



# Understanding Evil Deeds in Human Terms: Empathy for the Perpetrators, the Dead Victims, and the Ethics of Being the Afterlife

Natan Elgabsi 

Received: 14 November 2022 / Accepted: 28 April 2023 / Published online: 7 June 2023  
© The Author(s) 2023

**Abstract** This essay concerns what it means to historicize evil in an ethically responsible way: that is, what it means to think and narrate perpetrators and victims of evil through what is testified to and told about them. I show that a responsible gaze can only be recognized by allowing ourselves to be addressed by the dead victims. The argument consists in an existential critique of a set of common ideas in the human sciences, which suggest that we must attempt to empathize with the perpetrators in order to understand their deeds in human terms. This empathetic thought, I suggest, easily leads us either to aestheticize the victims or to think that the evils in our history should be addressed as a metaphysical susceptibility to evil internal to being human. By critically discussing these ideas, I show that empathy for the perpetrators in several respects does injustice to the dead victims, which marks that we as their afterlife continue to have an irresponsible relationship with the dead.

**Keywords** Responsibility · Afterlife · History and Ethics · Empathy · Moral psychology · Evil · Testimony · Christopher Browning · Stanley Milgram

## 1 The Existential Commitment of Historicizing

Some 20 years after the massacre in Polish Poniatowa, a former SS guard was a witness in the investigation and trial of his Nazi superiors who were prosecuted for the deeds they had ordered. The SS guard, who was an occasional bystander, did not deny the massacre of civilians, but rather described in detail the procedure of murdering 14 000 Polish Jews in 1942, as well as his own indirect participation

---

✉ Natan Elgabsi  
Department of Philosophy, Åbo Akademi University, Åbo/Turku, Finland  
E-Mail: nelgabsi@abo.fi



in these deeds. (Browning 1998, 140-1) This testimony was among the “judicial interrogations of some 125 men conducted in the 1960s” that historian Christopher Browning used in his acclaimed qualitative study of the 500 men strong SS Reserve Police Battalion 101 (first edition 1992. I use 1998, xviii). Browning confesses that although he had studied archival and court documents connected to the Holocaust for nearly two decades, his confrontation with these interrogation protocols “was singularly powerful and disturbing” (1998, xvi). “Never before,” he says, “had I encountered the issue of choice so dramatically framed by the course of events and so openly discussed by at least some of the perpetrators. Never before had I seen the monstrous deeds of the Holocaust so starkly juxtaposed with the human face of the killers” (1998, xvi)

The distress that Browning expresses here in the preface to *Ordinary Men*, a book that has become paradigmatic of qualitative research about the Holocaust for the past 30 years,<sup>1</sup> is worth considering. It speaks, albeit unwillingly, to what it means existentially to write about the past in the name of a human science. What is “singularly powerful and disturbing,” one could say, is not only the existential troubles of seeing the faces of the perpetrators together with the deeds done when confronting these juridical interrogations and personal stories about a horrifying past. Nor is it merely the disturbing realization that these judicial interrogations as well as the very essence of historical thought and writing are made possible by the life of the dead other who has an indirect countenance in what is testified to. What shakes us is perhaps primarily that both Browning and we who live on in a temporal world—we who are, so to speak, the afterlife of the event (Tamm ed., 2015)—continue to have a *relationship* with both perpetrators and their dead victims, to whom we continuously respond through our thinking, writing, and narrating about the past (see Derrida 2006, 24-5; van der Heiden 2019, 251; Fritsch 2018, 52; Nchanian 2009, 87-8). To be the afterlife or posterity, means that we historicize from a situation posterior to what has happened and that we have a relationship with past real persons by virtue of being their posterity (see Benjamin, 2007, 253-4). As some scholars have argued it is through posterity’s *relationship* with past real persons (the dead) that any historiography becomes possible (de Certeau 1988; Ruin 2018). Thus the existential trouble for us, as Edith Wyschogrod argues, is to recognize that our discourse is entangled in and “mandated by another who is absent, cannot speak for herself, one whose actual face,” anyone of us who are presently living “will never see” (1998, xii; see also Levinas 1991, 89, and Butler 2009, 34 for this responsiveness). To historicize is to meet the faces of the dead and nameless others in our thought, our trying to

<sup>1</sup> One example that shows how influential *Ordinary Men* has come to be for contemporary Holocaust research is the conference that was held in October 2019 by Thomas Köhler, Peter Römer, Simon Lengenmann, and Hans Wupper-Tewes, „Ein Vierteljahrhundert nach Christopher Brownings ‚Ordinary Men‘ – Perspektiven der neuen Polizei-Täterforschung und der Holocaust-Vermittlung.“ The conference was organized in cooperation with Münster Stadt, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, and Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center. In the conference presentation, *Ordinary Men* is described in the following way: „Vor einem Vierteljahrhundert erschien Christoper R. Brownings wegweisendes Buch ‚Ordinary Men‘ (‚Ganz normale Männer‘) zum Reserve-Polizeibataillon 101, das in Deutschland auch weit über die Wissenschaft hinaus große Aufmerksamkeit erfuhr.“ The presentation proceeds with exemplifying the social and scientific impact that this book has had and still have.

think about past others in an ethically responsible way (see also de Certeau 1988, 46-7; Ruin 2018, 200).

In this existential philosophical essay, I will seek to understand what it is for me, thinking and reading here and now, to have a responsible relationship with persons having done and suffered evils in the past. What is it to responsibly historicize evils that have taken place between past real persons? What is it to be ethically and temporally implicated with these people? Right at the start, I must recognize the ethically charged nature of this study, as a way for me personally to seek justice to the perpetrators and to the dead victims in my thought.

In this respect, I will perform my analysis in relation to Browning's *Ordinary Men*, which I quoted in the beginning. In *Ordinary Men*, Browning claims to bring forth what a responsible attitude to the evils done by the SS men consist in, by arguing that only "an attempt to empathize" with the SS men is to understand them in "human terms" (1998, xx). Every other attitude would be to no longer see the humanity in the SS perpetrators, and thus it would be to succumb, as Browning says, to depicting what has happened in the past in terms of "one-dimensional caricature" (see 1998, xx, 221). In this investigation I will disentangle and put tension on this claim forwarded by Browning in his paradigmatic study. My leading question is exactly what is it to understand these SS perpetrators in "human terms"? On the basis of Browning's methodological remarks in *Ordinary Men*, I will reconstruct an attitude to people in the past that Browning himself calls "an attempt to empathize" with the SS men (1998, xx), an attitude that I, in turn, will forward an existential critique toward. This means that I will evaluate the logic, ethics, and metaphysics that Browning's methodological ideas are entangled in. My existential critique begins by first seeing the implications of what I subsequently call an empathetic attitude or method. In Browning study, "an attempt to empathize" involves, as he says, that "I must recognize that in the same situation, I could have been either a killer or an evader—both were human—if I want to understand and explain the behavior of both as best I can" (1998, xx). The existential critique I perform will consist in discussing in what ethical directions this methodological claim, as my own attitude to persons in the past, leads me. I thus re-read some of the SS perpetrators' testimonies in *Ordinary Men* through the empathetic lens that I take Browning to offer. I will thereby put into question and criticize the underlying claim of *Ordinary Men*: that this empathetic attitude or method is as such a responsible response to persons having done and suffered evils in the past.

Through a close analysis of the existential meaning of the attitude that I reconstruct, I will show that this empathetic attitude or method exemplifies familiar problems of *identification*, *aestheticization*, and *apologetics* of evils recurrent in psychological, philosophical, and theological discourses in our broader intellectual culture.<sup>2</sup> But above all, "an attempt to empathize" with the SS men fails at meeting the dead victims' gaze. Thus, as an existential critique, I argue that however painful it may be, we need to see the circumstances of death through the dead victims' eyes in order to continue living an afterlife that is not oblivious to what has happened.

---

<sup>2</sup> Examples of these tendencies exist in, for example, (Milgram 1974; Gleeson 2006; Todorov 2010; Svendsen 2010; Cowburn 2012; Overy 2014).



## 2 Understanding Perpetrators in “Human Terms”

The first idea that I need to reconstruct is what is meant when Browning says that the attitude or method of *Ordinary Men* endeavors to understand the SS men in “human terms.” What are these “human terms”? The “human terms” spoken about imply above all “a rejection of demonization” (1998, xx). That is to say, they consist in a supposedly non-judgmental attitude to what people have actually done, and to why they have done it. In the name of science, it is a resistance of our proneness to ethically judge people having done what they have done. Browning’s central methodological statement in this regard reads as following:

Clearly the writing of such a history [of SS men] requires the rejection of demonization. The policemen in the battalion who carried out the massacres and deportations, like the much smaller number who refused or evaded, were human beings. I must recognize that in the same situation, I could have been either a killer or an evader—both were human—if I want to understand and explain the behavior of both as best I can. This recognition does indeed mean an attempt to empathize. What I do not accept, however, are the old clichés that to explain is to excuse, to understand is to forgive. Explaining is not excusing; understanding is not forgiving. Not trying to understand the perpetrators in human terms would make impossible not only this study but any history of Holocaust perpetrators that sought to go beyond one-dimensional caricature. (Browning 1998, xix-xx)

This claim hinges on a set of common ideas in the human sciences about being *fair* to one’s object of study, by being essentially impartial, neutral, or non-judgmental (see Weber 1949b; Bloch 1954; Todorov 2010).<sup>3</sup> As historian Marc Bloch says, the human scientist should not judge. The scientist is not in the position to make a verdict. “When the scholar has observed and explained,” Bloch says, “his task is finished. It yet remains for the judge to pass sentence” (1954, 139). The judge, in turn, is deemed impartial if his personal desires are silenced and if the sentence is pronounced according to the law. But the judge “will be impartial in a juridical sense, not in a scientific sense” (1954, 139). Indeed, as Bloch continues, “we can neither condemn nor absolve without accepting a table of values which no longer refers to any positive science” (1954, 139). The scientist must be impartial by refraining from judgmental attitudes in favor of what Bloch instead calls “understanding” (1954, 143; Browning refers exactly to this discussion by Bloch, see 1998, xx). Scientific impartiality thus implies that it is not the task of the human sciences to reach a judgmental decision on personal or normative preferences (Bloch 1954, 141). In contrast to our ordinary inclination to judge matters in terms of, say, righteous victims and monstrous villains, the human sciences have a self-understanding of

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of evaluative features in the human sciences see (Ahlskog 2016) and (Kronqvist and Elgabsi 2021).

providing impartial (i.e., non-judgmental) investigations of what has taken place and why.<sup>4</sup>

Browning himself alludes to two methodological ideas in particular as to what a non-judgmental understanding of SS perpetrators involves. The first is a contextual understanding of the SS men based on a microhistorical, “history of everyday life” (*Alltagsgeschichte*) as to how the people who became SS men lived and felt.<sup>5</sup> The second one is a psychological understanding based on “obedience to authority,” as to what humans are inclined to do in similar circumstances. Browning argues that “as a methodology” the “‘history of everyday life’ is neutral,” and that it fails to be neutral only if we fail to see that for the SS soldiers “mass murder and routine had become one” and that in society at large “normality itself had become exceedingly abnormal” (Browning 1998, xix). Similarly, he argues that the “ahistorical” psychological approach “is predicated upon the humanity and individuality of the perpetrators and allows for a moral dimension in the analysis of their choices” (1998, 219, 221).

The “attempt to empathize” in order to understand the SS perpetrators in “human terms” consists in a mix of these two supposedly non-judgmental dimensions of describing human life and behavior. In the following I will reconstruct and discuss the existential meaning of this attitude to the SS men and to their victims.

### 3 Scientific Impartiality and Empathy in the Human Sciences

The attitude that Browning in the name of a scientific, non-judgmental stance calls “an attempt to empathize” with the SS men, consists, as mentioned, in his saying that “I must recognize that in the same situation, I could have been either a killer or an evader” (1998, xx). If this attitude is to be taken as scientific impartiality in line with Bloch, for whom the mere observation and explanation of fact amounts to a scientific understanding that is non-judgmental (1954, 138-43), it invites the following conundrum. On the one hand, if scientific impartiality supposedly means to detach oneself from all relations (from both perpetrators and victims) in order to be impartial, the question then becomes why it is so important to “reject demonization”

<sup>4</sup> Compare (Bloch 1954, 139-44) with (Todorov 2010, 30), and (Browning 1998, xx). See also (Gleeson 2006, 267). However, the contrast between judging as supposedly leading to caricature or demonization, and understanding as supposedly leading to a more humanizing response, shows that the human sciences tend to lean on a rather restricted idea of what an ethical judgement possibly can be. For a discussion of this issue particularly in historiography see *History and Morality* (2020) by Holocaust historian Donald Bloxham, especially the chapter “Writing History: The Problem of Neutrality;” 87-126.

<sup>5</sup> The so called “history of everyday life” (*Alltagsgeschichte*) emerged in West Germany in the 1970s as an attempt to focus truly on the life and lived experiences of ordinary people. As Browning also explains, the trend has been particularly criticized for leading to troubles when investigating everyday life under the Nazi regime. Methodologically, however, the “history of everyday life” has its roots in two parts of social- and cultural history. On the one hand, in the “history of mentality” of French historians Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, which sparked to life in the 1920s (what has subsequently been known as the *Annales* school that revolutionized the modern historical science). See Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution* (2015). On the other hand, in the “history from below” of English historian E. P. Thompson. For a good discussion of particularly its connection to the work of Bloch and Febvre see (Schöttler 1995). See also (Elgabsi 2017).



in favor of empathetically understanding the SS men (see Strandberg 2015, 168-74)? This detachment from relational entanglements is rather to deny the possibility of being impartial. It is because this interpersonal relationship exists that responses such as empathy (in contrast to judgmental attitudes) becomes warranted. But on the other hand, if scientific impartiality means to stand in relation to perpetrators and to their victims, nothing necessitates that impartiality means that “I must recognize that in the same situation, I could have been either a killer or an evader.” This attitude would rather be what impartiality is not, that is, to be consumed to some degree by one particular party.

The confusion in the empathetic proposition—“I must recognize that in the same situation, I could have been either a killer or an evader”—is that “I” am here called on to do something in relation to the SS men but simultaneously it is as if “I,” in the name of scientific impartiality, am not allowed to exist in relation to them. It is the existential problems of this empathetic attitude that I will subsequently discuss. The attitude can, I wish to say, not be conceived as impartial, and as a relational attitude, it has deeply troubling implications.

Max Weber’s rejection of the proverb “To understand all is to pardon all” clearly exemplifies this problematic interconnection between neutrality, scientific impartiality, and empathy in qualitative human science. It arises exactly from the hermeneutic dilemma of how we in the human sciences existentially should understand our own involvement (Weber 1949b, 13-5). Weber writes:

“Understanding all” does not mean “pardoning all” nor does mere understanding of another’s viewpoint as such lead, in principle, to its approval. Rather, it leads, at least as easily, and often with greater probability to the awareness of the issues and reasons which prevent agreement. (Weber 1949b, 14)

As Weber explains throughout this essay, values, beliefs, and behavior of others are the objects of scientific study, but it is not the business of a qualitative human- or social science to evaluate the correctness of them. This means that a researcher should refrain from passing judgements on “the desirability or undesirability of social facts from ethical, cultural or other points of view” (1949b, 10). “What is really at issue,” Weber says, “is the intrinsically simple demand that the investigator and teacher should keep unconditionally separate the establishment of empirical facts (including the ‘value-oriented’ conduct of the empirical individual whom he is investigating) and *his* own [the researcher’s] practical evaluations” (1949b, 11). Weber claims that this kind of ethically “neutral” or “objective” understanding of another’s individual viewpoint consists in the scholar’s capacity to “‘feel himself’ empathically into” ways of thinking that he does not necessarily share, and that are even “normatively ‘false’” according to the scholar’s own vision (1949b, 41; see Stueber 2006, 21). Thus, empathetic understanding of an “individual viewpoint” does *not* in principle involve the researcher himself in taking a stand on what it truly means ethically for him to say that the other person holds these views (Weber

1949b, 41).<sup>6</sup> The explanations or explications that the detached researcher provides are only descriptions of particular perspectives that some agent has held, and in principle the perspective described could have been discovered, or at last could have been made sense of, by any rational researcher following the same method (Weber 1949a, 106–7). Thus the description of an “individual viewpoint” in Weber’s sense is a description from nowhere.

If this Weberian view is what Browning means when he speaks of empathy and neutrality as methodological concerns, the attitude should be existentially critiqued. What Weber does not recognize is that what he calls a concrete “individual viewpoint” as such is not objectively given for scientific scrutiny. The other person’s point of view is something that I must engage in seeing, which means that I do not stand in relation to only one individual but rather come to recognize my being entangled in relations with several other persons, a relational context to which I too belong by being the posterity of those who are now dead. This hermeneutic difficulty as to how I myself am engaged in reflectively conceiving what the other says and does could be shown by considering one testimony that Browning scrutinizes. In the context of the Józefów massacre, one man in the firing squad consisting of eight persons that had rounded up and shot Jews in the woods said:

The shooting of the men was so repugnant to me that I missed the fourth man. It was simply no longer possible for me to aim accurately. I suddenly felt nauseous and ran away from the shooting site. I have expressed myself incorrectly just now. It was not that I could no longer aim accurately, rather that the fourth time I intentionally missed. I then ran into the woods, vomited, and sat down against a tree. To make sure that no one was nearby, I called loudly into the woods, because I wanted to be alone. Today I can say that my nerves were totally finished. I think that I remained alone in the woods for some two to three hours. (Browning 1998, 67-8)

These are the words of another person whom I in posterity stand in front of as I read this utterance, when he tells about what he has done to others and how he felt afterwards. What does scientific impartiality and neutrality mean in this situation? What is the other person’s viewpoint that is given independently of any other person’s gaze, and independently of my gaze in posterity? It would be wrong to say that posterity conjures up or projects the meaning of what the SS guard says, but I am certainly responsible for reflectively seeing what he expresses and speaks about. I see the SS guard’s reflection on personal sentiments with regard to what he has done to another. They testify to the continuous repugnancy of the things he has done. His words are his retrospective response to what he has done to those he and his comrades deprived of their lives, as well as a response to the interrogators or to us others in posterity who address him and ask how he could do it. But before being a response to us who life after the event, it is a response to those persons whom he and his comrades murdered (Wyschogrod 1998, 49; 2006, 261; Agamben

---

<sup>6</sup> The idea of understanding an “individual viewpoint” is more closely spelled out in relation to the question of objectivity in (Weber 1949a). Compare with the discussion about explanation and justification in (Dancy 2004, 104-7).



2008, 164). To realize that the SS guard is seized and changed by the horrors he has committed is to realize that the victims were continuously present before him and that the guard at some point could no longer avoid their gaze. His gradually seeing what he has done to them and what he has become through their eyes means he cannot continue to shoot. Even if the utterance that we read is what he expresses 20 years later, it shows his gradually seeing himself through the victims' eyes in a way that tears himself apart. Every word spoken by him *continuously* circulates around the face of the murdered other, who the guard and we in posterity already see (Agamben 2008, 161-4; van der Heiden 2019, 251; see also Wyschogrod 2004, 40-1).

In this sense, the supposedly detached scientific position is illusory. Our thought of scientific impartiality creates, as Hans-Georg Gadamer critically puts it, a very powerful dialectical illusion under which we do not understand that whenever we explicate or try to understand the other's viewpoint in posterity, we do it from within the ethical bonds of an I-Thou relationship (2006, 354). As existential selves we are implicated in this relationship, but also vulnerable to being changed therein. To deny this ethical bond to our past is, Gadamer claims, like denying the ethical bond to another person. This is also the malady that modern human sciences often suffer from, the desire to escape our existential situatedness within a life shared with others. (2006, 353-5)

In this light, the attitude of scientific impartiality in the tradition of Weber (and Bloch) implies a loss of my own responsiveness, that is, a loss of my acknowledging that I actually stand in a relationship not only to perpetrators but also to their victims, and that I will respond, as Gadamer says, inside this ethical-temporal relationship as their posterity (Gadamer 2006, 353-5; see also Levinas 1991, 89; Fritsch 2018, 80-1; Todorov 1999b, 5). The historiographical lens that Browning offers is no exception, which invites a closer look at its relational meaning. Browning suggests that "an attempt to empathize" with the perpetrators means that "I must recognize that in the same situation, I could have been either a killer or an evader" (1998, xx), and furthermore that this is to understand the perpetrators in "human terms" (1998, xx). What then does this empathetic attitude mean in relation to both perpetrators and victims? If the empathetic claim should be read as an attempt to *identify* with the perpetrators on psychological premises, there is a prominent criticism of this idea that needs to be taken into account. Indeed, the criticism concerns, yet again, the very *possibility* of being able to respond to what other people have done or suffered.

Max Scheler claims, in relation to Sigmund Freud's theory of identification, that the emotional tie of empathy, as developed in certain branches of *Verstehen* philosophy in terms of constituting the method of a human science, amounts to two related problems (Scheler 2017, 18-25; Freud 1995, 105-8). On the one hand, empathetic understanding tends to invite the "eclipse and absorption of another self by one's own," which deprives the other of an independent existence (Scheler 2017, 18). (This is apparent when I think that I can understand the other because, or in as far as, the other somehow is like me.) On the other hand, it invites the tendency that "I live, not in 'myself,' but," to some degree "entirely in 'him'" (2017, 19, see also Stein 1989). (This is apparent when I think that understanding another is to imagine what it would be for me to be him or her.) In both cases, the possibility of



understanding is predicated upon a feature that I assume that both of us share, often a psychological one (Freud 1995, 105-7). If “an attempt to empathize” with the SS men for Browning means to render their behavior intelligible on such an identifying premise, and furthermore that it is only on this premise that I can understand what they have done, the thought is vulnerable to the criticism of identification that Scheler puts forward. (see also Gustafsson 2014)

The psychology of identification brought about by empathetic understanding, Scheler claims, blurs or even obliterates the relational distance between selves that is a prerequisite for ethical life, passing for a false notion of “fellow-feeling” (2017, 25, 33). Contrary to the moral emotion of empathy, true “fellow feeling,” Scheler says, “presupposes just that awareness of distance between selves” that the psychology of identification dissolves (2017, 23). “Fellow-feeling” is an awareness of selves that makes it possible to say that I respond ethically to what the other expresses or does, because another person is not someone I am “one with,” but rather someone whom I stand with, to paraphrase Edith Stein (Scheler 2017, 18; Stein 1989, 16). It is imperative to any notion of understanding and ethical response to “have it given to us that the other has an individual self distinct from our own” whom I need not mime, reproduce, or empathetically identify with, in order to responsibly be with in an interpersonal relationship (Scheler 2017, 9-10; see also Gaita 2004, 267).

Even if empathy is not always identification, and should not be ruled out as a deceptive moral emotion in all circumstances (see Maibom 2020; Stueber 2006; Gustafsson 2021), Scheler’s critique is important with regard to the empathetic understanding that Browning seems to employ. Scheler shows that a clear differentiation between self and other is needed in order to be able to respond to another. By invoking psychological similarity, however, empathetic identification obliterates the possibility of seeing the other as other, as it suggests that the SS man’s behavior is not his; instead, it would be mine as well had I been there. But this speculation about what it would be to step into another person’s shoes makes it unclear whose behavior murder actually is, as murder becomes a psychological trait that both of us share, to some degree or other. Somehow, I have become the other, but the other has also become me. Scheler shows in contrast that it is imperative to any ethically clear-sighted understanding of the SS soldier’s viewpoint to say that his behavior is his behavior and not mine, and that when I respond to the SS soldier’s murder, I respond to what another person has done to others and not to a psychological trait, which is supposedly there in me too. (Scheler 2017, 35; Todorov 1999a, 203)

#### 4 Ethical Agency and the Psychology of Identification

So far I have shown how the intertwined ideas of scientific impartiality and empathy in the human sciences alter my own responsiveness. They do so, on the one hand by not recognizing that a historical description of the SS soldiers’ behavior is made from my own posterior existential situation, and on the other hand by no longer deeming it important to differentiate between my own ethical self and the other’s.

What are the further ethical and existential consequences of invoking “an attempt to empathize” with the SS men? What are the consequences of the customary intel-



lectual attitude, as Lars Svendsen puts it, that “when it comes to Hitler, most of us have little reason to identify ourselves with him; on the other hand, it is easy enough to identify ourselves with those who participated in his program” (2010, 12).<sup>7</sup> The consequences of this psychology of identification could best be shown by one of Browning’s witnesses. In the juridical interrogations, one SS soldier who in 1942 stood guard at the execution site of 14 000 Jews in Poniatowa says:

I myself and my group had guard duty directly in front of the grave. The grave was a big zigzag-shaped series of slit trenches about three meters wide and three to four meters deep. From my post I could observe how the Jews ... were forced to undress in the last barracks and surrender all their possessions and were then driven through our cordon and down sloped openings into the trenches. SD men standing at the edge of the trenches drove the Jews onward to the execution sites, where other SD men with submachine guns fired from the edge of the trench. Because I was a group leader and could move about more freely, I went once directly to the execution site and saw how the newly arriving Jews had to lie down on those already shot. They were then likewise shot with bursts from the submachine guns. The SD men took care that the Jews were shot in such a way that there were inclines in the piles of corpses enabling the newcomers to lie down on corpses piled as much as three meters high.

...The whole business was the most gruesome I had ever seen in my life, because I was frequently able to see that after a burst had been fired the Jews were only wounded and those still living were more or less buried alive beneath the corpses of those shot later, without the wounded being given so-called mercy shots. I remember that from out of the piles of corpses the SS [sic] men were cursed by the wounded. (Browning 1998, 140-1)

If I take to heart that empathetic identification means identifying with another *person*, i.e. that I could have been a killer or an evader, I must ask what this means to me. Trying to face the reality of what the SS guard speaks about already implies that stepping into these persons’ shoes is extremely hard to do. To say that I too could have been a guard who watched other persons being slaughtered, an officer who commanded the slaughtering of civilians, or a soldier that shot civilians in a mass grave requires my own ethical investment if it is to be something more than an aesthetic platitude. It is easy to say in the abstract that I could have been one of those persons, but can I really imagine and identify with this? Truly, I would have to ask myself what it means to live a quite different life had I done these same things to others. Asking these questions implies realizing that empathetic identification with a person who carried out these deeds is not the same thing as identifying with the acts of a character in a theater play, which I can play with slight discomfort. These are actions of real persons who murdered their fellows, other real persons who stood there and looked back. Whereas I can play a character doing horrible things in a theater play while coming back to being myself again when the play has come to its end, I would be a very different person than the person I am if

<sup>7</sup> Other examples of this thought are found in (Gleeson 2006, 265-7; Todorov 2010, 30; Askenasy 1978, 37; Hamblet 2014, 27-30).



I really were to do these things to others. To say that this could have been me strongly shows that the life I then would live is no longer my life as I live it now, and consequently that I am no longer myself. But it also shows the utter difficulty if not impossibility of aesthetically speculating about our being able to play another real person. Nevertheless, asking what it means to live with having done these same things to others also invites another much more restless thought. I could of course as well have been a civilian standing in a mass grave shot half dead and left to die in between a pile of corpses. That could have been my life, or actually the end of it. But then I would also not be myself, for I would be dead.

Although this bizarre aestheticizing tendency is, as Wyschogrod puts it, in itself one injustice to the voiceless others and a failure to responsibly giving them countenance (1998, 9; see 2004, 40-1), there is, I wish to say, another ethical problem of empathy at stake that can only be shown indirectly. It transpires when we empathetically identify with a *situation*.

In a way this empathy for the *situation* is already shown in the utterance of the particular SS guard whose testimony this is. But at first glance this is not apparent. The guard describes himself as a bystander, perhaps thinking that he could as well have been one of those who shot Jews but that it was not he who happened to do it. The guard goes on and claims that from the perspective of the bystander's "the whole business was the most gruesome I had ever seen in my life," because, he says, the wounded civilians had no possibility of receiving "mercy shots." This consideration reveals that he does not fully recognize how he is involved in what has been done. Instead, speaking retrospectively 20 years after the fact, the guard speaks as one having been detached from the action even at the time when the massacre occurred. *Post factum* the guard shows that we must recognize the cruel way in which the civilians were murdered but, above all, that the massacre is something that would have been done also without his participation. Thus, he does not want to see his contribution to the murdering of these Jewish civilians. He wants us to accept the inevitability of the situation, which had to arise no matter he was there or not, a situation that now is a historical necessity as it belongs to the past (see also Neiman 2002, 256-7).

To empathize with the perpetrator would, in this case, be to empathize with the givenness of a past situation that he (and consequently I) thinks he happened to observe as a bystander. This detached *post factum* position is very close to the position that people historicizing in posterity seek. It is not the killers or the victims with whom one identifies. One identifies instead with being a bystander, speaking afterwards about a given situation, because this resembles our own existential situatedness. To be a bystander speaking after the fact is what few of us have difficulties imagining because this is already part of who we are. Thereby we are easily seduced by what the SS guard says about the givenness or inevitability of the past situation.

Even if the SS guard's thoughts involve a persistent acceptance of the necessity of these Jewish civilians having to be killed, a thought that I too could identify with because the perpetrator (like me) speaks *post factum*, this is where my thought becomes deceptive and irresponsible with respect to what has happened. It is exactly my posterior empathetic acceptance of the necessity of the Jewish civilians having to be killed that is not ethically clear-sighted. If I seek a responsible understanding



of the other, I must recognize that the massacre was not inevitable before it was done, before people took part in it and committed it. The difficulty is that even if empathetic identification with someone may be possible, especially with regard to being a bystander speaking after the fact, the situation I am supposed to empathize with is not simply given, but, rather, the SS guard is himself implicated in making the horrible situation what it is. He is not a mere victim thrown into unfortunate circumstances.

What then can be meant when Browning empathetically claims that “I must recognize that in the same *situation*, I could have been either a killer or an evader” (1998, xx)? I have highlighted two possible directions of this thought. If I empathize with a situation, I identify either with its necessity, or with my living a life as a perpetrator. The first one is a mark of grave self-deception, the other is impossible.

In contrast to these attitudes, it is ethically imperative to my understanding of the SS guard’s deeds that I do not empathetically accept certain ways in which he thinks about the inevitability of the situation, but rather understand, as Svendsen puts it, that “in a given situation they *could have acted differently* (2010, 24; see Kant 1999, B560-B562; Arendt 1994b, 322)”<sup>8</sup> This means that it is irrelevant to speculate about what I possibly could have done, or if I possibly could have partaken in creating the *same situation*, as my concern is what the other in fact did in the situation that he contributed to creating and upholding (compare with Rothberg 2019, 50). It is not empathetic identification but rather an understanding of the other as an ethical self distinct from myself that is to truly come closer to his life and to think about the other from the “agent’s perspective” (Danto 1995, 79; Ahlskog 2020, 6–7; see also Svendsen 2010, 31).

## 5 The Victim’s Perspective

In the aftermath of trauma, Susan Brison remarks, people have a tendency to think of their own self as distinctly different from what they were when the traumatic event happened. They often narrate and relate to the event that has happened as if it had happened to persons other than themselves. The SS guard who tells about what he saw in Poniatowa testifies, as said, to this detachedness. Even if he speaks of his standing guard during the massacre, he does not want to acknowledge his participation. The guard speaks *post factum* as a detached observer describing a given situation that many could have seen, but he does not speak as a self having been actively involved in this mass murder. “Even those who are able to acknowledge the existence of violence,” Brison claims, “try to protect themselves from the realization that the world in which it occurs is their world (2003, 9).” As in our current estrangement from the realization that we are implicated in a relational context of life where this has happened to other real persons who are now dead and to whom

<sup>8</sup> Browning emphasizes that the SS perpetrators’ choices are important to his analysis. However, it remains unclear to what extent the SS men’s freedom of choice is different from entangling their choice in a variety of factors (ideological, cultural, psychological, etc.) that Browning unfolds in the book. See for example (Browning 1998, 181-9, 220-1).

we continue to respond, the SS guard protects himself from the realization that the horrifying situation is the world that he has contributed to creating by being involved in mass-murder. Taking up the safety of hindsight makes it hard to respond to the dead victim as belonging to our world at all (Brison 2003, 9; Arendt 1994b, 322-3).

How could the dead victim be seen through what is spoken in this testimony, retold in historiography? Raising this concern is again to acknowledge personally my immanent existential implication in the perspectives that I see. The victims who are dead cannot speak directly as the survivors or the SS soldiers can. The dead have no perspective independent of my ability to speak in posterity about them, that is, my ability to indirectly give a voice amidst all that the SS guards speak of and testify to in posterity – to the people who were forced to undress and were pushed into the zigzag mass-graves, the dying persons shot by the soldiers, the pile of corpses. My seeing the perspective of the dead victims requires my realizing that the SS guard's testimony already includes the dead other and that every word spoken by him bears witness to the civilians who were ruthlessly killed. To be addressed by the others is to see how the victims' perspective permeates our very gaze. Thus, if we hold Wendy Hamblet's suggestion that "evil is an experience viewed from the vantage point of the victim (2014, 20)," I must persistently *avoid* the thought that evil is a lived experience that is *confined* to the victim's subjective self-understanding, or that I must hear both *independent* sides of the perpetrator-victim story, like a judge in court, in order to make up my mind (Ahlskog 2020, 32).<sup>9</sup>

An ontology of points of view based on supposedly isolated subjective perspectives would make it questionable if the perpetrator and victim belong to the same world at all, as if I could understand what the murderer has done without considering the fate of those whose life he deprived (Wyschogrod 1998, 39). To be a perpetrator already means that you have made a victim to whom you continue to have a relation (Bataille 1991, 15-9; Strandberg 2021, 161-77); and this is what I, by being addressed by the dead victims and by living in the aftermath in relation to both perpetrators and their victims, must conceive. I see that the SS guards' testimonies show the different degrees to which the dead victims breach the guards' discourse, and also how the guards themselves understand their own deeds through the victims' perspective, that is, through "the language of evil," which is "the language of the victim" (Hamblet 2014, 20). To be addressed in this way is to be seized by the victims' eyes. For example, to describe an event in its aftermath as "genocide" means, as Michele Moody-Adams importantly argues, that we understand what has been done not in the first instance as "a war crime," but as "an attack on the very *humanity* of any people targeted for destruction" (2017, 161; see also Ahlskog 2020, 91-2). Describing an event as genocide is thus an imminent attempt to see the situation from the dead victims' perspective, to have a humanizing gaze on what the perpetrators have done.

What one faces in Browning and others' appeal to empathizing with the perpetrators' perspective is the ethical problem of deliberately choosing to be addressed by and to some extent identify with the SS soldiers in the name of a responsible

<sup>9</sup> This connects to the illusion of scientific impartiality as a supposed detachment from interpersonal relations as discussed in the beginning of the article. See (Strandberg 2015, 171).



understanding of what they have done. Even if our thought and inquiry continuously circulate around the faces of the dead, and even if we uphold an illusory righteousness of claiming to speak justly also on their behalf, we deliberately let the life of these shattered and killed people not concern us. This choice to let the victims not concern us could, as Brison aptly puts it, indeed be seen as a pathological “emotional illiteracy” inbred to our culture (2003, 12), where we constantly treat the victim as a faceless requisite in a spectacle, a silhouette not worthy of recognition. It marks just how distanced from a humanizing understanding of perpetrators and victims of evil we actually are:

We are not taught to empathize with victims. In crime novels and detective films, it is the villain, or the one who solves the murder mystery, who attracts our attention; the victim, a merely passive pretext for our entertainment, is conveniently disposed of—and forgotten—early on. We identify with the agents’ strength and skill, for good or evil, and join the victim, if at all, only in our nightmares. (Brison 2003, 10)

This disruption is devastating to ethical relationality. We cannot empathize with the dead victim when he died, or with the horrors of what survivors of evil express, their dying inside. It is often difficult for us to be with them and for them to be with themselves. But empathy with the perpetrator, on its part, tends not only to show a relational difficulty of being with the victim; rather, it aestheticizes the victim and exiles him from our world. Whether our empathy concerns real or imagined perpetrators, the victim remains a “passive pretext,” which shows, quite disturbingly, that we never really responded to the victim as a real person.

## 6 People Are Led to Kill with Little Difficulty

So far I have shown a variety of existential and ethical difficulties that are involved in Browning’s empathetic contention, “I must recognize that in the same situation, I could have been either a killer or an evader—both were human” (1998, xx). Empathetic identification with the perpetrators’ viewpoint involves, I have suggested, a loss of my own responsiveness as a posteriorly speaking self, a neglect of the perpetrators’ ethical agency, as well as a deliberate marginalization of the victim’s existence.

Yet, empathetic identification with the perpetrators’ perspective is, in Browning’s words, also tied to an “ahistorical” psychology of human nature with regard to what human beings are inclined to do in the *same social-psychological circumstances* (Browning 1998, 218-9; see also Roth 2004, 232-6). The circumstances, as Browning sees them, are what Stanley Milgram calls a psychology of “obedience to authority,” which suggests that people attach themselves to authority and conformity in order to absolve themselves from responsibility and deliberation when acting (Browning 1998, 174). On this basis Browning argues that although “the multifaceted nature of authority at [the] Józefów [massacre] and the key of conformity among the policemen are not quite parallel to Milgram’s experiments, they nonetheless render considerable support to his conclusions, and some of his observations are clearly



confirmed (1998, 175).” In line with Milgram’s experiments, Browning concurs that the role of devaluation or indoctrination did not play a considerable role in what the SS soldiers did; the perpetrators were rather ordinary men who came to act in a destructive process. “Once entangled,” so to say, “refusal appear[ed] improper, rude, or even an immoral breach of obligation”; thereby they could easily become murderers (1998, 173).

In his report, Milgram additionally concludes that “the most fundamental lesson of our study” is that “ordinary people simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process” (Milgram 1974, 6). “Sitting back in one’s armchair,” he continues, “it is easy to condemn the actions of the obedient subjects. But those who condemn the subjects measure them against the standard of their own ability to formulate high-minded moral prescriptions. That is hardly a fair standard” (1974, 6). Instead he claims to have discovered that “though such prescriptions as ‘Thou shalt not kill’ occupy a pre-eminent place in the moral order, they do not occupy a correspondingly intractable position in human psychic structure” (1974, 7). Eventually, the psychological truth is that “men are led to kill with little difficulty” (1974, 7; Browning 1998, 173). It is, in Browning’s words, this “ahistorical” truth that we must identify with (see Askenasy 1978, 37; Overy 2014, 523). “It was,” Browning claims, “exactly because the experiments were kept ahistorical that the insights from them have validity, and that scholars now know that deference to authority and role adaptation are powerful factors shaping human behavior” (Browning 1998, 219).<sup>10</sup>

Speaking in an existential mode again, what does it mean to hold the idea that my psychological inclination to murder under authority is a fairer response to another person who has murdered his fellows than my condemning the awfulness of this deed? (see Pleasants 2018, 29-30) We must look closer at the testimonies of Browning’s study in order to understand in what existential direction this psychology leads us. Browning quotes one SS policeman, who killed at least twenty Jews:

Truthfully I must say that at the time we didn’t reflect about it at all. Only years later did any of us become truly conscious of what had happened then. ...Only later did it first occur to me that had not been right. (Browning 1998, 72)

He also quotes a metalworker in the force saying:

I made the effort, and it was possible for me, to shoot only children. It so happened that the mothers led the children by the hand. My neighbor then shot the mother and I shot the child that belonged to her, because I reasoned with myself that after all without its mother the child could not live any longer. It was supposed to be, so to speak, soothing to my conscience to release children unable to live without their mothers. (1998, 73)

On Browning’s account, I would be invited to identify with this ahistorical truth about being human when responding to the children, their mothers, and to their

<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Browning emphasizes that his study takes into account a plurality of factors in the explanation and understanding of the SS men’s behavior, and not only these psychological ones (Browning 1998, 220-1).



murderers. The ahistorical truth that I too could have shot these children is called for as a supposedly *fair* response to these real persons (Milgram 1974, 6-7; Browning 1998, xix-xx, 173, 219-21). In what direction does this response take me ethically? Even if the psychological, ahistorical vision about human nature claims to let go of an ethical order in favor of merely describing moral-psychological facts about who we are, it invokes an issue of susceptibility or even propensity to evil that is close to metaphysical. But by claiming that “men are led to kill with little difficulty,” as the ahistorical *standard* for being human, the psychological vision follows a line of reasoning that in the last analysis is apologetic of humans doing evil.<sup>11</sup>

From a Judeo-Christian perspective, it is one thing to claim that humans have the possibility to do evil, and yet another thing to say that humans have an inclination to do evil (Fromm 1965, 19-20). “That I succumb to temptation,” Hugo Strandberg argues, “does not mean that the susceptibility to temptation must already have been there” (2016, 24). The first sense of invoking evil (occasionally falling for temptation) is bound to our understanding of ourselves as free ethical selves who can wrong other beings and must be responsible for our wrongdoing by knowing good from evil. In this sense, evil marks a place we should keep ourselves and others away from. The second sense of invoking evil (susceptibility to temptation) is that we are inclined or drawn to wrongdoing as a condition of our being. In terms of human self-understanding, they express quite different things, for in the first respect wrongdoing is ideally avoidable and in the other unavoidable.

Transformed into a metaphysics, both possibility and inclination to do evil can easily be redescribed as a susceptibility internal to our being.<sup>12</sup> It can be, for instance, made by the means of psychological, ahistorical claims following the logic that “the ‘foul beast’ is not in some remote place outside of us, it is within (Todorov 2010, 82).” But as Karl Jaspers argues, this common tendency to trace the horrors of the Holocaust “back to its source,” which is supposedly “the human essence,” whereby we assert that not only the Germans are fallen, but that evil “exists as a possibility in man as such,” is an evasive understanding of ourselves (Jaspers 2000, 94). In this line of thought, “German guilt is sometimes called the guilt of all: the hidden evil everywhere is jointly guilty of the outbreak of evil in this German place” (2000, 94). “The Germans were the first victims to this barbaric invasion,” which “the world permitted to happen” (2000, 89). This customary metaphysical response to evils done by the human hand is apologetic, as it asserts that evil is what no one is saved from. A metaphysical susceptibility to evil asserts that we are all victims of evil; whereas it was actualized in you it remains a potentiality in me. But what kind of response is susceptibility to evil in face of those who were murdered? As Hannah Arendt points out, “Where all are guilty, nobody is” (2003, 147). But the same thing could be said about being a victim.

In this light, an ethically clear-sighted understanding of evils done by the human hand is not to trivialize guilt or victimhood by the means of a metaphysical suscep-

<sup>11</sup> For a good discussion of this “realism” about human nature see (Bregman 2020).

<sup>12</sup> For a criticism of this tendency see (Strandberg 2016, 32). Some examples that come close to a general susceptibility to evil see (Bataille 1991, 18-19; Gleeson 2006, 267; Todorov 2010, 82; Hamblet 2014, 27-30).





tibility to evil, nor is it to escape my ethical implication as the posterity of those having done and suffered evil. It is also not to *identify* with the victim, since such identification would be no less unresponsive from identifying with the perpetrator (see Arendt 1994a, 402). As their posterity, I stand in relation to both victims and perpetrators, and I try to have an ethically clear-sighted relationship to past persons by seeing the horror of what has actually been done (see Moody-Adams 2017, 161). As Arendt says in reply to Eric Voegelin:

If I describe these [horrifying] conditions without permitting my indignation to interfere, I have lifted this particular phenomenon out of its context in human society and have thereby robbed it of part of its nature, deprived it of one of its important inherent qualities. (Arendt 1994a, 403; see also Arendt 1994b)

If it belongs to the conditions and deeds under scrutiny that they are inherently abhorrent, historicizing them under an ethical understanding is, with Arendt, not to express a moralizing sentimentality but rather “to describe the totalitarian phenomenon as occurring, not on the moon, but in the midst of human society” (1994a, 403). And to actually see the abhorrence of these deeds and the situations created, I have suggested, is to see the circumstances of death through the dead victim’s eyes, a perspective that is right before me in the perpetrators’ testimony.

## 7 Responsibility for the Dead

What does it mean to responsibly historicize evil deeds in the past and to do justice in thought and understanding to what real persons have done and suffered? This is, as Wyschogrod shows, an endless question of responsibility which springs from the existential realization that we speak in posterity about those who are now dead, about those who no longer can speak. The stories we tell about living and dead others, the stories that we who are the afterlife reiterate about the past, demand us to ask how we should stand with the ones we narrate and what it means to do them justice. Thus we bury and care about the dead in language and in thought through telling those who live after what it was that has happened to the dead. Through narrating and chronicling past others we seek an ethically clear-sighted way of narrating who we are and who we should be for coming generations, as we see what stories about ourselves we no longer conscientiously can reiterate. To do justice to the dead through what is testified to and told about them is, I have shown, our resisting to aestheticize the perpetrators and the victims, but it is also our resisting to think that the evils in our history are to be addressed as a metaphysical susceptibility internal to being human. This realization can only be invoked by seeing the circumstances of death from the victims’ perspective, from the perspective of those persons who have only us in posterity to testify to their continuously belonging to the same world as we who live on.

**Acknowledgements** I would like to thank Hugo Strandberg, Jonas Ahlskog, Kalle Pihlainen, Bennett Gilbert, Göran Torrkulla, Camilla Kronqvist, Ylva Gustafsson, Ada Elgabsi, Olof Bortz, as well as the editors and reviewers of *Zeitschrift für Ethik und Moralphilosophie* for their insightful suggestions to this article. This work has been conducted with financial support from Victoriastiftelsen.



**Funding** Open access funding provided by Abo Akademi University (ABO).

**Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

## References

- Agamben, Giorgio. 2008. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books.
- Ahlskog, Jonas. 2016. Michael Oakeshott and Hayden White on the Practical and the Historical Past. *Rethinking History* 20: 374–94.
- Ahlskog, Jonas. 2020. *The Primacy of Method in Historical Research: Philosophy of History and the Perspective of Meaning*. London: Routledge.
- Arendt, Hannah. 1994a. A Reply to Eric Voegelin. In *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn, 401–8. New York: Schocken Books.
- Arendt, Hannah. 1994b. Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding). In *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn, 307–27. New York: Schocken Books.
- Arendt, Hannah. 2003. Collective Responsibility. In *Responsibility and Judgement*, ed. Jerome Kohn, 147–58. New York: Schocken Books.
- Askenasy, Hans. 1978. *Are We All Nazis?* Secaucus: Lyle Stuart Inc.
- Bataille, Georges. 1991. Reflections on the Executioner and the Victim. *Yale French Studies* 79: 15–19.
- Benjamin, Walter. 2007. Theses on the Philosophy of History. In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, 253–67. New York: Schocken Books.
- Bloch, Marc. 1954. *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bloxham, Donald. 2020. *History and Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bregman, Rutger. 2020. *Humankind: A Hopeful History*, trans. Elizabeth Manton and Erica Moore. London: Bloomsbury.
- Brisson Susan. 2003. *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Browning, Christopher R. 1998. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Burke, Peter. 2015. *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School 1929–2014*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Butler, Judith. 2009. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.
- de Certeau, Michel. 1988. *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cowburn, John. 2012. *The Problems of Suffering and Evil*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.
- Dancy, Jonathan. 2004. *Practical Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Danto, Arthur. 1995. The Decline and Fall of Analytical Philosophy of History. In *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner, 70–88. London: Reaktion Books.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2006. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge.
- Elgabsi, Natan. 2017. The Ethical Presupposition of Historical Understanding: Investigating Marc Bloch's Methodology. *Culture and Dialogue* 5: 223–41.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1995. Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920-1922)*, ed. James Strachey, 65–144. London: Hogarth Press.
- Fritsch, Matthias. 2018. *Taking Turns With the Earth: Phenomenology, Deconstruction, and Intergenerational Justice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Fromm, Erich. 1965. *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.



- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2006. *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Continuum.
- Gaita, Raimond. 2004. *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*. London: Routledge.
- Gleeson, Andrew. 2006. Humanizing Evil-Doers. In *Judging and Understanding: Essays on Free Will, Narrative, Meaning and the Ethical Limits of Condemnation*, ed. Pedro Alexis Tabensky, 257–70. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Gustafsson, Ylva. 2014. *Interpersonal Understanding and Theory of Mind*. Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press.
- Gustafsson, Ylva. 2021. A Critical Analysis of Neurological Theories of Empathy in Healthcare. *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics* 14: 97–113.
- Hamblet, Wendy C. 2014. *Conceiving Evil: A Phenomenology of Perpetration*. New York: Algora Publishing.
- van der Heiden, Gert-Jan. 2019. *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Jaspers, Karl. 2000. *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. E. B. Ashton, intro. Joseph W. Koterski. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1999. *Critique of Pure Reason*, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Köhler, Thomas, Peter Römer, Simon Lengemann, and Hans Wupper-Tewes. 2019. “Ein Vierteljahrhundert nach Christopher Brownings „Ordinary Men“ – Perspektiven der neuen Polizei-Täterforschung und der Holocaust-Vermittlung.” [https://www.bpb.de/system/files/dokument\\_pdf/VtH%20Muenster%20Browning%20Taeterforschung%20Programm.pdf](https://www.bpb.de/system/files/dokument_pdf/VtH%20Muenster%20Browning%20Taeterforschung%20Programm.pdf) (accessed November 7 2022).
- Kronqvist, Camilla, and Natan Elgabsi. 2021. The Difficulty of Understanding: Complexity and Simplicity in Moral Psychological Description. *Scientia Moralitas* 6: 78–103.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1991. *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Maibom, Heidi L. 2020. *Empathy*. London: Routledge.
- Milgram, Stanley. 1974. *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. London: Tavistock.
- Moody-Adams, Michele. 2017. Moral Progress and Human Agency. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 20: 153–68.
- Neiman, Susan. 2002. *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Nichanian, Marc. 2009. *The Historiographic Perversion*, trans. Gil Anidjar. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Overy, Richard. 2014. ‘Ordinary Men,’ Extraordinary Circumstances: Historians, Social Psychology, and the Holocaust. *Journal of Social Issues* 70: 515–30.
- Pleasants, Nigel. 2018. Ordinary Men: Genocide, Determinism, Agency, and Moral Culpability. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 48: 3–32.
- Roth, Paul. 2004. Hearts of Darkness: ‘Perpetrator History’ and Why There is No Why. *History of the Human Sciences* 17: 211–51.
- Rothberg, Michael. 2019. *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ruin, Hans. 2018. *Being With the Dead: Burial, Ancestral Politics, and the Roots of Historical Consciousness*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Scheler, Max. 2017. *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath. London: Routledge.
- Schöttler, Peter. 1995. Mentalities, Ideologies, Discourses: On the ‘Third Level’ as a Theme in Social-Historical Research. In *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke, trans. William Templer, 72–115. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Stein, Edith. 1989. *On the Problem of Empathy*. Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications.
- Strandberg Hugo. 2015. *Self-Knowledge and Self-Deception*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Strandberg, Hugo. 2016. Is Pure Evil Possible? In *The Problem of Evil: New Philosophical Directions*, ed. Benjamin W. McCraw and Robert Arp, 23–34. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Strandberg, Hugo. 2021. *Forgiveness and Moral Understanding*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stueber, Karsten. 2006. *Rediscovering Empathy: Agency, Folk Psychology, and The Human Sciences*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Svendsen, Lars. 2010. *A Philosophy of Evil*, trans. Kerri A. Pierce. Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press.
- Tamm, Marek ed. 2015. *Afterlife of Events: Perspectives on Mnemohistory*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.



- Todorov, Tzvetan. 1999a. *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*, trans. Arthur Denner and Abigail Pollack. London: Wiedenfeld & Nicholson.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. 1999b. *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. 2010. *Memory as a Remedy for Evil*, trans. Gila Walker. London: Seagull Books.
- Weber, Max. 1949a. 'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy. In *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed Henry A. Shils and Edward A. Finsh, 49–112. New York: The Free Press.
- Weber, Max. 1949b. The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics. In *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed Henry A. Shils and Edward A. Finsh, 1–47. New York: The Free Press.
- Wyschogrod, Edith. 1998. *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wyschogrod, Edith. 2004. Representation, Narrative, and the Historian's Promise. In *The Ethics of History*, ed. David Carr, Thomas R. Flynn and Rudolf A. Makkreel, 28–44. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Wyschogrod, Edith. 2006. Memory, History, Revelation: Writing the Dead Other. In *Crossover Queries: Dwelling with Negatives, Embodying Philosophy's Others*, 248–62. New York: Fordham University Press.