Catastrophe as Religious Experience: Levinas, Leibowitz, and the Holocaust

Key Words: Philosophy; Holocaust; Judaism; Theology; Phenomenology

Abstract: Emmanuel Levinas and Yeshayahu Leibowitz, two prominent Jewish philosophers of the 20th century, maintain opposing positions on the religious significance of the Holocaust: Levinas identifies crises as the defining experiences of Judaism, while Leibowitz declares all historical events, no matter how catastrophic, religiously insignificant. In this paper, I consider the coherence of each position vis-a-vis the Holocaust as a limit case that forces us to admit the significance of historical events and context into philosophy and theology. By illustrating how each thinker directly or indirectly responds to his historical situation, I bring these two seemingly opposing positions much closer than they initially appeared. Further, I argue that the philosophical positions of both thinkers stem from the same imperative to reconstitute Judaism around the experience of universal and apodictic ethical commandment after it had been destabilized by the Holocaust. While I analyze a particular problem in Jewish thought, my question is a universal, philosophical one: what is the grip of experience on thought, of history on philosophy? This paper has broad implications as to the need for increased attention to historical context in examining philosophical and theological positions.

“The Jewish conscience…regains its unity and unicity in moments of great crisis, when the strange combination of texts and men, who often cannot speak the language of these texts, is renewed in sacrifice and persecution. The memory of these crises sustains the quiet intervals.”
— Emmanuel Levinas, Difficult Freedom

The trajectory of modern Jewish philosophy was profoundly shaped by the catastrophic events of the twentieth century that culminated in the Holocaust. Yet responses to such catastrophes are as varied as thinkers themselves. The opposing views of Jewish philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Yeshayahu Leibowitz on the religious implications of catastrophe exemplify a broader conflict in postwar Jewish thought: while wartime persecution became an integral part of Jewish religious experience after the Holocaust for Levinas, it remained religiously irrelevant for Leibowitz. These contrary conclusions, I argue, are born out of the same need for a new foundation for post-Holocaust Judaism. The trouble is that, since these positions seem incompatible, we are led to wonder whether Judaism was after all irreparably fragmented
by the Holocaust—precisely the defeatism they both resisted. Though their responses to the call of catastrophe differ radically, I will argue that each figure’s views should be regarded as different sides of the same coin, drawn from the same concern for solidifying Jewish identity amidst post-Holocaust uncertainty. After Judaism itself was put at risk of extinction, these thinkers were faced with a daunting question: What, after all this, is Judaism? For both for Levinas and Leibowitz, the Holocaust ultimately necessitates a turning away from subjective religious experience and reaffirms commandment as the defining element of Judaism. While this paper analyzes a particular problem in Jewish thought, my question is a universal, philosophical one: what is the grip of experience on thinking, of history on philosophy?

**Background: Thinking “After the Deluge”**

The postwar era in which Levinas and Leibowitz wrote was a time of religious anxiety in which thousands of years of religious tradition were tested by the persecution of the Jews of Europe. The Holocaust incited an upheaval in Jewish thought, and theology in particular, as characterized by Richard Rubenstein in the preface of his 1966 *After Auschwitz*:

> It would have been better had six million Jews not died, but they have. We cannot restore the religious world which preceded their demise nor can we ignore the fact that the catastrophe has had and will continue to have an extraordinary influence on Jewish life. Although Jewish history is replete with disaster, none has been so radical in its total import as the Holocaust. Our images of God, man, and the moral order have been permanently impaired. No Jewish theology will possess even a remote degree of relevance to contemporary Jewish life if it ignores the question of God and the death camps.\(^2\)

Rubenstein’s theology sparked split reactions. Some Jews, especially many survivors of the camps, shared Rubenstein’s misgivings about traditional faith. As Levinas writes about such survivors, “Chapter 53 of Isaiah,” which suggests that the innocent bear the suffering of all, “was drained of all meaning for them” (*DF* 12). This spelled the end of the classic form of *theodicy*—as Susan Neiman defines it, “the systematic justification of suffering, and of God’s goodness in the face of
it.” While other catastrophes in the history of the West could be redeemed by their positive effects, the Holocaust, the epitome of what Levinas called “useless suffering,” rendered this logic impossible. Some Jews stopped practicing out of doubts born from the Holocaust; as Primo Levi said, “There is Auschwitz, and so there cannot be God.” But many others became more religious than they had been before the war and thought the postwar period both occasioned and necessitated a revival of Judaism. As we will see, Levinas and Leibowitz clearly fall into the latter group: each attempted to reestablish what he felt was the core of both Jewish religious experience and Judaism itself.

**Emmanuel Levinas**

Born into a Jewish family in Lithuania in 1906, Levinas received a basic Jewish education but largely left it behind in his young adulthood, when he went on to study phenomenology in Germany. He would be nearly forty by the time he began studying Talmud and rediscovered the Jewish tradition in postwar Paris. Throughout the arc of his thought I am about to lay out, we see the profound influence that historical events, specifically crises, had on his post-Holocaust writings. In the late piece “Signature,” Levinas explicitly describes his corpus as, “dominated by the presentiment and memory of the Nazi horror” (*DF* 291).

While serving in the French army, Levinas was captured in 1940 and sent to a prisoner of war camp in occupied France. In 1942 he was relocated to a special work unit for Jewish prisoners of war in Germany, not far from the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen. During this time, “The French uniform still protected us from Hitlerian violence” (*DF* 152). This period was fundamental in Levinas’s move away from the German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger, who had been his mentor and whose genius Levinas praised in numerous early texts. All this changed, however, when Heidegger joined the Nazi party in 1933. Levinas began to move away from the
focus on Being in Heidegger’s philosophy, and toward a philosophy emphasizing “the Other” as a kind of escape-hatch from the circular trap of the question of Being. Drawing upon Levinas’s recently published wartime diaries, Sean Hand writes that for much of the war Levinas departed from philosophy entirely and begins to cite the Torah in the notebooks around 1944.

The haunting nature of the Holocaust echoed his personal experience at liberation. His biographer writes: “For Levinas, the return from captivity also meant the discovery of horror. His whole family in Lithuania had been murdered…by machine-gun fire in Kaunas. Levinas never spoke about it.” Only Levinas’s wife and daughter, who had been hidden by a close friend, fellow philosopher Maurice Blanchot, survived the Holocaust.

As Levinas put it himself, he returned from the war to “a world put into question by Hitler’s triumphs.” In a 1968 essay, Levinas writes, “There is in the exegesis of texts, the ‘assumption’ of one’s history, as it is termed these days, the questions raised for today’s Jews by the ordeal they have just passed through, their need to regroup, to find themselves again.” These questions are fundamental and existential: they speak of a lost world, of having lost oneself. Levinas saw the persecution as a hopeful opportunity for the re-appropriation of traditions like exegesis, and goes so far as to list the experience of persecution among the elements that “nourish Jewish thought.” Perhaps for this reason, Levinas’s focus is never on atrocities committed; he does not vow revenge or draw political conclusions. Rather, he grounds the need to renew Judaism in the fact that, amidst the chaos of the war, some “found a way to behave,” to be ethical. However few, those like Blanchot who resisted the violence seem to have inspired Levinas’s call for a “new access” to Jewish tradition, which becomes the priority of justice through the encounter with the Other.

In his essay “Judaism,” Levinas is concerned with what defines Judaism, no doubt responding to competing claims to “true” Judaism between Zionists, reform Jews, and other
groups after the Holocaust. He comes to reject narrow definitions of Judaism as simply cultural, religious, or national, for he sees the true essence of Judaism distinct from and extending beyond these concepts—as something that only becomes clear in times of crisis:

The Jewish conscience, in spite of its different forms and levels, regains its unity and unicity in moments of great crisis, when the strange combination of texts and men, who often cannot speak the language of these texts, is renewed in sacrifice and persecution. The memory of these crises sustains the quiet intervals. (DF 25)

“During these extraordinary moments,” he goes on to explain, conceptions of Judaism based on the miracle of Revelation alone are revealed to be insufficient. “In the place of the miracle of the unique source,” he writes, “there shines the marvel of confluence” that is Jewish life. In these moments, Jews experience “a voice calling from the depths of converging texts and reverberating in a sensibility and form of thought that are already there to greet it.” The textual voice is at once new and familiar, so the exegesis Levinas practices is at once religiously innovative and traditional. In defining moments, Judaism is revealed as more than a nationality unified its their chosenness and religious revelation—both of which for him deprive Judaism of its “spiritual significance.” It instead becomes a collective “sensibility” that builds upon a textual tradition to bear what for Levinas is the unique commandment of Judaism. “What does the voice of Israel say?”

The traumatic experience of my slavery in Egypt constitutes my very humanity, a fact that immediately allies me to the workers, the wretched, and the persecuted peoples of the world. My uniqueness lies in the responsibility I display for the Other. (DF 25–6)

The uniqueness of the Jew, qua Jew, which for Levinas is his duty for justice and obligation to the Other, emerges out of the collective Jewish experience of persecution that begins with enslavement in Egypt. For Levinas, this defining commandment develops out of history and reality—a genuinely divine commandment, but one that is only realized in times of crisis.

Yeshayahu Leibowitz
Sharply counter to Levinas, Leibowitz writes, “To consider history as the foundation for faith is to deplete religion of all religious significance.” For Leibowitz, Judaism is distinguished not by its textual tradition, which is shared with the other religions of the book, or its history, which he does not consider unique, but by its form: the Halakhah, or Jewish commandments, which “is essentially ahistoric” (JHV97). Drawing upon a tradition of ahistorical Jewish thinkers, Leibowitz concludes that the vicissitudes of history are insignificant for Judaism, for “man is required to serve God in the world as it is” (JHV102). This includes even the Nazi persecutions of Jews, which motivated Leibowitz’s family’s emigration from Germany to Palestine in 1935. However influential they may have been for Leibowitz personally, he writes that these events have no religious significance:

The Holocaust of our generation is religiously meaningless. The Holocaust belonged to the course of the world, it merely exemplified the lot of the helpless who fall prey to the wicked. What was not done for the sake of Heaven, or was not suffered for the sake of Heaven, is indifferent from a religious point of view. (JHV217)

Leibowitz insists that persecution, even if religiously motivated, should not elicit a religious response from its victims. Since Leibowitz sees the fulfillment of the Halakhah as the only means of access to God, ascribing religious significance to historical events as Levinas does is idolatrous—a misunderstanding of what is properly religious.

Leibowitz summarizes this view in the essay “The Uniqueness of the Jewish People,” in which he argues that Jewish history or Israeli origin are insufficient criteria for capturing the essence of Judaism. He rejects the idea of Judaism as a “factual datum” or “natural entity” instead arguing that it is a “being of the mind,” for “a nation exists insofar as there is a consciousness of its existence” (JHV80–81). In this view, real events are barren of true value, including religious value. Leibowitz takes seriously the Biblical claim that God reigned before anything was created, and so “The world and all it contains are insignificant before God.” Since God created and
elected the Jewish people, he is the ultimate source of religion, not they. Leibowitz posits this philosophical view: “Values are not rooted in reality; they are objects of aspiration beyond reality toward which one must strive from within reality” (JHV 80). Reality cannot be the foundation for the divine aspirations that by definition transcend it.

Following Maimonides, religious actions are for Leibowitz the aim in themselves (lishmah, or disinterested), not in the service of human needs or values, or even protection from catastrophe as devastating as Job’s. Providence is thus “essential,” for its own sake and purely religious, rather than “functional,” or instrumental toward human ends (JHV 59). Divine governance in this view works abstractly through God’s giving of the Halakhah, not as his intervention in or concern for particular historical events. With this claim, Leibowitz seems to provide a final answer to the problem of evil: providence is completely detached from history and thus cannot be legitimately put into question by historical events. Yet Leibowitz’s cold, resigned conclusion that “Natural things do happen, and at times cause harm” seems far too blasé after an event like the Holocaust, which was not merely harm but near elimination (JHV 59). Leibowitz’s Judaism, completely devoid of concern for human reality, deprives us of the comfort of an ordered world that human beings have always sought from religion, from the cries of Job to those of Holocaust victims. His faith lishmah is truly and purely spiritual, but at what cost?

Contesting an Ahistorical Judaism

Leibowitz’s position fundamentally opposes Levinas’s, who, on philosophical grounds, considers religious experience a far more inclusive category than faith lishmah. For Leibowitz, Judaism—insofar as it is defined by the Halakhah and is thereby eternal—is immune to history. For Levinas, such a view of religion becomes impossible after the reality of the Holocaust:

What happened in Europe between 1933 and 1945, culminating in the death camps, led
this sensibility [of a reunion with an ancient religious experience] beyond the impossible. Religion certainly does not begin with a triumphant, irrefutable Religion…But there are human events which tear open their own envelope. There are events which burn up the concepts that express their substance…The Nazi persecution and, following the exterminations, the extraordinary fulfillment of the Zionist dream, are religious events outside any revelation, church, clergy, miracle, dogma or belief.” (DF 262-3, emphasis mine)

Irrefutable Religion here points to Hegel’s conception of Christianity as God manifesting himself in history in the form of destiny. Such an unshakable view of religion as inevitability becomes untenable after the Holocaust, as no principle of faith seems inviolable after such real horrors. Religious concepts are emptied of their meaning for a people so threatened by catastrophe, so their religion cannot be considered an unchanging entity. This leads Levinas to conclude that the Nazi persecutions, and also the founding of the state of Israel, are in fact “religious events” even though, like Exodus or the Babylonian Exile before them, they fall outside of faith lishmah.

Leibowitz criticizes what he calls “Religious historiosophers,” who especially tend to read Isaiah and Jeremiah as historical, even political, thinkers in the Bible—the former defending the unique importance of Jerusalem, the latter denying it (JHV 100). But Levinas might accept Leibowitz’s pejorative label, given that he explicitly extrapolates philosophical principles from particular experiences in history. For Levinas, the commandment of responsibility for the Other, which is universal and transcendent, originates only from the particular encounter with the face of another person. Inspired by certain Talmudic interpretations of specific historical events in the Bible, Levinas routinely attributes religious significance to historical events in their particularity.

The personal underpinning of Levinas’s thought is clear in the connection he makes between the Nazi persecution of Jews and his understanding of Judaism as grounded in the reality of Jewish existence, regardless of Halakhic observance:

Let us imagine the apocalyptic atmosphere of the period 1933-1939! War is coming…The Jewish question takes on metaphysical dimensions…Without credo or worship, Judaism is lived out in a religious or apocalyptic way. This unique destiny, beyond the misery of a people, shows us the fundamental incompatibility between the spiritual and the idyllic. (DF
Under circumstances of persecution in which Halakhic worship became impossible, Levinas affirms that Judaism survived through some other means. One might even go so far as to suggest that the sheer survival of the Jews in that apocalyptic time was a religious act, in line with Emil Fackenheim’s proposed 614th mitzvah, in Levinas’s wording: “The Jew, after Auschwitz, is pledged to his faithfulness to Judaism and to the material and even political conditions of its existence.” The purely conceptual carries little weight in reality for Levinas; the basis of religious experience must be found elsewhere. And so “the Jewish question” Levinas refers to, originally a non-Jewish pretext for anti-Jewish mythology, acquires metaphysical significance for Jews in the aftermath of the Holocaust as an opportunity to reevaluate what constitutes Judaism.

*Toward a Judaism of Commandment*

I have laid out several major philosophical oppositions between Levinas and Leibowitz on the religious significance of the Holocaust. But in emphasizing what their responses have in common, we can trace the emergence of an even more important turn in postwar Jewish thought. Each thinker ultimately turns away from subjective humanism toward absolute principles that take the form of religious commandments. For Leibowitz, this means a defense of the Halakhah as a tool to check those individual desires that led to the horrors of the Holocaust. He writes:

> Disparagement of “social superstitions,” of “meaningless routines” or “empty conventions” has only loosed the reins and set free forces of darkness and agents of horror which had been restrained only by customary routine. Our generation especially has learned that men are incapable of living a life fit for men by their own decision and on their own responsibility. ([JHV 23](#))

On a practical level, the Halakhah serves as a yoke of joyful decency and humility for the Jews who bear it. Leibowitz is responding here to supporters of individualistic and subjective religious experience that characterize others from his generation, who in their suffering turned to prayer
akin to that in Christianity. Though Leibowitz may not consider the Holocaust and related events religious experiences as such, it serves his point to remind his readers of the horrors that have befallen his generation and his people. It thus seems that these events do carry religious significance for him insofar as they influenced his religious philosophy and reinforced his values.

Leibowitz’s pessimistic view of human nature, as an example of which he invokes the Holocaust, compels his belief in the Halakhah, which serves to delimit the sphere of holiness:

Nothing is holy in itself. There is only that which is “holy to God”…Abrogation of the distinctive religious category of holiness and imputation of sanctity to human functions and drives is one of the most vicious phenomena of our times, socially, educationally, and morally. This generation has been witness, as none other before it, to the evil which may be perpetrated in the name of fatherland, nation, honor, liberty, equality, and any other human value to which holiness is attributed when men lose sight of the great truth that holiness is resident in a realm which transcends human values…By distinguishing the sacred from the profane the Halakhah functions as a bulwark against idolatry in all its manifestations and a defense against the corruption associated with it. (JHV 24-25)

Again, we see Leibowitz calling out to his generation, having witnessed the Holocaust, to realize the risks idolatry entails. These are the risks of improper religious practice, especially subjective prayer and sanctifying worldly goods — first among them, land. (Leibowitz was an outspoken critic of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, which he predicted would corrupt the character of the Jewish people). Yet idolatry means not only sin, disapproval from God, or religious “corruption” in the abstract—it also has worldly ethical implications. Idolatry is not only a distraction from the proper relationship with God; it also leads to the perpetration of violence in the name of the false idols (and ideologies) of human values.

Levinas levies a similar accusation against Western civilization’s idolatry that reaches back farther than Heidegger to all of Christianity. He describes ethics as an unconditional commandment in his polemic against French philosopher Simone Weil’s notion of Christian mercy. Weil praises willingly but indiscriminately loving one’s neighbor as Christ did, but Levinas insists that this choice is not up to us. Rather, we are commanded to serve the other as
“someone who is associated with God and has rights over us” (DF 139). He thus writes,

“Violence is any action in which one acts as if one were alone to act”—precisely what mercy is for Weil (DF 6). While Weil’s mercy leaves the individual in command over the Other, Levinas calls justice a “moving out of oneself,” for “The attributes of God are given not in the indicative but in the imperative” (DF 17). Yet it is a rational justice that takes account of desert, while Weil’s mercy is more like indiscriminate sympathy. This experience of deriving a principle from a particular experience imitates in miniature Levinas’s abstraction of religious principles from history. And so ethics, and with it Judaism as a whole, takes the form of a commandment for justice from God, abnegating the subjective experience of ethical choice.

Levinas and Leibowitz thus both define the Jews as a people commanded by God.

Returning to his essay on the uniqueness of the Jewish people, Leibowitz writes:

The uniqueness of the Jewish people is not a fact; it is an endeavor…The uniqueness of the Jewish people is a direction and a target. The people of Israel were not the chosen people but were commanded to be the chosen people…The Jewish people has no intrinsic uniqueness. Its uniqueness rather consists in the demand laid upon it. (JHV 86)

Leibowitz resists the Nazi definition of Jews as primarily a race or nation of Israel. Rather, the uniqueness of the Jews lies in their status as commanded by God. But importantly, he continues, “The people may or may not heed this demand. Therefore its fate is not guaranteed” (JHV 86).

Since Leibowitz defines Judaism by its commandment to fulfill the Halakah, the fulfillment of Judaism hinges not upon the mere giving of the commandment, but upon Jewish religious praxis. Judaism is thus a fragile entity, for it is dependent on the observance of real Jews in the present. This concedes that Judaism is in some sense dependent upon Jewish practice in history, thus qualifying, if not contradicting, Leibowitz’s concept of a completely ahistorical Judaism.

In his book Jewish Philosophy and the Academy, Emil Fackenheim reports this problematic view of Leibowitz’s in what is perhaps its most extreme articulation:
At a Tel Aviv conference in the late 1980s—on the film *Shoah* yet!—Yeshayahu Leibowitz asserted that what mattered was the survival of Judaism, not that of Jews. Claude Lantzmann, the guest of honor, was scandalized. He would ask just one question of the professor but would have nothing more to say to him after that: “Where were you during the Holocaust?” Leibowitz replied that he had been in Palestine, with Rommel at the gates, and that if the Holocaust had also wiped out the Yishuv [pre-Israel Jewish colony in Palestine] he would think no differently.16

On account of his views of what constitutes Judaism, Leibowitz dismissed the significance of the Holocaust for Judaism at a time when most academics stressed its influence on Judaism. While Lanzmann’s question insinuates that Leibowitz’s views were shaped by his merely indirect experience of the Holocaust, Leibowitz stood his ground by insisting that even the destruction of all the Jews in the Jewish homeland would not change his view. Fackenheim, who moderated the panel with Lanzmann, was forced to conclude by *reductio ad absurdum*, “If Professor Leibowitz says that Judaism would survive the murder of the last Jew he cannot be serious. He is joking about a desperately serious subject.” Indeed, Leibowitz’s conclusion about the Holocaust seems absurd, and Levinas disagrees with him profoundly on this issue.

Levinas criticizes the idea of prayer as the gatekeeper of Jewish consciousness, and with it Leibowitz’s conception of Judaism as Halakhic observance, as too narrow. “By closing ourselves to the Jews who are without Judaism but who, without Judaism, act as Jews, we risk ending up with a Judaism without Jews” (*DF* 271). A paradox of identity arises under Leibowitz’s exclusive Judaism of the Halakhah: there are real Jewish contributions to the world — for Levinas, ethics in particular — that Jews could put forward yet not be considered Jews by Leibowitz’s restrictive definition. By essentializing Judaism in Leibowitz’s strict terms, we risk what is after the Holocaust and the diaspora the threat of Judaism’s literal disappearance.

Meanwhile, Levinas courts the opposite risk by broadly defining Judaism as the exemplary bearer of justice for all mankind. He does this in part because, compared to Leibowitz, Levinas places the modern world in less extreme distinction to the divine, for “the activities of the
modern world have lost the world’s profane character” (DF 271). Levinas seeks a new direction for Judaism, concerned that “The prayer that institutes Judaism and confirms it, no longer opens itself up sufficiently to God and humanity to satisfy the contemporary Jewish consciousness in Europe” (DF 271). For Levinas, Halakhic practice alone can no longer link the Bible to those who must live by it, and so a Judaism of justice must take priority over a Judaism of the Halakhah. As Leibowitz critiques this position:

> Morality is morality. The attempt to fuse morality and religion is not a happy one… From the standpoint of Judaism man as such has no intrinsic value… The Bible does not recognize the good and the right as such, only the good and the right in the eyes of God. (JHV 7)

This view is absolutely opposed to Levinas’s, in which morality is the highest religious practice and in fact the only means of access to God. Yet Levinas is aware that his project of re-centering Judaism around ethics “entail[s] the risk of atheism,” a phenomenon that clearly worries Leibowitz greatly (DF 15). Nevertheless, Levinas concludes, “That risk must be run.”

**Conclusion**

Despite the risks entailed by universalizing God’s commandment to the Jews, Levinas is unable to compromise on the primacy of ethics after Judaism’s very existence was threatened during the Holocaust. While this conclusion could have been independently reached, it is clear from Levinas’s biography and the way in which he intersperses references to his own captivity into his philosophical readings of Jewish texts that it is at the very least heavily influenced by the Holocaust. While Leibowitz lacks the personal experience of catastrophe, he nevertheless directly engages many of the same problems as Levinas that Judaism faced after the Holocaust. I have attempted to show how each thinker’s understanding of the religious significance of catastrophe for Judaism informs his conception of Judaism itself. Though Levinas and Leibowitz’s responses
to the Holocaust differ radically, they converge on a new idea of Judaism: each affirms Judaism’s foundation of irrevocable commandedness as a counter to the dangers of subjective ethics and idolatry. This unshakable foundation for Judaism, as distinct from historical, national, or cultural bases for Judaism, is central to post-Holocaust Jewish identity and religious experience. Once Judaism was nearly destroyed, it had to be reconstituted with unconditional principles at its core.

End Notes:


5 It seems likely that Levinas would echo a sentiment espoused by another Jew assimilated before the war, Primo Levi: “If it hadn’t been for the racial laws and the concentration camps, I’d probably no longer be a Jew, except for my last name” (1987), “Until these months [of 1938] it had not meant much to me that I was a Jew.” See Berel Lang, Primo Levi: The Matter of a Life (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), 91.

6 Levinas describes Heidegger in 1931: “Martin Heidegger, whose name is now Germany’s glory” is a thinker of “exceptional intellectual power” and “extraordinary prestige.” See Emmanuel Levinas, “Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology” Unforseen History, trans. Nidra Poller (1931; Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 64.


12 This text was originally titled “Honor without a Flag,” referring to the flags that once flew atop synagogues and other Jewish institutions destroyed in the war. Emmanuel Levinas, “Nameless,” Proper Names, 121.


