

Individual and Collective Misfortune: Possibilities of Transcendence

Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies

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ABSTRACT

How did people overcome the massive misfortune of World War II? This essay primarily focuses on the experiences and later thought of Rudolf J. Siebert, a German author, who as an adolescent conscript and survivor of that war, turned into a prolific scholar and developed a moral high ground leading to a religious transcendence of the utter meaninglessness of large-scale evil. This author's lifework seems to have shaped an alternative identity as a person deeply committed to a different humanity and a revitalized religious faith, which appears to embody a model of spiritual transcendence. Others, M. Gandhi and N. Mandela for instance, much suffering notwithstanding, attempted to affect a cultural and/or a social version of the same in their countries. Sociologically, the paper discusses the implications of personal and social efforts for overcoming misfortune. In particular, it reasons about the primacy of the collective dimension of being human, yet, at the same time, it argues that the overcoming of doubt, anguish, and grief should be easier when disparity between personal and a collectively held frame of belief is slight, that is, when one can depend on broad collective resources.

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INTRODUCTION: OLD AND NEW MEMORIES OF WAR

2015 was some sort of a historic milestone for the greater part of the world. Seventy years have passed since World War II, which “has been the deadliest conflict in history in absolute terms of total dead.” 60 Million war deaths have been recorded, but its overall total may exceed 80 million.¹

Old and new memories of that dreadful war are the object matter of this paper. It is hard to imagine that any light could shine out of that inferno of darkness. Yet Rudolf J. Siebert, a young German Lieutenant, who almost miraculously survived, succeeded in that task. Having outlived the massacre and presently being in his late 80s, he has devoted whole his academic life to studying the mid-20th century German tragedy, the inequities of the Nazi regime, and the consequences of that horrific warfare and its inconceivable Jewish genocide by formulating a critical theory of society and religion.²

WW II ended in Europe May 7, 1945 with Germany’s total defeat. For the author-to-be, a better life began as prisoner of war. Thanks to his leadership role in the Catholic Youth Movement of his local parish, whose pastor he admired very much (Siebert 1993), he was recognized as anti-Nazi to the extent of receiving preferential treatment (Siebert 2010: 863; 1010). Still at the young age of 18—before he embarked on the study of theology in his own country—he was chosen for democratic re-education in the USA, to be followed later in 1953 with two more years of graduate study at Washington Catholic University. In 1962, after more study and teaching positions in Germany, the author and his wife—the granddaughter a mid-19th century German immigrant, settled in the US, where he engaged in university teaching, initially complimented with social work and political engagements. In this way, the author achieved a successful career as an esteemed university professor.³

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

What lessons have been learnt from the enormous amount of human suffering? How do variable links between the individual and the collective conditions/dimensions of living affect remembrance of evil, and how could this linking enable the transcendence of extreme injustice? How could the specter of the evil of war be countered today?

Seen personally and collectively, our paper may benefit from Japan’s war experience. Though culturally and religiously quite different from the West—and Japan’s specific human relations not with standing—psychology factors are similar. All living people inherit the same humanity.

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE TRAGEDY

Rudolf Siebert introduces his own painful story after almost a thousand pages of his grand opus, towards the end of Volume II (The *Manifesto*, chapters 21-22). Here, the theme of suffering stands central. Being only 14, teenager Siebert had a happenstance encounter with an old Jewish lady. In April 1942, the elderly woman got an order to report to the Nazi Headquarters, a huge building not far from Siebert’s high school he frequented by bicycle. As ‘destiny’ would have it, the chain of his bike had derailed and he was unable to get it in place. Pushing his bicycle, he neared the

grandmotherly woman, carrying two heavy suitcases she had to put on the walkway every now and then to rest. He offered her to take care of the luggage. On arrival at the building, a young, good-looking SS Officer scolded him severely for carrying the bags of a “Jewish pig.” The SS man promptly reported the case to Gymnasium’s Director for stern punishment. Yet, because the Nazi director got drafted in the army, it took never place. His Deputy, a Christian-Protestant humanist, too near-sighted to fit in the army, quietly dismissed the case.

The author could have told this uneventful if shocking event in half a page or so. Instead, he chose to dramatically enact it on a stage as it were, letting the old lady with the Yellow Star of David on her black coat, repeatedly appear on the scene in two consecutive chapters (981-2; 984; 988; 995; 996-7; 1002; 1015; 1039).

Again, the description of the author’s dramatic, nearly fateful war experience is very special. At 15, he had been drafted to be part of a FLAK unit, targeting warplanes. At 17, he joined an infantry army division. After five months of combat in the Taunus Mountains, northwest of Frankfurt—his home town—he fought the incoming tank division of General Patton, at first with some success, but his unit got almost totally destroyed and he found himself on top a wooded hill, alone with two fatally wounded comrades, who asked for a priest. Late at night, he was able to get one from the nearby village, as well as to take the old man back to his parish house. It was thereafter, when crossing a country road that a team of SS men on a three-wheel motorcycle spotted him, a soldier without his rifle, a sure sign that he was a deserter. Immediately, they started the paper work for his execution. If his General, whom Lieutenant Siebert knew personally, had not happened to appear almost miraculously on the scene, he would have been shot and hanged on a tree (1004-7).

Chapter 22 comes closest to the peak of collective suffering: the *shoa* of the Jews, but mainly in the form of ‘afterthoughts’ expressed by Jewish intellectuals. In the 1930s, they examined the causes of the WW I. After the second, they racked their brains to find a shade of religious meaning about the horrible reality that unfolded at Hitler’s death-camps, “summed up under the name of Auschwitz” (959).

IMPLICATIONS OF DISASTER

Germany’s disaster was self-inflicted, but historically it is vital to see the linkage between individual involvement of its main actors and the collective conditions within Germany, a central European country. From the middle of the 1930’s, after the debacle of WW I, and the Great Depression, the country had been on its way to recovery, restoring its old glory. Gradually, Hitler had come to power and established the Third Reich with his totalitarian Nazi regime. Germans began to see their homeland community as the greatest nation on earth (*Deutschland über alles*)—for many a sense of pride and euphoria perhaps. From the beginning however, Hitler accused the Jews of being the cause of the previous war. He ordered them to get out of the country or get deported to ‘labor camps.’ When the war worsened from 1942 on, Hitler’s began to convert his work camps into death camps. The *shoa*, the worst of *collective* human suffering, was on its way toward its dreadful climax. The common people could not know. Certainly, this is also the case of the author at his young age. As he himself avows, he could not have known or imagined that his government was utterly criminal. The Catholic Center Party had made Hitler a legitimate dictator (1007). Yet, at the same time, it is hard to believe that the senior citizenry was unable to see the

black clouds gathering at the horizon. Not only did the marginalization of the Jews begin soon, others who dissented and opposed the Nazi regime were sent to concentration camps as early as 1933 (Dachau). Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland were seized in 1938-9.

When losing the war became inevitable, when Hitler, his wife Eva Braun, and many of his staff killed themselves April 30, 1945, when the people got the news from Auschwitz and learned the many names of the places where Jews were exterminated, the author and many surviving Germans must have felt enormously dumfounded and sad. Most inconceivably, six million Jews had to pay the ultimate ransom, for which they got only fear, pain, and despair in return. Aside from this so-called Holocaust, Hitler's political expansion-drive also resulted in the killing of 27 million communists (3; 1347; 1502). Now, their own country was completely ruined, while also around six million fellow Germans had lost their lives. After the *Führer* settled his own final solution with cyanide and his body converted into smoke as he did to the scores of his Jewish victims, thousands of other Germans committed suicide. Even the members of the *Hitler Jugend* (youth) had their cyanide capsules at a ready (Wikipedia, title Aug. 20, 2014). Guilty as he certainly was, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels killed himself, together with his wife and their six innocent children—this too is immensely tragic. What might have been their last feelings: sorrow, or guilt, or just spite for the absolute failure of their pride and arrogance?

PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE REMEMBRANCE

Japan's tragedy of WW II may have been even more severe. Due to its island isolation, Japan has been able to develop a compact cultural and religious identity as a nation blessed by the gods, represented by its unbroken imperial dynasty. Being polytheistic, freedom of religious faith was respected, but devotion and dedication to the Emperor was considered to be a *moral* duty before and during the war (Bachika 2010; Shinya 2010). Loyalty included giving up one's life. Having never been conquered by outside forces during its long history, many Japanese firmly believed their country to be invincible. In case of partial military defeats, suicide was a moral responsibility too.

Very different from Germany, Japan's Emperor declared that the war had ended Aug. 15, 1945. As is shown on television every year in August, those who listened to the radio announcement near the Imperial Palace did so on their knees, head touching the pavement. Also in contrast to Germany, most Japanese army people could not believe they lost the war. Many thought Japan could revert to guerilla tactics involving common folks, or, if that could not be done, commit massive suicide. Happily, some well-educated officers pondered a new beginning. They won out (Japan NHK TV's evening broadcast, Aug. 16, 2015). Despite the enormous destruction of the country and the terrible double atomic shock, from that time on, Japan embarked on a new start and new beliefs, beginning with willy-nilly making ends meet. Practically, Germany did the same.

However, the practical collective situation does not obliterate individual memories of severe pain. For instance, the yearly commemorations of the A-bombing at Hiroshima and Nagasaki of August 6 and 9 focus on frightful personal recollections of survivors, who are still suffering. Television stations recount the objective features of the A-bombs: the altitude of the planes that dropped them, the heat produced (between 3000 and 4000 degree Celsius), but they always continue with stories of survivors who lived or worked over one kilometer or so from the epicenter. These persons recall vivid recollections of blinding light, the fearsome mushroom cloud, the awfully red sky during that fateful day, and the black rain the following morning. In its aftermath, thousands of people, young and old, have suffered from mutilated body parts and festering wounds. Many died

soon from radiation related diseases. For years, others have fought the trauma of mutilation by engaging in anti-war movements and activities for world peace. They mostly do not question or denounce the US decision of dropping the A-bombs nor Japan's war guilt. Their reminiscences concern personal experiences.

Returning to the *Manifesto*, how was its author able to surmount individual suffering? How did he overcome eventual feelings of guilt for having been involved in the extreme brutality of his beloved homeland? He barely escaped execution as an alleged deserter. This disastrous bad luck must have extended at times into severe distress and acute anxiety. Yet, except for the account of his own misfortune, personal suffering of the author has no central place in the *Manifesto*. Given that its three volumes are a recent publication, one may suppose that old wounds healed long ago. The Acknowledgements of the *Manifesto* provide a clue. Here, the author greatly dwells on his later realization of a sense of purpose and happiness (The *Manifesto*: Appendix B., titled: "Special Considerations and Inspirations" 390-413).

Most acknowledgements concern scholarly backing. The *Manifesto* praises personal support. His whole family, all of his friends and colleagues have assisted him in his mission, co-laboring as it were for his life-long task of making meaningful again what was an abyss of meaninglessness.

COMPARABLE SOCIAL ACHIEVEMENTS

With respect to individual-social misfortune a comparison with other eminent personalities like Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) is informative, at least in part. Both of them are acknowledged worldwide as national heroes, who astoundingly suffered for their humanitarian causes, but in their later lives they accomplished vital social improvements for their countries (Cf. Wikipedia. August 2014. *Mahatma Gandhi; Nelson Mandela*).

M. Gandhi is known for his socio-cultural ideal of nonviolence (*ahimsa*). Beginning with opposition against apartheid in South Africa and followed by over thirty years of civil disobedience towards the British overlords in his own country, he spent many years in prison in both places, but later, living a very simple life, he never gave up the hard struggle against the arrogant occupiers of India, working for the alleviation of the poverty of his people and the abolition of various forms of discrimination.

Similarly, N. Mandela who, after much suffering for being jailed during 27 years, emerged as a forgiving gifted politician. He turned the stakes in South Africa's politics, altering stretched-out misfortune into new opportunities for his country and himself. Mandela was most successful, while Gandhi had to face much greater difficulties in a multi-racial, multi-cultural India—on 30 January 1948, at 78 he was murdered by a Hindu nationalist. Evidently, Gandhi and Mandela are different personalities, but as young lawyers, they were socially thriving before fate struck. Their initial success probably translated in later strength.

INTERCONNECTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE LIFE

For physical growth and inner awareness alike, all living things exist in, and depend on their environment, but how exactly personal and social life are linked is unclear. Social science tells us that humans are humans within a particular national or ethnic culture. In the context of personal

relations personality plays the greater role, but in public life deep-seated culture is the major factor at work. Thus, both personality and culture are equally of vital importance. Yet, the primacy of either dimension tends to shift in particular situations. In studies of culture, religion and in history as well, invoking various points of view is a common approach. A famous phenomenologist puts it as follows.

Should the starting-point for the understanding of history be ideology, or politics, or religion, or economics? Should we try to understand a doctrine from its overt content, or from the psychological make-up and the biography of its author? We must seek understanding from all these angles simultaneously, everything has meaning, and we shall find this same structure of being underlying all relationships. All these views are true provided they are not isolated, that we delve deeply into history and reach the unique core of existential meaning which emerges in each perspective” (Merleau-Ponty. 1969: 27).

The wide-ranging scope of the *Manifesto* and its multiple perspectives lend them selves to further investigation and alternative interpretations. Assuming that the collective dimension has greater explanatory significance over and above the personal, let us follow once again the author’s narration of WW II.

NARRATION OF WW II CALAMITY AGAIN

If personal hurt is not at issue in the *Manifesto*, description of German’s tragedy is minimal too. At times, to Germans and non-Germans alike, Hitler appeared as a politically shrewd opportunist and a successful economic strategist as well (p. 1160-1), but, morally, he became a man-monster. This term appears in psychoanalytic literature on Hitler’s life (E. Fromm. 1973: 417, 457, 469). Two concubinary women referred to Hitler as “a monster.” One was his niece and the other a movie actress to whom he behaved respectively as a sadist and a masochist. Both liberated themselves from the monstrous man by means of suicide. Several other ladies contemplated and tried to take their lives by the same means—accorded to her diary, including Eva Braun—but somehow failed.

Evidently, Hitler was not born a monster, but the sources mention that an inveterate narcissism was the core of his character. It prevented the formation of kind feelings towards others. Instead, he developed a destructive urge described as a “necrophilous” mindset that came about as follows. As an infant between 3 and 5 of age, little Adolf learned to dominate his mother, who was his father’s second young wife. She overindulged her first child. The kid would throw fierce tantrums when his every wish was not met. In elementary school the bratty boy did well, but he also learned to be a tough leader of schoolmates playing games of Indians and soldiers. In secondary school he became a virtual dropout, detesting common learning. His dream was becoming an artist-painter but he twice failed entrance examinations. World War I turned out to be an occasion to prove him self as an exemplary and daring soldier when he was in his mid-twenties. The lost war gradually inspired his bigger dream of becoming a politician. Towards that goal he wrote “*Mein Kampf*.” He would revenge German’s defeat—and his own earlier failures as well. Almost unbelievably, for a short span of time he became the master of Europe. His public appearances before and during the World War II show an eccentric angry man, but actually he was a shrewd politician, quite sensible towards associates, while also gentle and courteous towards ladies of higher standing (E. Fromm. 411- 485).

Hitler's character only indicates his inclinations deriving from his narcissism, which, in some way, were the cause of massive forms of aggression. Part of his thought on war planning—too much to mention—and his actions proved how monstrous a man he turned into.

However, the *Manifesto* does not treat Hitler with such scorn and contempt. Rather than ethically, he is denounced for his thought that followed the “*aristocratic principle of nature*,” turning toward extreme racism. In order to survive and thrive, predators have to be predators. If this strategy fails, they become prey. When defeated, Hitler saw this as his fate (525- 6).

The *Manifesto* exhibits a collective scenario. It focuses on embedded forms of social thinking: fascism, neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism, which are bedfellows of capitalism (cf. chapters 1, 19, and 20). According to the author, it is these types of thought that caused the antagonistic tendencies of modern societies. One might want absolute denouncement of radical evil and its perpetrators, but the author's main goal is theory formation concerning the makings of societies. To repeat, the author's first social-science aim is establishing a critical theory of society. His second goal is examining the plight of religion, in order to elaborate a parallel theory of this specific subject, including the means of overcoming the feelings of despair and meaninglessness.

In any case, it is not easy to come to terms with the confluence of good and evil in personal and social life, except perhaps religiously. According to the author's earlier description of his profound vision of socio-religious Future III, in the ideal state of societies, religion and social science are no longer feuding, all antagonisms are reconciled, from race to gender to social class and economic injustice, from personal autonomy to universal solidarity. Yet he concludes: “While global Future III is very desirable, it is unfortunately not very probable or possible under present world-historical circumstances...” (356). A similar statement runs as follows. “While the critical theorists are open for the offer of Divine grace, forgiveness, and redemption...they also speak for those who have lost their religious faith...after the limitless cruelties of Auschwitz and Treblinka... Hiroshima and Nagasaki...” A few lines down in the same paragraph he notes: “Maybe some things are too cruel in order to be forgiven, and a new beginning may not be possible” (498).

THE QUANDARY OF GOOD AND EVIL

Theoretically, the linkage between good and evil is problematic. Existentially, good and evil are each other's opposite. They cause totally different states of mind that cannot be discussed on the same level of objectivity. This is the core of the matter. Those states of mind consist of good or bad feelings that easily come about in one and the same person, depending on inner and outside circumstances. Humanly caused evil is hardest to bear. One wants to undo the occurrence of evil and get rid of the awful feelings. People are likely to redress this kind of suffering by invoking punishment for the aggressor, but even the severest penalty cannot restore lost happiness or undo enacted evil. For instance, German Jewish intellectuals argued at length that the A. Eichmann trial and execution was an act of revenge that effected no atonement for his numerous victims at all (Siebert 2010: 971-80). One could argue that, existentially, evil cannot be transcended. The author affirms that only faith can do the job. Specific religious attitudes can effect sublimation of severe injustice and grief.

Moreover, good and bad feelings are totally different. Nothing must be done about what is good, except enjoying it and being grateful. A touching story of WW II exemplifies this point. It recounts the highly unusual happening of an experienced German fighter pilot who, Dec. 20, 1943

had already downed about two dozen 474 four-engine Allied bombers in the skies above Bremen, north German, but suddenly changes his mind and decides to rescue a badly damaged American bomber with bullet holes all over its hull—he wondered how it was able to stay aloft. Because almost defenseless, the German pilot goes alongside the wobbling plane, looking at its crew in despair as if waiting for the final blow, while trying to care for their wounded buddies. He decided to let them go, even escorting the enemy plane above a German flak unit that looked on incredulously but did not react. Christmas was near. Remembering a brother pilot who had been downed a year earlier, he spared those helpless enemies. By doing so, the German Samaritan gave up his chance of winning a Knight Cross, a medal of honor for knocking out a large amount of enemy planes. His sudden impulse epitomizes an act of personal overcoming of collective hate. A recent book about this wondrous story summarized that happening in its title: *A Higher Call* (Makos, Adam & Larry Alexander). 2013.⁴

Reading even the summary of the book moves one to tears. One thing is clear. Had the German pilot acted rationally, following orders, he would have gotten his silver Cross but also a bad conscience for the rest of his life. In 1990, due to fortunate circumstances, after almost 50 years, he was able to meet the American pilot he rescued and two surviving partners. Thanks to the German foe, these three Americans were able to have a family, children and grand children. They expressed their gratefulness to their savior, holding hands and embracing him for quite some time, all four of them sobbing.

Organizations must build on rationality. Individual people, alongside reason, have feelings that may get on top in personal relations: empathy, admiration, affection, if also—depending on circumstances—feelings of unhappiness, disillusion, and disgust. The latter are dead weight. Hitler and his henchmen stood by their political, organizational goals: exterminating as many Jews as possible and playing boss over neighboring countries. The author of the *Manifesto* repeats that they did not pity their hapless enemies nor felt any remorse. ‘Barbarous corporatism’ is the term he uses to describe fascism, but it applies also to the ideology of liberalism that allows the powerful to exploit the powerless even today (Siebert 2010: 812). The corporatism of the Nazi leadership was barbarous in an extreme fashion. They never repented any of their massive killings of Jews, Russians, and numerous others that stood in their way (1032-4).

The difference between good and evil is clear-cut interpersonally, but much less so on collective levels. As was the case of Germany and Japan, the conditions and motives for initiating war are complex. When war is over, the winning side decides on punishments and measures of compensation of war damages. When these are in place, the matter is settled collectively. However, ill feelings of unjust treatment and personal suffering tend to linger on for decades. The problem of the so-called sex-slaves misused by the Japanese army is a case in point. A few survivors once in a while demonstrate in front of Japanese Embassies in South Korea, the Philippines, and Japan’s Office of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo. The horrors of war are enormous in scale but getting again and again personally maltreated and abused with respect to what is supposed to be the core of intimacy and individual bliss is a dreadful crime too.

POST-WAR JAPAN

Since 1949, Japan has become a parliamentary democracy with a Constitution that separates State and religion, and further renounces the use of military force. Enabled by its post-war

economic recovery, Japan has made ample compensation for war damages to neighboring countries, and its Prime Ministers have sincerely apologized time and again concerning military aggression (Wikipedia. June 2015. *World War II Casualties: Post-war events and reactions, Official apologies, Compensation, etc.*)

At the height of its recovery in 1985, Japanese politicians perhaps endeavored to enhance nationalism—and full confidence as a sovereign nation—by making public visits to their national shrine, while reassuring commitment to peace. Nevertheless, Japan’s neighbors are critical about this matter (Wikipedia. June 2015. *Controversies surrounding Yasukuni Shrine*).

Seven decades after WW II, politicians in China and South Korea still denounce Japan for its ‘bungled view of history’! Some European pundits join in the dispute on the side of the accusers. At the 70th anniversary of D. Day (Wikipedia. June 2015. *Normandy Landings*) European Heads of State, including German chancellor Angela Merkel, held a memorial that became an occasion to criticize Japan for not taking the same posture. A short Internet article about this topic shows a picture of Japanese Parliamentarians who, headed by a Shinto priest in white robes, worship at the *Yasukuni Shrine*. Supported by some recent European literature on the subject, the article lambasted Japan’s revisionism that started the 1980s, mentioning that Japan’s attitudes about WW II look insincere, and that official apologies miss the point: “The revisionist right hijacked history” (Lehmann J.P. 2015)⁵

With respect to so-called war criminals and worshiping at their national shrine, most Japanese take the internally religious point of view without squarely focusing on Shinto. They believe that the war dead acted out of love for their country, and therefore are rightly revered at the Yasukuni Shrine. A pertinent example is Naval Commander Yamamoto Isoroku (1884-1943), who proposed the attack on Pearl Harbor, because he sensed that a war with the USA had become inevitable. Having studied and worked in the US for several years, initially Yamamoto had opposed the tripartite pact with Hitler and Mussolini, in order to avoid an unwinnable war with the USA—being killed in a fighter plane attack, he remains highly respected. (Kodansha. 1993: 1729). More suggestive even, most Japanese do not see Army General Tojo Hideki as a war criminal, because ‘legally’ he did not commit any crime. He accepted his indictment for having been unable to avoid Japan’s destruction (he was hanged 23 Dec. 1948).

For similar reasons, the author of the *Manifesto* is a faithful son of his home country. Descriptions of his wartime country represent the view of an insider—outsiders tend to advance black-and-white pictures. Thus, keeping his German distinctiveness should be permissible. From elementary school on he was educated in the atmosphere and the burgeoning ideas of his country’s nationalism, but his Christian faith remained firm and he kept his distance from Nazism. Soon after the war, he embarked on the study of theology, but subsequently he turned to philosophy and the social sciences. He gradually became one of the leading heirs of German thought—he developed an early interest in philosophy already in middle school, after a happenstance introduction to Hegel. His weightiest references come from enlightenment philosophy (in particular G. W. Hegel and K. Marx) as well as from the most famous scholars the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research: Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Theodor W. Adorno (1903-69), Walter Benjamin (1892-1944). At the same time, the author is quite familiar with his country’s literary writers, poetic literature, recent philosophers and religious writers as well.

THEORIES: INSTANCES OF COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT

Reading the *Manifesto*, at times I have wondered why the author, with exception of his narration of minor personal experiences and the political doings in his adopted country and elsewhere, he seldom argues in his own name, building on earlier articles and books, as most social-science writers use to do. In other words, the *Manifesto* is an epic *opus* that reveals a world in its own right so to speak. Not the author, but the work itself stands out. His references to his prior work disappear in a wealth of other references. The author paraphrases what his sources mention, carefully acknowledging them in many lines, cramped with references. Almost every page has three to four lines in brackets with ten to fifteen references. More than ten lines of references are not exceptional. In a few instances, the greater part of the text consists of references. For instance, the section “From Modernity to Post-modernity” has 4 pages 3 of which are references (1538-42; cf. also 1542-4; 1557-8 and 1568-70).

One could speculate that the author’s purpose was to represent his work as a collective enterprise. A collective declaration should be much more forceful than the voice of one person for condemning societal wrongs that lead to enormous collective evil. Rehabilitation of the Jews who were Hitler’s archenemies serves the same purpose. In identifying with them, the author re-validates their honor. Besides, he shares with the Jewish philosophers the same Judeo-Christian religious thought.

LIVING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Since the middle of the previous century, Western societies have changed a great deal for the better, educationally, economically, politically, and culturally. Education has expanded to the extent of making higher education or professional training available to about one third of the younger generation. Economic up and downs notwithstanding, affluence is a major characteristic in this so-called first world. Retail shops, shopping malls, and department stores are stocked to capacity with affordable goods, from numerous kinds of ready-made foodstuff, to countless kinds of clothing, footwear, to cosmetics and numerous goods for body care. Politics in those countries are more or less balanced. Political public figures keep talking to one another. War among stable nations has become all but impossible, but it remains a menace in regions with festering ethnic conflicts or where the gap between the have and the have-nots seems unmanageable.

The conditions of culture are less easily assessed. Popular leisure culture is globalizing among the younger generations, together with the goods of affluence, but not so national and ethnic cultures. For example, were it not that these cultures remain separate and antagonistic, the young folks of China, Korea, and Japan could blend into each other’s nationality, the more so because physical differences among them are minimal. Yet, world religious cultures remain highly diverse. Some of them foster revengeful fanatics who train faithful followers for suicide missions to maim and kill scores of blameless individuals accidentally present at public places of assault.

So, social life has improved considerably in the countries afflicted by WW II. The greater part of their populations being born after 1945 have no personal memory of that dreadful era. This means that daily life itself has obliterated past misfortune. Just by growing up and envisioning a comfortable life, most people do enjoy daily living as long as family life does not break down and no incurable diseases strike. Yet, how safe are modern affluent societies? Industrial pollution of air, water, and land is problematic at many places, and natural catastrophes, earthquakes for instance occur in many parts of the world. Again, large-scale societal problems too exist due to the use of

nuclear energy. However, apart from catastrophic mishaps, nuclear weaponry constitutes the greater danger. According to related statements, approximately 15,850 nuclear weapons fill stockpiles worldwide, one fourth of which are operational. Present-day W88 warheads on US Trident II submarines have 30 times larger explosive force than those dropped on Japan. A United-Nations treaty for abolishing those weapons altogether has been discussed, but nuke-nations disagree. Instead, according to the same sources, the USA intends to spend \$ 1 trillion over the next 10 years on the replacement of its abominable dangerous stuff (Pax Christi International. Aug. 2015)⁶

Visiting Hiroshima last May 27, US President Obama performed a sensible job remembering the enormous suffering of WW II, pledging efforts to decrease and ultimately eliminate the dreadful nuclear arsenal. Though seemingly heartfelt, Obama nonetheless sounded as being unable to change the status quo, which means that, except for a minority of people in various countries including Japan, it seems that the grave lessons of WW II have not been learnt.

What could be done to increase peace among all nations? It is clear that only collective decision-making could end the nuclear madness of the present age. How and when will the awareness of the all-out necessity of world peace come to fruition? Value research might play a role for improving interpersonal/social relations (Bachika R. & Schulz M. (eds.) 2011; Lindner E. 2006; 2009; 2010)⁷ but also research in multi-media communications stands to become a greater force. Enterprising individuals using the new social media on the Internet (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others) communicate with millions of people, launching a multitude of thoughts. Yet, more important probably are the Web movements that endeavor to promote world peace.⁸

Among other things, investigating these activities could focus on how great diversity of experience and thought could be scaled down to unify *individual* and *collective awareness* of societal curses in order to muster strength for eliminating them.

Though somewhat different and not lined out in that way in the *Manifesto*, taken apart, these the two perspectives of *individual* and *collective* data concerning misfortune could be succinctly summarized more or less as in the following sections.

COLLECTIVE TRANSCENDENCE OF SUFFERING

With his view of the future of religion, the author of the *Manifesto* extensively discussed the possibility of a collective transcendence for humankind, which he firmly framed at the end of both volume II and volume III of his opus. Religiology is the term he uses for his new understanding of religion in a social context.

The author's in-depth vision of religion moves beyond Jewish and Christian theology. It constitutes a radical critique of traditional supernatural faith, but, by no means, a rejection of that faith. More to the point, the dialectical character of the problem dimly reveals a solution. The annihilation of the European Jews, the worst of purposely afflicted human suffering ever, is the *aporia* of human and religious meaninglessness towards which all theology remains utterly powerless—"a cipher or sign theology" (Siebert 2010: 1023). However, "[T]he murderer must not triumph over the innocent victim, at least not ultimately." (868, 1345). If earthly courts cannot vindicate innocent victims, belief in a heavenly Last Judgment comes close to a religious redemption. The author summed up his insight as follows.

According to the dialectical religiology, informed by historical idealism and materialism, man becomes man only in so far as he transcends through ethics and morality, art, religion and philosophy, nature and himself toward the non-reified, demythologized, un-

humanized, wholly Other than the darkness and evil, force, violence, and terror present in nature as well as in society and history (1045).

Evidently, this vision implies that religion (in the singular) cannot remain the same as it has been. Following up on his sources, the author looks for visionary images of times to come, discussing three alternative states of religion in connection with societal structures at specific times. He puts his hope on “Alternative Future III.” This is characterized by the reconciliation of personal sovereignty and universal solidarity. Thus, religion may survive as “...a post-theistic, critical, a-dogmatic and non-authoritarian religion...in which not only personal autonomy and universal solidarity, but also *the sacred and the profane* will be reconciled” (p. 1107, emphasis added). Thus, the author’s understanding of religious potential is indeed farsighted. The religion of the future will be ideal in any and all human respects.

INDIVIDUAL TRANSCENDENCE: A ROSE IN THE CROSS

Organizations and theoretical systems of thought are characterized by logic and a set of rules. As such, these are life-less creations. However worked out well and evocative of ideal life, theoretical assertions have no inherent efficiency. Collective transcendence is a mere possibility. In contrast, growth of human personality is unique. Only living persons, who have a developing mental life, can grow in decency, friendliness, kindness, and eventually holiness—if also in the opposite direction.

If anything can sum up the sincerest thought the author of the *Manifesto*, his love and his faith—and his view of overcoming individual misfortune as well—it may be the image of a rose that the author had carved as a decoration onto the upper part of the tombstone for his beloved spouse, which he designed for himself too (Siebert. 2010: 392; 1326). It is made of a solid piece of brown-reddish rock, somewhat curvy and smoothly polished. It stands like a human figure near the top of a grassy and a little wooded hill-slope, used as a burial ground, not far from the author’s home. Actually, “a rose in a cross” appears at several places in the *Manifesto* (25; 28; 190, 375, 470, 865-6). This image originated from an inspiration by Dante Alighieri and Martin Luther that Hegel interpreted as “the Rose of Reason, of the Divine Logos.” For Hegel, a rose came to symbolize the possibility of overcoming the negativity of suffering, transforming it into “creative negativity.” Harm and bereavement as such cannot invert into a sense of wellbeing, but with unswaying faith, people may produce resilience and spiritual strength, unrelenting hope for what looks utterly hopeless.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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sociology of religion and related problems of culture and values. Latest publications: Religion and Politics in Present-Day Japan (edited monograph) in *Politics and Religion* Journal, No. 1/2010 (pp. 7-66). Publisher: The Center for Study of Religion and Religious Tolerance, Belgrade University, Serbia. Values and Culture in the Social Shaping of the Future (a monograph) edited together with M. Schulz, in *Current Sociology*, 59-2, 2011 (pp. 107-274), Journal of the ISA.

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- (6) *Normandy Landings*. June 2015.

NOTES

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- ¹ Cf. Wikipedia. June 2015, *World War II Casualties*: between 22 and 30 million military deaths; 19 to 30 million civilian victims of military action; deaths due to related diseases: 19 to 25 million.
 - ² Rev. of Siebert: *Manifesto of the Critical Theory of Society and Religion*: Brill, Leiden 2010. In *The Politics and Religion Journal*, Vol. IX, Spring Issue, 2015:127-133.
<http://politicsandreligionjournal.com/>
 - ³ The author seems to have reached a high point in his career when, together with his wife, he established a course for critically studying society and religion at the Inter-University Center for Post-Graduate Studies, at Dubrovnik, Croatia in 1975. (Siebert: 2010: 397-9; 867-8).
 - ⁴ From a note about this book by Wendell Bell, Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Sociology, Yale University.
 - ⁵ Lehmann Jean-Pierre, emeritus professor of international political economy at IMD: International Institute for Management Development, a business school located in Lausanne, Switzerland.
 - ⁶ Pax Christi International: *70 Years Inspiring Peace*. Brussels, Aug. 2015. Cf. also Editorial Staff of NCR (National Catholic Reporter): US bombing anniversary: *Demand disarmament*, by Christians marching to Hiroshima's Peace Park, 5 Aug.2015.

⁷ Evelin Lindner is Founding President of *Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies* initiated in 1991: a trans-disciplinary fellowship of academics, activists, and practitioners who discuss means for ending humiliating practices and promoting equal dignity for all. Cf. Website: <http://www.humiliationstudies.org>

⁸ The following are [non-profit Web movements laboring for a better world](#).

1. *World Beyond War*: A global movement to end all wars: info@worldbeyondwar.org
2. *Global Futures Studies and Research* (a US non-profit organization): <http://www.millennium-project.org/millennium/201516SOF.html>
3. *Global Harmony Association* (GHA) originated in St. Petersburg, Russia. GHA has a Web site in 15 languages. <http://www.peacefromharmony.org>, [@ghapeace3](https://www.facebook.com/ghapeace3), [@freelists.org](https://www.freelists.org)
4. *Avaaz (Le Monde en Action)*, a fully private organization, counting over 2 million followers. avaaz@avaaz.org.
5. info@rootsaction.org “RootsAction is an online to galvanize people who are committed to economic fairness, equal rights, civil liberties, environmental protection – and defunding endless wars.”
6. <http://www.theworldsstage.tv> The World Stage TV is “An Interactive Global Media Collective (“People Powered - Community Driven.” It has a part time staff of 5 people serving over 2 million readers and users worldwide).