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## JEWISH PARTICULARISM IN CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSALISM

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The overwhelming ambiguity--one might even say contradiction--of the modern era may be stated as follows: precisely at a time when the rhetoric of universalism has reached an unprecedented peak, and precisely at a time when the myths associated with universalism have become part of the conventional wisdom, the tribal instinct has reasserted itself with overwhelming vigor. Far from an atavistic anachronism, nationalism now comes to be seen as the wave of the future, and the operational question, which so recently was widely taken to be how the last residues of nationalism might once and for all be extirpated, and eschatological visions made real, has now turned to a seemingly less ambitious concern with the management of diversity.

It is not surprising that the enlightenment doctrine should still seem plausible. The diffusion of advanced technology, although a much slower process than had originally been predicted, continues to promise a standardization of consumption around the world. The emergence of a major non-national community of significant size and still more significant power--to wit, the trans-national community of intellectuals--suggests a universal priesthood entirely in keeping with universalist doctrine. Even the advent of national super-powers, and regional alliances, however disconcerting along other dimensions, may be seen as a movement away from the tribe and towards the family of man.

What is surprising is the resistance one now encounters, in almost every nation, to the passage of place as a meaningful reference point, to the destruction of past as a useful handle on the future.

The question that quite naturally arises is what view enlightened men, as distinguished from men of the Enlightenment, may take of this contradiction. Shall we persist in the conventional view that the tribal instinct is an insidious urge, from time to time to be indulged on tactical ground, but still to be opposed as a matter of strategy? Shall we continue to believe that education will, in the end, liberate us from the constricting bonds of nationalism? Shall we, as we have in the past, set as our goal the emergence of universal brotherhood in fact as well as in theory? Shall we, in short, view the current assertiveness of groups within the family of man as merely an index of how far we have yet to go, of how much work still needs to be done?

Or shall we, instead, cast aside our central convictions regarding the desired shape of the future, shall we take the evidence which mounts each day now that the rhetoric of universalism does not describe the reality of nationalism as

evidence that it is our theories, and not those who in their deeds reject them, that are flawed?

My thesis this morning is that Jewish nationalism, as represented in the Zionist movement and by the State of Israel, is, first, an authentic reflection of the Jewish tradition, and not, as some would argue, a deviation from that tradition; second, that in the most literal sense, Jewish nationalism is revolutionary, specifically in its early and explicit rejection of the assumptions of universalism; and third, that the nature of Jewish nationalism offers useful precedent and helpful insight into how the typically reactionary consequences of particularistic nationalism may be avoided, permitting the development of a theory which satisfies both the modern liberal disposition and the tribal instinct simultaneously.

If I speak of Zionism as an authentic reflection of the Jewish tradition, I do so not on episodic historical grounds. Obviously, the emergence of Zionism at a specific time and in a specific place as a political movement, the struggle of Zionists to establish a nation-state, and the success, eventually, of that struggle, constitute a set of specific responses to the historical conditions of the moment. There was a confluence of capability and opportunity, and Israel came to life. But my argument is that the idea of Israel was always present, however embryonically, in the Jewish understanding, that, fundamentally, the State of Israel was logically and hence inevitably implied by that understanding.

I would not presume--certainly in these surroundings--to suggest either an Old Testament genesis to Jewish nationalism, nor a New Testament refutation of nationalism, although I must confess that my superficial familiarity with the literature leads me to think both suggestions plausible. But it is clear that throughout Jewish history and Jewish literature, both secular and sacred, the urgency of the preservation of the Jews as a distinct group was central. The concept of election supported that perception, the liturgy is replete with references which endorse it, and, most important, the stubborn refusal of Jews to opt for what must surely have been seen as the easier course of assimilation reflects it. In short, whether the chief cause is seen as essentially theological presupposition, or cultural pattern, or historical experience, the centrality of Jewish survival must be taken as the key to the Jewish understanding. I speak, you will note, of Jewish survival, and not merely of the survival of Jews.

How can that instinct for distinctive survival be explained? Conventional explanations do not suffice, for it is clear that the survival of the Jew as Jew was not, in general, regarded as a prerequisite to salvation, nor that such survival was coterminous with the survival of any given way of life. Nor is it sufficient, in my judgment, to suggest that Jews were forced to opt for distinctive survival since their hosts around the world were nowhere prepared to view Jews as other than Jews. Indeed, I do not find in any of the literature a persuasive statement of the ideology which presumably leads to the instinct. It is almost as if Jews have become fixated on survival for its own sake, without ever having been very eloquent about why it is that such survival matters. That, in fact, is why I use the term "instinct."

It is the persistence of Jews in their apartness that has troubled so many people for so many years. The Church has never understood it very well; Lenin was furious about it; and Arab nationalists have failed to accept it. Perhaps the fault lies with the Jews, who could hardly expect others to understand what they themselves did not understand, but knew without understanding. In this generation,

of course, the understanding is a bit easier, for this is the generation of Auschwitz, and that may be all that is required to understand the urgency of survival, an urgency expressed so clearly during the days before the Six Day War. But the memories of Auschwitz will fade, for better or for worse, and with them, once again, the explanation; the instinct, if history is any guide, will not. And so, if we would search for understanding, it is to behavior rather than theory that we must look.

To have insisted on apartness, of course, has meant also to reject the liberal dogma of universalism. The extraordinary tension, within the Jewish communities of Europe, between those who saw the Enlightenment, with its presumed tolerance and humanity, as the best hope for Jewish survival, and those who insisted on clinging to more traditional and more parochial patterns, is an argument which has not yet been put to rest, for Jews or for others, although the idiom has changed substantially. It is an argument which has not been put to rest because it is not capable of resolution, since there is so much impressive evidence on either side of the debate. It is true, of course, that the Enlightenment proved far less enlightened than its authors had intended, and the tradition more viable than its detractors have predicted. But the central question has remained: is it possible to imagine a pacific world society still moved by ethnocentrism, or does ethnocentrism not inevitably lead to hostility, and ultimately to madness? Can we regard as legitimate fraternities that are less than the whole? Is it not obvious that members of any one fraternity will come to view all non-members as enemies? And, on the other hand, can we plausibly expect men to attach themselves to a society so large as the family of man? In a world of universal brotherhood, in a world in which everyone is your brother, what does brotherhood mean, what can it possibly mean?

Israel must be understood as the Jewish effort to answer these questions creatively, and in deed rather than word. Israel is, in a fundamental sense, the procreant resolution of the tension between the tradition of the Enlightenment and the tradition of the Tradition. For, most simply put, it was, and is, an effort to produce a society parochial in structure but universal in ideology. And that, it seems to me, is precisely what Jewish history has all been about. The absurd aspect of Jewish history, of course, is that we would normally have expected a people exposed to what the Jews have been exposed to, subjected to what the Jews have been subjected to, to have been withdrawn, embittered, certainly disenchanted. Whose innocence has been violated more often or more comprehensively? And who has remained, at the same time, more steadfastly committed to the vision of the end of days, and to the behaviors required to translate the vision into reality?

I put it to you as simply as I know how: if, through some blinding alchemy, Israel could suddenly be transformed into an island state, surrounded by neutral and placid waters--if, that is to say, the harsh facts of hostility in the Middle East could be cast aside--Zionism, and its product, the State of Israel, would be seen everywhere as a creative effort to confront and to resolve the modern dilemma rather than as a gnawing irritant, or a tragic predicament. I do not mean to trivialize the tragedy of the Middle East by suggesting that we can disregard the conflicts there; I mean instead to propose that the Jewish dream, as authentically reflected by the State of Israel, is a dream which both challenges our conventional modern wisdom and excites our creative imagination.

It is not, of course, a dream without problems, both internal and external. The internal problems, which are not here our direct concern, seem to me manageable; it is the external problems, of course, which threaten to convert the dream



into a nightmare. For Jewish nationalism, however authentic, has not been expressed in a vacuum. It has been expressed in a setting bitterly uncongenial. It is a bone in the throat of liberals, who, if they endorse Israel at all, do so chiefly out of guilt, rather than out of ideological persuasion, and it is a bone in the throat of right, which has never wished the Jews well, and it is a bone in the throat of the left, which has always viewed the Jews as too committed to bourgeois behaviors, and it is a bone in the throat, and worse, of its neighbors, with whose own resurgent nationalism it conflicts almost directly. Though the State of Israel will surely survive these problems, it is possible that these will, in the end, mean defeat for the idea of Israel. That is to say, they will force Israel towards a destructive parochialism.

Yet I find it interesting and instructive that now, some twenty years after Israel's national rebirth, the clamor for national survival--for distinctive identity--has reached such massive heights around the world. We may, of course, as so many do, continue to view the assertions of identity as tragic symbols of how far we have yet to go to find the new freedom, or we may, as I prefer, take them as evidence of how wanting liberal universalism is as a compelling theory of human organization. We may, that is, conclude that others are now discovering for themselves that responsible universalist ideology permits, and likely even requires, continued particularism in structure. It is, if you will, as if everywhere people were saying that universal brotherhood, because too big to contemplate, is also too small in reward, and were endorsing instead a kind of universal cousinhood, acknowledging their kinship in the family of man, but insisting on their right to be somewhat more selective in their fraternity.

Contemporary sociological wisdom should be open to such a perspective. Have social critics not railed against the destabilizing consequences of mass urbanization, and the attendant loss of place and of perspective? Have we not lamented rootlessness, and anonymity, and anomy, have we not characterized the modern condition as the lonely crowd? Surely insights such as these would lead to a warm embrace to those who sought to convert the lonely crowds into meaningful entities, who sought to rebuild the walls the Enlightenment had torn down, on the grounds that the walls serve to stave off the uprooting flood.

But sociology, and the liberal community it serves, is informed by universalism, and so has been far more concerned with the conflicts the walls appear to generate than with their stabilizing function. It has systematically avoided confronting the problem of stability and the problem of tolerance simultaneously, preferring instead to divide itself into ideological sects, with the most powerful voices raised against tradition and for the universal ethic.

If I say that Israel represents a genuinely revolutionary phenomenon, I do so because Israel has, at least, made the effort to solve this timeless and apparently intractable dilemma. And, if I say that Israel offers insight to us all today, I say it because it is more than accident that the early Zionist literature is now studied with care by black militants in America, that Israel has become a chief symbol to Eastern European revolutionaries seeking to reassert their own particular destinies against the Soviet monolith, that, wonder of wonders, the recruitment rhetoric of the El Fatah is so similar in tone and even in wording to the Zionist literature of 1947. It is not that each of these, and all the others, seek the same kind of answer the Israelis have found. It is, instead, that each confronts precisely the same dilemma, the dilemma of reconciling, somehow, the two contradictory impulses of the modern temper.

Would that our discussion could end at this point. But Jewish nationalism, like Jewish history, has not only its own internal logic to pursue, but also the logic imposed upon it by angry neighbors. In this connection, there are two points which need to be said out loud. The first is that no enemy of the Jewish people, throughout history, has had so powerful an argument or so plausible a position as the Arabs, and the second is that Arab passions, at long last, are now coming to be seen as authentic, no less authentic than those of the Jews.

I say these things with pain, and with misgiving, for in the struggle for Jewish survival, I am an unshakeable participant. But it will no longer do, I think, for us to delude ourselves into supposing that Arab hostility towards Israel is somehow manufactured, not to be taken seriously. During the days of Ahmed Shukeiry, it was easy to dismiss the Arab cause as buffoonery. But that is no longer possible, and, however much I resent and resist the expressions of Arab anger, I can no longer casually disregard them. This is not to adopt the rhetoric of the New Left, which remains largely fatuous. Israel is no sinister imperialist conspirator, insidiously subverting Arab authenticity. There is too much historic truth to Israel's story to permit such superficial assumptions. Or, if you will, it is as misleading, and therefore ultimately as dysfunctional, for Arabs to regard Israel as superficial as it has proved, over the years, to have been dysfunctional for Jews to treat Arab statements as meaningless. It is easier, no doubt, to dismiss the enemy as shallow in his purpose, and it is self-serving, in the short run. But, in the long run, it serves only tragedy, not self.

It is necessary, of course, to suggest that the resolution of this tragic conflict must lie in the direction of an adjustment of the claims of the protagonists. But to specify the content of that adjustment is extraordinarily difficult, and far more difficult than viewing the competing claims as mutually exclusive and hence entirely irreconcilable. I would not presume to identify what the nature of the Arab claims, their irreducible nature, is taken to be by those who make them. I would, however, in closing, make two points, one with respect to the Jewish claims, and one with respect to the purposes of history.

With regard to Jewish claims, everything I have said should make it clear that to speak of an Israel de-Zionized is to reject Israel's definition of itself, and, in effect, to shear it from its history, which is, in the end, its chief justification. What others sometimes take to be the artificiality of Israel belies what I take to be its authenticity. De-Judaizing it, or, for that matter, secularizing it, as some propose, would be the surest way to convert authenticity into artificiality.

Second: if the story of Israel, and the emergent story of a dozen other and more recent experiments in national liberation, are to have any durability, they can endure only if and as they confront quite squarely the modern dilemma, that is, the problem of creatively combining the tribal instinct and the universal ideology. To argue for an exclusivist solution, a solution in which the national instinct of one group is expressed at the expense of the no less authentic national instinct of another, is to violate that mandate. That is a lesson Israel will find it hard to learn, given recent history, but it is a lesson to which the Jewish experience is almost uniquely open. That is a lesson I can only pray the Arabs learn, not only because what little I know of Islam tells me that it is a congenial lesson, and not only because as a Jew I dread the consequences of continuing exclusivity, but finally because the bold experiment with national expression which now unfolds before us everywhere can as easily become the harbinger of a new brutality as of a new creativity, solving the modern dilemma by retreating from it rather than ad-

dressing it directly. There are, in short, more challenging conquests to be made than the continuing and fruitless conquests of each other, and it is to these that we are now duty bound to turn our attention.