

Cheryl O'Brien  
Professors Keller and Humstone  
Module 3 Quiz Readings Summaries/Outlines  
RELI 4500/AMST 4500  
July 12, 2014

### Reading-*After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights*

In *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights*, Robert Meister provides his interpretation and analysis of a specific human rights politics that follows evil, "especially the evil of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" (1). The author explains that "After Evil" addresses the period of time "that comes before justice" when the urgency of justice is postponed (10). Meister declares the objective of his book is to keep the urgency of justice "alive" (19).

#### 1. Introduction

In the Introduction, Meister provides the basis for his discussions, arguments, and conclusions that he focuses on in his book. The author raises thought provoking issues for the reader to consider. For example, he questions the true significance of President Clinton's remarks "Never Again" at the opening of the Holocaust Museum, when we consider the genocide that has occurred since in Bosnia and other countries. According to Meister, his book explores "the temporal dimensions of human rights-the pasts they bring to closure, the futures they foreclosed" (7). Ten important points discussed by Meister in the Introduction include:

1. Contemporary human rights concerns often "seek to postpone large-scale redistribution" in contrast to past human rights campaigns that intended to accelerate social equality (1).
2. Human Rights advocates changed their focus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century from "perpetrators of atrocity" to "third parties" who did not adequately support human rights and now are considered part of the outcome (2).
3. A changed global situation existed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that impacted changes in the extent of global powers and politics involved in considering human rights. Human Rights Discourse (especially after fall of communism) "world community should intervene *when it can* to prevent...evils that it failed to prevent" ...in the past. (3) (Meister questions failure of "international community" to become involved in Auschwitz or Rwandan genocide)
4. Meister discusses the conflicts associated with forgiveness and vengeance (issues-surviving victims "have duty to take vengeance," but "vengeance leads to a cycle of future vengeance." Forgiveness is associated with failure to remember (8).
5. Meister discusses the significance of "Before Justice Comes." He uses the analogy of St. Paul's consideration of the time between the Resurrection and the return of Christ when new sins will be considered differently from earlier sins "that have been pardoned" and will "be judged by a different standard" (10).

6. Contemporary version of human rights “looks for more time for those who fear it may be too late.” (global warming-US as beneficiary of global warming is provided with a “second chance” to make changes and will be “judged differently” for these new changes undertaken after the need for change has been recognized) (13).
7. Meister focuses on “changing temporalities, in which claims of justice are made and contested.” (impacts on closure of evils of Nazism, slavery, and apartheid questioned)(14)
8. Meister introduces concept of a “revolution against” a form of social organization. He uses a metaphor of a “giant labor camp-such as a plantation, mine, factory, or prison.” (use of labor metaphor for production. He considers questions “who benefits and how benefits accumulate”)(14)
9. Meister questions whether specific perpetrators should be prosecuted (impact serves to give amnesty to others-example Nuremberg)(17).
10. Meister concludes justice is an “intertemporal problem (the supersession of one time by another) and not simply an interpersonal problem (both aspects apparent in recent global issues) (19).

## 2. Chapter 3-Living On

In Chapter 3, Meister maintains that “transitional justice is concerned with the temporality of justice-what *will have* happened if the past is properly understood: what *would have happened* had we known then what we now understand (84).” In addition to the issues Meister discusses concerning the Civil War, we can add the placement of Japanese Americans in relocation centers, such as the Relocation Center at Heart Mountain, as another relevant example.

Meister contends that “intertemporal reconciliation” makes the absence of justice today “more acceptable...than when evil prevailed” (84). The author describes how transitional justice involves a state of time that “can be of indefinite length.” Meister argues that this results largely for the benefit of “ongoing beneficiaries” and that “former victims do not become the new beneficiaries” (85). Meister discusses three different interpretations of the Fourteenth Amendment. He present one view of the Fourteenth Amendment, that he attributes to Lincoln, “as an instrument of national recovery from a traumatic history...with the purpose to go forward now on a common moral footing-not because the past has been forgiven or forgotten, but because continuing struggles against an evil that is gone is no longer appropriate” (94). Ten important points Meister discusses in Chapter 3 include:

1. Meister argues that “the U.S. experience of prolonging the transition from slavery has both a positive and negative prototype for recent attempts to end evil by postponing justice.” (the efforts of justice for victims of slavery suspended for almost 100 years and “remain unfinished today”) (83).
2. The U.S. failed to present a formal moral narrative after the Civil War concerning the impacts of slavery and civil issues (unlike more recent transitional events or issues) (84).

3. Contrast between transitional justice and revolution. Transitional justice involves expansion of transitional time (involves recovery, reconstruction, redemption, and rebirth). Revolution involves immediate demand for justice (86).
4. Lincoln legacy elevated Americans above the “cycle of guilt and recrimination” ... “from a sense of being unwilling perpetrators of evil, first to recognize that we are all victims, and then to acceptance of the common national identity as survivors” (87).
5. Lincoln’s perspective of national slavery issues-nature of problem is to help nation recover from guilt,” not to correct wrongs for individual victims (88).
6. America’s national recovery period associated with the Civil War based on unified pledge to “remember the past to avoid repeating it” (89).
7. Lincoln’s peace strategy for national survival provided a “moral framework” in which the South could accept the North’s victory rather “than a humiliating punishment for slavery and secession” (“malice toward none, charity for all”) (90).
8. The North’s actions following victory resulted in “eventual reconciliation to the South at the expense of justice for the victims of slavery” (91).
9. Post-Civil War “Forgiving and Forgetting”-Andersonville was leading symbol for war atrocities-Only Captain Wirz, second in command, tried for Civil War crimes (92).
10. Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction of December 1863 granted full pardons to soldiers and citizens upon their oath of loyalty to the U.S. (92).

### 3. Chapter 4-The Dialectic of Race and Place

In Chapter 4, Meister discusses the relationships and issues related to race, ethnicity, and territory. The author relates that modern colonialism involves acts of conquest or “unopposed claims to previously inhabited territories.” Meister explains that modern colonialism (post 1942) is associated with the concept of a “nomos” or a fundamental norm for dividing up the land. According to Meister, modern colonies have an imagined spatial and temporal relation “between a territory’s prior inhabitants, its colonial possessors, and its eventual citizens as an independent state.” The colonial perception involves consideration of temporal succession requiring replacement of existing inhabitants (114). Ten important points Meister discusses in Chapter 4 include:

1. Meister claims that modern colonialism introduces “a fundamental distinction between native and settler” (mainly political) and the associated differences between ethnicity and race (114).
2. The native’s identity is based on priority and place (they were there first). The settler’s identity is based on “global theories” related to the concept of race (115).
3. Meister presents several examples to explain how the identity of members of ethnic groups is often racialized when they relocate. He provides examples of groups who return to their ethnicity origins (African Americans, Jewish groups).

4. "Racialized thinking is essentially translocal and transtemporal: it foregrounds successive occupation of inhabited spaces." Therefore, a race can imagine its spatial migration over time (race stays the same, not dependent on location). A race can also relate to potential extermination (115).
5. Ethnic names are assigned to a local place that depict the link between ethnicity and territory and also expresses their interest in the place to the outside world (115).
6. Colonists consider their occupation of new lands "discovery" because it results in the acknowledgement and documentation of a place "on their own world map" (115).
7. The political distinction between race and ethnicity is dynamic in any location (116).
8. Ethnicity is not determined by being "local." Races exist in "actual and potential migration in an ethnicized world." A racial identity pertains to "a place of current occupation" and may include "a historic destination" to the place of origin or more intensive settlement of their existing place (116).
9. By excluding Native Americans from a race/ethnicity distinction, the American meaning of ethnicity "allowed descendants of all settlers to be members of a single race" (including African Americans).
10. Liberal tradition-"the importance of Old World origins and identities" are minimized once people relocated to the New World (117).

#### **4. Conclusion-Justice in Time**

In the Conclusion, Meister provides an extensive, comprehensive, and complex summary of his major points and arguments. The author summarizes his contrast of two paradigms of historical injustice. The first involves the perpetrator, victim, and beneficiary and "is based on class struggles." The second involves the native/settler pair, and is "based on anticolonial struggle." The author claims that the beneficiary of evil realizes past injustices have benefited him, but "it was done to someone else by someone else" (305).

The author discusses how the "grammar of injustice" influences people's perceptions. The author argues that these perceptions provide the beneficiary with a "temporal distancing from the perpetrators of past injustice" even if a closer association with the victims develops (305). Meister concludes that Twenty-first century Human Rights Discourse addresses the issue "that someone is to blame" for evil and to insure that blame is not placed on the victim, but does not achieve "greater justice." Meister contends that if Human Rights Discourse follows evil, "something must come next" (316). Ten important points Meister discusses include:

1. "Figural realism" allows backward reasoning within "a narrative of before and after" (306).
2. "Realistic narratives" of history should not be considered as the absolute truth about the past. (Example-historical narrative of 20<sup>th</sup> century evils "that prefigure present understanding of human rights" (307).
3. To avoid messianic and realistic voice-need to consider interpersonal and intertemporal relationship to include relationship between who suffers and when (308).

4. Parfit considers the difference between “self and other” and associated difference between “now and then” as contingent and changing (308).
5. Parfit contends it doesn’t matter to who or when suffering occurs, it is the “experience of suffering that matters morally” (309).
6. Human Rights Discourse depends on a “contestable view” of what occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and “whether it was the beneficiaries of past injustice who won” (313).
7. Human Rights Discourse serves as a strategy for making justice less urgent (314).
8. Insistence on individual responsibility of perpetrators restricts Human Rights Discourse (315).
9. Luther’s claim-in “disavowing evil we may still unconsciously embody it” (We may “do what we no longer will,” but in our minds) (315).
10. Meister argues that Human Rights Discourse is “a set of cultural techniques that allows individuals to disavow the collective wishes on which past struggles were based” (316).