

**Rob Gildert and Dennis Rothermel, eds.**

*Remembrance and Reconciliation.*

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*Remembrance and Reconciliation* (not to be confused with Björn Krondorfer's book of the same name) is a collection of nine essays pertaining to America's past misdeeds, its citizens' collective failure to remember and acknowledge those wrongs, and the possibilities still open for seeking reconciliation with those whom they have harmed. As Dennis Rothermel explains in his editorial role, 'Remembrance follows the obligation to remedy suffering... [and] refocuses attention upon transgressions and atrocities that too easily memory allows us to forget' (5 – notice how here, as throughout the book and indeed in this review, an American audience and community of interlocutors is presumed). By providing the 'opportunity' for reconciliation among previously estranged peoples (5), remembrance is the normative basis for rebuilding trust and cultivating peace globally. To that end, the first five authors ask (in some cases, *demand*) that we remember our recent misdeeds; while the remaining four focus attention on different practical aspects of reconciliation and the ways that process may be understood.

Some remarks on content and textual coherence are at this point unavoidable. First, the decision to focus exclusively on recent American history is not well explained; the failure even to mention the genocide of the indigenous peoples of this land and to give slavery a passing comment are indefensible omissions within a work that valorizes *memoria*. Second, there is almost no sense in which the essays that comprise this volume form a coherent whole: whatever their individual merits, their appearance together does not rise to the level of a thematic treatment of either 'remembrance' or 'reconciliation'. Third, the normative requirement to 'remember' is never properly explored, so questions regarding who is obligated to remember and what moral role is played by memory are left unanswered. In one of the more thoughtful essays on remembrance, Joseph C. Kunkel's "Forgetting and not Reconciling Hiroshima," the author builds a compelling case that America's failure to repudiate its previous use of nuclear weapons constitutes a serious barrier to a nuclear-free world. In this instance, the author is principally concerned with issues of public policy and what actions ought to be taken by political officeholders to secure peace. However, Kunkel is mindful of the public refusal even to consider (i.e., remember) the possibility that we were wrong for using such weapons in the first place and points to the debacle over the exhibit at the Smithsonian as a case in point. It is at this juncture that we may ask, 'Which Americans are required to remember Hiroshima?'. Are Japanese-American citizens who suffered interment or fought in Italy so required? Are recent immigrants from other countries so required? Are Americans born after Hiroshima so required? And, what exactly are these persons required to remember? If the *Historikerstreit* taught us anything, it is that it is wholly possible for persons to remember the same facts, in no way dispute those facts, and yet not arrive at a morally satisfactory consensus as to how those facts should be understood. The distinction between moral apologetics and moral repudiation turns upon what judgments we make in respect of what we know and not, pace Rothermel, upon remembrance. On these matters, no more need be said. In the space remaining, let us profit from a closer inspection of at least some of the essays from this volume.

In “Vulnerability and Beneficence” Eddy Souffrant recognizes the increasing reach and growing influence of global corporate power and the corresponding diminishment of nation-state sovereignty. Where others, myself included, fear the prospects of ever-growing corporate power, Souffrant sees an opportunity. He cites three examples where corporations have voluntarily accepted responsibility for some past wrong and assumed ownership of the enduring effects of those wrongs. From this he reasons that it is possible that corporations can be understood as (limited) moral agents and rightly observes that such a possibility is already resident within a utilitarian ethic. Souffrant also believes there is much corporations can do to protect the world’s vulnerable, exercise stewardship over the world’s resources and environs, and make right mistakes they may have made in the past. Of course, those sympathetic to the ‘Occupy’ movement will likely be skeptical, while those who are adherents to the Chicago School doctrine of ‘social responsibility’ will likely conclude that corporations have no business other than to maximize shareholder value. One thing is for certain: corporations are here to stay. Can we really afford to cling to our basic assumptions in respect of them? Or, do we take Souffrant’s lead and make efforts to imagine new and morally better possibilities for these global Behemoths?

What do victims of injustice require in order to recover successfully? Robert Paul Churchill offers answers to this question in “Compassion and Reconciliation”. Churchill reminds us that ‘[f]orgiveness and reconciliation are different: neither entails the other’ (61). Perpetrators may fail to signal remorse or contrition, and victims may forgive in the absence of these signs. What Churchill identifies as crucial for the victims is compassion-for-self (62). Under ordinary circumstances, the notion of self-compassion might appear narcissistic, even absurd, for compassion is understood as taking-up the perspective of the Other. In the case of victimization, ‘acknowledging that their former self ... is irretrievably lost’ (64) makes self-directed compassion possible because perspective-taking bridges a now meaningful division between a recovering personality and one that was previously unharmed. However, victims need to know the facts about their victimization and, ideally, under circumstances where a trusted-other exists to reaffirm the victim’s judgment of having been wronged. Churchill does not naively assume that publicity has some occult power to heal victims of injustice. Rather, the salient feature of publicizing forms of remembrance is the possibility of reaffirmation of the victim’s perceptions and judgments by intersubjective consensus.

In “What’s Wrong with Victim’s Rights?” David Boershema assumes the contrarian position that much of what is advocated for under the rubric of ‘victim’s rights’ grants undue powers to the state and wholly fails to serve the interests of justice. Rights to due process exist, among other things, in order that we punish the correct person to the extent that this is possible. The truth of the verdict is inherent in the very concept of just punishment. To introduce ‘victims’ into the pre-trial and trial phases of the prosecutorial process is to already make assumptions as to who is more likely guilty; something we cannot permit ourselves to do. States already possess vast prosecutorial powers, and providing them with yet another tool in their already formidable arsenal is to condemn the ordinary citizen to surmount further impediments to due process. Also, what is a right without corresponding responsibilities anyway? Boershema observes, quite correctly, that any honest recognition of ‘victim’s rights’ would have to entail correlative duties qua victim (paraphrase 77). Have we a *reductio ad absurdum*?

“Pedagogy and Punishment,” by editor Rob Gildert, advances a *utilitarian* (not, presumably, ‘Unitarian’, though the Table of Contents and chapter title page indicate otherwise) argument in favor of changing the way we understand and implement punishment for most criminals. High rates of recidivism, Gildert believes, indicate a deep failure to teach criminals the social-moral consequences of their actions (82). Gildert proposes a dialogic model of mediated interactions between perpetrator and victim that would accomplish the transformation of the criminal into a ‘pro-social’ person by ‘teaching behavior modification techniques’ (89). As a civil proceeding or as an adjunct to criminal proceedings with first-time offenders, Gildert’s proposal may have merit insofar as the interests of retributive justice may not be as strong as those of compensatory or restorative justice. Even so, in a volume where large-scale violations of rights and mass atrocities figure prominently, Gildert offers us no reasons to think his model could be adapted to the task of reconciliation among groups, tribes, peoples, and nations.

Andrew Fitz-Gibbon’s entry, “Perpetual Violence?” is far and away the most interesting and compelling essay of the lot. His palpably personally felt concern and deep humility make it nearly impossible not to take him seriously when he claims that ‘Western society has an ideology of violence that permeates the whole’ (102). Fitz-Gibbon sincerely worries that ‘the human experience of violence comes close to what existentialist philosopher Karl Jasper’s termed an “ultimate situation”; a condition we cannot evade or change’ (105). In response, Fitz-Gibbon develops a social-psychological account of the dynamic of ‘perpetual violence’ that is indebted to René Girard’s account of *mimesis*, but goes well beyond the work of the latter thinker in its application. Here, and for the first time, the Janus-faced character of memory is exposed and we are given insight into the morally ambivalent territory through which we have so far crossed. Memory can be the dynamic engine that *re-presences* and imprints the displaced emotions of a bygone generation upon the living present, thus sustaining hatreds and renewing motivations for further violence. Or, alternatively, memory can be the reservoir from which we may creatively imagine new paths toward social solidarity and the wellspring from which acknowledgement of past wrongdoing takes form.

*Dum spiro, spero!*

**Brian K. Cameron**  
Saint Louis University