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Alain Finkelkraut: In the Name of the Other Study Guide

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ALAIN FINKIELKRAUT: IN THE NAME OF THE OTHER

STUDY GUIDE, 2008

Steven Alan Samson

http://www.azure.org.il/download/magazine/946AZ18_A_Finkelkraut.pdf

<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/antisemitism/voices/transcript/index.php?content=20080228>

Study Questions

1. **Part I:** If Hitler gave anti-Semitism a bad name, what accounts for its comeback in France and the rest of Europe? What does the author mean by saying that the resulting fear is a strange mixture of humiliation and *déjà vu*? Why does he say that this is not a revival of the old, but “young demons, old arguments?” Why does it take a “surprisable soul” to understand our new world? Here Finkelkraut calls to mind the radical vision of Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy.

NOTE: **Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy**, writing soon after the Nazi takeover of Germany, took a very long view of the nature of anti-Semitism, seeing it as something that has grown out of the historical relationship between pagans (the Alpha people) and exiled Jews (the Omega people) with Christianity connecting them. For his fascinating and provocative meditation on the new messianism that accompanied the French Revolution, see Out of Revolution: Autobiography of Western Man (1938), pp. 219ff.

2. Why has the Holocaust “gained even more depth as the negative companion to the democratic conscience,” as the unique “incarnation of Evil,” in a manner that “no other doctrinaire carnage” has? According to the Frankfurt philosopher, **Jürgen Habermas**, what has changed? What authorized the United States to erect a Holocaust museum in the heart of its capital? What does Finkelkraut mean by using the Protestant concept of “consubstantiation” in holding democracy to be consubstantial with the nation? [This by the way is the answer to the debate among conservatives at the Philadelphia Society in 1996: “America: An Idea or a People?” The answer, of course, is both]. “In a homeland without an *ancien regime* [in other words: In a “new world” or a “novus ordo seclorum”], no distinction may be drawn between polity and homeland.”
3. What is the crucial difference between democratic America and democratic Europe? What kind of reminder is the Holocaust for each? What pits the two against each other? What are the consequences of “post-criminal Europe” becoming what Albert Camus called “the penitent-judge?”
4. **Part II:** What did the anti-fascist demonstrator mean by saying: “We wanted to sing: ‘Le Pen, we love you.’ He woke us up?” What accounted for the euphoria that followed on May Day, 2002? [NOTE: Le Pen, the leader of the fascistic National Front, was the run-off candidate against the Gaullist incumbent, Jacques Chirac, after the Socialist candidate came in third]. Why did Finkelkraut decline to join the celebrants over Le Pen’s defeat? What does Finkelkraut mean by saying that “the future of hatred is in *their* camp?”
5. **Part III:** The first sentence means: Jews are now held responsible for martyring the Palestinian Other. “We take them [the Jews] to task for joining us Europeans at the very moment we are taking leave of ourselves.” This may be interpreted to mean that a nation-state of Israel has added itself to the family of nations – “autochthony” means aboriginal or native *to a place* – at the very moment Europeans have remorsefully decided to abandon the idea of the nation-state (by submitting to “borderlessness,” wandering,” and “deracination”). The “wandering Jew” is now rejected for settling down and becoming a nation just like all the others. [The desire for Jews to become a nation like others is reminiscent of 1Sam. 8:5; similarly, the reaction of the Europeans

resembles that of the ever-dissatisfied children in the marketplace described by Jesus in Luke 7:31-32; in effect, each wishes to trade places with the other].

6. What did Barbara Spinelli mean by saying that Israel owed the Palestinians a *mea culpa* ["my fault," an apology] for its very existence? By superego, she refers to Freud's conception of the conscience. Having converted to the "religion of humanity" associated with the French Revolution and Auguste Comte because of its own anti-Semitism, Europe now finds that Israel flouts this new faith. [The irony of the remark by Emmanuel Todd is exceeded by the irony of his name: Tod in German means death (Death is with us?)].
7. What are the four wars that **Michael Walzer** says are underway between the Israelis and the Palestinians? How does the "dread of radical evil" delude these critics? "Hypermnestic" refers to an intensified, precise, vivid memory (after Mnemosyne); but in this case it is very selective (like R. J. Rushdoony's doctrine or selective depravity). This imagery is Finkelkraut's clever way of saying that Europeans are becoming Manichean in their thinking, seeing only Nazis and victims. The idea of the enemy is now *passé*. "In short, we were so utterly concerned for the Other that the figure of the Other eventually replaced that of the *enemy*. Thus, the Palestinians are no longer the enemies of the Israelis, but their Other. The result is clear: Being at war with one's enemy is a human possibility; waging war on one's Other is a crime against humanity." Explain the implications of this postmodern mode of thinking. Is there a danger here if we try to apply René Girard's idea of mimetic rivalry? Does it suggest a possible "moral equivalency?" Or is the danger even greater (in the case of Spinelli and Todd) that the Jew may now be consigned to the demonic role of the Nazi as the enemy of humanity with whom there can be no compromise?
8. **Part IV:** Finkelkraut brings the discussion back to stark realities: The rebellious child wants a Kalashnikoff to shoot Jews, not simply to shoot adherents of an enemy ideology: Zionism. In the dualistic imagery of the Beast vs. the Other, the Beast is always the evil Nazi and the Other is always the victim. What does Finkelkraut mean by the supremely ironical paragraph that starts: "Such people are conscious only of the Other's disgrace?"

NOTE: Rosenstock-Huessy sees all of this under the aspect of eternity: "The anti-Semitic hatred of the Jew, in all its simplicity and straightforwardness, has always and necessarily been the hatred of the Beginning of things for the End. . . . The Jews represent the end of human history before its actual end: without them pagan history would not only have had no goal, but would have gotten nowhere. The pagans [nations] represent the eternal new beginnings of history, and without them history would never have acquired any shape or form or beauty or fulfillment or attainment. . . . Now the periodical persecutions of the Jews were the metaphysical warfare by which the Gentiles combated the pressure of a hostile calendar. Through the pogrom they tried to throw off the yoke which joins Alpha to Omega. Wherever an old form is reluctant to go to its doom . . . it defends its own obsolete and dying institutions by persecuting the Jew, the eternal symbol of a life beyond any existing form of government. Wherever a young generation tries to relive the first day of creation, it attacks the Jew because he smiles at this passionate belief in fugitive forms. In Germany during the orgies of Hitlerism a certain Jewish journalist was asked to correct the book of a Nazi authoress; and in return for the favour she agreed to take him to see Goebbels and Goering. After tea with them he came back as though enlightened and told his friends: 'They cannot help persecuting us; they are playing Red Indians, and they know that we cannot take their game seriously.'" (pp. 225-26)

9. The indignant penitent-judges of France now tar the Jewish defenders of Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish captain falsely accused and convicted of treason in 1894 (an incident that led to the birth of Zionism) and sentenced to life imprisonment at Devil's Island, with the same brush with which they condemned the early French nationalists who had condemned Dreyfus and opposed his eventual exoneration and restoration in 1906. Is Finkelkraut again being ironical when he warns against mistaking the new anti-Semitism for the older variety? Since it is not the white citizenry of the old France that is giving offense this time, is this the reason why French progressives are

willing to give “this principally Muslim-Arab violence . . . at least a positive reception, or a sympathetic interpretation.”

10. **Voices on Anti-Semitism:** Why do Europeans believe Israel as a state was a mistake? A **mitzvah** is one of the 613 commandments of the Jewish law. Too many Europeans and others cultivate the attitude that Jews claim special privileges because they suffered the Holocaust. As a result, many now claim their own Holocaust! They say: We suffered from colonialism or the slave trade. As a result of the historical “otherness” of Jews in the West, the notion of the “other” has now been rehabilitated. Refugees are granted special protection. But Jews are now blamed for making refugees of Palestinian Arabs and for seeking to create a Jewish nation-state where Arabs have permitted the right to do so. As Finkelkraut remarks: “It’s as if Jews had betrayed their otherness [by becoming an established power]. So after paying for being ‘the other’ [the victims of persecutions], they are now paying for betraying their otherness.”

Review

Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy
penitent-judge
religion of humanity

Holocaust
nation-state autochthony
Michael Walzer

Jürgen Habermas
borderlessness/deracination
anti-Semitism