way to enhance our understanding of history? Should we never screen these films, or perhaps show only short clips from them? Perhaps precisely such a restriction would hide the problematic context in which the films were shot. As Hersonski asserts, this was these films’ ultimate destiny, as its images came—perhaps unintentionally—to represent life in the ghetto in museums around the world. In order to return the propaganda film to its context, Hersonski included the testimony of Willy Wiest, a

cameraman for the Nazi film. The testimony was given at one of the trials that took place in Germany after the war. In it, Wiest hides behind his professional capacity and claims that his main difficulty in shooting the mikveh scene was the lack of suitable lighting.

This point brings us back to the dilemma we started with: How does one contend with a crime that utterly silenced its victims? What is to be done when most of the records of the crime, in ostensibly objective documents and photographs, were created by the perpetrators and from their own perspective? Hersonski, like Friedländer, chose to bring the victims to center stage and supplemented the silent propaganda film with the voices of the victims, extracted from the many diaries written during that period, along with the later reactions of survivors of the Warsaw ghetto who were filmed while watching the Nazi silent film. Can this later integration of the Jewish voice with the Nazi perspective, quite impossible in real time, in some way amend the heinous crime? Might this combination create its own historical distortions? Perhaps it would have been better to screen the Nazi film in full, without any additions? Or perhaps it is particularly this comparison of the Jewish camera and the Nazi camera that is missing? In David Perlov's fascinating film, *Memories of the Eichmann Trial* (Israel, 1979), restored and reissued in 2011, we can perhaps find the beginning of an answer. Perlov presents the stills taken in the Lodz ghetto by the Jewish photographer Henryk Ross, who risked his life to document it with his hidden camera. Even though his images seem to be similar to those presented in the Nazi film—pictures of hunger, despair and death—Ross's camera succeeds in conveying a completely different impression, one that preserves his humanity despite the attempt to strip the victims of their last vestige of their own humanity. In contrast to Willy Wiest's avoidance of moral discussion by hiding behind his professionalism, we learn that the Jewish photographer who risked his life in order to provide photographic evidence from the Lodz ghetto never took a single picture after his liberation, perhaps under the weight of his moral obligation to the dead.

The issue ends with **Na'ama Shik's** book reviews, in which she examines the attitude toward the Holocaust as reflected in the public reception of early memoirs by female Holocaust survivors. Shik discusses the memoirs of three survivors of Auschwitz, published in the first few years after the war. Two of them were translated into Hebrew only in the past decade; the third has never been translated, despite its renown in the rest of the world. By taking a gender perspective and a

comparison of the early memoirs with those written decades later, Shik paves a new path for understanding the unique female experience in the camps and highlights the links between the historical understanding of the Holocaust and the stages of Israeli society's relationship to the Holocaust and to women's experiences during that period.

Taken together, the articles in this issue open up a critical and reflective discussion, each in its respective field, about the responsibility of the Academia more generally vis-à-vis the political sphere: Does it come down to merely maintaining professional codes of scholarship and objectivity, or should it accept ethical and moral responsibility for the use of scholarly distance as a way to avoid taking a moral stance? There is an incisive debate in Israel today about the relations between academia and politics, in the shadow of the threatened closure of the Department of Politics and Government at Ben-Gurion University by the Council for Higher Education. In opposition to the arguments that extol "scientific objectivity" and warn of the dangers of the politicization of Israeli universities, the articles in this issue remind us of the opposite danger—that of evading political and moral conflict in the name of professionalism and scholarship. By taking a retrospective look at the ways in which various disciplines grappled—or avoided grappling—with the challenges of the Holocaust, we hope to invite further reflection on these issues. Instead of instrumentalizing the Holocaust, as common in Israel, as a rhetorical device for putting an end to debate even before it begins, this volume hope to be an invitation for further reckoning.