




1985

## Menorah Review (No. 5, Fall, 1985)

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# MENORAH



REVIEW • THE JUDAIC STUDIES PROGRAM OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • NUMBER 5 • FALL 1985

## THE AMBIGUITIES OF JEWISH NATIONALISM

*In the Land of Israel*

By Amos Oz

Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich

A Review essay by  
Howard R. Greenstein

Until the actual restoration of the state of Israel in 1948, Zionism was a highly volatile issue for a sizable segment of the Jewish religious community in America. A major component of Orthodox Jewry condemned the campaign to re-establish a Jewish commonwealth on the grounds that it was an arrogant presumption of a divine prerogative. The rebirth of Jewish sovereignty could only be the consequence of Messianic initiative. Zionism, in their view, was blasphemous in its defiance of divine authority.

In Reform Judaism, too, the cause of political independence for the *Yishuv* evoked equally adamant opposition but for different reasons. To be sure, vast numbers of Reform Jews opposed any form of Jewish nationalism because they feared charges of "dual loyalties" or a resurgence of anti-Semitism in response to unpopular policies of their people in Palestine. At the same time, Reform leadership objected on more subtle but serious grounds.

Zionism, like Reform Judaism, was deeply rooted in a vision of social justice. Both movements strove for the realization of the "just society," a life of freedom, equality, and personal dignity for all. Both were quick to cite deficiencies in the existing political, economic, and social structures as a principal explanation for the exploitation of the Jew and other minorities of the population. The ideology of both groups taught that the

redemption of society required a determined effort to rectify and reorganize the existing order.

The early Halutzim incorporated that principle in their development of the Kibbutz as their model of collective social responsibility. It is interesting to note that several Reform rabbis were among the most ardent supporters of the Labor Zionist movement almost from its very inception. The clash between Zionists and anti-Zionists was thus not always a question of ends but of means. Zionists sought to achieve the "just society" through a unique brand of nationalism while Reform Jews pursued it as a matter of religious principle.

If the personal interviews that Amos Oz has collected in his most recent volume are an accurate reflection of the prevailing mood in Israel today, then Jewish nationalism has not demonstrated any distinction in achieving the dream of the "just society," which the founders so deeply cherished. Oz concedes as much when he recalls in a visit to his old neighborhood in Jerusalem that in earlier times "everyone . . . expected that the establishment of the State would turn over a brand new leaf. 'We have left yesterday behind us. The path to tomorrow is still ahead,' they would sing in those days. Now 30 or 40 years have passed, and we have left tomorrow behind us, and yesterday is here upon us with . . . placards in Yiddish, invoking excommunication and expulsion and curses. . . ."

This latest work of Amos Oz, *In the Land of Israel*, is essentially a collection of various encounters with diverse personalities whose prescriptions for peace and political harmony span the entire spectrum of public opinion. The book originated as a number of conversations and later published as a series in the weekly supplement of *Davar*.

Oz emphasizes that his articles do not constitute a "representative pic-

ture" or "typical cross section" of Israel. Clearly, his reports may not be judged on the basis of a sound, scientific survey. Nonetheless, they divulge a level of despair, resentment, and cynicism about the present and future that is particularly disheartening among a people whose formula for survival has always included a perennial hope and optimism about the human enterprise. The pervasive disenchantment that currently prevails among ordinary Israelis is virtually a repudiation of the premise.

The bitterness and resentment between Israeli Arabs and Jews is more than an ample legacy of grief and heartache itself. One of the instructors at the Telshe Yeshiva in Jerusalem points to Arab laborers, poses a rhetorical question to Oz, and asks, "Why was Ishmael the goy called Ishmael, which means 'He shall hear the Lord?' Do you know? No? I'll tell you. He was called Ishmael so that he would hear what Isaac, his brother and master, ordered him to do. And why was Isaac the Jew called Isaac, 'He shall laugh?' So that he would laugh at the sight—because the labor of righteous men is done by others."

Elsewhere, in appraising the prospects for reconciliation with the Arabs, one of the Gush Emunim settlers in Tekoa replies indignantly, ". . . this is a religious war! A holy war! For them and for us. A war against all of Islam. And against the goyim. . . . The goyim are bound to be against us. It's their nature." When the author asked another resident what Israel should do if the Arabs offer a compromise and a peace treaty now, the respondent immediately insisted that "We should tell them flat out: Sorry, too late! We should even start a war, so they don't persuade the sissies among us."

Most observers will agree that the most serious obstacle to peace in the Middle East is political extremism in

defense of nationalism, which invariably leads to terror and violence. Israel's friends are usually very quick to accept that premise but always blame the Arabs entirely for that tragic truth. They point to Iran as evidence of the ordeal and the fulminations of the Ayatollah Khomeini, or the outrageous, diabolical conspiracies of a Khadafy or Yasir Arafat or Hafez el-Assad. There is a tendency to insist that fanaticism is exclusively an Arab affliction. The culprits are always Israel's neighbors, and Israelis are always the victims.

The actual state of affairs is far more complex. Attitudes and behavior are so polarized in the region that neither side owns a monopoly on extremism. The hatred and hostility of Israelis for the Arabs in their midst is difficult to distinguish from the tirades of intransigent Arab fanatics. Israelis, like their Arab neighbors, are facing a rising tide of uncompromising belligerence.

All extremists, Israelis included, appreciate most acutely the power of language. Those who despise compromise understand much better than their opposition that the way people describe their world and how they perceive their options are the most decisive factors in winning public support. Arafat did it, of course, with his appeal to the "legitimate rights" of the Palestinian people, but Gush Emunim has succeeded just as well with its insistence on calling the territory beyond Israel's pre-'67 borders "Judea and Samaria" instead of the "West Bank." The Israelis who were arrested for violent acts against West Bank Arabs were described in Israeli newspapers as "Jewish terrorists," but Jewish settlers are calling them the "Jewish underground," evoking heroic images of the popular resistance that fought for Israel's independence in the thirties and forties.

Fanatics also are fond of clinging to descriptions and explanations for complex issues. Ask a militant Palestinian why his people will not settle for half of Palestine, and he will reply, "Because it's all ours." A moderate would be forced to explain the virtue of compromise, not nearly so inspiring an argument. Similarly, if Jewish settlers are asked why they should be allowed to retain the entire

West Bank, they will answer with two words: "It's ours." Detailed discussions about future demographic distributions in the area are totally irrelevant to their priorities.

Finally, extremism flourishes when it feeds on frustration and insensitivity. Again, Arab fanatics are finding an increasing number of counterparts among their Israeli neighbors. In the wake of an endless string of conventional political failures, Arab extremists have resorted to an impassioned religious fundamentalism with the promise of a Messianic solution that secular politics could not deliver. In Israel, the embarrassing phenomenon of Rabbi Meir Kahane stems from a similar overdose of frustration and disappointment. Kahane won election to the Knesset, because he promised results that others would dare not even mention, no less produce. The fanaticism of Arab extremists accounts for Kahane as much as Israeli militancy, and the two only fuel each other into a continuous cycle of escalating rhetoric and inevitable violence.

Israel is no longer immune to the cancer of political extremism. Oz verifies that diagnosis beyond any reasonable doubt. Prospects for accommodation are just as remote in the Holy Land as elsewhere in the Middle East, when a political activist can seriously suggest that "Maybe we should let somebody like Ariel Sharon wipe out as many of them as possible, and those countries of theirs, until the Arabs realize that we did them a favor by letting them stay alive at all." Oz echoes the anguish of Israel's dearest friends when he asks, "Is it possible Hitler not only killed the Jews, but infected them with his poison?"

The argument that such strident voices are a minority in Israel, or that Israel treats its Arabs better than Arabs treat their Jews (both of which claims cannot be denied), is still no rebuttal. The safety and security of Israel ultimately depends not on who is right, but what will work. The United States had a "right" to retain

the Canal Zone as a permanent possession, but that did not mean it was wise to do so. The British had a "right" to keep the Falkland Islands and to remain in control of Hong Kong into the twenty-first century, but that does not mean those would have been good decisions. What matters more than the legitimate legacy of the past are the requirements for the future. Where rightful interests conflict, as with Israelis and Palestinians, giving in is not giving up. Courage is a matter of taking risks for peace, not for war.

The emergence of religious authority as a powerful political force is also a further sign of the erosion of reason in public affairs. The appeal to revelation as the supreme authority for political decisions is a deadly standard for settling human differences. One person's miracle is another person's myth. If the Enlightenment taught civilization any lesson at all, it is that truth is not subject to personal preference, however sincere the preference may be. Faith is not knowledge. Knowledge requires more than faith. It requires verification. One of the saddest ironies of the times is the ideological symmetry of the Islamic fanatic, the Christian fundamentalist, and the Jewish extremist who, as Oz reports, proudly proclaimed, "No. You cannot separate faith and certainty. They are one and the same. In my vocabulary they are synonyms." Curing the world's ills with that kind of medicine is a prescription for Armageddon.

Even more discouraging, however, than the rift between Israelis and Arabs, and perhaps more dangerous, is the estrangement of Israelis from themselves and each other. Mutual mistrust and resentment between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews is nothing new, but it is still no less regrettable or humiliating. Israel's friends remind her critics that few if any nations in the world are immune to religious, racial, or ethnic tensions in their own societies, and that Israel, in fact, has achieved more progress in this realm in less time than any other country on earth. Unique as that achievement may be, so too is the uniqueness of certain realities that permit us to expect as much from Israel and perhaps even more. Discrimination between people of differ-

ent origins is deplorable in any context; even more so among Jews whose origins are the same. More than that, the lessons of the Holocaust alone are sufficient to preclude even a hint of intolerance by one Jew for another. The cloud of suspicion and exclusion still hovers over Israel in the hurtful outcry of Jews, like the Sephardi that Oz interviewed, who exclaimed, "I'll tell you what shame is: they gave us houses, they gave us the dirty work; they gave us education, and they took away our self-respect. What did they bring my parents to Israel for? I'll tell you what for. . . . You didn't have Arabs then, so you needed our parents to do your cleaning and be your servants and your laborers . . . and policemen, too. You brought our parents to be your Arabs."

Oz has only furnished us with more convincing evidence that Jewish nationalism has not purified the Jewish people as it first promised. Indeed, it is problematic whether nationalism of any kind can inspire moral fortitude if it assigns the highest priorities to self-preservation and self-interest. Political sovereignty is not a self-evident virtue. Oz concedes as much when he concludes

that "Nationalism itself is, in my eyes, the curse of mankind." He may have added that Zionism and the creation of a Jewish state were a necessity, spawned by grim and gruesome realities, but that does not sanctify them for all time.

The prospects for achieving justice and peace depend on a higher loyalty than country. They depend on the vision of justice and equality bequeathed to all Western civilization by the spiritual mandate of the most authentic religious kind—the Biblical prophets—and which responsible religious Jews continue to endorse and advance. Israel will meet its challenge not when it reduces inflation, but when it faces the necessity of refining its faith, faith in the imperishable message of Judaism and its ethical foundations.

The most constructive path Oz might have found to a brighter future was not along the highways of his Jewish countrymen, but in the office of the editor of an Israeli Arab newspaper that stated emphatically: "What was is over. Finished. Everyone wants to live on the land. All the Jews and Arabs want to live. Write that the land doesn't belong to the Jews or the Arabs. The land is God's.

Whoever finds favor in His eyes will receive His land. God alone decides. And whoever does evil will pay the price: God will pass over him and forget him. And write in the Israeli newspaper that Abu-Azmi sends his regards to Mr. Cohen—that's a good man."

And that's also the best hope for all good people.

*Dr. Greenstein is rabbi of Ahavath Chesed Congregation in Jacksonville, Florida.*

## INVITATION

By Carol Adler

God instead of being dead  
I'd like to think of You as  
more of a senior citizen:  
retired and at this time in Your  
life probably more interested in  
fishing and shuffleboard than saving  
souls or solving earthshaking problems.

Because You see God  
even if You are senile and a little bit  
out of it  
at least there's a comfortable feeling  
that You're still around  
and that of course I'm not the next to go  
relatively speaking—although I know  
I've no proof of this.

Then—There's something nice about  
witnessing someone else's aging.  
It almost takes the sting out of your  
own. And it's also good to have someone here who will  
still look up to you come to you for comfort  
and advice . . .

So because of these things  
I don't mind opening doors  
for You or cutting up Your food.  
Furthermore, it gives me something worthwhile to do.  
For in today's world not only You  
but anyone can feel useless.

So I'm happy to imagine  
that You're over there by the fire  
rocking  
or mindlessly gazing out the window  
or that You're seated opposite at the table  
reading the Scriptures while I write  
this. . . . nodding. . . .

So God—I want You to know—Listen  
carefully—Turn up Your  
hearing aid—I want You to know God  
that You're welcome to stay here  
with me for as long as  
You please.

*Carol Adler is a poet, teacher, and freelance writer, living in Pittsford, New York. She has published two books of poetry, Arioso (Pentagram Press, 1975) and First Reading (Northwoods Press, 1984), as well as numerous short stories and essays. This is her second appearance in Menorah Review.*

## FREUD AND HUMOR

*The Jokes of Sigmund Freud: A Study in  
Humor and Jewish Identity*

By Elliott Oring  
University of Pennsylvania

A Review essay by  
Dan Ben-Amos

"Sigmund Freud devoted the last 50 years of his life to psychoanalysis. Its theory and practice continued to absorb his attention until his final days. When the agony of a long-endured cancer became unbearable, he asked his physician and friend Max Schur to fulfill an old promise. Schur injected Freud with two centigrams of morphine, and Freud fell into a peaceful sleep. Schur repeated the dose 12 hours later, and Freud lapsed into a coma. At three o'clock in the morning on September 23, 1939, Sigmund Freud died. It was the tenth day of the Hebrew month Tishrei: Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement" (p. 123).

Is this the way to end a book about jokes? Granted, no one wants to finish with a whimper, but does the bang have to be so loud, or rather, so ironic? The careful wording indicates that a punch line was intended, but in the final analysis, whose punch line is it, Oring's or Freud's? Could Freud, through suffering and pain, will his death on the most holy day of the Jewish year? Within a system that leaves no room for accidents and has no event without a motive, even the time of death, in an irrational way, becomes meaningful. Does Freud, the Jew who in pursuit of truth upset his own religion from its roots by turning Moses into an Egyptian prince and the Israelites into a primitive horde that murdered their leader, offer himself now as atonement? For whose sins, his or ours?

Obviously, such a design belongs more to drama than to life, and this drama, despite its relation to reality, is of Oring's making. What then does the moment of death have to do with jokes? Does Oring suggest that Freud's death was his last joke—a black, literally morbid, humor at

that? Or, does he make an implicit temporal association, in Aggadic fashion, between the Rabbi Akiba, who laid the cornerstone for rabbinical Judaism, and who, according to tradition, dies as a martyr on Yom Kippur and Freud, the Viennese Jew who shook Judaism at its foundation, yet could not shake it off his own personality?

Ironies abound. Like psychoanalysis itself, the Jewish joke has become a prevailing symbol in modern society, embodying the humor of the victim not the victor. Freud endowed it with a universal appeal, and at the same time defined it as distinctively Jewish. By his generous use of the Jewish joke as examples in his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, he universalized Jewish humor. Through the prism of his mind they become the epitome of the humor of the suppressed, the defeated, and of the common man who is struggling with forces that overwhelm him. Freud made Chaplin Jewish. But Freud was also the first to brand Jewish humor with the quality of self-criticism. "The occurrence," he writes, "of self-criticism as a determinant may explain how it is that a number of the most apt jokes . . . have grown up on the soil of Jewish popular life. They are the stories created by Jews and directed against Jewish characteristics." And he concludes, "I do not know whether there are many other instances of a people making fun to such a degree of its own character." Throughout the twentieth century in fictive, popular, and scholarly writing, this feature has become the *sine qua non* of Jewish humor.

Is Freud, therefore, a Jewish joke-teller according to his own insight? Oring's Freud certainly is. The stories with which he illustrates the relation of jokes to the unconscious extend no further than his own mind and life. While the theory is universal, its illustrations reflect personal problems that Freud encountered and with which he had to cope at various stages of his life. Oring indulges in the analyst's ultimate revenge fantasy, putting the arch-analyst on the metaphorical couch. He discerns Freud's jokes in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* and in other scholarly and personal writings dis-

tinct themes and figures and then proceeds to examine them in terms of the incidents of Freud's biography, his thoughts, even his dreams as they appear in letters and *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

Oring relates the *schnorrer* figure that recurs in Freud's jokes to Freud's own financial dependency in his early years. Freud recounts poverty-tales as funny stories in a letter to his fiancée, Martha Bernays, and even after their marriage, which was postponed until 1886 because of financial uncertainties. Freud continued to accept loans from Joseph Breuer, Ernst von Fleischl-Marxow, Joseph Paneth, and others. On the basis of such biographical evidence, letters, and memoirs of others, Oring concludes that "First, Freud identified with the figure of the *schnorrer*. Second, Freud's economic position was for many years a tenuous one in which he, like the *schnorrer*, was repeatedly forced to accept gifts and loans from his friends. Third, Freud resented the feelings of dependence that resulted from this indebtedness. And, fourth, Freud occasionally acted in a manner, like the *schnorrer*, that tended to deny his indebtedness and dependence."

The occurrence of the *schadchen*, the Jewish marriage broker, in Freud's jokes is also hardly accidental. This figure—that in popular tales either excuses or inadvertently reveals the bride's flaw—expresses Freud's covert hostility and aggression toward his otherwise beloved Martha. Oring draws a correlation between the *schadchen* jokes and the daily conflict Freud conceived in his own life between career and family life. He blamed Martha for his failure to complete the research on the aesthetic properties of cocaine and later even sublimated this hostility to a theoretical level, according to which women become the rivals to civilization by consuming men's creative energy.

Other themes embrace cultural, ethnic, even national subjects, though wandering in Freud's territory Oring neither can nor wishes to ignore the individual. Viennese atti-

tudes toward East European Jews, the emergence of Zionistic thought and Jewish religion, all become entangled in Freud's dreams, tales, and actions. The jokes and the humorous anecdotes become few and far between—after all, humor and faith do not mix well—but by now Oring has established his thesis convincingly, that for Freud his jokes, like his dreams, are windows to his mind. And even if his "Jewish" jokes are not at all critical of his own self, they project almost always aspects of his life of which Freud was not necessarily aware.

In the many attempts to decipher Freud's personality, relatively few resorted to his jokes. Such a neglect has occurred despite that in his social life Freud displayed a sharp sense of humor sparkled with the Jewish joke in particular. For example, Ernest Jones comments in his biography that Freud had "a fondness for relating Jewish jokes and anecdotes." Unfortunately, writers tend to take jokes at their face value—lightly—and the jokes of Freud have been until now no exception. In fact, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* is a neglected book in Freudiana, receiving only minimal attention outside psychoanalytical theory of humor. Yet, in terms of the growth of psychoanalytical theory in general, this was one of the key books, appearing only five years and one book after the seminal *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Oring points out that already in June 1897 Freud wrote to his friend Wilhelm Fliess that he has "recently made a collection of deeply significant Jewish stories (i.e. jokes)." The nature of the collection is not entirely clear: did he note down stories he recalled, casually heard, or in a folkloristic fashion, sought from storytellers? The manuscript is not extant, and critical scrutiny of Freud's folkloristic effort is impossible, but the date is revealing. This was the period in which psychoanalysis was in ferment. Freud commenced his own self analysis that was crystallized in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in which he formulated the fundamentals of psychoanalysis.

Apparently, while *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* appeared only in 1905, Freud began to think about the project and to make relevant notes at the time that he was fully engaged in self-analysis and in the formulation of the principles of the psychoanalytical method. For Freud, dream-work and joke-work were analogous. The principle processes of transformation, condensation, and displacement are common. The foibles that effect the recollection of jokes suggested to Freud that together with dreams, their origins are in the unconscious. No doubt, Freud did not reduce jokes to dreams, nor did he suggest that dreams are jokes stripped of humor. Some of the distinctions between the two are obvious: dreams are involuntary, individual, irrational, and often incoherent; jokes, on the other hand, are voluntary, social, require command of logic, and coherent.

Nevertheless, for Freud, jokes offered the empirical, observable evidence for the operation of which the mind is capable in the privacy of dreaming. Unlike psychoanalysts after him or even a folklorist like Oring, Freud does not elaborate upon the therapeutic potentials of humor nor on the diagnostic significance of jokes. Perhaps this is the reason for the near neglect of *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* in psychotherapeutic literature. Yet, in terms of his own conception of humankind, mind, and language, jokes offer the socially observable mirror of dreams. Always the careful scientist, Freud approached jokes with the white robe of a clinical doctor. Oring shows us the person behind the scientist, and to the surprise of none, he is Jewish and proud of his own heritage. However, his use of jokes does not reflect so much self-criticism, as he alleges why Jews tell jokes, as his own personal ambivalent attitudes toward himself, his family, and his society. Oring himself engaged in a Jewish intellectual joking, turning the tables upon Freud and demonstrating that jokes and dreams share one more feature, one that Freud least explored: both could be a diagnostic tool.

In light of Freud's merciless self-exposure and self-analysis in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, it seems not

unreasonable to pursue his obliviousness to the diagnostic capabilities of jokes. Was he too busy laughing that he did not realize how seriously his own jokes touched his own psyche? Or perhaps he realized their limitation in that direction and their unreliability as keys to the soul. Indeed, the Freud that Oring reveals is as much a Freud that Oring creates. The jokes about the schnorrer, the schaden, the East European Jews, and others, are all in Freud's writings, but the categories are of Oring's making. It is a free association achieved by laborious research and erudition that Oring, not Freud, makes between jokes, dreams, and events. While jokes may arise, as Freud suggests, in the unconscious, they are independent of social actions and interactions. There are too many extraneous factors to consider them truly diagnostic. Furthermore, if they originate in the unconscious, they require not only conscious but clearly logical operations. Laughter is, in the words of Roger Bastide, a short circuit in thinking, and as such, jokes often get caught in the cross-thoughts of the mind.

*The Jokes of Sigmund Freud* reflects even stronger currents—the turbulence of life and history. As the book progresses, the number of cited and analyzed jokes decreases, and a somber tone takes over. The jokes that Freud told were no laughing matter. Even if Oring reads into them more of Freud than Freud would have granted, he nevertheless places humor in a more central position in Freud's life than any of his previous biographers. By unmasking the joke's facade of lightness, he related them to the core of Jewishness in Freud's life. While David Bakan sought the roots of psychoanalysis in Jewish mystical tradition, Oring points to the Jewish European tradition in Freud's personality and work. Freud himself, as Ruth Nevo argues, considers humor to be the opposite pole of his ideal of human maturity. For him humor is, in the nineteenth century terms of individual evolution, infantile survival in adult life.

This was in theory. In reality, Oring shows that the jokes and humor of Sigmund Freud are more germane to his adult thoughts than he allowed himself to believe. Jewish jokes that turn defeat into defiance and Jewish humor that humanizes transcendental thought were an integral part of Freud in his life and, in a tragic-ironic way, in his death as well.

Reference list available on request from the director of the Judaic Studies Program, VCU.

*Dan Ben-Amos is professor of folklore and folklife at the University of Pennsylvania.*

### TO THE EDITOR

I received a copy of *Menorah Review*. It is a high-level bulletin, and I congratulate the Judaic Studies Program for so thoughtful and rich a bulletin, full of important content and clearly designed to advance Jewish-Christian dialogue.

The lead article by Dr. Hans S. Falck, "Reflections on Membership" (winter 1985), is a thoughtful and provocative piece, with important implications. Clearly, it seeks to present the dignity of Judaism as well as Christianity. Indeed, one could argue that it is flattering to Judaism in the various comparisons that it makes.

Nevertheless, it has a fatal flaw. To put it simply, its presentation of Judaism is that of a modern individual who has censored major portions of the tradition in order to present Judaism as flatteringly as he can in his own terms. The piece ends up, therefore, simplifying and stereotyping Judaism as a this-worldly, collectivist, almost materialist religion.

Classic Judaism, that is, in its rabbinic formulation, believes in immortality and afterlife, as well as affirming resurrection. Particularly in the medieval period, the focus on afterlife and on the individual's need for oneness with God and on forgiveness of sin came to play a heavy and central role. "For the Jew, however, there is only one basic reality, the here and now of human existences

... " is quite simply a modern bowdlerization of the tradition. Similarly, the implied putdown of "how seductive is the Christian belief that God tests men and women on earth with a greater reward in the hereafter!" is a fair description of many Jewish views as articulated in some of the greatest literature of the Middle Ages.

It would be fairer to point to the dialectic of this-worldliness and other-worldliness in Jewish tradition, to emphasize the biblical priority for this world and the modern Jewish bias in that same direction, as a background for the development of individualism within Jewish tradition. This individualism grows within the very same context that I have described, in the works of rabbis and of modern Jewish theologians. Christianity, on the other hand, has developed strong worldly affirmations, particularly in the modern period, so that it, too, is dialectical, with perhaps a dominance of the other-worldly among more tradition Christians and a similar priority for worldliness among modernized Christians.

In short, even good intentions do not justify simplifying or stereotypical versions of either religion. This criticism is stated, although I have great respect for Professor Falck's important comments about membership perspective.

—Dr. Irving Greenberg  
President, National Jewish Resource Center

Dr. Falck replies

I thank Dr. Greenberg for his thoughtful letter and the editor for the invitation to reply.

The purpose of my article was to show how the concept of membership can help us understand major themes in the history of Judaism and Christianity. The purpose was not to render moral judgment upon the merits of either.

Membership speaks to two human characteristics. The first is quantitative, the second qualitative. In speaking quantitatively, we recognize that without membership there is no human life. One cannot be a nonmem-

ber and survive. When speaking of the qualities of membership, we think of morals, ethics, and social and religious dimensions. These tell us about the ways people conduct their membership, their meaning for each person and, therefore, for others also.

In both Judaism and Christianity, certain fundamental themes prevail, as clarified by their constancy in history, the universality of application to the problems of daily human existence, yet also spanning the ages. I think that "Jewish peoplehood" is such a theme.

Torah speaks of God and people, and of people as members of each other. It speaks of human conduct, of action, of law, particularly with its emphasis on *Tsedakah* and *Gemilut Hasadim*, not in some superficial public relations sense, but in the most profound dimensions of law and ethics. In the honor and dignity it ascribes to the human person, it emphasizes peoplehood as the seedbed and context from which the differentiation of each human being springs and to which every individual in turn contributes. The social and the personal are totally interdependent; they have no independent existence.

It is virtually impossible to find examples in Christian tradition that come close to defining community and person in the sense in which it may be found in Jewish history. Nor is this a matter of surprise when one considers that belief is individual, while action (i.e., human behavior) is subject to immediate and constant social judgment. While Christian tradition, as I pointed out before, can cite many examples of communalism, their reasoning has to do with the idea that it is believing individuals who join together, not members whose primary identification rests on peoplehood. I suggest that Judaism has avoided that split by its definition of the person as social being *in natura*. It so happens that twentieth century biology, to say nothing of the social sciences, moves increasingly in the same direction.

Often forgotten in historical argumentation is that for each family in Israel, times were always "modern";

that during and after 2,000 years of persecution of the Jewish people, the existential reality of the present determines their decisions about their Jewishness as everything else. That includes their current sense of history; and it must have been as true of the rabbi of the post-biblical period as it is for us. It is time, therefore, that we address and dignify the struggles of our own people, presently alive, as the continuation of what we call "tradition." After the withering criticism of present (especially American) Jewry is done with, we ought to recognize that we are children of our mothers and fathers, reaching back thousands of years. We, as they, struggle with the meaning of our present membership in Israel, to assure its survival and its dignity. Whether Jews believe in the resurrection of the dead seems less urgent than whether there be a Jewish people whose members can decide one way or another. This has always been, and still is, the central agenda for Judaism as I perceive it.

*Dr. Falck is professor of social work and psychiatry at VCU.*

### SYMPOSIUM CONTINUED

*The following is another in a series of responses, first appearing as the "Symposium" in the summer 1985 Menorah Review, to Joseph Bendersky's Review essay of Hitler, Germany, and the Jewish Question by Sarah Gordon. Dr. Bendersky's original essay was published in the spring 1985 Menorah Review*

—J.S.

#### Nora Levin

It is helpful to have Sarah Gordon's work in order to prevent some of the dangerous generalizing Dr. Bendersky refers to in his *Review* essay. But her book is the outgrowth of a doctoral dissertation, not a comprehensive treatment of anti-Semitism in Germany in the years 1870 through the Nazi period. Hers is essentially a quantitative history, focused on a small sample of opponents of Nazi

measures in Dusseldorf, from which certain conclusions are drawn, combined with a synthesis of other works confirming the absence of rabid anti-Semitism in Germany as a whole. There are some serious gaps, however, in her analysis and in Dr. Bendersky's review.

One has to ponder Dr. Gordon's choice of Dusseldorf, situated as it is in the Rhine-Ruhr area, with a small Jewish population and virtually no Eastern European Jews, an area Gordon herself admits that contained "higher percentages of both *Judenfreunden* and *Rassenschänder* than . . . had they been exactly reflective of the general population. . . ." In a sample from Saxony or Leipzig, where more than half the Jews in 1933 were foreign, mainly from Eastern Europe, or from Franconia, where Streicher was Gauleiter and where *Der Stürmer* saturated the population, the results would have been very different. But even had these tabulations showed that only a small percentage of Nazis approved racial persecution of Jews leading to mass murder, her analysis would be incomplete, in my view. The major points made—namely, that a number of individual Germans may have helped Jews and that many or most were passive and/or indifferent and did not act to protest or stop the deportations, but did not approve of the drastic actions—do not attack the critical issues involved. These turn on the reasons for the indifference and the institutional complicity in all the anti-Jewish measures under Hitler, starting with the "Aryan" paragraph, and then, step by step with increasing severity, ending with deportations, massed executions, and gas chambers.

The popular indifference to the fate of German Jews after 1938 can surely be linked to the SS terror in the Nazi state and dread of punishment. Even so, as late as 1940 and 1941, there were popular and church outcries against the euthanasia program, which had killed over 50,000 Germans, and the killings were stopped. Except for the determination of several thousand "Aryan" wives married to Christian "non-Aryans" (Jews under the Nuremberg definition) who protested the detention of their husbands in February 1943 in preparation for deportation, and a protest

against the evacuation of a Jewish home for the aged, there were no public protests in Germany on behalf of the Jews. The "non-Aryans" were saved and the evacuation of the home was postponed, showing that protest could achieve results. However, the popular indifference was lined with generations of cultural, religious, and state-sponsored anti-Semitism, and Hitler was clever enough to fuse all of his targets (communism, world domination, decadence, etc.) to the image of the Jew, which had been formed by this history. Had they been attached to any other minority, they would have misfired. The failures of the anti-Semitic parties made much of by Gordon and Bendersky and the 44 percent vote for the Nazis in 1933 do not at all deal with the residual, latent, and floating anti-Jewish feelings that went far beyond formal political party identification. The basic question, it seems to me, does not lie in the connection between rabid anti-Semitism and the gas chambers, but in the general acceptance of so-called moderate measures beginning in 1933 with the boycott and Aryan paragraph, then acceptance of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, and successively drastic measures that inexorably led to deportation "to the East." Church officials, members of medical and legal professional organizations, university professors, and judges may not have been members of the Nazi Party at the time, but they acquiesced in each increasingly punitive measure. It is this acquiescence—before the Nazi dictatorship was consolidated—that German history, specifically the failure of Weimar, can help us understand as well as lament.

The purely legal restrictions German Jews faced in 1920 may have been no greater than those in England or the United States, but such a statement begs the question. The democracy of Weimar was paper-perfect but substantively frail. The Republic never resonated to the strongest needs and yearnings of the German people and never commanded the loyalty of most Germans. A survey of court decisions, the increase in assassinations and street fighting, the rootlessness of re-



turning soldiers, and the quick polarization of political life are only a few of the indications of the fundamental inability of the Republic to sustain itself, and thus its inability to provide institutional strengths that *did* exist in England and the United States and would have been available to challenge threats to Jews had they come, long before the threat of physical annihilation. A very telling, ominous illustration of the kind of acquiescence I am referring to is Dr. Gordon's reference to general public acceptance of the Nuremberg Laws "primarily because they appeared to clarify the legal position of Jews in Germany." Thus, denial of citizenship rights and a legal ban on marriage and sexual relations between Jews and Germans, among other rights, were "accepted in principle

and as an abstract concept." This acceptance is, of course, not "rabid anti-Semitism," but is an easy springboard to the more drastic measures rabid anti-Semites have in store; more significantly, such acceptance does not brake those measures or the thought processes of the rabid anti-Semites.

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REVIEW • THE JUDAIC STUDIES PROGRAM OF VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY • NUMBER 5 • FALL 1985

*Menorah Review* is published by the Judaic Studies Program and the Judaic Culture Committee of Virginia Commonwealth University. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome, especially review essays of books with substantive, original content. Address all correspondence to Judaic Studies Program, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA 23284-0001.

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