

Father Can't You See . . . ? (Death)

Adam Rosen-Carole

Razinsky, Liran, *Freud, Psychoanalysis and Death*, (Cambridge: Cambridge: 2014), 316 pp.

Liran Razinsky's *Freud, Psychoanalysis and Death* (Cambridge: 2014) aggressively pursues the thesis that the psychoanalytic tradition both constitutively and contingently obscures the overwhelming obviousness of death, a "metaphysical reality" to which common sense attests and in respect of which human life is fundamentally oriented, which yet is in need of theoretical and practical acknowledgment and elaboration into the service of which Razinsky seeks to recruit psychoanalytic inquiry once suitably reformed by a systematic incorporation of the sovereignty of death. Deflecting relations to death, its (anti-)human significance, into familiar hermeneutic apparati has allegedly cost psychoanalysis dearly in terms of its theoretical, cultural, and practical authority; Razinsky seeks to present the bill and offer a path to redemption of the heretofore unacknowledged debt. That death, however metaphysically and thus psychologically inescapable, is *not* sufficiently traumatogenic is what, ultimately, Razinsky protests against—the normalization of death.

Razinsky's pseudo-philosophical connivances at rendering the "existential" or "ontological" meaning of death are matched in juvenile bombast by the middlebrow pseudo-sophistication of his linguistically unwieldy—overindulgent and woefully imprecise—writing and by the audacious naiveté of his ambition to rectify "official" psychoanalytic theory and thereby reform practice. In light of the manifest plurality of psychoanalytic perspectives,¹ the relative mutual autonomy of psychoanalytic theorizing and practice and the perhaps originally anachronistic, i.e., mythological or polemical-projective status of "official" psychoanalytic theory, Razinsky's presumption of an official, dominant, and unified—or unifiable—psychoanalytic theory whose rectification would

¹ Cf. Adam Rosen-Carole, *Plurality and Perspective in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013).

immediately entail practical revisions, seems a freighted fantasy. Pursuit of what would seem the least pertinent of these complaints, namely, that concerning the juvenile quality of the writing, may prove uncommonly rewarding, i.e., put us on track of a number of substantive, illuminating, and interconnected vexations.

The writing is extremely imprecise, inferentially reckless, and exegetically and philosophically sloppy—aggressively sloppy, perhaps. Especially with Freud—the master—in view, Razinsky misconstrues one view, then claims that the misconstrued view contradicts another (often misconstrued) view, or otherwise forces a contradiction. The plea for logical consistency, especially in the context of not otherwise illuminating analyses of “contradictions,” while not in itself untoward, seems, in its stale, quasi-compulsive repetition, to bespeak a disgruntled adolescent purism, a disenchanting yet undislodgible demand for coherence, integrity, and therewith, Justice, rightful authority, perhaps a plaintiveness raised against the heavens and/or an equally nebulous, immanently conflicted and extremely censored, ethical/political protest. While it would be pedantic to correct Razinsky’s many and massive misreadings²—and we are not yet in a position to appreciate the significance of the dogmatism and polemical willpower that lend pseudo-coherence to a book that, argumentatively, is in shambles, let alone its political-theological complications—attending briefly to the juvenile character of his writing may provide entrée to concerns that are by no means “merely rhetorical.” Razinsky seems to write, as often do inadequately read and instructed yet ambitious juveniles, with his finger on the thesaurus function. Synonyms for the repudiation of death multiply furiously,³ yielding muddied obscurity there where concretion is called for and slightly annoyed boredom there where Razinsky would seem to be driving home his central point: commodified variation dulls intellectual appetite yet

² For a striking example, see Razinsky’s reading of Freud’s “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death.” How Razinsky comes to consider *The Interpretation of Dreams* “Freud’s most important theoretical and clinical book” is a mystery (46; see also 48).

³ E.g., underplayed, discarded, deflected, dismissed (96), forbidden (102), neglected, reduced, relegated to secondary status (103), repressed (183), belittled (183), subordinated (184), marginalized (189), minimalized (189), minimized (179), concretized (190), ignored (190), neutralized (190), disqualified (246), reluctantly acknowledged or examined (1, 187), unwillingly recognized (2), disbelieved (2), distorted (4), excluded, pathologized, rejected (10), not taken seriously (25), concealed (54), defensively displaced (86), suppressed (94), retreated from (95), downgraded (101), expelled (109), lost and forgotten (109), not considered (111), subjugated, blocked (124), rendered secondary, epiphenomenal (128), sidestepped (131), unaddressed (147), trimmed to manageable size (161), overlooked (170), deflated, cut down, and flattened (170), brought low (173), diverted (174), explained away (179), subordinated (184), refused as a question, reduced to a definite theoretical construct (194), expunged (206), pushed aside, rendered absent (209), diminished and altered (213), unappreciated (219), disregarded (227), relegated to a secondary voice (282), left out (282), so on.

piques it just enough to be duped into disappointment by the next iteration of the self-same amorphousness. And in each appeal to the nebulous credentials of the thesaurus function, one senses conflict and prohibition: a claim to semantic sophistication, thus to creative-critical individuation, is processed as a demand for authoritative social integration. Razinsky's devotion to common sense will be soon discussed in greater detail. For now, let us note the awkward, adolescent admixture of semantic and thematic bravado with seething anti-intellectualism: nothing in the book is empirically-experimentally established or corroborated, or even presumes to be; Razinsky's arrogation of "common sense" against empirical and reflective inquiry manifests as explicit anti-intellectualism, implicit social contempt (orthodoxy⁴), in short, as defensive ego rigidity. "[T]error of death needs no explanation," says Razinsky; it is "intrinsic" (225). "Israel in truth" and "Egypt in error"?⁵

The structure of the book is likewise lame because it is excessively but ineptly obedient to an imperative to standardization. (The "argument" is overintegrated yet threadbare—like modern subjectivity?) Hobbled yet excessively animated, it seems—by an imperative to proceed "methodologically," that is, to "exhaustively" and "circumspectly" contend with the psychoanalytic tradition's alleged multiform deflections of and occasional rapprochements with death—Razinsky cannot stop going through the motions, yet such strenuous, fixated, overtaxed efforts yield but an intellectually vacuous, rote reproduction of high academic form, i.e., academic kitsch. Death, says Razinsky, is "a powerful, independent, and unchangeable reality of another order" (242); "pointless, incomprehensible, and unjustifiable," and as such "lies at the heart of our misery" (205). Unavoidably and pervasively influential in virtue of its "resistance to representation" (28), it is indifferent, without reason, a blind force of nature (137, 145, 148). An all-pervasive power, "it touches every aspect of our life, every act, project, and plan" (167) yet remains intractably obscure, withdraws itself. So thematized, "death" might seem a cipher for the obscure, incomprehensible and irrefusable relation to authority that characterizes

⁴ On the connection between orthodoxy and anti-Jewishness, see Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion and Its Heirs: Marx, Benjamin, Adorno* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Of particular concern for clinicians is that Razinsky's arrogance precludes empirically establishing whether death-related material is pathologically or otherwise clinically pertinent, whether generally or particularly. Indeed, such arrogance overrides empirical and reflective inquiry altogether. Cf. 230-231.

⁵ That is, albeit through multiple mediations, one might sense in Razinsky's arrogance an echo of what Jan Assmann describes as the "Mosaic distinction." See Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998). See also Jann Assman, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).

210 Father Can't You See . . . ? (Death)

Razinsky's orientation to his central topic: intellectually and affectively disorganizing obedience to self-obscuring authority takes shape as aggressively fixated (self-) certainty, commitment to a cause or, stylistically, to a form. If the Oedipal overtones of conflicted adolescent attempts at individuation are here palpable—simplifying considerably: irreversible independence, i.e., impossible and (un)desirable return to parental authority and intimacy, is phantasmatically processed as, at once, abandonment and overintrusiveness, resulting in sadomasochistic flight into identifications with ideals and their embodied representatives—then Razinsky's otherwise strained (frankly ludicrous) positioning, i.e., idealization, of Lacan as an ally is symptomatically comprehensible. As are, perhaps, the theological-political undercurrents of the text, to which we will later turn more explicitly. More pertinent to the present context is that the empty spectacle of "rigorous" and "exhaustive" analysis may put one in mind of gifted adolescents educated in contexts they know to be inadequate and untrustworthy, resulting in extreme, repressed worry as to whether, as a result of such conditions for intellectual formation, they will ever be anything other than frauds, and consequent conflicted attempts to deceive themselves—and others, thereby siding with the agents of stultification against the injured potential—by passing off quantity as quality (magical thinking), while at once, and thereby, confessing their need for instruction, thus demanding a more felicitous future for their yet (it is hoped) promising past. That Razinsky's engagements with Freud and certain sectors of subsequent psychoanalytic thought⁶ are picky (anti-authoritarian) while exegetically and philosophically undiscerning, even sloppy (sadomasochistic, libidinally unbound, "death driven"),⁷ and that the core complaint—"death is denied"—is repeated *ad nauseam*, becoming as if a mantra, a fixation providing a measure of consistency to a

⁶ Oddly, given his concern with the "external" and especially the voicing of this concern as criticism of the primacy of the intrapsychic in psychoanalysis, Razinsky makes no mention of a figure who would seem to be his natural ally, namely, Ferenczi, nor of prominent psychoanalytic trends informed by Ferenczi, i.e., relationalist developments. See, e.g., 184, 242 and 37.

⁷ See, e.g., 16. The aggressively Oedipal tenor of Razinsky's complaints—awkward and pathetic precisely in their purported seriousness—is unmistakable. Razinsky charges Freud with inconsistency—what a shock! Father Freud is deemed insufficient, wanting for authority because failing to provide a complete "map," (i.e., theory) of the mind—this is just calumny, if not delusion. Freud is accused of indulging in speculation without explicitly marking the provisional, tentative character of his speculations—a scandal! (The irony of this accusation is plain.) Yet Freud's texts are said to be "full ... of reservations and personal expressions regarding the subjective nature of [his] response" to death (37). So Razinsky charges Freud with unearned certainty and suppressed doubt while knowing full well of Freud's explicit provisionality, then accuses the psychoanalytic tradition of rigidifying what was explicitly tentative in Freud: accusations run wild. Whether there is a connection between Razinsky's hysterical desire for father Freud's consistent authority and the political-theological issues discussed below, and if so, what manner(s) of connection, I leave as a question for the readers of this review.

partially disorganized, overfreighted mind, while at once interrupting such consistency by dint of its purportedly unmetabolizable content—death “evades modeling and understanding” (255), is “almost absent, inherently contradictory, absurd” (265), “a significant impossibility” (265)—and thereby attaining an air of authenticity, suggests, broadly, juvenile turmoil. The suggestion of a prodigiously overgrown and thereafter awkward, immature hothouse plant, i.e., of stultified juvenility, is everywhere on display. To claim, and all the more so to insist, loudly and publicly, that awareness of death “shakes our beliefs about the constancy of our world” would seem a consummate expression of juvenility (51). That Razinsky is stylistically, methodologically, and programmatically identified with power and authority is perhaps the most evident, and certainly one of the more distressing, loci of his vexed juvenility.⁸ The dialectic of juvenile adoration of power, disillusionment, sadomasochistic delinquent outburst, reparative fantasy, and its fraying proceeds undaunted, structured as a whole by a defensive idealization of depressive integration.⁹

Everyone denies death except Razinsky ... and, it turns out, everyone else *except* Freud and those working within the tradition he inaugurated.¹⁰ The inherent terror of death (106), that death “can intervene at any moment” (258), and the constitutive significance of death, that awareness of death is an essential condition for the development of meaning and value, for the shaping of a life, Razinsky claims, are ubiquitously recognized, indeed common sense, and yet Freud, obtusely and somewhat perversely, deflects, isolates, and otherwise repudiates the orientational significance and primordial disturbance of death. (Note once again the undercurrent of anti-intellectualism: Freud raged against common sense.) Freud is calumnized as

⁸ Compare cautiously – T.W. Adorno, “Hothouse plant,” in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2006).

⁹ A brief clinical note: To acknowledge death in the way that Razinsky demands may put analysts at serious risk of calamitous failures to master the transference. See Sigmund Freud, *Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905 [1901], Standard Edition Vol. 7, pp. 1–122).

¹⁰ More precisely, Razinsky’s (implicit) claim is that death is broadly denied in contemporary culture, indeed, to an extent, must be denied given its metaphysical structure, though such pervasive denial symptomatically bespeaks the evidence of death, its prior registration, and thus is not a denial of death on the order practiced by Freud and his followers. The psychoanalytic denial of death—especially subsequent to Freud—is qualitatively, indeed categorically, distinct: its specific mark is its non-symptomatic, thus nondisclosive, automaticity. *The psychoanalytic denial of death is not exemplary* in the sense of representative, it is merely striking—an outlier. At worst, the following analysis isolates and explores an explicit, strong claim advanced by the text, shielding it from other sectors of the text that contradict or are in tension with it, and so hyperbolizes a bit. Whether the risk of objectively unavoidable isolation and exaggeration proves worthwhile can only be decided by the reader’s judgment of the value of the insights attained or claimed by these means.

the—albeit ambivalent and contradictory—Jewish denier of death¹¹ responsible in large part for the marginalization of death in the psychoanalytic tradition and thus for that tradition's wanting for theoretical and practical authority.¹² The Oedipal inflation of Freud as the inadequate Father responsible for the corruptions of his progeny is noteworthy, as is the shaping of this Oedipal fantasy by a Christological redemption motif: Freud's repudiation of death is cast as original sin, ineffaceable corruption (such repudiation, recall, is in part constitutive of psychoanalytic praxis) that yet does not put its inheritors beyond hope for (qualified) redemption. And if Freud is so obviously a "Jewish thinker," then, presumably, we are to understand the psychoanalytic tradition¹³ as "the Jewish science," at which point Razinsky appears to be intimating that the primary culprits in the denial of death, ineffectual though they may be against its common sense (self) evidence, are "the Jews" or that such denial is in some way "Jewish." *The Jews deny death. Denial of death is a Jewish inheritance.* Even were one to hear, or overhear, in such intimation a heavily guarded registration and highly mediated pressing of a claim about the disposition of contemporary hegemonic Israeli politics, discourse, and popular psychology¹⁴ as concerns death-bearing relations to Palestinians and other Arab peoples, their current regional and/or global fallout, and their even more catastrophic potential (e.g., Israeli Jews pervasively deny—isolate, minimize, repudiate, rationalize—historical and contemporary death-bearing relations to Palestinians and other Arab peoples, the mortal danger in which, partly in consequence, they find themselves, and the broader, potentially cataclysmic, geopolitical ramifications of mutually escalating, focus-consuming bellicosity), and/or as concerns the theological, specifically nihilistic-providential, character of the Israeli state—perhaps the pressing back of some such claim against its denial, marginalization, authoritative repudiation, official blockage; even were one to hear, or overhear, in such intimation a distorted, insistent echo of thoughts or fantasies concerning the experience and/or aftermath of the European Catastrophe, or perhaps a displaced and distorted claim about the relation of these to one another, an unassumable—prohibited—protest against their invidious and insidious convergence in contemporary hegemonic Israeli political culture, nevertheless, its perversity strikes quick and hard.

¹¹ Freud is claimed *immediately* as a "Jewish thinker"—on the very first page of the Introduction.

¹² If death's "pointless, incomprehensible, and unjustifiable nature ... lies at the heart of our misery," then psychoanalysis cannot, absent supplementation by existential inquiry, truly get at our misery (205). See also, 190.

¹³ Expecting Lacan?

¹⁴ Liran Razinsky is a Lecturer in the Department of Hermeneutics and Cultural Studies at Bar-Ilan University, Israel.

(*The Jews deny death. Denial of death is a Jewish inheritance.* Might one hear in such intimation a defensively transmuted reverberation of a historical truth: that whereas death once marked, or more precisely, through routine social-memorial praxis was supposed capable of marking, the outermost limit of a life, bringing all that unfolded within that life to a kind of closure, a significant end in view of which what precedes is regathered and reinterpreted (i.e., socially memorialized, hence doubly integrated); i.e., whereas death was once a moment of constitutive significance in a singular life, functioning as a stamp, simultaneously, of the singularity of a life and of the boundedness of that life, qua singular, to a social horizon; Jews (*inter alii*) did not die in the camps, death died in the camps? The anonymous production of corpses is the dying of death. *Jews were denied (significant) death, thus denial of death is a Jewish inheritance.* Might one then hear, too, the rumblings of the ideological Nazi appropriation of the truth they were instituting: Jews do not die in the camps; they are exterminated? And might we hear, further, an unmediated moment of raw disturbance issuing from the ashes of industrialized death: the death of death, occluded from memory, let alone worked through, is repeated as Israeli state providentialism, i.e., as Jewish inheritance? Such providentialism, in league with its diabolical double, nihilistically perpetuates the death of death *as singularly significant*, each time unique, by claiming anonymous mass deaths as proleptic state property, the death of death as a moment of the state's foundational narrative (theodicy), indeed as *necessary violence redeemed* by the significance it attains for an entirely independent—as if metaphysically independent—stratum of significance, namely, the ideological—and to an extent, material-psychological—foundation of the state of Israel. Through state providentialism and the imaginary immunities against concern for death-dealing and destruction it supports, “the Jews” deny death, as if this were their inheritance.¹⁵ Such providentialism, like psychoanalysis, according to Razinsky, automatizes the significance of death and thereby in a way de-realizes it, refusing the intransigence of death to understanding and control, rendering death too fully meaningful, normalizing it. Death becomes determinate negation, official political metaphysics.¹⁶

Might one hear, further, in such intimation the registration and repudiation of a related historical truth: that the camps revealed all too

¹⁵ One might then hear, albeit very obliquely: Jews, particularly state-revering Zionists, deny death in the sense that the Jewish prohibition of idolatry was originally tied to its connection to human sacrifice; the state demands human sacrifice (practical, intellectual, affective); thus the state is an object of idolatry—death as sacrifice is denied by state providentialism.

¹⁶ Razinsky's implausible characterization of “official” (dogmatic, unified, authoritative) psychoanalysis might be thought in connection with this.

plainly that death is hardly the worst fate that can befall us?¹⁷ Death died in the camps *as of orientational significance*. Or at least it did so for those who have come to be called, in an idiom popularized by Primo Levi, the *Muselmänner*.¹⁸ That there are fates far worse than death, that meaningful individuality, every semblance of dignity, even the impulse to self-preservation, can be utterly annihilated, thus that the human form of life is not a metaphysical given but an ongoing social accomplishment, is perhaps one of the central, repulsive, and repulsed cultural traumas of the Catastrophe.¹⁹ Razinsky's metaphysical enshrining of death, particularly his casting of death as *inherently* significant, may be understood as a deflection of (the dying of) death in the camps and of the unwanted transmission of the terrifying mortality of death "itself" into the present, i.e., as a denial of death, and at once, an overburdened, indirect obedience to a political-ideological commandment to remember, specifically to remember precisely these deaths, but to re-member them only within the ideological parameters of a specific political theodicy. Death's metaphysical memorialization is here, perhaps, the denial of its concrete historical specificity in the camps, thus an attempted foreclosure of alternative memory work and of the politics in which such work might issue or to which it might contribute; death is denied in and through its metaphysical-political remembrance. Or from a slightly different angle, political concern for the—in principle unlimited, but in practice highly uneven—exposure of human life to absolute peril, to total destitution and annihilation, is perhaps displaced and domesticated by Razinsky's metaphysics of death. Death itself, he says,

¹⁷ "In the camps death has a novel horror; since Auschwitz fearing death means fearing worse than death." See T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), 371.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man* (New York: Everyman's Library, 2000). Also see, *inter alia*, Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2002). Insistence on the metaphysical self-evidence and inherent orientational significance of death is a direct repudiation of the figure of the *Muselmännchen*. Given the prominent discussion of this aspect of the dying of death in the camps and Razinsky's interest in fields where this discussion occurs, his avoidance of the *Muselmännchen* seems a willful ignorance. To say that this evasion is willful, a shielding of eyes and of thought, is not to say that it is a calculated deception or otherwise strategic subterfuge. Quite the contrary. Razinsky's refusal of the obvious, the *Muselmännchen* as anti-metaphysical counterexample to his death metaphysics, seems beholden to dark powers: transgenerationally transmitted disturbances taking shape as imperatives not-to-know, and so to know selectively, thus as enforced prejudice. Vexed virility, both thematically (as in resolute facing of death-borne insignificance) and performatively, is perhaps not the least symptom of this. Incidentally, Razinsky's willful ignorance deprives him of the opportunity to raise what could be, in view of his concerns, an interesting question: If and to the extent that psychoanalysis cannot but focus on meaning, specifically on the meaning(s) of death, how can it respond, if at all, to the dying of death in the camps, to that singular form of the destruction of significance, and to its legacies?

¹⁹ "That in the concentration camp it was no longer an individual who died, but a specimen—this is a fact bound to affect the dying of those who escaped the administrative measure." See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 362.

is an “ominous backdrop” imperiling meaning, value, subjectivity before it coldly sweeps them away (258); the self-enforcing (104), brutal realization of “one’s insignificance” always already threatened (52).²⁰ And this is said to be a “stimulating” mystery and something with which we all in our own ways contend. Death in Razinsky’s sense would seem to bear the simultaneously repulsed and ideologically coveted memory of the Shoah, rendering such destitute death eternal yet occluded, sacralized²¹: untouchable, infinitely obscure, thus nonnegotiable, and in this way obscenely powerful—an irrefusable self-occluding authority; perversely, deathly anti-significance becomes the absolute master. The metaphysics of death recalls us to the scene of torture, the sovereign antiman.

In Razinsky’s intimation that the denial of death, like psychoanalysis, is specifically related to Jews or Jewishness or Jewish inheritance, might one hear a horrified, perhaps perverse, claim to Jewish exclusivity? The traumatic denial of (individuating, meaningful) death to Jews in the camps, their systematic, torturous devastation, destitution, and anonymous extermination, along with—or as the pinnacle of—the historically and globally sweeping denial of concern with Jewish death (and life), makes the denial of death a specifically Jewish inheritance, indeed a mandate for Jews—or their political representatives—to secure themselves against oblivion? The exceptional persecution of Jews grants them (in the eyes of God?) preemptive exculpation for whatever is done in the service of their security? Having suffered so much destruction, devastation, and death, and having suffered it in such uncommonly brutal forms, the Jews are granted—as unremittingly incomprehensible compensation—exceptional, indeed absolute, prerogative, i.e., are placed ontologically beyond good and evil, like a nominalist God?

Or might one discern a perverse theological-political protest: the “ordeal” of the Holocaust was insufficiently instructive, the revelation of the ontological evil of Death was not received, insofar as the Jews, or rather “bad Jews,” i.e., analysts (and perhaps others: anti-Zionist Jews?), deny death—the denial of death is a Jewish inheritance, indeed a “Jewish science”? (Hints of survivor guilt are also worthy of mention. As is prominent convergence, at least in the Anglo-American context, of psychoanalytic thought and anti-Zionist politics.) If so, one might suspect Razinsky’s metaphysical overcoding—and thereby occlusion, of simultaneously unprocessed and over-processed transmissions of concrete historical atrocity—of attempting to

²⁰ “Death itself” seems as paranoid a projection as “the Jew.”

²¹ Cf. Adi Ophir, “On Sanctifying the Holocaust: An Anti-Theological Treatise” in *Impossible Images: Contemporary Art After the Holocaust*, ed. by Shelly Hornstein, Laura Levitt, and Laurence J. Silberstein (New York: NYU Press, 2003)

turn the Shoah into revelation of the Truth of Existence.²² And if one senses here an attempt or imperative to relieve the living of the nightmare of dead generations weighing upon them by means of metaphysical sublation; then, perhaps unsurprisingly, a culture of redemption joins forces with veiled threat and condemnation.²³ Jews, “good Jews” in any case, do not deny death, specifically, the catastrophic death of European Jewry upon which the state of Israel stakes its claim to unquestionable legitimacy or necessity, even in occupied territories and extraterritorial actions. To resist the brute assertion of *raison d'état* is to deny death, thus to break the commandment emergent from the ashes of Auschwitz: *Remember*. Never forget, meaning: never deny, minimize, marginalize, analogize, resist.

Or might one hear in the intimation that denial of death is a Jewish inheritance, in conjunction with the wild proliferation of synonyms for such denial, an assertion of the unavoidability and unprocessability (which is at once an overprocessing) of Holocaust trauma? Death, says Razinsky, is deflected, dismissed, neglected, reduced, repressed, marginalized, concretized, distorted, excluded, pathologized, rejected, subjugated, blocked, deflated, diverted, disregarded. Such semantic diffusion perhaps suggests the extreme difficulty and/or prohibition of coming to terms with, i.e., acknowledging and elaborating, the specific forms, and let me underscore, the *various* forms, of “death denial” in contemporary culture, both Jewish and more broadly.²⁴

²² Independently of the abovementioned premise, Razinsky’s metaphysical occlusion of concrete, historical, yet unprocessed atrocity turns the Shoah into revelation of the Truth of Existence, thus into theodicy and Redemption. Not even the dead are safe: through such conversion the memory of the dead is made ready for political-ideological appropriation. Worse, reified death, abstract and indifferent to concrete historical detail, sanctions the existent as such: from its imperious metaphysical perspective, all is already lost.

²³ Karl Marx, “Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978).

²⁴ That Razinsky, so consumed with psychoanalysis’ alleged denial of death, does not engage the voluminous literature concerned with psychoanalytic responses to transgenerationally transmitted trauma and similar such topics is, to me, completely inexplicable. (That he is concerned, as he maintains in this book and elsewhere, with psychoanalytic *theory* and not applied psychoanalysis seems but a dodge made possible by a gross misunderstanding of psychoanalytic theory construction. Cf. 189) Less so, but still perplexing, is his silence concerning Freud’s very late flight from the Nazis and the literature around this perilous misjudgment. It is as if a prohibition on explicit discussion of the Holocaust conditions his metaphysical self-confidence and critical treatment of psychoanalysis. Compared with these, that Razinsky does not attempt to specifically configure the development of psychoanalysis in wartime and post-war Europe and America in relation to the concrete, historical experiences of death and terror among influential émigré analysts fleeing fascism, let alone pursue the significant contrasts between – and within – European and American developments, especially in relation to “darker matters” and differential conditions of hospitality to intellectuals in exile, e.g., pressures for integration, adaptation, and communication, seems but a failure of methodology rather than a mystery.

Even if one considers the premise of the previous paragraphs far-fetched, i.e., that the immediate identification of Freud as a “Jewish thinker” suggests an association of psychoanalysis with Jewishness—specifically, by invoking the ideological understanding of psychoanalysis as “the Jewish science”—resulting in an unconscious amalgamation to which are attracted, as if by extreme gravitational force, and in the highly volatilized matrix of which are forged distorted expressions of, a multitude of unspoken, inadmissible thoughts and fantasies concerning the denial of death of which psychoanalysis and, to be sure, not Jews, Jewishness, Israel, etc., is explicitly accused, nevertheless, Razinsky’s crude metaphysics of death and strained accusations of psychoanalytic death-denial seem, in view of their implausibility together with the imperturbable overconfidence of their assertion, freighted with forces they cannot easily bear. Something is askew. A culturally marginal therapeutic praxis is interrogated for its refusal to confront death “as death”: there is a manifest imbalance between the cultural clout and prevalence of the critical target—even to say that the psychoanalytic star is waning would be grossly optimistic—and the effort as well as the purported metaphysical and psychological significance of such a critical undertaking. If the above efforts to discern the contours of the unspoken seem less like patient attention to Razinsky’s intimations than speculative projection, then perhaps not only in view of the independent interest of the themes developed but also, indeed especially, in view of the challenge of making sense of manifest absurdity, such “speculative” endeavors will not be immediately despised. Least of all by those whose professional or intellectual interests crucially involve the risk of response to such challenges.

Irrespective of such a premise, there is something ethically/politically right about an Israeli academic wanting to acknowledge death and death anxiety. And that the form of acknowledgement such an academic pursues and demands is centrally “metaphysical,” i.e., precipitous and abstract (even when cast as culturally-mediated and/or idiosyncratic insight), is at least understandable in view of reigning political-ideological pressures and prohibitions. But there is something terribly wrong about blaming Freud and his inheritors for, respectively, inaugurating and consolidating the failure to acknowledge death, and about wanting the correction to take place in psychoanalysis.²⁵ In view of what would seem to be the stakes of Razinsky’s

²⁵ Razinsky is clear that correction immanent to psychoanalysis will be insuperably limited: psychoanalysis must be supplemented by forms of existential inquiry that, unlike psychoanalysis, are not bound to transmute the inherent metaphysical obscurity and diffuse wonder, i.e., the mystery, of death into forms of intrapsychic or otherwise personal *meaning*. We “suffer” from too much meaning, not enough freewheeling speculative encounter with the self-concealing Otherness of death.

project—pursuing and promoting encounters with the Nothingness, the “significant impossibility,” of death as it reverberates throughout life—what do Freud and his followers matter, unless these are ciphers?

Especially but not exclusively in the Israeli context, the urgent but unwanted confrontation with death might be considered in relation to the theological-political/discursive legacy of the Shoah, specifically in relation to death-bearing Israeli exceptionalism effected, in part, through projection of and identification with a sacralized victim position arrogated as the eternal ground of unrefusable, nonnegotiable, thus unintelligible political-theological authority. One might consider, for instance, that, ironically, Israeli political life has become beholden to a demand for pious obedience while Jewish theology is—or rather, remains—infinately negotiable and refusable, i.e., that the Israeli state is far more religious than Jewish theology. Or such a theological-political/discursive legacy, especially its appropriative, domesticating manifestation as exceptionalism, might be considered in relation to the accusation of nihilism readily and aggressively deployed at critics of the Israeli state. Such critics, accused of destructiveness, of bearing while at once denying death, indeed of putting the state and thereby the Jewish people at risk of annihilation while shielding objective alliance with the Enemy with disingenuous or naïve claims to freedom of thought, i.e., to political freedom, become targets of attempted annihilation. In view of the nihilist tendencies and potentially all-consuming destructiveness of Zionist belligerence, the projection of such critics as to-be-annihilated nihilistic elements seems not simply oppressively censorious but authoritarian mimetic regression, a malicious scapegoating in service of an anti-political fantasy of purifying the state/people and thereby achieving eternal stability: metaphysical presence. The historical resonance of such political theology is disturbing in the extreme.²⁶

Or more generally, one might consider the urgent but unwanted confrontation with death in the Israeli context, as configured with the theological-political/discursive legacy of the Shoah, in relation to Israeli—particularly Jewish Israeli—consumption of and by death anxiety: its exploitation by political and media interests, the pervasive haze it casts over daily life and thought, its morbid cherishing and horrified projection as the reigning affective atmosphere and/or concretized expulsion onto figures at once materially controllable and metaphysically indomitable, i.e., its idolization, its simultaneous intensification and amelioration by the securitizing of multiple sectors of civic society, its overwhelming if diffuse insistence and consequent exceptionalist appropriation, specifically but not

²⁶ Would it be too outrageously offensive to ask whether hegemonic Israeli politics and popular psychology have become, unwittingly, Schmittian?

only with respect the Nakbah, its sustaining and aggravation by “defensive” brutality, indeed its irrationalist disturbance of all political categories and institutions, its inhibiting effect on projecting, let alone pursuing, alternative futures, i.e., its mortifying, stultifying inertia—its destruction of possibility.

Or, the urgent but unwanted confrontation with death, specifically, with its disconcerting, defense-activating and -overriding, insistence and attendant anxieties, and with its various, often overdetermined and otherwise haze-enveloped, highly managed meanings, might be considered not just in relation to the theological-political/discursive legacies of the Shoah and the Nakbah, but, more generally, in relation to political-discursive questions concerning the relations between the living and the dead, thus with broader forms of exceptionalism, e.g., the rhetoric, psychology, cultural management, and politics of “our dead.”

In comparison, Razinsky’s mystified wonderings about natality (that we are of woman born), finitude (that we are, to the great dismay of our limitless narcissism, limited²⁷), and mortality (that we are exceeded and enveloped by the presence-absence of death) seem, if not trifling indulgences with which to assuage mass-produced boredom and “kill time,” then symptom-bait.

Or, from another angle, insofar as and to the extent that such historical-political considerations seep through or can be retrieved from Razinsky’s metaphysical constructions and obscurely motivated witch hunt are the latter more than vain palliatives for objectively enforced meaninglessness.

That an Israeli academic seeks to shift concern from the death of the other (aggression, sadism, abandonment) to the death of the self and, at greater circumference, to the human condition of finitude and mortality—or if not to redirect concern, then simply to focus concern on the death of the self at the expense, explicitly, of concern for the death of the other—is, at least, suspicious. Might the flight into juvenile (i.e., enthusiastically morbid) metaphysics and philistine platitude serve the defensive deactivation, displacement, or dispelling of socially enforced, in part appropriate, in part intrusive, anxieties?²⁸ Razinsky registers a true need: to consider the place and work of death in psychic life, and more generally. But he turns historical, psychosocial, i.e., material-political, truth, or what would be such, into ontological and psychoanalytic falsity.

While the psychic meanings of death are, Razinsky uncontentiously claims, indefinitely modifiable, and while his ambition to recruit

²⁷ Though the point cannot be developed here, one might consider Razinsky’s assumption about our wild narcissism in connection with melancholic consciousness. Cf. 259 and note 42 below.

²⁸ Appropriate anxieties *may* also be intrusive; these are not necessarily contraries.

psychoanalysts into the investigation and publicization of such meanings is in part sourced in a fairly standard conception of psychic idiosyncrasy, death itself, he insists, is conceptually and metaphysically self-sufficient: an in-itself. What is worrisome here is not only the philosophical credentials of Razinsky's metaphysico-linguistic realism, i.e., the credibility of his implicit thesis that the meanings, or at least the core or focal meanings, of concepts, or at least of certain concepts—e.g., and most prominently, “death”—are and/or must be real (as metaphysical universals) because, presumably, such concepts or their core or focal meanings correspond to metaphysically real, mind-independent objects: fixtures in the eternal cosmological architecture.²⁹ On such a picture of language, concepts and their objects are metaphysically real, out there in the mind-independent (divinely guaranteed?) order of things; meaning is achieved as or validated by descriptive correspondence between material signifier and immaterial yet metaphysically real signified, i.e., by mystical invocation through material-semantic ritual of extra-mundane Meaning (grace). Meaning runs on its own metaphysical tracks, invulnerable to the vicissitudes of practice. Such Meaning is infinite self-presence in contrast to the finite historicity of the human. When properly invoked, meaning is automatic, transcendently grounded and guaranteed, not, as Cavellian currents of Wittgensteinian thought, among others, would have it, precarious social responsibility, ethical rather than metaphysical. The meanings or meaningfulness that, Razinsky says, “death itself” annihilates, clearly cannot be this Meaning.³⁰ Even more worrisome than the philosophical credibility of this view is the manner of its psycholinguistic assertion, i.e., that it is manifestly unwarranted, merely stipulated, indeed not even explicitly asserted, let alone argued, but simply taken for granted, assumed with startling self-assurance. As if it were common sense. As if Razinsky were the voice of common sense, the conduit of self-evident authority. Here as elsewhere, Razinsky presumes to speak with a “universal voice,” though in a manner contrary, indeed antagonistic, to what Kant intends with this phrase. In comparison with the arrogance of its assertion, the theological-political aspect of which is made quite plain by Razinsky's *fiat veritas*, or more precisely, in comparison with the orthodox intensity of Razinsky's conviction, his arrogation, once again, of authoritative common sense, philosophical discomfiture pales in significance. Razinsky's identification with common sense and its smug, silencing employment suggests the festering of fascism within an ostensibly critical enterprise.³¹

²⁹ Compare Razinsky's characterization of death as “a powerful, independent, and unchangeable reality of another order” (242). Also cf. 193-4.

³⁰ Cf. 247.

³¹ Cf. T.W. Adorno, “Yet how ill does everything growing seem . . .” and “Behind the mirror,” in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2006).

Likewise, that in view of his metaphysico-linguistic realism, Razinsky's desired enlistment of psychoanalysis in the elaboration and publicization of the psychic meaning of death would relegate psychoanalysis to the role of underlaborer of metaphysics, and that this realism would thus be the rationalization of that relegation, is disturbing. But far more disturbing is that since such metaphysics reduces to identification with authority, psychoanalysis would come into the service of authority, obscurity, and prohibition, betraying its innermost interests, if successfully recruited into Razinsky's "existential" inquiries. In league with the culture industry and fascism, this would be psychoanalysis in reverse.³²

Razinsky insists that "death itself" is unique (225, 173, 184, 239), "a thing in itself" (257), metaphysically and thus semantically/conceptually self-sufficient, and yet "almost absent, inherently contradictory, absurd, opposed to the rest of the system of ideas" (265), thus unthinkable, or more precisely, incomprehensible, distorted by the theorizing and modeling (265, 267) it cannot but attract (267, 271), but by no means a transcendental illusion.³³ Death, "a significant impossibility" as Razinsky at one point puts it, seems to describe the preconscious insider's view of a symptom (265). Object of unavoidable attraction and repulsion, thus commanding site of conflict and (dis)orientation, and guarded by a demand not to unravel its "metaphysical" mystery,³⁴ death seems very much at home, and ill at ease, in a psychoanalytic setting. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, death is projected onto a theological—Razinsky would not doubt say "ontological"—register. Razinsky's death-literalism takes shape as an evasive negative theology: "Taking death seriously means, above all, recognition of death as a thing in itself, a recognition that avoids rendering death merely the aim of a death wish, social

³² As the underlaborer of death metaphysics, psychoanalysis, in virtue of its attention to psychic idiosyncrasy, would explore and elaborate the indefinite variability, i.e., "individuation," of the ever-same meaning of "death itself;" it would be the culture industry counterpart of metaphysical production in which the semblance of particularity is developed, packaged, and promoted, i.e., in which the illusion of individuation is socially enforced. Put otherwise, Razinsky's metaphysico-linguistic realism would make of the purported psychic idiosyncrasy of meaning but a pretense: the contingent uptake and processing of an invariant code. Razinsky's relation to psychoanalysis is thoroughly instrumental: subsumptive and annihilating.

³³ Cf. 224. Where Razinsky suggests (perhaps in the voice of another commentator, thus ambivalently) that though death necessitates illusion, it itself is no illusion.

³⁴ I note in passing that, especially on p. 267, "death" seems clearly modeled on *femme fatale* cliché. Correspondingly, Razinsky assumes the posture of lad detective, in a way reminiscent of David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*. (Recall this memorable bit of dialogue: Jeffrey: I'm seeing something that was always hidden. I'm in the middle of a mystery and it's all secret. Sandy: You like mysteries that much? Jeffrey: Yeah, you're a mystery. I like you very much.) This deserves to be thought more fully, especially in conjunction with Razinsky's—startling!—comparison of the would-be transformative integration of death into psychoanalytic theory and practice with the impact of feminist concerns on psychoanalytic theory and practice.

death, separation or any other understanding where death is actually no longer death" (257; cf. 29). Jealously guarded against analogy and, more broadly, against contamination by "vulgar" experience, death, "absurd and untenable," (265) unknowable and unrepresentable (29), is asserted as absolute and incomparable, pure self-presence, and as such, captivating: necessitating thwarted reflection, Death thus seems an object of ambivalent idolatry, the image of an immaterial god, a *metaphysical image*. A thing in itself, "death" perhaps bears a dim image of an intransigent and self-obscuring order of things, or more precisely, a reified image of reified life. Might the anguished theological longing contained in Razinsky's metaphysical image of death bespeak a protesting consciousness? What in the wake of Marx's "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" might be called a religious form of protesting consciousness? Death would be, as sexuality was once hoped to be, nonintegratable, a metaphysically secure moment of exception,³⁵ and perhaps resistance, to the overintegrated world of late capitalism. Or to speak with Hegel, "death itself" is the overintegrated world reflected in religious protesting consciousness.

Razinsky's metaphysical image of death, especially the imaging of death as an overwhelmingly intrusive, irrefusable yet only intermittently actualized, sovereign power to suffuse existence with anxiety and thereby collapse every normative horizon; as emerging from out of the nowhere (absurdity) of its perpetual presence-absence to unexpectedly engulf every modicum of meaning and value in its cold void; as "persistent trigger of dread and alertness" (29); as suddenly stripping life of all significance, emptying it not only of present significance and standing but of all hope for future significance, indeed of any connection to a future, thus radically de-potentiating life, not only refusing what was once initiated or accomplished of any possible futurity but retroactively destroying what once seemed significant, thus as sweeping in advance the remnants of a life, what would have been the possible horizons of its memorialization, into the sovereign enclosure of inescapable insignificance,³⁶ is uncannily reminiscent of Jean Améry's description of *ressentiment*, the indelible aftermath of torture: trust in the world is to be mistrusted because the more it is established, and thereby becomes self-effacing, the more it becomes available to violation, betrayal, sadistic manipulation. Death itself, which "shakes our beliefs about the constancy of our world" (51), which makes tremble and ultimately annihilates meaning and value; death itself, in "its pointless, incomprehensible, and unjustifiable nature, which lies at the heart of our misery" (205), which is "opposed to the rest of the system of ideas" (265),

³⁵ Cf. 242.

³⁶ Cf. 258.

“absurd and untenable” (265), unknowable and unrepresentable (29), “the meaningless end of life” (205), would seem a metaphysical image of loss of trust in the world: an image of worldlessness, of torture. Correspondingly, Razinsky’s understanding of death “as such” would seem a contemplative, intellectualized, thus palatable, even homeopathic, introjection of *ressentiment*: wide-eyed wondering and the mystified silence of metaphysical insight imaging a face transfixed by horror. What Razinsky ascribes to the metaphysical efficacy of death, the world become radically untrustable, subject to senseless, arbitrary, and absolute destruction of value and meaning: this is the scene of torture. *Torture* is the production of senselessness, meaninglessness, absolute arbitrariness, *torture* is the vortex in which human significance is plunged irrecoverably, not “death.” Not death but absolute lawlessness, or the obscene law of the antimatter, is the annihilation of reason and sense. Not incidentally, perhaps, does Razinsky situate mortality in corporeality itself, for torture is the systematically enforced betrayal of its victims’ selfhood by what was once their own bodies, the inscription of sovereign violence in the body become instrument of another’s annihilating will, the turning of bodily openness to the world—condition for meaning and value—into helpless exposure to limitless suffering³⁷—the endless scorching of insignificance into the “fact” of the body itself.³⁸ Torture, the enduring devastation of its human objects, becomes perversely “death itself.” Such sublation of unimaginable suffering into metaphysical permanence leaves behind its victims, its historical conditions of intelligibility.

That Razinsky would project acknowledgement of death, thus understood, as constitutive of the human is at once perverse and perhaps an important historical truth: the ontology of the human is radically affected by torture; we are the beings who can be ontologically undone. So redolent is Razinsky’s metaphysical image of death with scenes of torture that one might wonder whether the metaphysical function of this image is to block out—contain and refuse—the memory of torture. Is “death itself” the reification of torture? Lifted to the metaphysical firmament, death reigns as a new idol, or perhaps not so very new. To be plain, the question is whether Razinsky’s metaphysical image of death is Nazi wish fulfillment.

Though as a highly charged site of conflict, such a metaphysical image may be, also, a redemptive, metapolitical image. Insofar as it bears unappeasable, irredeemable loss of trust in the world to metaphysical heights, “death itself” may be a metaphysical, thus wishfully universal, timeless, and authoritative, registration of what historically was refused not only by Nazi destruction of archives of the atrocities they perpetrated but by

³⁷ It is perhaps limitless suffering that is metaphysically recoded as “the infinite.”

³⁸ Cf. 95. “The death that we fear is embodied in us.”

every call to work through or reconcile with, let alone forget, the past: namely, Nazi destruction of trust in the world via “the rule of the antiman...expressly established as a principle” (31).³⁹ Metaphysical “super-recognition” would thus be the wishful registration and repetition of historical non-recognition, the conducting of unappeasable complaints to God.

At issue here is not exclusively Holocaust trauma and its vicissitudes but the registration and refusal in the metaphysical image of death of contemporary conditions conducing to loss of trust in the world, especially but not exclusively among Palestinians, and of the urgent reflection and response they demand. Might “death itself” be a metaphysical overwriting, a bearing and concealing, of socially and historically variable exposure to the demographic, especially ethnic and religious, distribution of precarity? In particular, in the denial of its figurability (28) might “death” precisely figure, among other things, Arab abjection?

That death will suddenly and irrecoverably submerge life in insignificance (258, 52, 87-9), that its annihilating presence is active and felt beforehand, tormenting us with its ever-present onrush (87) and sapping the significance of life before its final *coup de grâce*,⁴⁰ indeed that death is coextensive with matter itself, “a permanent presence that permeates our entire existence,” (257-8, 89) and that we have intuitive—psychologically unavoidable (234)—knowledge of these and other aspects of its intrinsic meaning (129), would seem to suggest that life itself tremulously bears the trauma of death, that life transpires amidst the traumatic insurgency of death, in short, that life is centrally and constitutively an encounter with the trauma of death.⁴¹ So much so that “We have to create illusions, fantasies, defenses, cultural symbols, and biases in perception, to provide us with a sense of meaning to sooth the anxiety of death” (225, paraphrasing Piven; see also 137).

Though given to malignant morbidity—e.g., “The time one has left to accomplish one’s aims is uncertain, and this fact enters every consideration, every expectation. These are not sporadic or isolated thoughts, but pertinacious, tormenting concerns” (87; also see 268)—Razinsky stops

³⁹ Jean Améry, *At The Minds Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor of Auschwitz and its Realities* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980).

⁴⁰ In the words of *Ecclesiastes*, in the face of death “all is vanity and vexation of spirit” (*Ecc.* 1:9).

⁴¹ See 268, 273, 275-6. The metaphysical denigration of transient worldly existence in its totality, i.e., Razinsky’s thought of death as destructive of meaning altogether, is no less Christian (anti-Jewish) for being an inverted providentialism: the diabolic teleology in which material-political life, the “City of Man,” concludes inexorably, through its innermost tendency, in damnation/destitution, is recognizably Augustinian—though, because shorn of its dialectical relation to the “City of God,” distorted.

short of denying life significance altogether, and since “acknowledging, confronting, and coping with death” is necessary “to lend life content and make it worth living,” death must be pervasively acknowledged, confronted, and coped with (164). Razinsky’s criticism of the psychoanalytic tradition takes issue with its *exceptional* and even then oscillating denial of death. So certain is Razinsky of the universally traumatogenic insistence of death that even his criticism of psychoanalysis refuses the thought that death can be actually, effectively denied. Psychoanalysis, he claims, is constituted as such by the denial of death, developed in order to deny death (104), and ill from its ongoing deflections of death (51), thus everywhere testifies to the traumatogenic incursion of death. Apparently, what death presses upon us we cannot avoid. “It enforces itself” (104). “Even if not present, it is nonetheless present, as absence, and influences the rest of psychic life. Death is the light, or rather the shadow that is cast over all other psychic entities” (89). It is “the void at the center of our entire mental life” (89). Death is auto-enforcing power of annihilation, inescapable source of torment, and when adequately engaged, condition for a meaningful life, even for vitalizing enhancement.⁴² Death and whatever traumatisms it bears, as well as whatever emboldening opportunities its authentic confrontation affords, are undeniable—can only be, as with Freud, denied (feebly).⁴³

This all rings false. That Razinsky cannot stop screaming from the mountaintops that death is undeniable and all-influential; that laying the accusation of death-denial at Freud’s feet makes little sense if Freud or psychoanalysis is not in some way exemplary; various hints about “superficial” forms of acknowledging death not being limited to psychoanalysis (104); and the sheer implausibility of Razinsky’s projection of death mania onto human life as such, all suggest that, in some way, Razinsky knows better. How can he not? Is not the *onus probandi* on he who would assert that death, in Razinsky’s amplified sense, plays any, let alone a major, role in psychic life? Especially with respect to regions of the world where death is routinely subject to institutional and geographical separation and neutralization—America has dedicated two whole states to this separation and neutralization: Florida and Arizona; walls and checkpoints keep death distant, though less effectively elsewhere—to mass media anesthetization and block out, and to stunning/numbing production as aesthetic spectacle, is

⁴² See 230-231.

⁴³ The metaphysical ultra-meaning of death, no matter how existentially confounding or psychologically abrasive, redeems the nihilistic world as meaningful; it affirms what is as the inevitably adequate occasion for existential anguish and struggle. Yet in so grossly affirming whatever positivity as the ground of or springboard for allegorical ascent, something of the unredeemable pathos of the actual is registered: the nihilistic world comes into view as nihilistic in and as ongoing departures from it.

it plausible to claim that death is as captivating and disturbing, as grossly consuming, as Razinsky claims? To attempt to immediately turn the tables and claim that expulsion and aesthetic taboo are evidence of disturbance would be to precipitously discount the efficacy of these cultural institutions. What prominent social institutions (aside from the military), what forms of routine social accomplishment require, or even allow, concern for death or death anxiety? (An open question: Has Israel's "universal" drafting policy shaped Razinsky's understanding of death?⁴⁴) Could contemporary social institutions bear anticipatorily retrospective, i.e., death-oriented, reflection? Is their barbarism not secured by propagandistically defusing and deflecting such reflection until, feeble and despised or patronized (either way, infantilized), those who endeavor to so reflect have little chance of pressing their insights into transformative social praxis, even were they inclined, in the face of powerful, internalized social prohibitions, to spoil the optimism of those they love and for whom, after all, it is not impossible that things could turn out better?⁴⁵ Is death anxiety, when and where extant, sufficiently powerful to contend with trends toward the psychopharmacological alleviation of anxiety generally and the consequent dulling of reflection? With culture industrial bombardment, its dulling and manipulating of anxiety and inhibiting of reflection? Let alone with their combined neutralization of anxiety and reflection generally? Where has death not been crowded out, anxiety overtaken? The positing of death as inherent terror is hyperbolic protest against its unbearable, in part because all too bearable, normalization: metaphysical security against complacency, against the evisceration of *experience*, is itself complacent illusion—and adolescent fantasy.

In virtue of its *prima facie* implausibility, unevidenced assertion, and unlikely claim to psychoanalytic significance, might Razinsky's insistence on the centrality, systematic significance, and inevitability of encounter with the traumatism of death suggest protest detached from its target and consequently distorted? Might Razinsky's insistence on the "constitutive trauma" (that one is forced into such a contradictory expression is to the point) of death clamorously protest, i.e., register and refuse, a nexus of pressing problems having to do, broadly, with the fact that death is *too easily* mourned, evaded, ignored, that death is evidently *not* traumatic? Might Razinsky's vehement insistence on the necessity and self-enforcing significance of death trauma, his projection of such trauma onto

⁴⁴ Cf. 258. "Death can intervene at any moment. It is always a possibility for us."

⁴⁵ "Because the individual actually no longer exists, death has become something wholly incommensurable, the annihilation of a nothing. He who dies realizes that he has been cheated of everything. And that is why death is so unbearable." See T.W. Adorno, "Dying Today," in *Can One Live after Auschwitz?* ed. by Rolf Tiedmann, and trans. by Rodney Livingstone, et al. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 460.

“metaphysical reality,” signal quasi-religious desperation (fear and hope) over the fact that death is too easily integrated, managed, distributed, and disregarded? That, for instance, divestment and reattachment proves unnervingly easy⁴⁶ (it is the libidinal drive of late capitalism) and that anticipation of this corrupts attachment prior to its shattering (all relations are obsolete in advance); that the past does not fester, quickly becomes past, i.e., fades into the oblivion of ideological claims to progress or to the self-sufficiency of the present, or into a haze of induced forgetfulness; that loss is itself, as mutually dependent social institution and psychological capacity, lost, fueling and consumed by aggressive reattachment, e.g., ethno-religious nationalism,⁴⁷ or by aggressively provisional, ruinous and so self-justifying strategic attachment; that we fail to suffer what we sense we must if our humanity and individuality are to be more than ideology. The conversion of the loss of loss⁴⁸—i.e., of the inability to sustain loss, to reflectively endure its powers of interruption—into the irrefusable power of trauma would seem wishful thinking. This would be the social truth of Razinsky’s metaphysical ineptitude.

That death and that with which this concept is freighted is *not* traumatic may well be behind Razinsky’s protests against the denial of death, his demands to recognize death, his desire to metaphysically secure the meaning of death against practice and history. Razinsky would have it that death is absolutely non-integratable (242). Might such authoritative assertion give voice to a demand, garbled and inhibited because pitched against reigning, internalized political-ideological forces that will certainly refuse it as unintelligible or disastrous, and mimetically assuming their projection of authoritative inevitability, perhaps then more a dream than a demand, that death, in its overwhelming obviousness, not be so smoothly integrated into familiar political-discursive practice, thus to anxiety that death is too well integrated, normalized? Perhaps such conversion of inhibited ethical-political voice into defensively inflated ontological assertion bespeaks a demand for death to be integrated—negotiated, lived, memorialized—otherwise, as well as fear that such a demand would likely be immediately dismissed, manipulated, or patronized. Trauma thus becomes a placeholder for blocked political possibility, perhaps a conduit for refused political responsibility. Or more precisely, it may be that what Razinsky struggles to avow, what lies behind his “death driven” metaphysical inclination and protesting consciousness, is that death and that with which the concept is freighted is

⁴⁶ This consideration may be the least attended in the copious literature on Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia.”

⁴⁷ Also, compulsive monogamy, workaholism.

⁴⁸ See Gregg Horowitz, *Sustaining Loss: Art and Mournful Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002).

and is not traumatic:⁴⁹ that death is overintegrated yet (thereby) on the cusp of oblivion, a perturbing unprocessed residue borne by, and perhaps fueling, its administrative overprocessing. The stale stench of platitude throughout Razinsky's writing perhaps registers this grinding down of traumatism.⁵⁰ Not incidentally does Razinsky seem to plea at one point against learning to overcome irrational, perhaps infantile or childlike, dread of death: if death is denied in and through social rationalization, a dose of irrationality, of infantile helplessness, might seem like an antidote (227). Just as sexuality, or other figures of excess, have seemed like antidotes to those despairing over the want of clear and effective channels to protest reified social relations. This is juvenile regression.⁵¹

That death has become normalized, "inauthentic everydayness" as opposed to enduring traumatic disruption, routinely abstracted into statistics and population management rather than "authentically encountered," is what Razinsky refuses to know. But, to paraphrase Freud, neurotics hide their secrets in plain air, declare forthrightly and publicly, indeed clamor on and on about, what they refuse to know.⁵² Razinsky's death metaphysics and indictment of psychoanalysis are no doubt superficial and absurd, yet such surfaces teem with highly invested, contradictory content. What keeps such content unknown, perhaps, is unanalyzed authority. Razinsky's existential psychology repeats Heidegger's disastrous political-metaphysical juvenility.⁵³

⁴⁹ Just as administered society and consciousness are and are not seamlessly integrated.

⁵⁰ Just as his endless rehearsal of *Hamlet* perhaps registers its refusal.

⁵¹ Consider in this context Razinsky's cryptic insinuations about our prospects for radical re-beginnings. If death radically eviscerates significance, turns all to dust and wipes it away, then we can, indeed must, start anew *ex nihilo*. Razinsky's claims about the denial of death are themselves a denial of history, especially with respect to the spellbound character of the historical present. The "pretensions to profound human experience" forwarded by his "existential analytic" and all the more so by the existential adventurism he promotes are but sublimity amid the muck, false transcendence (Adorno, "Jargon of Authenticity," in *Can One Live after Auschwitz?*) 165.

⁵² "Death operates precisely as a kind of unknown, an absurdity, a nothingness" (28-9). "Death loses its uniqueness, singularity, and importance ... once ... equivalence is firmly established, one starts to lose sight of what was so frightening about death in the first place" (226-7). What such refusal to know perhaps knows too well is that *even death*, the absolute master, is radically outmatched by the forces sustaining the barbarously rationalized historical present, in particular that such inertial forces remain inordinately powerful despite profiting no one (or nearly so) and harming all, and despite being nothing but the product of social labor. Soil contaminated by such all-pervasive toxicity is apt for but the growth of magical thinking.

⁵³ Unsurprisingly, Razinsky takes religious hope seriously (223; see also 155-158): whether from the trauma of death or from the want of such trauma, "only a god can save us." A great debt of appreciation is due to Anna Katsman and Roy Ben Shai for their extraordinarily thoughtful and challenging comments on an earlier draft of this essay. Katsman is an interlocutor beyond compare: gracious and agile in her following of somewhat circuitous lines of thought and remarkably deft in her ability to discern their substantial core. Ben Shai's comments were so

Department of Philosophy, Rochester Institute of Technology, United States

References

- Adorno, T.W., *Can One Live after Auschwitz?* ed. by Rolf Tiedmann, and trans. by Rodney Livingstone, et al. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003).
- _____, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2006).
- _____, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973).
- Agamben, Giorgio, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).
- Améry, Jean, *At the Minds Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor of Auschwitz and its Realities* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980).
- Assmann, Jann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- _____, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).
- Dobbs-Weinstein, Idit, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion and Its Heirs: Marx, Benjamin, Adorno* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- Freud, Sigmund, *Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905 [1901]), Standard Edition, Vol. 7.
- Horowitz, Gregg, *Sustaining Loss: Art and Mournful Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002).
- Levi, Primo, *If This Is a Man* (New York: Everyman's Library, 2000).
- Marx, Karl, "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978)
- Ophir, Adi, "On Sanctifying the Holocaust: An Anti-Theological Treatise," in *Impossible Images: Contemporary Art after the Holocaust*, ed. by Shelly Hornstein, Laura Levitt, and Laurence J. Silberstein (New York: NYU Press, 2003).
- Razinsky, Liran, *Freud, Psychoanalysis and Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge: 2014).
- Rosen-Carole, Adam, *Plurality and Perspective in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013).

provocative that nothing less than an independent treatment of their themes would in any way do justice to their profound insight and importance. I hope to take up these themes in a companion essay in the near future.