
'Your mark is our disgrace':

Liberalism and the Holocaust

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- Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Die Juden in Deutschland, 1933–1945: Leben unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft* (Munich: Beck, 1993), 779 pp.
- Abraham J. Edelheit and Hershel Edelheit, *History of the Holocaust: A Handbook and Dictionary* (Oxford/Boulder: Westview, 1994), xix + 524 pp.
- David Cesarani, ed., *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation* (London: Routledge, 1994), x + 318 pp.
- Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on the Final Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xii + 191 pp.
- Richard Bolchover, *Britain and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), xi + 208 pp.
- Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), xiii + 366 pp.

In September 1941 the German Government introduced yet another means to abase and isolate the remaining Jews in Germany, the requirement that whenever in public they each wear a six-pointed yellow patch with the word 'Jude' written on it. Jewish responses were mixed. Some bravely embraced this sign of difference, following Robert Weltsch's exhortation of April 1933 that they 'Wear it with pride – the yellow patch'. Others felt deeply humiliated and exposed by having been thus marked out for all to see as social pariahs. But at least one anonymous non-Jewish German saw it differently. Addressing a Jew wearing the yellow 'star' the German said: 'Euer Fleck ist unsere Schande' (Your mark is our disgrace) (Beck, p. 623). That the Jews were forced to be different, forced *not* to be like everyone else, was to the shame of Germans and not Jews.

At the heart of the Jewish experience of modernity – and the Holocaust, despite appearances, is no exception – is the often embattled, sometimes heroic and always complex and changing relationship of Jews with the ideology of liberalism, in all its numerous shapes and sizes. It was the enlightened and liberal concept of Man as a rational, autonomous and perfectible actor which provided the foundation stone of the drive for Jewish emancipation. It was nineteenth-century liberalism's emphasis on the civic equality of the individual members of each self-determining nation or state which meant that 'true' emancipation was equated with complete accultur-

ation, if not assimilation. Conversely it was liberalism's triumphs in Western and to some extent in Central Europe which convinced most of European Jewry that emancipation and assimilation had been the right way to realise their religious Jewish mission; and it was liberalism's failures, periodic before 1933, which convinced some Jews that another, more clearly Jewish, way needed to be found, for instance in the formation of a separate Jewish (and usually liberal) Zionist state.

The Holocaust was the complete denial of liberalism. It was the absolute negation of the Jewish view of a liberal modernity made up of mutually respecting, rational human beings, bound together by ties of civility, morality and civic, patriotic or even national pride. Instead the counter-modernity represented by the results of National Socialism was one of terror and mass murder, genocide, perpetrated on the basis of a biological view of Mankind, in which the natural 'rationality' of Darwinian evolution was seen as the driving force of history, not the human, and humanitarian, reasoning of civic societies. The Holocaust also passed. Both the Jews and liberalism survived this most fundamental threat to their existence – and their meaning – but both were left profoundly damaged, and both Jews and liberals have had to remake themselves and reassess their relationship with each other.

It is this, I think, which explains both why, as Tony Kushner illustrates so well, the Holocaust is now coming into its own as central in the consciousness and conscience of the Western world, and also why it took such a long time to get there. The Holocaust tore so deeply at the moral underpinnings and assumptions of both modern Judaism and liberalism, and at the understandings between these two, that neither could face up to the full horror of what had happened for almost half a century. Many would argue that they still cannot, but over the decades both Jewish self-understanding and the sense of what liberalism stood for have changed so much that a new, different, but also very powerful relationship between the two has been restored. On the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the evidence from the books under review is that there is both *more* and *better* understanding of the Holocaust in all its ramifications. We are now in a position, thanks to the meticulous research by scholars of the most harrowing evidence, to know more certainly and in more detail the workings of the destruction: how it happened. We are also nearer, I think, to a more honest appraisal as to how it could have happened, or even in a (non-teleological) sense why it happened, and here the new relationship between Jews and liberalism is central.

The German Jews who are the subject of the immense tome edited by Wolfgang Benz, *Die Juden in Deutschland, 1933–1945: Leben unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft*, clearly thought, in 1933 at least, that there was a close relationship between their Jewishness and the heritage of German liberalism. There is something hauntingly predictable about the fact that the first major production put on by the Jewish *Kulturbund* under the Nazi regime was of Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, the vehicle whereby a German Enlightener, Lessing, used a Jewish figure modelled on a Jewish Enlightener, Moses Mendelssohn, to plead for universal tolerance and a new humanity. (The last major notable performance under the *Kulturbund*'s auspices was of the convert Gustav Mahler's Second, 'Resurrection', Symphony.) It was also

predictable that their leadership's initial response to ideas of flight after the Nazi takeover was to dismiss this as desertion of one's post, as good Germans.

The style of the contributions to the Benz volume – it is consciously a record, a memorial – makes it an excellent source for researchers, as memoirists, critics, journalists and other reporters are quoted comprehensively and at great length, as are minutes, manifestos, laws and other documents. There is an immense number of facts on community organisation, cultural life, economic life, Jewish welfare, emigration, 'Kristallnacht' and after, as well as the underground, all of it very interesting. It is left to the reader, though, to glean any larger significance. What stands out is the irony that Jewish willingness to salvage the horrible situation created by the Nazi takeover by forming a united Jewish front, with political, cultural and social umbrella organisations to protect Jewish interests, played into Nazi hands by making feasible the separation of Jews from the rest of society. Jews met the driving of Jewish children from public schools with the setting up of more and more Jewish schools, 'solving' the problem for the authorities; even the switch from an anti-emigration to a pro-emigration position from 1935, realistic and far-sighted though it now appears, was going along with what – at that time – the Nazis wanted, to clear Germany of as many Jews as possible.

There was a gruesomely ironic relationship between the assertion of Jewish group identity and Nazi policy of differentiation and exclusion, and it worked the other way as well. As Jews were more and more persecuted, more and more ostracised, they had nowhere to turn but to the Jewish organisations, to their Jewish friends, their Jewish selves. This process reached its apogee at Theresienstadt, where the camp's inmates included a dazzling array of cultural and intellectual talent, and, as the camp librarian Hugo Friedmann recorded, one of the largest Jewish libraries in the world. This sort of concentration of Jews could sometimes lead to a sense of strength through solidarity, of the sense that 'a community does not collapse, unless it gives up on itself' (p. 364). But, of course, this also was an illusion.

It was an illusion in two senses. First, it is clear that communal solidarity did nothing to stop the eventual deportation to the death camps; secondly, most German Jews seem to have remained distant from the attempts to revive a specifically Jewish culture, remained wedded in other words to the German liberal viewpoint with which they had lived before 1933, that they were Germans of Jewish religion, members of the cultural mainstream of the modern Western world. To pretend otherwise was to deny their true selves. What was incomprehensible was not their persecution as Jews so much as that they were regarded as separate in the first place. In hindsight one can say that the very fact that they held this liberal view of German society and the place of Jews within it had made them 'different' from most other Germans in 1933; in the same manner, the post-1933 Jewish organisational world was a sort of small-scale, ghostly survival of the political pluralism of the Weimar state within Nazi totalitarianism (p. 102). But that is not how many German Jews saw it; one can call their universalistic view of German society a particularist, even mistaken, anomaly, but it was real for all that, and it is

why the wearing of the yellow patch was so horrific, because it forced a recognition of difference which they neither wanted nor felt.

In the summer of 1941 Leo Baeck, German Jewry's spiritual leader, first learned of the destruction of Polish and Russian Jewry, and he subsequently learned that the fate of Jews transported to the East was either death or hard labour. He chose to remain silent on the issue, hoping that these 'rumours' were just the horrible fantasies of crazed minds. In August 1943, already in Theresienstadt, he found out for certain about the death camp at Auschwitz. He chose to remain silent, because it would help no one to know that the fate which awaited them was to be gassed. Rumours soon spread around the camp, but Baeck consoled himself with the knowledge that the inmates did not know for certain what awaited them. There was still hope; the others need not know for certain the depths of Man's inhumanity to Man (p. 613).

It is very difficult, knowing what we now know, to understand the tremendous barriers to comprehension, and to acceptance, of the facts of the Holocaust which existed in the minds of not only Leo Baeck but almost all other liberal-minded Jews and non-Jews in Germany, Europe and the Western world generally. As Walter Laqueur has phrased it, one might know what was happening, but it just could not be believed that any civilised, or even cultured, country like Germany could do such a thing, let alone think up such a policy, and carry it through intentionally.¹ If Benz's book articulates the disastrous impact of the Holocaust on Jewish and liberal faith in universalism, the 'intentionalist'/'functionalist' debate which is at the centre of David Cesarani's *The Final Solution* and Christopher Browning's *The Path to Genocide* is ultimately a debate about the other traumatic question which haunts both Jewish and liberal self-understanding: the question how such evil could occur.

For a certain brand of conservative the Holocaust is a horrific event, but it just goes to show how bestial men are under the surface and why, therefore, liberals and democrats are fooling themselves if they think human beings can govern themselves as if they were rational, equal individuals, without the need of ruling élites and a stringent civil, moral and legal code. Man is a Fallen Being, and the Holocaust proves it. The fact that it was people on the Right who were Hitler's allies is a huge embarrassment, but the Holocaust does not shake conservative ontology – and if one is a nationalist conservative, then this simply shows how *Germans* (and some other nations) went wrong. Similarly, for those on the Far Left, the pent-up frustrations of capitalism are more than enough to explain the destruction of communists and Bolsheviks, and Jews. But for those within the liberal world, broadly defined, whose foundation is a belief in the basic goodness of human beings, and their ability to tell right from wrong, the Holocaust – the programmatic elimination of millions of individuals, and of two whole peoples, the Jews and the Gypsies – is an awful conundrum.

This is why so much ink has been spilled over the apparently arcane question of when it finally was that Hitler and the Nazis ordered the Final Solution. Both

¹ Walter Laqueur and Richard Breitman, *Breaking the Silence* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986).

'intentionalists' and 'functionalists' are driven by the question of how any human being, or more importantly how a whole society of human beings, could do such a thing. If there is a divide between the two approaches it seems to be one between an intentionalist stress on the existence of evil in the world, specifically Hitler's evil and that of his cronies, and a functionalist reliance on the evil *consequences* of modernity and fate. Seen thus it is a classic confrontation of theories of free will and determinism, but it is also a clash between those who see something deeply wrong with Germany and German society before 1933, among them many Jews, and those who see the Final Solution as a horrible accident, a blot on an otherwise defensible record. And it is also far more complicated than any such schematicisations, precisely because it is at heart a question of liberalism's conscience, of the question of the West's responsibility or guilt for perpetrating or allowing genocide.

A representation of what might be termed the updated Jewish intentionalist position is offered by the Edelheits' *History of the Holocaust*. This is a serviceable summary of the story of the Holocaust which emphasises the German background (Austria and Vienna are hardly mentioned) and ends the story with the foundation of Israel, thus revealing its essentially 'pedagogic' purpose. It also has a useful compendium of terms attached. In their book, the Edelheits claim that it is 'clear to all' that the Final Solution was planned in tandem with the preparations for Operation Barbarossa (p. 59). As the more sophisticated approaches in both Cesari and Browning show, this is far from as self-evident as one would have thought.

The question of timing is not trivial. If Hitler all along, from *Mein Kampf* on, planned the Final Solution as it actually happened, with the poison gas turned on Jews instead of German troops in the trenches of First World War, then he was truly diabolical, and diabolically cunning in shaping destiny as if it were his plaything. Even if he only decided on this in late 1940 or early 1941, when planning Barbarossa, then he is still a picture of completely evil intent, conspiring with his closest advisors to turn the German army and people into mass murderers. If, in contrast, he only decided to wreak his absolute revenge on the Jewish people in late 1941 or even early 1942, when the setbacks on the Eastern Front had frustrated and enraged him and the German army to such an extent that they were intent on revenge against Judeobolshevism and hence Jews, then this reaction might be completely irrational, but is a reaction to the historical event of military defeat and the demographic 'fact' of large numbers of Jews who could no longer be expelled from the expanded German Empire. The consequence is the same, but the action is a little more understandable, a little more acceptable, a little less hard on liberal sensibilities, which can accept that someone is mad, but not bad.

The more and more research is done on this issue, the narrower are becoming the parameters within the 'timing' debate and the greater our understanding of how it happened. The results show very clearly that in this case to understand is the reverse of to pardon. The two most influential theories of what happened and when in the decision for the Holocaust, as presented in these volumes, are those of Browning and Richard Breitman. Breitman, a 'modified' intentionalist, sets the decision in the first months of 1941, while Barbarossa was being prepared. Browning, a 'moderate

functionalist', puts the decision in July 1941, when Barbarossa was in full swing, and the Germans were carrying all before them. Browning, Breitman and their respective supporters will continue to battle over the correctness of their timing (and I do not see why one cannot, in a sense, accept both, as steps along the way), but the difference between January and July is not as crucial as the difference between July and October. Whether Breitman or Browning is correct, both put the decision before Nazi defeats, both, in other words, see the Final Solution as the intentional response to success and not to failure. The elimination of European Jewry was Hitler's cherished dream, and once he thought this realisable (which before the winter of 1940 he did not, hence the idea of expelling Jews to Madagascar), he ordered the Final Solution.

What makes the current picture provided by research even more terrible is that investigation of what really went on in the summer of 1941 reveals the deep complicity not only of the SS in the campaign of mass murder but also of the German army – and the native populations. The Lithuanians and the Croats receive particular attention in the Cesarani volume, and the evidence amassed by Dina Porat and Jonathan Steinberg reveals the German authorities having to ride the tiger, trying to keep some control over 'home-grown' efforts at genocide. In comparison, the shady dealings and ethical duplicity of the Vichy regime described by John Fox seem almost benign. There is in such comparisons of one moral abyss with another something verging on the absurd, but then so much of this subject is, that questions such as whether one form of mass murder is worse than another, or conversely better than another, if unanswerable, nevertheless are justifiably asked. The sheer brutality of the Ustasha's obliteration of Serbs and Jews, as described by Steinberg, seems to be on a par with the worst possible excesses, but then he cites cases where converts to Catholicism were sometimes spared. This was a religiously informed genocide, based, in Steinberg's view, on 'real' ethnic hatred, not the machine-like, scientific extermination outlined at Wannsee. Does this then make the Croatian genocide of Serbs and Jews less absolutely evil than the Nazis' genocide of the Jews? What are our ethical measures when mass murder driven by real emotional hatred is compared to mass murder informed by purely ideological hatred? Are there any?

The essays by Omer Bartov and David Bankier attack our moral sensibilities from another angle. They both demonstrate that the 'ordinary' Germans, whether in the army or in the civilian population, were not, as has sometimes been claimed, unaware of what was going on in the East. Instead, army units not only knew of the destruction of Jews and 'Bolsheviks' during Operation Barbarossa, but many participated in it. Civilians similarly had generally done little to stand in the way of Nazi persecution of Jews, and by war's end many had become convinced that the mass devastation caused by the Allies' bombing campaign was retribution for the destruction of the Jews. Their feelings of 'guilt' were thus dependent on a world view which saw 'international Jewry' controlling the Allied war effort. Whether one accepts Bankier's view of a German populace with deeply engrained antisemitism, or sticks instead with Ian Kershaw's sense of German indifference and apathy

when it came to the Jewish question, again the conclusions one can draw about the moral standing of a population, given that we know that they knew, are horrifying either way. Indeed, they are almost more horrifying if there was no real animosity to Jews, *only* indifference, because then this is truly the evil of banality, of a complete absence of moral conscience.

That this is the proper conclusion to reach is suggested by many of the essays in Browning's collection. The individuals whom he chooses to highlight in describing how the Nazi policy of ghettoisation and then mass killing worked in practice were not, in his view, intent from the very beginning on genocide. Like bureaucrats anywhere, they were interested in anticipating what their bosses wanted to do, and so suggested policies accordingly. What they suggested reveals that their initial idea of this fell short of extermination camps.

Even Himmler, in his Madagascar proposal of May 1940, appears to have thought of this option as going too far. Talking of the forced emigration of all Jews to the African island, he opined: 'However cruel and tragic each individual case may be, this method is still the mildest and best, if one rejects the Bolshevik method of physical extermination of a people out of inner conviction as un-German and impossible' (p. 17). (Of course, if one did not reject this method. . . .)

Similarly, when the Jewish ghettos in Warsaw and Lodz were sealed, the debate among the German officials responsible, between what Browning labels 'productionists' and 'attritionists', those who wanted to arrange for the Jews to work for food as opposed to those who just wanted to let the Jews starve to death behind the ghetto walls, was initially won by the productionists, for it seemed evident that one could not want the Jews simply to die to no good purpose. As Hans Frank himself said in May 1941: 'The responsibility that the government took on with the creation of a Jewish district of 500,000 human beings is very great, and a failure would always be blamed on the authorities of the General Government' (p. 39). The use of the word 'Menschen', highlighted by Browning, just shows that, even at this date, someone such as Frank was not yet fully aware of how he should be thinking about the Jews if he was to satisfy his boss.

Browning's very disturbing point is that as soon as all these officials were aware of what the right attitude was, of which actual policy line should be followed to please their superiors, then even though it had been one which their own moral assumptions had previously rejected as 'un-German and impossible', they generally became enthusiastic supporters and enactors of this new policy direction. The lure of career enhancement was more than enough to overcome any ethical qualms they might have. Once they knew what the correct line was, moreover, they continued to try and do the best job they could and anticipate the wishes of their superiors, but now they knew that genocide was the preferred option.

Not only was this true of Nazi officials. Browning's evidence also suggests it was true of the rank and file, not even in the army, but below that level, in the mundane ranks of the Order Police. In his final essay in this collection, Browning details the experiences of Reserve Police Battalion 101, the effective equivalent of a unit of the American National Guard. He describes how on one day this unit of working- and

lower middle-class types, with only a few strongly committed party members among its officers, eradicated the Jewish population of the village of Jozefov, some 1,500 people.

They did this even though most were inexperienced in shooting people, and had to be shown how; they did this even though their commanding officer was clearly unhappy about his orders, and let it be known that anyone who wished not to do the killing would not have to and could be reassigned to other duties. Only a very few took him up on his offer. The provision of alcohol seems to have made the killing easier for some, others had career motives, a few might have genuinely hated Jews (conversely a few of those who chose not to kill claimed later that they had known Jews back in Hamburg), but most seem to have shot the Jews out of crushing conformity, because they had been told to. Browning is right to end his book with this completely mundane thought: 'Like any other unit, Reserve Police Battalion 101 killed the Jews they had been told to kill' (p. 183). So much for the basic goodness of humanity.

While Jews were being massacred in their millions in the death camps of Poland, Jews in England were reading reports about the slaughter in the Anglo-Jewish press. Their leadership was also trying gently to press the British government to do something about the genocide, without much – if any – success. The same was true for the most part about American Jewry and the American Government. Hardly anything was done by the two liberal democratic Allies to save European Jewry from the Nazis directly until it was much, much too late. Even when the War Refugee Board was set up in the United States after pressure was exerted on President Roosevelt by Henry Morgenthau and other prominent American Jews, many of its initiatives were frustrated by foot-dragging by the British Government, concerned about the consequences of a flood of more refugees, either to Britain – or the British Mandate in Palestine.

If our increasing knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust itself only deepens the gloom surrounding liberalism's optimistic view of human nature, the completely inadequate response by the liberal democracies to the Nazi genocide has also been seen as a condemnation of liberalism, and the Jewish embrace of that liberalism. Both Richard Bolchover's account of English Jewry's response to the Holocaust and Tony Kushner's more wide-ranging book are quite clear, and indeed eloquent, about the inadequacies and failures of Jews and the 'liberal' governments to respond to the Nazis' plans for Jewish extermination; both have a similar approach to the subject, with many of the same antecedents. Yet Kushner's is by far the better book, for he brings a sympathy and a sense of this historical context which Bolchover lacks.

Bolchover's is in many ways a most interesting book. He cites many very interesting sources, and makes many good points. His description of Anglo-Jewry's understanding of their position in England in terms of an emancipation contract is suggestive, and he has interesting things to say about the nature of liberalism and antisemitism in England, albeit he makes his best point in his endnotes. Nor can one really argue with his main assertion, which is that English Jewry was not able to

exert enough pressure on the British Government to get them to pursue any serious plans to rescue Jews from Hitler, or even let those Jews who did escape enter British-controlled Palestine in adequate numbers. Where his book becomes very tendentious is in his clearly expressed view that something else, namely the policies of the Revisionist Zionists, would have done much better in moving the government to the requisite actions.

It is more than understandable, given the subject, why one would want more to have been done. In hindsight it is clearly very distressing that, while Jews on the Continent were being eradicated like vermin, Jews in England were worrying about how they could do down their rivals on some committee or other, or which dance to go to. It is also surely somewhat frustrating from our perspective to read the speeches of English Jewish leaders and politicians of half a century ago in which any request to the government was bathed in the spirit of what Bolchover called 'cultic gratitude' (p. 116). Yet it does not make for very balanced judgement to let oneself be swayed by these frustrations, as Bolchover does. To talk, for instance, of Cecil Roth's 'almost slavish pandering to English ways and loyalties (by no means atypical of British Jews)' (p. 149) reveals a not particularly even-handed approach to the subject, which makes Bolchover miss the many subtleties in an admittedly deeply complex and ambivalent situation.

Bolchover misses, for instance, the fact that the quotations he uses to show the 'cultic gratitude' of Anglo-Jewish politicians have within them very pointed questions about British policy which no amount of 'grateful' window-dressing can hide, or was intended to hide. His unsympathetic account of Anglo-Jewry's going-along with British policy that the only way to save the Jews was to win the war neglects to consider that at least in one point the policy was sound: if the war had not been won, but had been lost, what price any Jewry at all? Indeed Bolchover's criticism of Anglo-Jewish strategy, or lack of it, is weakened by his own suggested alternative, which might well have merely antagonised the British Government without any positive results. British Jewry was simply too weak politically to be able to afford this. Ironically, as Bolchover himself points out, one of the reasons for this lack of influence was the fact that the old Anglo-Jewish élite, with its many connections to English high society and politics, had been voted out of their leadership positions by people with far stronger Zionist policies but far fewer connections.

Kushner, whose book stands out for its imaginative approach, serendipitous research, balanced judgements and brilliant insights, avoids many of Bolchover's problems by starting – on the first page – with the obvious. As he says, it is as well to remember what a British official said in 1946: 'His Majesty's Government were not responsible for countless deaths and suffering. The Nazis were responsible.' It is thus not a question of why the liberal democracies were some sort of accessories to mass murder, but rather why they did not do more to stop it. Having established this very important distinction, Kushner then proceeds to ask some very hard, but fair, questions of liberalism's relationship to the Holocaust and to Jews. The fascination of the picture drawn is greatly enhanced by his use of the Mass Observation

archives, which offer a picture of public opinion in England from the 1930s to 1950, and allow Kushner to show attitudes from the bottom up as well as the top down. As he says, this is not just an exercise in Holocaust studies, but also a most valuable contribution to American and (particularly) British social history generally.

Kushner's initial insight is that the lack of an adequate response to the Holocaust from the liberal democracies was not due to indifference, as is sometimes claimed. He shows very clearly that the governing circles and the public at large were shocked, horrified by what the Nazis had done and were doing to the Jews under their control. Even 'anti-Semitic' liberals (see below) could not fathom Nazi policy in the 1930s, let alone *Kristallnacht* or the Final Solution. But shock and horror do not, as we have increasingly seen in the post-Cold War world, translate into effective counter-measures. Nor did they when it came to the British response to the Nazis.

The main stumbling block was that the British could not see why they should take on the burden of all these peculiar German foreigners simply because another country was following crazy policies. Why, in an era when the sovereignty of the nation-state was an even stronger principle than it is today, should Britain be lumbered with Germany's problems? Especially when the foreigners were likely 'unassimilable'. In other words, the initial British response to the prospect of Jewish refugees from Germany set the subsequent pattern, which was one of ambivalence, an ambivalence of universalist liberalism on the one hand (Jews ought neither to be different, nor be treated as such, from anyone else) and exclusionary nationalism on the other (why should the British be concerned about the non-British?). It was not liberalism's indifference but its ambivalence to Jews which was the fatal flaw in the liberal democracies' response to the Holocaust.

Kushner shows in a series of chapters how this ambivalence played out. He shows how the trade unions, in an era of economic hardship, were sympathetic to the plight of Jews, but where they saw a clash with the interests of British working men they put the latter first. British working women were another matter, and Kushner is particularly ingenious in showing how much of the vast flood of refugees let in after *Kristallnacht* consisted of Jewish women allowed in to be domestic servants, because maids and other female domestics were not a powerful segment of organised labour, and so were not a pressure group feared by the people in government who set immigration policy.

He then elaborates on the ambivalence of liberal responses to the Holocaust, pointing out for instance how liberalism's universalist approach set up barriers to understanding the specificity of Nazi policy. The development of government policy in this ambivalent atmosphere, both in the United States and Britain, is then narrated, with particular emphasis put on the way in which sympathy for Jews as victims was always countered by fear of them as refugees, who, as 'different' foreigners, would cause no end of trouble, in the British case upsetting either the British in Britain, or the Arabs in Palestine. It was bad enough when the figures were in the tens of thousands, but when in the millions? Against such considerations the truly heroic efforts of individuals such as Eleanor Rathbone, to whom the book

is touchingly part-dedicated, could not prevail, despite great sympathy for the Jews among the British public at large.

In America, by contrast, where there does seem to have been an upswell of anti-Semitism from 1943, the 'pluralist' politics of the country meant that if a group was powerful and influential enough, as American Jewry was, and had strategically placed leaders, such as Henry Morgenthau, then something eventually could be done, even if too little and too late, as the War Refugee Board illustrates. The fact that the activities of this Board were then seen by the British as partially an attempt to embarrass them, and were stalled accordingly (leading to a fatal delay over Horthy's offer concerning Hungarian Jewry in the summer of 1944), is yet another horrendous episode which receives Kushner's balanced, calm and understanding treatment. Kushner ends with a long, comprehensive and insightful essay on the ways in which our liberal understanding of the Holocaust has changed, first in the United States and later in Britain, as the nature of liberalism has changed from a simplistic universalism, to a more complex, multiculturalist pluralism.

It smacks of churlishness to criticise such a good book, yet there remain a few small questions about Kushner's main argument. First, Kushner at times seems to take any condemnation of Nazi anti-Semitism as necessarily 'liberal'. Yet this is too broad a brush. There were plenty of professed 'anti-Semites' who objected to the ferocity of the Nazis' policies. Indeed one prominent German anti-Semite complained to a Jewish friend of his that Hitler was giving anti-Semitism a bad name. Within the liberal democracies there were many who were very conservative and disliked what they thought Jews stood for. They shared liberals' detestation of Nazi atrocities, but can they really be counted as 'liberal'? Does this mean then that the 'ambivalence' which Kushner sees *within* liberalism can be better seen, as Richard Bolchover suggests in an endnote (p. 182), as a conflict between liberalism's principles and other, more conservative, principles, such as nationalism or ideas of 'Englishness' set up to counter 'liberal' ideas of the nature of politics and the state?

Second, Kushner makes it clear that he thinks the turn to a multicultural pluralism has produced a much better relationship between liberalism and Jews, and its understanding of the Holocaust (as a *Jewish* event). He is right; clearly the pluralistic approach of contemporary liberalism represents an advance on the monocultural, 'intolerant' liberalism of the 1930s and 1940s, especially for the position of Jews in the liberal democracies, as well as other minority ethnic and racial groups. Yet it is unclear whether it is the multiculturalism or the pluralism (not necessarily the same thing) which is the benefactor here. Nor is it clear that even a pluralistic politics on its own is really the answer. What would have happened in the American case if Jews such as Morgenthau had not been so prominent and influential? Is it a good moral lesson that the interests of a group of individuals should depend on how well they can work the 'pluralism' of ethnic politics? Indeed, was not this success ultimately due to a liberal universalism which underlies all truly pluralist systems (although not necessarily multiculturalist ones)?

One can take the lessons of Kushner's brilliant analysis another way. One can follow someone such as Eleanor Rathbone and say that the problem with British

liberalism was not that it was not sensitive enough to particular groups, but that it was insufficiently universalist to be truly liberal. We are back again to measuring the immeasurable, but when the British 'liberals' quoted in Kushner's book averred that they thought that other victims had suffered just as much as Jews, that the Jewish victims should not be singled out, but be put on a par with all the others, they might have been unconsciously anti-Semitic, but they might also have been operating along the same lines as the quote which is the title of this essay. For did not – does not – the treatment of the Jewish case as 'unique', as another British official put it, 'perpetuate the very Nazi doctrine which we are determined to stamp out' (p. 127)? Is this not, in effect, putting a yellow patch on all Jews, as victims instead of race enemies?

There is clearly a huge difference in one respect. The stress on difference in the Nazi case was a tool of the most negative discrimination; the emphasis on difference in the multiculturalism advocated by Kushner is clearly tending to a justification for positive discrimination, in which difference and diversity are encouraged and in fact uniformity becomes abnormal, the conformist non-conformist (hence the ironies of political correctness).

Certainly in the specific case of the Holocaust it might not be a desirable goal that, as a BBC correspondent reporting on the Auschwitz commemoration pleaded the other day, there be 'universal harmony' in commemoration, but rather difference, discord, so that the pain and the reality remain forever vivid in our minds. Yet the people who died at Auschwitz may have died because they were Jews, but they also died *as* human beings and not only as Jews. The Holocaust has a universal significance because of Man's inhumanity to Man, not of German hatred of Jews.

It might be that the Holocaust's power as a symbol of horror derives from the ancient relationship between Jews and Christendom, that it is thus a symbolic suicide of the Western tradition in a Eurocentric world, and that it is this which makes it so compelling for us Westerners. Yet if it were only the Jewish Holocaust, then why should a peasant in Central China regard it as of universal validity? We are back to the never-ending dialectic between particularism and universalism which has marked the Jewish experience of modernity, and is nothing other than another version of the Jews' encounter with what for want of a better word we call 'liberalism'. If the Holocaust is not also of universal significance, cannot be understood precisely in those universalistic terms which are what 'pure' liberalism is really about, then it, ironically, loses much of its uniqueness, and much of its universal applicability as a symbolic warning.

For how else has it operated in Bosnia, for instance, if not as such? And why have Jewish organisations been at the forefront of protests against Western inaction, if not because they see the Jewish experience as also a universally valid one? The terrible irony of the Bosnian, and for that matter the Rwandan, events is that the sort of temporising, uncomprehending attitudes, vacillation, pleas of impotence and governmental posturing which marked the liberal democracies' response to the Holocaust are being replicated with uncanny similarity by, in the Bosnian case, the American but especially the French and British governments. The tragic delay to

the response to Horthy's offer in 1944 due to posturing and political infighting, and British attempts to rein in 'unrealistic' American policies, have been repeated time and again in Bosnia. The fatiguing of public opinion as it grows inured to the scenes of atrocity after atrocity, innocent victim after innocent victim, could well describe our response to Bosnia, but they are also described by Kushner in the public's response to the Holocaust (as is the British Government's careful vacillation until public pressure died down for them to do something about the genocide).

It is not the 'Jewishness' of the Holocaust alone which can be the main point, but its complete inhumanity, the appeal to a pseudo-scientific, biological theory which treated human beings in terms of animals, not as thinking, moral beings, which is the greatest horror, its most powerful symbolic worth. It is thus not a liberalism which abandons its universalism which is the Holocaust's most effective answer but rather one which, by adopting a truly pluralistic stance, strengthens it; one which does not treat people as merely members of groups but takes their rights as individuals seriously, including their right of association, to belong, *or not to belong*, to whichever group they wish.

Liberalism's optimism about the reality of humankind was proved wrong in the Holocaust, but then liberals have always been a little worried about that aspect of the theory. Why else did John Stuart Mill try so hard to protect the individual from other individuals? Rather what liberalism took as assumptions were always a form of semiconsciously wishful thinking. Yet if assumptions must be turned into norms so be it: the goal behind those assumptions, of a polity run by free, rational and moral beings, has not lost its universal validity.

What the Holocaust shows about the liberal imagination, for Jew and non-Jew alike, is not so much the inherent contradictions of liberalism, but rather that it was never truly strong enough, even in the liberal democracies, to apply universally beyond the borders of the nation-state. The proper response would seem to me to be to embrace the universalism inherent in both liberalism *and* the modern Jewish experience: to say in every case 'Never Again' – but mean it.