

Ontology, Demography, and the Silent Holocaust

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I

IN THE BEGINNING IS THE ONTOLOGY OF MIND.

To understand the present crisis of existence of the Jewish collectivity,¹ which I have elsewhere termed the "silent holocaust,"² and its relation to the Enlightenment with its consequent Emancipation, we must begin with an analysis of the ontology of the psyches of Jews. Such an ontological analysis of the contemporary Jewish collectivity reveals, I believe, that Jews generally possess one of two modes of perspection. A person's mode of perspection, broadly speaking (that is, omitting details unnecessary for this discussion), is constituted of two primary elements: a self-view of the characteristics constitutive of his being;³ and a *Weltanschauung*, his view of the fundamental characteristics of extramental reality.

Among the characteristics that a person can see as constitutive of his being are autarchy or heterarchy. A person who views himself as autarchic believes that he possesses an ultimate moral right to authority over himself, to autonomy, with the consequent freedom to believe, desire and act as he chooses according to truths and values that he himself determines. A person who takes heterarchy as constitutive of his being believes that some other entity possesses ultimate authority over him with the moral right, therefore, to command how he must believe, desire, and act.⁴ Should the heterarchic person disobey his ultimate authority, he condemns himself as guilty of sin or a crime.

The second element of a person's mode of perspection is his *Weltanschauung*. The fundamental characteristics that can constitute a *Welt-*

1. By "Jewish collectivity" I mean all persons considered to be Jews by some sizeable group of Jews who are regarded generally by other Jews as Jews. This tortuous description is required because there is no universal agreement on who is a Jew.

2. A. J. Reines, "Crisis, Polydoxy, and Survival," in *Polydoxy: Journal of the Institute of Creative Judaism* (Cincinnati, 1978), Vol. 3.

3. I regret that there are no neuter pronouns.

4. For further discussion of autarchy and heterarchy, see A. J. Reines, "Reform Judaism: The Shock of Freedom," in *Jews in a Free Society: Challenges and Opportunities* (Cincinnati, 1978), pp. 128ff.

anschauung and which concern us here are two beliefs: natural providence and supernatural providence. Natural providence is the concept that that which gives existence to humans, maintains their existence, governs their fortunes and eventually causes their death is natural causation or nature. Supernatural providence states the contrary: that human existence, the quality of life of every human existent, and death are to be attributed, ultimately, to the acts of a theistic god, or some other supernatural agency. It should be noted that there are god-concepts that are consistent with natural providence, as, for example, deism, which is referred to below. Moreover, there are those who adhere to supernatural providence and believe that a theistic god created nature to govern human existence except when he chooses to interrupt its causal flow by working a miracle.

By combining the elements described above we arrive at the two modes of perspection that are central to this inquiry: autarchic-natural providence perspection (ANP perspection), and heterarchic-supernatural providence perspection (HSP perspection). ANP perspection constitutes the consciousness of a person who is his own ultimate self-authority and who believes that natural providence governs existence. HSP perspection is the consciousness of a person who affirms that an external entity possesses ultimate authority over him and that supernatural providence ultimately governs existence. My view is that those who possess these two different modes of perspection differ ontologically, that is, the natures of their psyches differ. The critical importance of this point is that a person who possesses one mode of perspection cannot change to the other at will; one is one's mode of perspection unless there is an ontological change.

It is not my intent here to judge whether one mode of perspection is superior to the other. I will, however, permit myself an observation that bears upon the gravamen of this discussion: ANP perspection emerged later in the course of evolution than did HSP perspection. No evidence exists of ANP perspection before Thales, who lived in the last half of the seventh century B.C.E., and who founded the Milesian School of philosophy. On the other hand, whatever evidence there is of the psychic workings of prehistoric humans, and certainly the written records dating from before Thales, prove that HSP perspection existed long before the seventh century B.C.E. We have no evidence of ANP perspection among Jews until the advent of medieval philosophy. Before that time, from their earliest beginnings, the Jews give evidence of possessing only HSP perspection. This consisted, basically, of belief in a theistic God who created all that exists and who possesses absolute and ultimate authority over all creatures including humans; a God who revealed commandments to all humankind, but special ones to the Jews as terms of a unique covenant with them, and who exercises supernatural providence over all creation.

Maimonides' philosophic theology was the summit of Jewish ANP expression in the Middle Ages: a person's ultimate authority is his own reason; natural providence governs human existence; and deity is the absolutely transcendent, unknowable and unrelating ground of being. The appearance of Maimonides among the Jews, with his powerful presentation of an ANP perspective religious system produced a conflict that raised a fundamental question: could the Jewish collectivity remain united if Jews were ontologically divided into two modes of perspective? The answer indicated by events after Maimonides' death (but already foreshadowed by difficulties that he experienced with Rabbinic authorities in his lifetime) was not promising. Violent conflicts erupted between the Maimonists—Jews who shared Maimonides' ANP perspective—and the anti-Maimonists, Jews who bitterly opposed it. The subsequent course of history for the Jews was such that, in time, the conflict subsided. The underlying reason for the conflict, two contrary modes of perspective, would remain. With the advent of the Enlightenment and the Emancipation, the conflict re-erupted with even greater intensity and with results so destructive and persistent that we find ourselves today in the midst of the silent holocaust—the dissolution of the Jewish collectivity and the disappearance of Jews from the Western World.

II

The term Enlightenment will be used to refer to the 18th century, when the philosophic ideas advanced in the 17th century became widespread. (Thus, the Age of Reason would include both the creativity of the 17th century and the Enlightenment.) Although a number of different philosophies are encompassed by the term Enlightenment, there is significant agreement among them on the basic concepts that are relevant to this discussion. These concepts are here designated the "Enlightenment philosophy." ANP perspective is a broad way of perceiving oneself and the world that can be expressed by a number of different philosophies (Maimonides' philosophic Judaism, as stated earlier, is one) which differ from each other in details. None is more suitable, however, for such expression than the Enlightenment philosophy, as can be seen from the following brief description of its central concepts.

1. Reason was considered by the Enlightenment philosophy as the instrument for attaining truth. (The mathematical process, particularly as employed by the natural sciences, constituted the ideal use of reason). All humans possess reason, which functions in the same way in everyone. Hence, every person can attain truth. This does not occur, however, because the functioning of reason can be impaired or destroyed by a hostile environment. Particularly ruinous to the use of reason is a person's uncritical acceptance of authoritarian religions such

as Orthodox Judaism and Roman Catholicism, which place their ostensible supernatural revelations above the demonstrated truths of the individual's reason. Thus, only an autarchic person can use reason. Moreover, reason can control the will or desire. Through this rational will, humans can bring to fruition such values taught by the Enlightenment philosophy as: the abolition of ignorance, superstition, social injustice, prejudice, the political power of authoritarian religions, and every form of tyranny.

2. Nature alone, that is, only natural providence, governs human existence. Nature is ordered and behaves uniformly according to laws. These laws are comprehensible to reason which, through the rational will, can use its understanding of them to better life. As for supernatural providence exercised through miracles, it is a fantasy and non-existent. Still, the Enlightenment philosophy's notion of Nature did not exclude a concept of deity. Many Enlightenment philosophers subscribed to deism, the view that there is a God who created the universe, but who fashioned it so that it follows natural laws which the Creator never interrupts with supernatural acts of any kind.

3. The concept of reason, in the Enlightenment philosophy, established in three ways the proposition that all humans are to be treated as fundamentally equal. The first, already mentioned, is that every person is endowed with reason, and all persons, therefore, are essentially the same. Second, as Locke stated, reason teaches that humans have a right to protect their "lives and liberty and property." Finally since reason, the essential human characteristic, is developed by education, the weighing of alternatives, and the consideration of different viewpoints, a state must allow free speech and tolerate conflicting ideas, even as regards religion.

4. The Enlightenment philosophy promulgated the concept of "progress," an optimistic view of the course that history pursues. Nature so acts that, through reason, the quality of human life inevitably advances to increasingly better and higher states.

III

The philosophy of the Enlightenment, together with the economic, political, scientific, and technological advances of the period, brought about the Emancipation, which, in turn, led to fundamental sociological changes among the Jews, in particular, dramatic demographic upheavals. The details of these changes in the Jewish collectivity have been abundantly chronicled by historians. It suffices here to enumerate those which I take as critical for understanding the contemporary Jewish condition and the silent holocaust. Jews no longer lived in politically enforced ghettos where, for all practical purposes, they were restricted to Orthodox (that is, Rabbinic) Jewish legal control of their domestic re-

lations, Orthodox religion and culture, Orthodox education, and social relations only with other Jews. Inherent in ghetto life, too, were politically imposed economic distress, disfranchisement, and persecution.

Inseparable from the Enlightenment philosophy's contribution—by its insistence upon religious, political, and economic freedom for all persons—to radical changes in the material conditions of Jewish life was its introduction to the Jews of a compelling ANP perspection ideology that repudiated HSP perspection religions such as Orthodox Judaism. To list several fundamental dogmas of Orthodoxy that were rejected by the Enlightenment philosophy (primarily on the grounds that they would require supernatural acts by the deity that interrupt natural laws, which never occurs; but also because reason has no credible evidence for their truth): the revelation to Moses and the Israelites at Sinai, and all other acts of revelation recounted in the Bible; the claim of Orthodox Jews, based on the Sinaitic revelation, to absolute authority over all other Jews, which denies them religious autonomy and declares it to be sin; and the coming of a Messiah, resurrection, and eternal life.

The compelling quality of the Enlightenment philosophy for Jews lay in its ability to provide them with credible evidence for its ANP perspection principles. The use of reason, autarchicly combined with natural providence, produced scientific and technological advances that resulted in ever greater enhancement of the quality of human life—whereas miracles had not. Moreover, the rational will, together with natural providence, made possible the exodus of Jews from ghettos and had given them political freedom and economic opportunity—progress without the coming of the Messiah. The political principles of Enlightenment philosophy were concretized in positive law, sanctioning and securing religious freedom that enabled Jews to be autarchic, true to their own convictions whether they agreed with Orthodox belief or not. As the Enlightenment philosophy spread through the Western world (eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries), ANP perspection became the mode of consciousness of ever greater numbers of Jews, demonstrating that the stifling evil of the ghetto had only prevented the potentiality for ANP perspection from being realized in the psyches of Jews, but had not eradicated it.

IV

Yet, there has been a dark side to the effects of the Enlightenment philosophy on the Jewish collectivity of the Western world. (I am excluding the destiny of the Jews of Israel from this discussion, not because I believe that their situation, in the long term, will differ from that of Jews in the Western world, but on the assumption that their short term prospects require separate analysis.) The Jewish population of the Western world has declined to a point where more than one

demographer—and a Jewish philosopher such as myself⁵—believe that the Western Jewish collectivity, if it continues the status quo, particularly its religious establishments and their ideologies, is no longer a viable community. Graphically stated, this means that, for all practical purposes, a Jewish community in the Western world will no longer exist in a century or, perhaps, a few decades longer. Even the most optimistic views that can be taken seriously admit that the health of the Jewish collectivity is seriously impaired and its future survival uncertain.

The question arises: why is this the case? Why is the Jewish collectivity of the Western world disintegrating? The answer given by the establishment Jewish institutions can be broadly formulated this way. The Enlightenment philosophy, Emancipation, and environmental conditions coeval with them (political, economic, and the like,) enabled Jews to leave the ghettos and their restrictive conditions that forced them to be Jews and to behave in ways uniquely Jewish. Having thus acquired religious freedom, as well as material success and social status, the generality of Jews, of their own free choice, have, since the Emancipation, wilfully behaved in a sinful or otherwise blameworthy manner that is destroying the Jewish collectivity. In brief, the generality of Jews is itself responsible for the silent holocaust.

Among the noteworthy items in the establishment's bill of particulars against the generality of Jews are the following: Jews, in the main, do not attend the services of the establishment religious institutions, Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform. They do not observe the Shabbat or other Jewish holidays (even Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are witnessing a decline in interest). They do not keep Jewish rituals and have all but abandoned the dietary laws (sporadic tokenism occurs). Particularly blameworthy is the extraordinarily high rate of intermarriage. Moreover, Jews increasingly choose to live away from established Jewish neighborhoods, threatening the viability of synagogues, Jewish centers, Jewish religious schools, and the Jewish social infrastructure. Perhaps most disastrous and certainly most ominous is that significant numbers of Jews, particularly among the young, who have left the American northeast and midwest to relocate in the sunbelt, do not reaffiliate there with Jewish institutions of any kind, religious or secular. By these and other actions of malfeasance and nonfeasance too numerous to enumerate, the generality of Jews is fueling the silent holocaust.

An essential point must here be introduced: Jewish religious institutions are critical for the survival of the western Jewish collectivity. The reason is that only a Jewish religious institution can create Jews and give to a person a sense of authentic Jewish identity. For, in the Western world, there is common agreement within the Jewish collectivity that religious institutions have the authority to prescribe the rules

5. Reference in note 2.

that determine who is a Jew, whether by birth or by conversion. (The present disagreement over the rules among the different Jewish religious communities does not change this point.) Ethnic organizations, Jewish federations, centers, and the like, have no authority to create Jews and authenticate Jews; neither is there the prospect that such authority will be given them. Moreover, no matter how ethnic institutions may eviscerate, vulgarize, and superficialize Jewish holidays, rituals, and customs, these observances are religious in origin, and owe whatever mystique and magnetism they possess in ethnic institutional usage to the aura and nuances of religion that they communicate. If this analysis is correct, as I believe, Jewish religions and religious institutions are vital to the survival of Jews in the Western world. Ethnic organizations are superstructures erected on a religious base; they cannot create and authenticate Jews, neither can they function without the subtle ambience of religion nourishing their activity.

V

In the beginning is ontology. So it is that to deal with the silent holocaust, which has been eroding the Jewish collectivity since the Enlightenment and Emancipation, we must begin with its primary cause, which is ontological. Ontology precedes demography. It is a basic and catastrophic error to believe that the reason for the silent holocaust is the willful misbehavior of the generality of Jews. If this fallacy is accepted and used to determine the nature of remedial efforts to be taken in the future, they are doomed from the start (as the history of Jewish religious institutions from the time of the Emancipation clearly demonstrates). The primary cause of the silent holocaust is that there has been a profound change in the dominant mode of consciousness of the generality of Jews, from HSP perspection to ANP perspection. Paradoxically, the Jewish collectivity which, in biblical and talmudic theology gave to the world the ideal ideological paradigm of HSP perspection, has now seen its members create preeminent expressions of ANP consciousness in the works of Einstein, Freud, Nobel laureates, and countless other scientists and thinkers. The dominance of ANP perspection among the generality of Jews is the inexorable consequence that, for them, the establishment religious institutions and their HSP-perspection ideologies are obsolete and irrelevant. It is no argument against this conclusion that many Jews do not give voice to an ANP perspection, for it is not what they say, but what they do, that reveals their true mode of consciousness.

The most succinct way to present my views on the present situation of the Jewish collectivity as it has developed in consequence of the Enlightenment and Emancipation is *seriatim*.

1. Every Jew has an ultimate right to authenticity, which means his

basic loyalty is to the beliefs, values, and practices that his mode of consciousness, whether HSP or ANP perspection, considers true and valid.

2. Hence, no Jew owes loyalty to a religious institution if such loyalty requires disloyalty to himself.

3. The establishment Jewish religious institutions serve only HSP perspection in their ideology, liturgy, values, and ritual practices. Accordingly, belonging to such institutions, let alone participating in their religious activities, is religiously either a meaningless experience or an act of disloyalty to oneself if one's mode of consciousness is ANP perspection.

4. From all appearances, the Jewish religious and ethnic establishments are generally committed to suppressing the institutionalization of Jewish religious ANP perspection. This being the case, there is no alternative for a Jew with ANP perspection but to leave Jewish religious institutional life, or even the Jewish collectivity, to pursue his own authentic course of religious action. For he has, in effect, been exiled from the Jewish institutional world. He has not failed the Jewish collectivity; it has failed him.

5. In an ANP-perspection Jewish religious institution, problems that are devastating the establishment religious institutions would not arise. For example, services would be theologically open and, in any case, services constitute only one option among many possibilities of religious experience.⁶ Similarly, intermarriage would pose no difficulties. In the first place, it would not be disapproved of by the institution, and it is the disapproval that alienates so many intermarried Jews. More important, however, is the evident truth that if someone is firmly committed to the beliefs and values of a religious institution, intermarriage is no threat to that person's commitment, for loyalty to the institution is nothing other than loyalty to one's own beliefs and values. Intermarriage, in other words, is a threat to the Jewish collectivity because the Jews involved do not believe in the establishment Jewish religious ideologies and, therefore, are compelled to follow their quest for authenticity outside of the Jewish collectivity.

6. Inasmuch as a mode of consciousness such as ANP perspection is ontological, constitutive of one's being, in an open society there is no way that attempts at indoctrination by establishment Jewish religious schools can keep a young person who has the potentiality for ANP perspection from attaining it, or from retaining it if he is already so constituted. (Only a tyrannical community that forbids as immoral acquaintance with virtually all knowledge [particularly scientific and philosophic] other than that contained in traditional Jewish sources [mainly Bible, Talmud and, for some, Kabbalah], and condemns as sin-

6. See, e.g., A. J. Reines, "Two Concepts of Shabbat: The State-of-Being Shabbat and the Seventh-Day Shabbat," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, XXXIV, No. 4 (1987): 13ff.

ful participation in, and even acquaintance with, the general [that is, non-Jewish] culture can, to any degree, be successful in preventing the emergence of ANP perspection in a young Jewish person. Would the majority of Jews in the waning years of the 20th century submit to so cloistered and dictatorial a community; do they even think that the existence of a religious community so tyrannical can be morally justified? If the ideology of a religious community cannot remain credible to its members when they have access to a free marketplace of ideas, does such a community merit survival? Accordingly, there exist two alternatives between which the Jewish collectivity can choose. One is to permit its religious institutions to continue their actual or tacit excommunication and exiling of Jews who possess ANP perspection and, thereby, condemn the Jewish collectivity to the continuing self-destruction of the silent holocaust. The other is to validate and support the institutionalization of Jewish ANP-perspection religion and religious education.

7. There is no prospect that Orthodox Jews will ever accept an ANP-perspection religious institution or community. (In fact, there is a significant degree of balkanization in the Orthodox community itself.) Therefore, what is required is the creation of a confederation of the modernist Jewish religious institutions in the collectivity, which would not only sanction, but assist, in establishing ANP-perspection Jewish religious institutions, even if, at first, this means only funding research and aiding parents and educators who wish to set up ANP-perspection religious schools.

VI

In closing, I would like to correct an impression my foregoing remarks may have given the reader. Although it may appear that I have proceeded on the basis that I believe that the Enlightenment Philosophy is entirely correct, that is not the case. Two of its concepts that are enumerated above are flawed, namely, the natural dominance of reason among human beings, and the inevitability of human progress. The power of human reason to govern human behavior, as conceived by the Enlightenment philosophy, has been shown by depth psychology and various schools of philosophy to have been vastly overstated. There is present in humans a violent irrationality that too often destroys the meaningfulness of existence for the individual person, and its force may yet erupt to destroy the species. Similarly, the notion of inevitable human progress has been demonstrated by events to have been overoptimism to the point of delusion; the Holocaust, two World Wars, global and local depressions, environmental and nuclear threats to the survival of life on the planet barely allow an attitude of even the most uncertain and minimum meliorism. Yet, my view is that, although the Enlight-

enment philosophy's concepts of reason and progress have not stood the test of time, there is a seed of truth in their notions. For if it is the case that our confidence in human rationality has been greatly shaken, it is also true that reason remains the mightiest tool which humankind possesses for realizing the good. (Freud, whose insights into the power of irrationality in humans is surpassed by no one, could offer only a method of reason to overcome the irrationality.) In like manner, though we must consign the notion of inevitable progress to the realm of fantasy and dreams, it is a truth that sufficient productive possibilities exist for human betterment so that hope and effort are called for, and not surrender to paralysis and despair. In point of fact, it is because the Enlightenment philosophy seriously misunderstood just how difficult it is for humans to attain a state of ultimate meaningful existence, and how much education and support is required from the earliest years of the individual's existence, that Jews with ANP perspection advocate so strongly the affirmation by the Jewish collectivity of ANP perspection religious institutionalization.⁷

7. A. J. Reines, *Polydoxy: Explorations in a Philosophy of Liberal Religion* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1987). For a philosophy of liberal (polydox) Judaism that includes both HSP perspectionists and ANP perspectionists, pp. 13–32; for a definition of religion that encompasses both HSP perspection religion and ANP perspection religion, pp. 55ff.; for a theological explanation of the crisis of Jewish survival, pp. 185ff.