

Can There Be a Principled Anti-Zionism? On the Nexus between Anti-Historicism and Anti-Zionism in Modern Jewish Thought

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The task of this article is to pose the question: Can there be a principled anti-Zionism? That is, can there be an anti-Zionism that escapes the scourge of anti-Semitism? After suggesting criteria by which this may be possible, the article excavates a tradition of Jewish anti-Zionism (or Zionist agnosticism) in the past that can hardly be branded anti-Semitic. The first current of this tradition flows out of early-twentieth-century Germany, where Jewish thinkers, in conscious opposition to Zionists, envisaged a Judaism that did not submit to the contingencies of time or space. The second current, comprised of twentieth-century Orthodox Jews, similarly opposed Zionism for its attempt to return Jews to history and to their ancestral homeland. After following these overlapping currents, the article concludes by returning to the contemporary scene and inquiring whether a principled Jewish anti-Zionism is possible today.

On the face of it, the equation between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism that stands at the heart of this issue of *The Journal of Israeli History*—and of much recent public debate—is not self-evident.¹ Or perhaps it is better to say that without careful contextualization and delineation, the equation should not be bandied about freely. That I feel compelled to belabor this rather obvious point results from a complex series of developments in the Middle East, Europe and North America since the outbreak of the Al-Aksa *Intifada* in late September 2000. Among them, a resurgent anti-Semitism, particularly in Europe, has had a noticeable effect in widening an already vast gulf

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between unquestioning critics of Israel and unquestioning supporters. This growing gap leads us to wonder whether opposition to the State of Israel, or the Zionist ideology underlying it, must invariably succumb to anti-Semitism. Can there be, in short, a principled anti-Zionism?

That there can be an unprincipled anti-Zionism, informed by and consonant with anti-Semitism, is widely recognized. Recent affirmation of this comes from a rather unlikely source: high-ranking Catholic leaders meeting with Jewish counterparts in Buenos Aires in July 2004.² At this meeting, the Catholic leaders accepted the logic frequently articulated by Jews that attacks on Israeli government policy at times bear within them an animus that crosses the bounds of legitimate criticism into the terrain of anti-Semitism.

But given how charged today's political climate is, is it possible to hold to a principled anti-Zionism? Merely to raise this question is to invite hostility. Within the organized Jewish world, its mention risks severe castigation, partly due to the fear of granting solace to haters of Jews and partly due to the fact that Zionism has become an important pillar of faith for many modern Jews. In fact, it is not simply (or even primarily) Zionism that has attained this status. Israel and its representative institutions have become central foci of identity for many Jews.³ This is particularly so in the diaspora where cynicism about those institutions and their efficacy is far less pronounced than it is in Israel. Hence, the actions of the Israeli government are often considered above reproach, and all the more so in times of crisis.⁴ One consequence in the current environment is that even *pro*-Zionist critics of Israeli government policy are subjected to sharp accusations by fellow Jews, including claims of self-hatred and betrayal. The kind of exaggerated language invoked reflects a state of heightened anxiety that at times borders on delusion. For example, we read the verdict of Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, who opens his 2003 book *Never Again?* with the following assessment: "I am convinced that we currently face as great a threat to the safety and security of the Jewish people as the one we faced in the 1930s—if not a greater one."⁵ What seems to be startling hyperbole is made all the more so by the locus of Foxman's concern. At least five of eight chapters in *Never Again?* deal with anti-Semitism not in the Muslim or Arab world, but in the United States. And the axis around which much of this potent new anti-Semitism swivels, according to Foxman, is anti-Israel agitation.

This kind of alarmism grossly distorts, to my mind, the reality on the ground in the United States.⁶ But what complicates the picture—indeed, what compels us to recalibrate our political bearings—is that the reality on the ground in other venues, principally Europe, is quite different. The first unreleased report of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia in March 2003—and the second published report in April 2004—chronicle the demonstrable rise in anti-Semitic word and deed in various European countries, especially since 2002. The reports go on to discuss the ways in which the Middle East conflict, agitation against Israel, and the facile equation of Israelis and Jews are contributing factors to this phenomenon.⁷

Against this background, itself haunted by the long shadow of anti-Semitism in Europe, the questions invariably arise: When is criticism of Israel legitimate? And when

does it stray into that lamentably familiar terrain of anti-Semitism? Two concise criteria may help clarify the link between criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism: exclusion and group stigmatization. In the first instance, when criticism of Israel exists in a near-total vacuum, as if Israel is the sole state worthy of condemnation in the international order, one must wonder about the motivations behind this selective attention.⁸ This is not to deny the debilitating and corrupting nature of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. It is to suggest that an exclusive focus on Israel's misdeeds often ignores other state-sponsored violence of a similar or greater scale elsewhere. Second, when criticism of Israel shifts its target from the actions of Israel's political leaders to the character of Jews, Israeli or diaspora, a red line has been crossed. Charles de Gaulle's famous words in November 1967 that the Jews had become "un peuple d'élite, sûr de lui-même et dominateur" (an elite people, sure of itself and dominating) may have crossed that line.⁹ Despite his later qualifications of this judgment, de Gaulle's words tapped into an old discursive strand in anti-Semitic language that has gained new momentum in recent times. It is the claim, readily associated with the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, that Jews are clannish, exclusive and capable of political fealty only to themselves.

These two criteria may help in ferreting out the anti-Semites from among Israel's critics. And this is an important task. But they do not necessarily provide traction in addressing the core question with which we opened our deliberations: the putative equation of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. If the hallmark of anti-Zionism today is opposition to the idea of a Jewish state, is it possible to imagine an anti-Zionist who is possessed of good will towards Jews—that is, who rejects the claim that Israel is uniquely inhumane among the world's nations or that it reflects and draws from an ignominious Jewish character?¹⁰ Can there be an anti-Zionist whose opposition to Zionism is in fact motivated by good will towards Jews and Judaism? In fact, there are a good number of such critics, some of the most prominent of whom were or are themselves Jews. If the latter fail by any reasonable standard to be counted as *sonei Yisrael* (haters of Israel)—and not simply because of their origins, but also because of their views—then the equation between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism quickly becomes subject to challenge, modification and refinement. It is with this proposition in mind that we now begin to excavate a historical tradition—or set of traditions—of Jewish anti-Zionism that seems to escape the stain of anti-Semitism.

Beyond Time, against Zion

In the crowded marketplace of ideas in *fin-de-siècle* (and early-twentieth-century) Europe, Zionism was but one of the ideologies competing for the hearts of the Jewish masses. The Bund, the Autonomists, Reform Judaism, the Agude (i.e. Agudat Yisrael)—all saw Zionism as a competitor whose underlying rationale and territorial ambition were fundamentally flawed. It is a measure of Zionism's impressive success and good fortune—as well as the tragic murder of millions of Europe's Jews—that these voices of opposition disappeared by the end of the first half of the twentieth

century. While we do not dwell in the world of the counter-factual, it is hard to avoid asking what might have been the fate of opposition to Zionism—such as the Bund or the Agude—had the large concentration of eastern European Jews avoided the Nazi terror.

Without the tools to answer this question, we must retreat to what is more tangible. For the purposes of this article, I will first examine a current of anti-Zionism uncovered in the course of research for a book on anti-historicism in modern (and, more particularly, German) Jewish thought.¹¹ In the second section of the article, I will trace a second and intersecting current of Jewish criticism of Zionism. The third section extends the discussion to our times and observes a curious inversion whereby one of the most visible strands of Zionism today has itself appropriated the language and logic of anti-historicism. The net effect is *not* an exhaustive account of anti-Zionism, but rather a historically informed meditation on the central question announced at the outset.

1. *Anti-Historicism and Anti-Zionism in Prewar Europe*

One of Zionism's boldest wagers was that it would not merely restore the Jewish people to the land of Israel, but that it would restore the Jewish people to history as well. In classical Zionist thought, diaspora Jews were prisoners of historical contingency (and prey to the caprice of often hostile hosts). But at another, perhaps more important level, diaspora Jews existed beyond the laws of normal historical contingency in an extraterritorial and ahistorical domain: *Galut*. The task of Zionism was to pull Jews back into the flowing current of history, not as petrified detritus but as active and purposeful swimmers.¹²

In the course of being restored to history, Jews would be able to observe and write their own history with new perspicacity. The most notable of the first-generation Jewish scholars at the Hebrew University, Gershom Scholem, wrote in 1937 that the road from Exile to Zion afforded Jews "an historic point of view from within"—within, that is, the vibrant current of history itself.¹³ Scholem's statement suggests that the Zionist "return" was a bridge to both ontological and epistemological transformation. Restoration to history would create a new lens *onto* history.

It was while studying Scholem and other founding fathers of Jewish studies in Jerusalem that I often wondered whether their double act of historicization met resistance from other Jews, perhaps from a set of European Jewish alter egos. After all, it was the relentless historicization of life that prompted Ernst Troeltsch, the Protestant theologian and historian, to declare in 1922 a "crisis of historicism."¹⁴ Troeltsch's call culminated a half-century of intense criticism of history as ontological plane and scholarly method extending back to Friedrich Nietzsche's 1874 essay, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie" (On the use and abuse of history for life).

Were there Jewish critics of historicism who, like their Christian contemporaries, expressed concern about the debilitating effects of history on their religious tradition? Indeed, there were Jewish thinkers who saw in history a grave threat to the integrity of

Judaism. We might logically expect such fear issuing from the ranks of "traditionalists"—for whom immersion in subjects or methods beyond the canon of classical Jewish texts was discouraged or proscribed. We will return to the traditionalist camp below. But there was also an intriguing critique of historicism that issued not from the avowedly insular, but from those Jews who proudly embraced the surrounding secular culture. What is even more intriguing is that these thinkers' concern about history often overlapped with their critique of Zionism.

The progenitor of this lineage was a contemporary of Friedrich Nietzsche's who would gain renown as one of the leading Jewish and German philosophers in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth: Hermann Cohen (1842–1918). Already in his first article as a budding neo-Kantian philosopher in 1871, Cohen voiced reservations about the hegemonic impulses of the historical method within the *Geisteswissenschaften*.¹⁵ His fear was twofold: first, that the contextual logic of historicism led to fragmentation and atomization—in stark contrast to philosophy's quest for holism and coherence; and second, that history was on the verge of supplanting philosophy as the pride of the "human sciences."

Over the course of his subsequent career, Cohen periodically returned to a critique of historicism. Often enough, he did so by attacking his erstwhile teacher at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau, Heinrich Graetz. Graetz represented for Cohen the antithesis of a stable philosophical demeanor. His "emotional perversity" resulted in equal parts from his personality, the historical vocation and his ideological stance—the last a form of which Cohen labeled in 1874 "Palestinian."¹⁶ This curious pre-Zionist label referred less to a territorial proclivity on Graetz's part than to a preference for the material and mundane features—what Cohen called the "saftige Frucht"—of history.¹⁷

In Cohen's reading, the methods of the historian were exclusively (and regrettably) attuned to this kind of materialist, "Palestinian" perspective; as such, they failed to grasp the grandeur of Judaism as a soaring and timeless ethical system. On similar grounds, Cohen later extended his critique of Graetz's "Palestinian" perspective to Zionism per se, which he bitterly opposed. Indeed, Cohen's anti-Zionism was as pronounced and public as his fealty to neo-Kantianism—and that was hardly coincidental, since the two derived from a shared resistance to a sensory-driven materialism. As Cohen made clear in his famous polemic with Martin Buber from 1916, Judaism did not require territorial autonomy in order to survive. On the contrary, "political integration into the modern nation-state"—the bane of Zionism—was the best guarantee of Judaism's survival.¹⁸

A number of provisional conclusions can be offered at this point that serve as signposts for our future discussion. First, Hermann Cohen was hardly a marginal figure in German-Jewish culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the contrary, he was the most famous Jewish philosopher of his day, a German patriot and a passionate opponent of anti-Semitism. Second, his deep-seated belief in the union of *Deutschtum und Judentum* anchored his conviction in the viability of a vibrant Jewish life in the diaspora and, conversely, his steadfast opposition to Zionism.¹⁹

The example of Cohen reminds us that appreciation—even glorification—of the diaspora was a respectable position in his day and shortly after. The early decades of the twentieth century in Europe, we recall, witnessed a robust debate between Zionists and their opponents over the ideal locus of Jewish existence. In Germany, it suffices to say that not all Jews—in fact, only a small minority—shared the Zionists' belief that exiting the diaspora and returning to the homeland was imperative.²⁰ But neither did all German Jews believe that their task was, as the nineteenth-century Eduard Gans once prophesied, to disappear like a river into the ocean of European society. There was a middle ground inhabited by the likes of Cohen, strongly committed to their Jewish and German identities and convinced that the true Zion did not lie in Palestine. Redemption was possible even—perhaps only—in *Golus*.

We see clear traces of this stance in Hermann Cohen's student and friend from Berlin, Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929). The two differed by generation, background and philosophical proclivity. Whereas Cohen was the flag-bearer of nineteenth-century neo-Kantianism, Rosenzweig belonged to a younger generation of intellectuals hungry for a new and more urgent philosophical language—what Peter Gordon has called a “counter-lexicon of religion, vitalism, and *Existenz*.”²¹ And yet, for all of their differences, Cohen met Rosenzweig at an important crossroads. The year was 1913, and the young Rosenzweig had decided to leave behind the professional study of history (at Freiburg with Friedrich Meinecke) and commit himself anew to Jewish learning, most particularly with Cohen in Berlin. In Cohen, he was encountering not only one of the great German philosophers of the day, but the man in whom “twentieth-century Jewish theology in Germany emancipated itself from a sterile Historicism.”²² And so it seems fair to assume that Cohen's periodic, if determined, chiseling away at the edifice of historicism reinforced Rosenzweig's own skepticism about history.

In any event, Rosenzweig's famous return to Judaism clearly marked an escape from history—as professional vocation and method. But it also signaled release from the gravitational pull of historical contingency. To illustrate this point, we must recall another shared trait of Cohen the teacher and Rosenzweig the student: their skepticism over Zionism. It would be mistaken to maintain that Rosenzweig was as unequivocal in his condemnation of Zionism as Cohen. He was more a Zionist agnostic than a confirmed opponent.²³ But similarly to Cohen, Rosenzweig insisted on neither a return to history nor a return to Zion.

In 1919–20, Rosenzweig delivered a series of lectures in his hometown of Kassel that revealed his views about the distinctiveness of the Jewish people. In one of these lectures, Rosenzweig spoke of Jews as a people born and tested not in its own territory, but in exile, a condition that steeled them for “battle on behalf of the exalted life and *against descent into the contingency of land and time*.”²⁴ There was no ambition here to restore the Jews to the normal flow of history. For, as Rosenzweig, declared: “The Jewish spirit breaks through the shackles of time. Because it is eternal and aims for the Eternal, it disregards the omnipotence of time. Indeed, it walks unperturbed through history.”²⁵

This image of a Jewish spirit "unperturbed" by history stands in stark contrast to the Zionist ideal of a return to history. At the same time, Rosenzweig did not surrender an inch of the Jewish claim to national uniqueness. He was as staunch in opposition to assimilation as the Zionists, and thus charted a third way between those Jews who sought salvation in Germany and those who sought salvation in Palestine. We might say that Rosenzweig sought salvation neither in terrain nor, for that matter, in any space.²⁶ Like a number of other Weimar Jewish intellectuals, he sought refuge in a particular kind of time, not the dynamic and fast-moving chronological time that measures historical change, but *Jetztzeit*, an eternal and unchanging present in whose midst the possibility of messianic transformation—even of a measure of eternity—was always alive.²⁷ By pointing to this present (and the transformative potential inhering in it), Rosenzweig was holding at bay the Zionist desire for return—to history, to Zion, to a normal national existence. Simultaneously, he was pushing towards a new evaluation, even valorization, of *Galut*.

Some years after Rosenzweig's Kassel lectures, another young German-Jewish thinker, Leo Strauss (1899–1973), offered up one of the most enigmatic descriptions of the Exilic condition uttered in his day. Drawn to Zionism as a youth in Kirchhain, Strauss was increasingly attracted, as an aspiring young academic in Weimar times, to the logic of political Zionism. And yet, in an essay in 1923 devoted to the early Zionist Max Nordau, he called attention to the common thread that linked Zionism and its apparent opposite, assimilationism. Zionism, through its quest for normalization, had the ironic effect of accentuating "the dejudaizing tendency" so characteristic of assimilation.²⁸ This critical observation of Zionism sets in relief a comment made earlier in the essay when Strauss was summarizing, it would appear, Nordau's view of Exile. He noted the simultaneously preservative and destructive forces that framed Exile, the net effect of which was to afford Jews "the maximum possibility of existence by means of a minimum normality."²⁹

Eugene Sheppard has written more extensively on Strauss's notion of *Galut* than I can here.³⁰ But it is interesting to note that while Strauss was hardly an avowed anti-Zionist (or a self-professed Diasporist), his remark about *Galut* appears, as a matter of literary style and context, to be as attributable to his own stance as to Max Nordau's. This is interesting to us, because the formulation is far from the classic Zionist "negation of the diaspora." On the contrary, it reflects a posture of ambivalence and even (if we read "between the lines," as Strauss would later counsel) a veiled appreciation of the creative capacity of Jews under difficult conditions. Of course, this is all the more interesting to us in light of Strauss's later claim in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952) that conditions of political persecution are conducive to the communication of profound esoteric truths.

This later assertion does not allow us to conclude that Leo Strauss was unequivocal about the glories of Exile in 1923. He was simply too complex, ambiguous and tortuous a thinker, even at age twenty-four, for that. That said, we can use his 1923 formulation as more than a summary of Max Nordau's (or his own) views of *Galut*. For our purposes, it can serve as an epigram for those early-twentieth-century German

Jews who struggled between the poles of Zionism and assimilationism and, in the process, contemplated the prospects of a robust Jewish existence in the diaspora.³¹ We have seen here that Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig struggled, each in his own way, to delineate a Judaism that defied the gravitational pull of base historical contingency. Concomitantly, each was prepared to countenance, at least for a time, the prospect of Jewish political alienation in Exile rather than Zionist normalization. And perhaps most germane, neither of them (nor Leo Strauss for that matter) can be judged in the least as anti-Jewish.

2. *Between Tradition and Revision: Postwar Legacies*

The intellectual heirs of this tradition of thought are not many. The erasure of German-Jewish culture in the Nazi terror, followed by the creation and growing prominence of the State of Israel, diluted the logic of Jewish anti-Zionism and Zionist agnosticism.³² One can point to a small number of postwar legatees of the German-Jewish intellectual tradition like Jakob J. Petuchowski and Steven Schwarzschild, both German-born Reform rabbis who served as academics in the United States. Schwarzschild, for example, feared that a Zionist return to history would jeopardize a cherished ethical quality of the Jew—the sense of alienation, of being “always and everywhere a stranger except in Judaism and with God.”³³ In a similar vein (but different field), the literary critic George Steiner has long celebrated the Jew’s Exilic cosmopolitanism: “Instead of protesting his visitor-status in gentile lands, or, more precisely, in the military camps of the diaspora, the Jew should welcome it.”³⁴

In addition to Steiner, Schwarzschild and Petuchowski, we can note a diverse array of Jewish critics in the diaspora ranging from Simon Rawidowicz³⁵ to Michael Selzer³⁶ to groups such as the American Council for Judaism and Breira.³⁷ Meanwhile, the State of Israel has produced its own diverse lineage of Jewish critics of Zionism (such as Uri Avnery, Boas Evron, the group Matzpen) whose ranks grew after the Six Day War and then swelled even more after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

However, there is a second and more concerted source of Jewish critique of Zionism to which we must now turn our attention: that emerging out of Orthodox and, often, *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) circles. Contemporary observers are well aware of the staunchly anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli line of the small *haredi* group, Neturei Karta.³⁸ This group gained renown for its highly visible expressions of support of the Palestinian national cause in the 1970s. But in fact the movement’s roots extend much deeper into the fierce anti-Zionism of traditionalist Orthodox Jews in Europe that surfaced at the turn of the twentieth century. It was this sentiment that gave rise to the creation in 1912 of Agudat Yisrael (or Agude), a coalition of various Orthodox bodies (for example, German, Hungarian and Polish) assembled to combat the growing secularization and assimilation of European Jews, one of whose principal manifestations was Zionism.

Among the leading German proponents of the Agude was Isaac Breuer (1883–1946), a contemporary of the Weimar-era intellectuals mentioned earlier and a figure

who returns our attention to the link between anti-historicism and anti-Zionism.³⁹ Grandson of the renowned neo-Orthodox rabbi, Samson Raphael Hirsch, Breuer lived out his own version of the Hirschian ideal of *Torah im derekh erez* (stringent Torah observance complemented by openness to secular culture). He was a university-trained lawyer with a deep and abiding reverence for Kant. Moreover, he was a frequent critic of the bourgeois materialism of the separatist community that his grandfather created in Frankfurt and in which he was born and raised. In this regard, he shared an important concern with leading Jewish intellectuals in Frankfurt, including Franz Rosenzweig and members of the city's Institut für Sozialforschung.

At the same time, Breuer not only remained scrupulously observant throughout his life; he also inherited his grandfather's belief that the essential ideals of the Torah did not change over time and thus were immune from the ravages of history. Breuer refined this notion by suggesting that the chief bearer of Torah Judaism, the Jewish people, actually inhabited a different realm of existence than the gentile nations—the realm of *Metageschichte* (Metahistory). As a *Gottesnation*, a divinely elected people, the Jews soared above the fast-moving current of prosaic history.⁴⁰ Consistent with this view, Breuer regarded Zionism as “the most dreadful enemy that has ever arisen against the Jewish nation.”⁴¹ For Zionism sought nothing more than to re-immense Jews into the current of history through a return to political power. The mission of the Jewish nation was to resist this profanation. Life in Exile was a good defense against this danger. It taught Jews, Breuer declared in 1918, “to abjure the path of sovereignty, the striving for political power.” Over the course of the Jews' long dispersion, “*Golus* became the school of the messianic nation.”⁴²

Breuer's view of Exile resonates with that of other Weimar-era Jewish intellectuals, who contemplated the creative potential of a diaspora existence. What separated Breuer from these intellectuals, though, was his decision in 1936 to leave Germany and move to Palestine—the very site of Zionist dreams! To be sure, Hitler's rise to power was sufficient incentive to leave Germany. But in fact, Breuer's decision was more complicated. Zionism was a source of revulsion to him, but evidently also of vertiginous allure. His ambivalent posture, according to a recent biographer, amounted to a kind of counter- or “alternative Zionism.”⁴³ A man who knew Breuer well from Frankfurt, Baruch Kurzweil, could only explain his attitude in this way: “Huge contradictions swim around in the depths of his soul.”⁴⁴

Space does not permit a full unpacking of these contradictions. It is enough to say that Isaac Breuer symbolized a line of thought—an Orthodox critique of the Zionist descent into history—that paralleled and at times overlapped with the German-Jewish lineage discussed earlier. Curiously, Breuer's own paradoxical passage from Frankfurt to Jerusalem presaged the continuation of that line of thought in Israel. The aforementioned Baruch Kurzweil (1907–72), the irascible and iconoclastic literary critic, gained notoriety in Israeli intellectual circles for his barbed attacks against Gershom Scholem and the “Jerusalem School,” whom he accused of genuflecting before the “god of ... the normalization and historicization of Judaism.”⁴⁵

As with previous critics, Kurzweil traced in Zionism and historicism a coarse materialism that threatened the exalted spiritual status of Judaism. This position could also be said to characterize the thought of an equally irascible and iconoclastic Israeli Orthodox thinker, Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–94). With his decidedly unsentimental demeanor, Leibowitz insisted that each individual Jew was required to accept the burden of Halakhic observance as a reflection of his/her submission to “Divine supervision.” It was this “supervision,” not the return to Zion or history, that lent the Jewish people its distinctiveness.⁴⁶ In fact, the attempt of some Zionists to apotheosize the return to the land was, for Leibowitz, an act of idol worship.⁴⁷

As is well known, this perspective is shared by a good number of ultra-Orthodox Jews—those who, unlike Breuer, Kurzweil or Leibowitz—eschew engagement with modern secular culture. Most prominently, Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum (1887–1979), the Satmar Rebbe and a towering figure in twentieth-century ultra-Orthodoxy, was as unrelenting a Jewish critic of Zionism as ever was. According to Rabbi Teitelbaum,

if we place all the immodesty and promiscuity of the generation and the many sins of the world on one side of the scale, and the Zionist state on the other side of the scale by itself, it would outweigh them all. Zionism is the greatest form of spiritual impurity in the entire world.⁴⁸

Zionism’s cardinal sin was to violate a number of oaths to which God had sworn the Jewish people, principally the proscription against Israel’s “breaching the wall” (*she-lo ya’alu ba-homah*) by entering the land of Israel (Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 111A). Indeed, it was the Zionist attempt to throw off the heavy yoke of Exile and undertake an active return to history that marked a heretical usurpation of divine prerogative. God’s punishment for this transgression, Teitelbaum argued in one of his most well-known and controversial assertions, was the Holocaust.⁴⁹

As marginal and repugnant as such a view is, it is undeniable that Teitelbaum’s views about Zionism are perfectly acceptable to thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Jews the world over—such as the *Edah Haredit* (ultra-Orthodox community) in Jerusalem, as well as Hasidic communities in Brooklyn, Monsey, Kiryas Joel and New Square, and *haredim* in Europe and Australia. The question that these *haredi* critics—and their more centrist Orthodox coreligionists—raise is the very one that we broached at the outset: can anti-Zionists—in this case, people who are single-mindedly devoted to the perpetuation of the Jewish people and Judaism—be anti-Semitic? There has in fact been a consistent anti-Zionist refrain from traditionalist Jews for as long as there has been a Zionist movement. Were they motivated by hate or bias?

If intent were the sole measure, then none of those discussed above—from *haredim* to liberal German Jews—would qualify as an anti-Semite. None wished ill either of the Jewish people or of the Jewish religious tradition. On the contrary, all were deeply concerned for the well-being of Jews and Judaism. Nor is it clear that the effect of their words was deleterious in any meaningful way. Expressions of anti-Zionism or Zionist agnosticism coming from those examined above neither hastened the Nazi reign of

terror nor impeded the Zionist march to political realization. If we find little trace of anti-Semitic intent or effect, we are hard-pressed to designate the Jewish critics of Zionism mentioned here as anti-Semites.

3. *Jewish Anti-Zionism: The Contemporary Question*

The historical survey I have offered, incomplete as it is, has followed a variety of twentieth-century Jewish thinkers who departed from the increasingly normative path of Zionism, not out of animus for Jews, but rather out of deep concern. This deep concern, we repeat, did not have a noticeably deleterious effect on Zionism. On the contrary, it could be argued that these Jewish critics—from the time of the Bund—have pushed Zionism to sharpen and refine its own ideological distinctiveness.

Can the same be said about today, with the Israel-Palestine conflict and a rise in anti-Semitic activity looming ominously in the backdrop? One important difference from earlier times is that Zionism has lost much of its steam, owing both to its successes (such as the realization of the Herzlian vision of a bourgeois political state) and its failures (chiefly, the unresolved conflict with the Palestinians, exacerbated by the occupation). It is the latter perception that has prompted a loosely organized group of Israeli intellectuals (such as Yitzhak Laor, Uri Ram, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, Ilan Pappé), often brought together under the rubric of post-Zionism, to criticize the underlying principles of Zionism. This body of criticism has generated a torrent of responses, including many insisting that the so-called post-Zionists are themselves responsible for the death of Zionism.⁵⁰

I sense that the opposite is the case. That is, the very challenge posed by the newer critics of Zionism has had the effect of reviving Zionism, or at least of providing much-needed energy to the debate over Zionism's purpose. In this sense, I would echo Jonathan Freedland's observation, in one of the most insightful essays on the link between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, that Zionists ignore at their own peril the arguments of their critics, particularly those who cannot be deemed anti-Semitic; Freedland mentions as an example Israeli Member of Knesset Azmi Bishara, and we might add the Jewish critics who have been discussed here.⁵¹ It is important to recall that we have focused exclusively on Jewish critics of Zionism so as to consider the most plausible conditions for an anti-Zionism untainted by the stain of anti-Semitism.⁵² But we must also state what will appear more or less obvious, depending on the eye: namely, not all non-Jewish critics of Zionism can be deemed anti-Semites, especially if they avoid those criteria (selectivity of focus and group stigmatization) that distinguish legitimate from illegitimate criticism.

One of the key questions for present-day critics of Zionism who are not anti-Semites is the deep structural issue of whether Israel can and should remain a Jewish state (or a state of the Jews), as opposed to becoming a state of all its citizens. This question has been much discussed in Israel throughout the 1990s, but assumes increasing

urgency as the demography of Israel and Palestine continues to shift in favor of the Arab side.⁵³ Is it better to avoid the claims of those critics who argue that the basic character of Israel can no longer be maintained? Or can principled critics of Zionism, even anti-Zionists—for example, those who oppose the idea of a Jewish state but are committed to a state of all its citizens, *as well as to the well-being of Jews*—contribute to discussions about the future contours of the State of Israel? Might it be that they offer a vision of the future that is as likely to be realized as is preserving the status quo?

In recalling the provocative and thought-provoking role of Jewish critics of Zionism in the past, I am inclined to answer these questions affirmatively. I am further inclined to believe that the debate engendered by the current Israeli critics is important, as a matter of public discourse and moral conscience, to the future of the State. Clearly not all will agree. At a minimum, it is advisable to move beyond the equation of critique of Zionism and group betrayal, for it has a chilling effect on debate over issues of key import to the Jewish future.

Should one be unmoved by this call, I propose in conclusion another benefit to retracing the path of Jewish critics of Zionism. This path serves as a revealing backdrop to a significant development in the recent history of Zionism—namely, the emergence of a form of expression that subverts the earlier impulse to return to history. One of the tasks of this essay was to excavate a group of diaspora Jewish thinkers who came to appreciate the status of Exile beyond time and space, set against the Zionist desire for historical normalcy. Ironically, it may be that the staunchest—perhaps even the last—Zionists left in Israel today share an important characteristic with these diaspora thinkers. I refer to the messianically imbued settlers of the West Bank and Gaza, inspired by the teaching of Rabbis Kook *père et fils*. Whereas the elder A. I. Kook bestowed a powerful kabbalistic language upon the notions of Exile and Zion, his son (Z. Y. Kook) thoroughly conflated the ideals of “historical necessity” and “cosmic redemption.”⁵⁴ At this juncture of history and cosmos, the messianic settlers who follow in the path of the Kooks take flight from the older, largely secular Zionist vision that sought a return to mundane history. At the same time, their quest for a new plane of messianic history paradoxically recalls that of anti-Zionist Orthodox Jews like Isaac Breuer and the Satmar Rebbe.⁵⁵ But it adds an explosive and dangerous tonic: political and military power.

And so contemporary Zionists, like the anti-Zionists studied here, seek to escape history—in large measure, by sacralizing it. But of course, neither group fully succeeds. Both are condemned to live in history's fast-moving current. Within that current, both are often motivated by the desire to advance the Jewish commonweal. This is particularly important to bear in mind with regard to the Jewish critics of Zionism. To be sure, there is no guarantee that all critics of Zionism will be similarly disposed. As we have seen in recent years, criticism of Zionism can slip from legitimate and morally compelling grounds to the murky terrain of group stigmatization. But the gist of this article has been to suggest that this has not always been the case in the past. And perhaps it need not be the case in the future.

Notes

- [1] On the subject of the new anti-Semitism, see, inter alia, Chesler, *The New Anti-Semitism*; Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel*; Foxman *Never Again?*; and Iganski and Kosmin, eds., *A New Anti-Semitism?*. There have also been some rather searching journalistic pieces by Ian Buruma: "How to Talk about Israel," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 31 August 2003 and "The Myth of the New Anti-Semitism," *The Nation*, 15 January 2004; and by Omer Bartov: "He Meant What He Said," *The New Republic*, 29 January 2004.
- [2] See "Vatican Leaders Condemn Anti-Zionism," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 8 July 2004.
- [3] The most recent National Jewish Population Survey (2000–2001) indicates that a strong majority of American Jews remain "emotionally attached to Israel" and feel a "common destiny" with Israeli Jews. See the NJPS findings on Israel at http://www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=83868. Meanwhile, Jacob Neusner gave voice to these sentiments when he noted of American Jews: "The sole commitment shared by nearly all, uniquely capable of producing common action, is that the State of Israel must live." See his introduction to Neusner, ed., *Israel and Zion in American Judaism*, xi. See also the comprehensive article on the American Jewish project of "Israel advocacy" by Raffel, "History of Israel Advocacy," 103–80. On the other hand, it is essential to note that some observers have traced a decline in American Jewish support for Israel since the high-water mark of 1967. See, for example, Rosenthal, *Irreconcilable Differences?*
- [4] According to New York labor leader Victor Gotbaum, the Holocaust was an important turning point in his uncritical embrace of Zionism and Israel: "Since I helped to liberate Buchenwald, I feel Zionism as a faith. I can never be critical of Israel." Quoted in Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 18.
- [5] Foxman, *Never Again?* 4.
- [6] Leon Wieseltier has brilliantly refuted this claim in "Hitler is Dead: Against Ethnic Panic," *The New Republic*, 27 May 2002.
- [7] In the earlier report, the authors argue that "one cannot deny that there exists a close link between the increase of anti-Semitism and the escalation of the Middle East conflict." See Bergmann and Wetzell, "Manifestations," 16. Meanwhile, the second and more fragmented report states that "it seems clear that the Middle East conflict has a negative impact on the lives of the Jewish communities." See "Perceptions."
- [8] Akin to this form of selectivity is the October 2003 poll sponsored by the European Union in which Israel was deemed the leading threat to world peace. See "European Polls Call Israel a Big Threat to World Peace," *International Herald Tribune*, 31 October 2003.
- [9] De Gaulle's comment was made in response to a question at a press conference on 27 November 1967. For a transcript, see www.obsarm.org/dossiers/damo/palestine/de-gaulle.htm.
- [10] For the purposes of this article, I use the terms "anti-Zionist," "Zionist agnostic" and "critic of Zionism" relatively interchangeably. While there are obvious gradations among them, the common denominator is the shared challenge to the wisdom of territorial concentration and political sovereignty for Jews in the Land of Israel.
- [11] Indeed, much of the following discussion of Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Leo Strauss and Isaac Breuer draws from Myers, *Resisting History*.
- [12] The Zionist impulse to "return to history" has received some new and interesting attention. Most significantly, Raz-Krakotzkin argues that this impulse was animated by a powerful, if not always articulate, "theological" ambition that marked an unwitting absorption of a Christian eschatological scheme: that is, Zionism marked the move from Exilic disfavor to salvation ("Ha-shivah el ha-historiyah," 249–76); see also the earlier essay by Schweid, "Ha-shivah el ha-historiyah," 673–83.
- [13] Scholem, "Kabbala at the Hebrew University," 8.
- [14] Troeltsch, "Die Krisis," 573.

- [15] See Cohen, "Zur Kontroverse."
- [16] See Cohen's letter to F. A. Lange from 5 September 1874, discussed in Liebeschütz, "Hermann Cohen," 3–4.
- [17] Cohen, "Grätzens Philosophie," 203.
- [18] The exchange between Cohen and Buber between July and September 1916 is translated in Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 571–77.
- [19] Cohen, *Jüdische Schriften*, 237–318.
- [20] See the figures on German Zionists in Poppel, *Zionism in Germany*, 176.
- [21] Gordon, "Under One Tradewind," 66.
- [22] Altmann, "Theology," 194.
- [23] As Stéphane Mosès shows, Rosenzweig at various points in his life, particularly in the 1920s, appeared quite understanding of the Zionist impulse, and even sympathetic to Jewish settlement in Palestine. For instance, Mosès recalls that Rosenzweig once wrote in his diary in 1922 that "the Jew who lays down roots in the diaspora loses his creative Jewish and religious powers." See Mosès, "Franz Rosenzweig," 324. For a broader review of Rosenzweig's ambivalence toward Zionism, see also Meir, *Kokhav mi-Ya'akov*, 105–19.
- [24] Rosenzweig, "Geist und Epochen," 537 (my emphasis).
- [25] *Ibid.*, 537 (my emphasis), 538. It is important to note that Karl Barth, Rosenzweig's theological contemporary, described Christianity in somewhat parallel terms, as a religious faith that refused to succumb to the temporal. See Ogletree, *Christian Faith*, 92–6.
- [26] This is certainly true relative to Hermann Cohen's embrace of Germany. At the same time, Rosenzweig's notion of *Zweistromland*—the "land of two streams" as his collected Jewish writings were called—hints at a fertile coexistence between Jewish and non-Jewish (e.g. German) culture.
- [27] Rosenzweig understood *Weltgeschichte* not as a story of the past and surely not of the gentile past. Rather, "it is *now*"—a living present whose bearers long ago buried their one-time contemporaries (i.e. the Greeks). Rosenzweig, "Jüdische Geschichte," 539, 542–43.
- [28] Strauss, "Der Zionismus bei Nordau," 317, 319; Myers, *Resisting History*, 127.
- [29] Strauss, "Der Zionismus bei Nordau," 318.
- [30] Sheppard, "Leo Strauss."
- [31] In fact, these meditations were not restricted to an esoteric circle of philosophers. As Michael Brenner has shown, Weimar Berlin, with figures like Simon Dubnow in residence, boasted a minor revival of earlier Diasporist ideas in communal discourse, one of whose by-products was a moderately successful, if short-lived, political party, the Jüdische Volkspartei. Brenner, "The Jüdische Volkspartei," 219–43.
- [32] A proper mapping of these interrelated phenomena would take note of the earlier critique of political Zionism offered by Central European Jews in Palestine (many of them self-identified Zionists) through the organizational mouthpieces of Brit Shalom and the Ihud faction from the 1920s up to 1948. See, for example, Ratsabi, *Between Zionism and Judaism*, and the more dated study by Hattis, *The Bi-National Idea*. A number of these figures—e.g. S. H. Bergmann, Martin Buber and the American-born Judah L. Magnes—strongly preferred a binational political arrangement in Palestine to Jewish sovereignty. Another member of this group, the scholar of nationalism Hans Kohn, left Palestine in frustration over what he saw as the errant course of the Zionist ideal. See, for example, Kohn's essay, "Zion and the Jewish National Idea," originally published in *The Menorah Journal*, no. 1–2 (autumn–winter 1958) and reprinted in Selzer, ed., *Zionism Reconsidered*, 175–212. Mention must also be made of the forceful critique of another German Jewish intellectual and lapsed Zionist who did not settle in Palestine, Hannah Arendt. In 1945 Arendt published "Zionism Reconsidered," in which she asserted that the growing push toward a Jewish state in Palestine would create an "insoluble 'tragic conflict'"—or worse, "as many insoluble conflicts as there are Mediterranean nations" (214–15). A more extended

- mapping of Jewish criticism of Zionism would also register the appearance of the American Council for Judaism, which mounted an energetic campaign against Zionism in the 1940s under the leadership of Rabbi Elmer Berger. See Kolsky, *Jews against Zionism*.
- [33] See Schwarzschild, *Franz Rosenzweig*, 14, as well as Menachem Kellner's discussion of Schwarzschild's opposition to Zionism in *The Pursuit of the Ideal*, 12. See also Petuchowski, *Zion Reconsidered*.
- [34] Steiner, "The Wandering Jew," *Petahim* 1, no. 6 (1968): 21, quoted in the informative discussion in Sagiv, "George Steiner's Jewish Problem." Sagiv's analysis of Steiner comports with the gist of the present article when he notes that "Steiner's opposition to Zionism and his challenge to Jewish collective existence contain no hint of what is often called Jewish self-hatred." See "George Steiner's Jewish Problem," 2. I thank Ruth Gavison for calling my attention to Sagiv's article.
- [35] Rawidowicz repeatedly expressed concern that a growing Zionist triumphalism would lead to neglect or even "negation" of the diaspora. This is a leitmotif of his 900-page study, *Bavel vi-Yerushalayim*, especially the second part, "1948 and the Jewish Question."
- [36] One of Selzer's key angles of critique of Zionism is its dominance by Ashkenazic Jews and concomitant discrimination of Sephardic Jews, which he outlines in the provocatively entitled *The Aryanization of the Jewish State*. Selzer concludes this book with a call for a renewed diaspora nationalism: "The foundations of a Dubnovian, autonomous Jewish life are already well established outside Israel, particularly in the United States" (118).
- [37] See the account of Gorny, *The State of Israel*, as well as the voices assembled in Kushner and Solomon, eds, *Wrestling with Zion*.
- [38] For an insider's account of the group, see Domb, *The Transformation*.
- [39] See Myers, *Resisting History*, 130–56.
- [40] Breuer, *Messiasspuren*, 18.
- [41] Ibid. *Judenproblem*, 89; Myers, *Resisting History*, 154.
- [42] Breuer, *Messiasspuren*, 44, 79.
- [43] Morgenstern, *Vom Frankfurt nach Jerusalem*, 231.
- [44] Kurzweil, "Yitzhak Breuer," in idem, *Le-nokhah ha-mevukhah*, 117.
- [45] Ibid. See also "Al ha-to'elet ve-al ha-nezek shel mada'ei ha-yahadut," in idem, *Be-ma'avak al erkhei ha-yahadut*, 209.
- [46] See Leibowitz, *He'arot le-farshiyot ha-shavu'a*, 112. Leibowitz insisted that "the abiding and constant element in Jewish history, the *Halakhah*, is essentially ahistoric." Leibowitz, "Ahistorical Thinkers," 97.
- [47] According to Leibowitz, "exalting the land itself to the rank of holiness is idolatry *par excellence*." Leibowitz, "The Uniqueness," 86–87.
- [48] See <http://www.jewsagainstzionism.com/quotes/teitelbaum.htm#SomeWords>.
- [49] Teitelbaum, *Sefer va-yo'el Moshe*, 5, 8.
- [50] For a sampling of the debate between "post-Zionists" and their critics, see, inter alia, Ginossar and Bareli, eds, *Tziyonut*; Weitz, *Bein hazon le-revizyah*; and Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates*.
- [51] Freedland has offered one of the best and most credible accounts of the relationship between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism (or varieties of anti-Zionism). Freedland's discussion of MK Bishara introduces an important category of anti-Zionist expression to the tradition under discussion—Israeli, particularly Israeli Arab, anti-Zionism. Freedland, "Is Anti-Zionism Antisemitism?" 127.
- [52] In this regard, one is reminded of an apocryphal story told about the arch Jewish anti-Zionist, the Satmar Rebbe. It is a story whose moral is at once compelling and repellent, intuitive and immoral. Once a politician in New York came to visit Rabbi Teitelbaum to ask for his endorsement. Apparently, the politician knew with whom he was dealing and avoided any

mention of Israel. However, at the end of their meeting, the Satmar Rebbe asked the politician what his stance on Israel was. With some hesitation, the politician admitted that he was a strong supporter of Israel. Surprisingly, the Rebbe responded with approval. Later, he explained to his "perplexed followers ... that non-Jewish opposition to the state of Israel is rooted in hatred of the Jews." In other words, it was dangerous and threatening—in fact, anti-Semitic—for a non-Jew to oppose Zionism. The accompanying logic—that which guided the Satmar Rebbe throughout his life—was that it was not only possible but obligatory for a Jew to oppose Zionism. See Nissan Ratzlav-Katz, "The Wisdom of the Satmar Rebbe," *Arutz Sheva*, 28 March 2003 (www.israelnationalnews.com/article.php3?id=2129). The Satmar Rebbe's logic is similar to that of one who believes ethnic jokes are legitimate only when told by a member of the in-group. On the one hand, such logic violates our sense of basic fairness regarding human nature (by imputing ill will to the outside critic). On the other, it hardly seems unreasonable to maintain that Jews would feel a deeper sense of commitment to Jewish survival than non-Jews, and thus might oppose Zionism out of altruism rather than malice.

- [53] See the section dealing with this question, particularly the contribution by Israel Supreme Court Justice Aharon Barak, in Walzer, Lorberbaum and Zohar, eds, *The Jewish Political Tradition*, 545–61. See also the recent attempt by Jakobson and Rubinstein to compare Israel's version of democracy to that of other nations in *Yisra'el u-mishpachat ha-amim*, as well as Gavison, *Yisra'el ki-medinah yehudit ve-demokratit*.
- [54] See Ravitzky, *Messianism*, 125–56, and more generally chapter 3.
- [55] Ravitzky calls attention to the affinity between religious Zionist and religious anti-Zionist messianism in *ibid.*, 138.

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