The New Anti-Zionism and the Old Anti-Semitism: Transformations

01.03.2020 | Raphael Jospe*

I. INTRODUCTION: THREE THREATS TO JEWISH EXISTENCE

In his "Letter to Yemen"[1], Maimonides (1135-1204) describes three types of Judeophobia, that is, fear of and antipathy towards the Jews and Judaism. In his analysis, Judeophobia is characterized by three different types of attempts to eliminate the Jewish people, contradict the Torah and to abolish Jewish religion:

1) **Physical eradication.** Enemies of the Jews, such as the biblical Amalek, Sisra, Sancherib and Nebuchadnezzar, and the Roman Titus and Hadrian, attempted to eradicate the Jewish people by force, conquest and the sword.

2) **Ideological polemic.** The ancient Syrians, Persians and Greeks attempted to undermine Judaism by proofs and polemics of their intelligentsia and scholars.

3) **Religious supersession.** Christianity and Islam have attempted to supplant Judaism by claiming a new prophetic revelation superseding the Torah.

If we apply Maimonides' 12th century analysis to the situation of the Jewish people at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, we find that the physical and religious threats remain, but in many respects the main threat is ideological in nature.

As for the physical threat, despite terror and weapons of mass destruction facing Israel, and despite the growth of rabid Judeophobia in Arab and Islamic countries, and the increasing Judeophobia in Europe among the children or grandchildren of the generation of the Shoah, the Jewish people today – as opposed to Maimonides' time – possess, and are able to employ, the physical power provided by the sovereign State of Israel.

Regarding the religious threat, although fanatical and extremist Islam is increasingly and overtly Judeophobic, the extremists do not represent all of Islam, and there remains a long legacy of Jewish-Muslim symbiosis and cooperation (of which Maimonides himself is a prominent example). Although fundamentalist Christianity often remains unreformed in its supersessionist claims which delegitimize Judaism, much of the Christian world has undergone a major transformation regarding the Jews and Judaism since the Shoah, and especially since Vatican II. Even today's fundamentalist Christians often see Jews in a positive light and are supportive of Israel and

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Zionism, for reasons relating to their ideology of millennialism.

Turning to the ideological threat: For much of the 20th century it was identified primarily with right-wing fascist and Nazi ideologies, and the threat from totalitarian Communism was often unconsciously underestimated or deliberated downplayed. But what we now witness in the western world, after the fall of most of the totalitarian regimes, is a revival of the ideological threat from an unanticipated source – the liberal or left-wing intelligentsia, in the name of universalism. In many respects, this liberal or leftist universalism is the most dangerous ideological threat today. Since it claims to speak in the name of progressive morality, it is intellectually seductive, and even Jews themselves are susceptible to it. The threat, therefore, sometimes comes from within, and not just from without.

The premise common to all the different forms of the ideological threat is that the Jews somehow violate the universal norm by insisting on maintaining their own particular identity and distinctive way of life, and that the Jews, by being different, are, therefore, an impediment to universal well-being and happiness. In other words, the offense of the Jews is simply that they exist as Jews – they are different, and wish to remain so.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE IDEOLOGICAL THREAT

1. The Ideological Threat: Classical Greco-Roman Versions

The Greeks and Romans often accorded the nations they conquered a fair degree of religious autonomy. In a polytheistic context, there was no inherent contradiction between the continued worship of local gods and the official worship of the gods of the conquerors. The Greeks and Romans were unable to comprehend, therefore, the distinctive behavior the Jews, who refused to assimilate and intermarry with others, to eat their food, or to worship the gods of those who had defeated them.

Thus we find that Diodorus the Sicilian, who lived in the first century B.C.E., and wrote in his Greek *Bibliotheca Historica* about the Jews in the time of the Macabbean revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes (174-164 B.C.E.), says that Jewish distinctiveness is a manifestation of their misanthropic hatred of mankind:

Now the majority of his friends advised the king to take the city [of Jerusalem] by storm and to wipe out completely the race of the Jews, since they alone of all nations avoided dealings with any other people and **looked upon all men as their enemies** . . . the [Jewish] refugees [from Egypt] had occupied the territory round about Jerusalem, and having organized the nation of the Jews had made their **hatred of mankind into a tradition**, and on this account had introduced utterly outlandish laws: **not to break bread with any other race, nor to show them any good will at all** . . . Moses [was] the founder of Jerusalem and organizer of the nation . . . who had ordained for the Jews their **misanthropic and lawless customs**. And since [Antiochus] Epiphanes was shocked by such **hatred directed against all mankind**, he had set himself to break down their traditional practices.[2]

For Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.) Jewish distinctiveness was an affront to the Roman empire:

The practice of their sacred rites was at variance with the glory of our empire, the dignity of our name, the customs of our ancestors.[3]

In the view of the Roman historian Tacitus (56-120 C.E.), the religion of the Jews is opposed to all other religions, and the Jews hate all other people.

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To establish his influence over this people for all time, Moses introduced new religious practices, quite opposed to those of all other religions . . . The . . . customs of the Jews are base and abominable, and owe their persistence to their depravity . . . The Jews are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion, but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity.[4]

2. The Ideological Threat: Modern Enlightenment Versions

A. Enlightenment: The cultural dimension of the ideological threat

In modern times, the classical Greco-Roman Judeophobia, opposing the Jews simply for being different, was revived by such Enlightenment figures as Voltaire (1694-1778) who similarly condemned the Jewish refusal to assimilate to what he regarded as the universal norm. Implicit in this modern, secular ideological anti-Semitism is the notion that you, the minority, are different, and not we, the majority; your minority culture is particular, whereas our majority culture is universal.

But differences are like a basic law of physics, that all motion is relative to a given point, without which one cannot determine if object A is moving relatively to object B, or whether B is moving relatively to A - - regardless of whether A or B is the larger object. Similarly, the question of who is "different", and which culture is "particular", is simply a matter of perspective: from your perspective, I'm different, but from my perspective, you're different. Ultimately it's a question of power (whether political or cultural): the majority in power define the norm, and the powerless minority are "abnormal".

Some Jews, in their enthusiasm for modern secular culture and Enlightenment, also accepted this assimilationist ideology, that the Jews have no right to their own distinctive cultural and national identity, and that by identifying with and assimilating into the majority European culture, they would thereby escape the bonds of particularism and become universalistic. The poet Y.L. Gordon (1831-1892) wrote in his poem "Haqitzah 'Ami" ("Awake, My People!", 1863) what was to become a motto for such ideology: "heyeh adam be-tzetekha vi-yehudi be-ohalekha" ("be a man when you go out and a Jew in your home"). To which the Zionist essayist and ideologue Ahad Ha-Am (1856-1927) replied:

A man when you go out? But when the man goes out he does not remain merely an abstract man; he must put on some form. And if he is not a Jew, he is a Russian, a Pole, a German, etc.[5]

In short, Ahad Ha-Am argued that the Jews may escape their particular Jewish identity by assimilation, but cannot thereby become abstract, universal human beings. One can never escape particularity, or being different. One can only exchange one particularity for another, one kind of being different for another kind of being different.

B. Emancipation: The political-social dimension of the ideological threat

In pre-modern Europe, society and the economy were compartmentalized. The Jews, being excluded from the Church, the estates, and the guilds, had to live within their own separate compartment, the legally defined, quasi-autonomous Jewish community. However, with the emergence of the modern nation state and capitalist economy in the 18th century, a separate compartment for the Jews, namely the autonomous Jewish community, became anachronistic. The nation state maintained a monopoly of power, and recognized no corporate political authority other than its own, even that of the nobility or the church. The capitalist economy undermined and destroyed the corporate guilds. The Jews now had to be emancipated as a minority and integrated into the modern nation state.

The logic of emancipation was that if individual Jews are members of the French nation, for

example, they would be entitled to citizenship in the French state. But any collective Jewish rights, and any distinctive Jewish culture and nationality, were seen as incompatible with membership in the French nation, and thus with citizenship in the French state.

Therefore, the Jews as individual French nationals, could be awarded citizenship. But the autonomous Jewish community had to be disbanded, so that there might be no "nation within a nation." In the words of a member of the French National Assembly during the French Revolution:

Everything must be refused to the Jews as a nation; everything must be granted to them as individuals. They must be citizens. It is claimed that they do not wish to be citizens. Let them say so, and let them be banished; there cannot be a nation within a nation.[6]

In the ideological framework of Jewish emancipation, equality could thus be understood only in terms of individual rights, not in collective or national terms. In retrospect, some two centuries later, we can see how the Emancipation of the European Jews, by its very success, led to tragic failure. The Jews were successfully denationalized and to a large extent renounced their own distinctive culture. At various times and in different European countries they were accorded greater or lesser degrees of equal rights as individuals. But the problem of Judeophobia or anti-Semitism was not thereby resolved. It was merely transformed. The religious anti-Judaism of much of traditional Christianity became transformed into a modern secular ideology: political and racial anti-Semitism. In turn, the Jews, by their denationalization and loss of their own culture, lost the ability to respond collectively and effectively to renewed threats, culminating in the Shoah.

The tragic results of the Emancipation's successful denationalization of the Jews and negation of Jewish culture were described by the late Afro-American, Black-Muslim leader, Malcolm X (1925-1965):

History's most tragic result of a mixed, therefore diluted and weakened, ethnic identity has been experienced by a white ethnic group - - the Jew in Germany. He had made greater contributions to Germany than Germans themselves had . . . But those Jews made a fatal mistake - - assimilating . . . The Jews in Germany had been increasingly intermarrying. Many changed their names and many took other religions. Their own Jewish religion, their own rich Jewish ethnic and cultural roots, they anesthetized and cut off . . . until they began thinking of themselves as "Germans". And the next thing they knew, there was Hitler, rising to power from the beer halls, with his emotional "Aryan master race" theory. And right at hand for a scapegoat was the self-weakened, self-deluded "German" Jew. Most mysterious is how did those Jews, with all of their brilliant minds, with all of their power in every aspect of Germany's affairs, how did those Jews stand almost as if mesmerized, watching something which did not spring upon them overnight, but which was gradually developed - - a monstrous plan for their own murder. Their self-brainwashing had been so complete that not long after, in the gas chambers, a lot of them were still gasping, "It can't be true." . . . And then the Jews set up Israel, their own country, the one thing that every race of man in the world respects and understands.[7]

III. ZIONIST RESPONSES TO THE IDEOLOGICAL THREAT

It is significant that the two most prominent 19th century founders of Zionism, Leo Pinsker and Theodore Herzl, both came from assimilated Jewish backgrounds, initially favored Jewish assimilation, and subsequently developed their Zionist ideology in reaction to the rampant anti-Semitism they witnessed.

Leo Pinsker (1821-1891) grew up in a liberal, enlightened Jewish home in Russia, and was a member of an organization promoting Jewish assimilation into Russian culture. The widespread

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pogroms against the Jews following the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881 led him to write a German pamphlet while abroad in 1882, ***Auto-Emancipation***.[8] In Pinsker's analysis, the Emancipation's denationalization of the Jews and emphasis of individual rights had not solved the problem of anti-Semitism, but had compounded it. The denationalized Jews are neither natives nor foreigners anywhere in the world; they are strangers, because they have no country of their own. Without a country of their own, he argued, the Jews lack the reciprocal basis for human rights that apply to all groups.

In seeking to fuse with other peoples, [the Jews] deliberately renounced to some extent their own nationality. Yet nowhere did they succeed in obtaining from their fellow citizens recognition as natives of equal status.[9]

Not only is he not a native in his own home country, but he is also not a foreigner; he is, in very truth, the stranger par excellence . . . The foreigner has a claim to hospitality, which he can repay in the same coin. The Jew can make no such return; consequently he can make no claim to hospitality . . . The Jews are aliens who have no representatives, because they have no country.{10}

We have sunk so low that we become almost jubilant when . . . a small fraction of our people are put on an equal footing with non-Jews. But he who must be put on a footing stands but weakly.{11}

What a pitiful figure we cut! We are not counted among the nations, neither have we a voice in their councils, even when their affairs concern us. Our fatherland – the other man's country. Our unity – dispersion. Our solidarity – the battle against us. Our weapon – humility. Our defense – flight. Our individuality – adaptability. Our future – the next day. What a miserable role for a nation which descends from the Maccabees!{12}

Pinsker's emphasis of reciprocity as the basis for human and national rights (which, he argues, the Jewish people lacks) has ample precedent. For example, the **Magna Carta** (1215), article 41, states that when England is at war, enemy alien merchants in England shall be detained unharmed, "until information be received by us . . . how the merchants of our land found in the land at war with us are treated," and will be treated accordingly. The Jews, however, have no such reciprocal basis for protection. Therefore, in article 10, the interest on debts to Jews need not be paid by the heirs of the debtor nor by the king, if he assumes the debt. And in article 11, the needs of the widow and children of a debtor to Jews are to be provided for, as well as taxes owed to the feudal lord, and only whatever funds remain are to be repaid to the Jewish creditor.{13}

Pinsker concludes, therefore, that the challenge is not the emancipation by the non-Jewish majority of Jews as individual members of a minority everywhere. Such emancipation is ineffective in overcoming Judeophobia (a term he explicitly uses). The fight against Judeophobia is futile: "Polemics are useless, and we should abstain from it as a waste of time and energy . . . Prejudice or instinctive ill-will is not moved by rational arguments, however forceful and clear."{14} Pinsker is thus criticizing the liberal notion that rational arguments can overcome anti-Semitism. It is precisely the irrational nature of prejudice that renders it impervious to reason. Rather, what is needed is a "radical change", namely "the auto-emancipation of the Jewish people as a nation" and the founding of a Jewish national homeland.{15}

Theodore Herzl (1860-1904) also came from an assimilated background in Austria, and was led by the Dreyfus affair in France (1894) to reconsider the position of the Jews in Europe. The result was his book ***Der Judenstaat*** (1896). Like Pinsker, Herzl regarded anti-Semitism as both inevitable and irrational, and argued that it is an "error that Anti-Semitism can be refuted by reasonable arguments. We are probably disliked as much for our gifts as we are for our faults."{16} If the Jews are to have true equality, they must, therefore, have equality as a nation, in

their own state.

Lest Herzl and Pinsker be accused of betraying liberal, progressive and universalist principles, it should be noted that both emphasized their commitment to universal human liberation. Herzl wrote in ***Der Judenstaat***: "The Jews are not the only people in the world in a condition of distress . . . We may as well begin by removing a little bit of this misery, even if it should at first be no more than our own."{17} And in his ***Altneuland*** he wrote of the Jewish State's relations with Africa:

I am not ashamed to say, though I be thought ridiculous, now that I have lived to see the restoration of the Jews, I should like to pave the way for the restoration of the Negroes.{18}

Pinsker had similarly written: "The general law does not apply to the Jews as true aliens . . . Like the Negroes, like women, and unlike all free peoples, they must be emancipated."{19} As we have seen, by this Pinsker did not mean the emancipation by others of individual Jews, but the collective auto-emancipation of the Jewish people, the restoration of the Jews as a nation, and the establishment of a Jewish national homeland.

IV. CONTEMPORARY TRANSFORMATIONS

Modernity, which for many Jews in Europe began with the 18th century Enlightenment and emancipation, has thus not overcome Judeophobia, but merely transformed it in various ways. The classical Greco-Roman antipathy towards the Jews because of their distinctive culture and religious practices became transformed in the "Age of Reason" into a similar aversion to Jewish refusal to assimilate into the enlightened European culture that liberals perceived as universal. The traditional religious anti-Judaism of much of classical Christianity became transformed into a secular and supposedly scientific philosophy of political and racial anti-Semitism (a term coined by the anti-Semite Wilhelm Marr in 1879). In the words of Mordecai Kaplan, the Jews

had been hated and persecuted for centuries, but it was not before Germany came and called it anti-Semitism that Jew hatred became a philosophy.{20}

The crime of the Jews was now no longer (or no longer merely) that they were not Christian, but that they were not (for example) German or French or racially "Aryan." In short, once again, the crime of the Jews is that they are different. From a right-wing perspective, the Jews are seen as different because they are not members of the majority "Volk" or of the supposed Aryan race, or because they are socialists or communists. From a left-wing perspective, the crime of the Jews is that they are charged with being capitalists. From a nationalist perspective, they differ because they are regarded as being cosmopolitan. From a universalist socialist perspective, the Jews are perceived to be ethnic nationalists. The common denominator of all these modern ideological transformations of Judeophobia is simply that the Jews are judged guilty of deviating from whatever the majority ideology posits as the desired norm, whether that norm is defined in terms of Volk, race, nation, capitalism, socialism, or communism. In short, in modern transformations of ideological Judeophobia, as in Greco-Roman times, the crime of the Jews is simply that they are different.

Since the Shoah in World War II and the State of Israel's independence in 1948, we have witnessed two new transformations of ideological Judeophobia, both relating to Zionism and Israel.

1. Arab-Islamic Judeophobia

The first type is the contemporary transformation of classical Christian and modern European Judeophobia by the Islamic and Arab world, which for many centuries was far more tolerant of and hospitable to the Jews than Christian Europe was. Islamic and Arab Judeophobia has simply

taken over many of the Christian, European and even Nazi caricatures of the Jews, including such obscenities as the blood libel, the charge of killing Jesus (repudiated by most Christian churches today), Arabic publications of the notorious forgery “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion” and of Hitler’s “Mein Kampf”, and Nazi-like stereotypical physical portrayals of Jews in general and Israelis in particular in political cartoons. There seems to be no contradiction in this form of Judeophobia between denial or minimalization of the Holocaust, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, accusing Israel of Nazi-type atrocities. Reports from Europe indicate that Holocaust education in schools is becoming difficult or impossible to maintain in light of increasing resistance by Arab and Muslim pupils. In October, 2003, Malaysian President Mahathir Mohammad was greeted by a standing ovation at the summit Conference of Islamic Nations for a speech replete with attacks on the Jews, who, he said, “rule the world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them.” More recently, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, then the president of Iran, did not hesitate to call openly for wiping Israel off the map (a call repeated frequently by his successors to this day), and to deny or minimize the Shoah, incurring some condemnation, but no sanctions, from Europe and other countries.

In late 2003, the European Commission withdrew and shelved a study of anti-Semitism it had sponsored, because of the embarrassing conclusions it reached concerning the clear connection between the growing Arab and Muslim minority in Europe and violence committed against Jews and Jewish institutions in European countries, which also showed how much traditional Judeophobia continues to characterize alarmingly high percentages of the population in Christian or post-Christian Europe. The liberal, universalist ideals of European nations reflected in their immigration policy are now being tested, as at least some Muslim immigrants openly reject the values of their host countries (such as equality for women, free speech and a free press, for example, when a Danish newspaper published cartoons mocking Muhammad).

The claim of some Arabs and Muslims that they are not anti-Jewish but only anti-Zionist is clearly belied by their adoption of classical Christian and European caricatures of Jews, by the widespread publication and dissemination of Judeophobic literature in Arab and Islamic countries, and by attacks not only on Israeli targets but also on local Jewish targets in the Middle East (such as synagogues in Djerba, Tunisia and in Istanbul, Turkey), in Europe, and in Latin America. Their claim is clearly belied by the treatment of the remaining Jewish communities in Arab countries, by the openly anti-Jewish rhetoric and actions of terror groups like Da’esh (ISIS), Jihad Islami, Hamas, Hizballah and Al-Qa’idah, and by such supposedly “moderate” Arab countries as Syria, whose president Bashir Asad saw fit to lecture the Pope in Damascus about the defects of the Jewish religion and the alleged crimes of the Jewish people in the time of Jesus and ever since.

2. Anti-Zionism as Anti-Semitism

The second contemporary transformation of ideological Judeophobia or anti-Semitism takes the form of anti-Zionism. In certain respects, it is the most dangerous ideological threat, because it claims – and its adherents may sincerely believe – that it speaks in the name of universalism, liberal values, human rights, justice and peace. As such, it is internalized even within certain sectors of the Jewish community, and thus also threatens the Jewish people from within.

To clarify our terminology. Criticism of specific Israeli policies does not constitute either anti-Zionism or anti-Semitism. There are many Jews, Israelis and Zionists (myself included) who are quite critical of various Israeli government policies or actions. These people strongly affirm the right of the Jewish people to a national homeland and political sovereignty in the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, but also suggest that Israel would be strengthened (depending on their respective points of view) if only it were to become more religious or more secular, more socialist or more capitalist, more militant or more accommodating towards the Palestinians, with more government control of the economy or with more of a market economy. Such criticism does not render a person anti-Israeli, anti-Zionist, or anti-Semitic. To the contrary, such constructive

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criticism is both the right and duty of the citizens and supporters of the Jewish State.

Constructive criticism of the Jewish State is thus by no means anti-Zionism. Anti-Zionism means the denial of the right of the Jewish people to their own homeland and denial of the right of the State of Israel to exist (in whatever form) as the state of the Jewish people. Unfortunately, even some Jews, and even some Jewish intellectuals like Professors Noam Chomsky , Tony Judt and Daniel Boyarin, affirm such anti-Zionism. The fact that they are Jews (and in some cases professors of Jewish Studies) gives legitimacy, aid and comfort to anti-Zionism in the eyes of non-Jewish opponents of Zionism and Israel.

How, then, can I suggest that such anti-Zionism is tantamount to anti-Semitism, when many of these people – sincerely believing in their liberal and universalistic ideology – would strongly oppose any discrimination against individual Jews, as they would against any other individuals?

To reiterate: Zionism argued that the equality of individual Jews, living everywhere in the world as a minority, is an illusion, so long as the Jewish people have no collective equality as a nation exercising the right of self-determination. National self-determination can only be exercised by groups who are a majority in their own country. Individuals living as a minority do not exercise the basic human right of self-determination; they are tolerated, more or less, by the majority among whom they live. For instance, the Japanese people enjoy self-determination only in Japan. The Japanese minority in the U.S.A. have rights as American citizens, not as Japanese, and they have not always had those rights, when in World War II the Nisei (American citizens, born in the U.S.A., of Japanese background) were interred in American concentration camps.

A group which, unlike the Japanese, lives everywhere as a minority and has no state and homeland of its own, is deprived of the fundamental human right of national self-determination, as Pinsker and Herzl recognized. Zionism therefore argued that the Jews will ultimately only be fully equal as individuals if the Jewish people attains collective equality among the nations of the world. Paradoxically and tragically, by transforming the question of Jewish equality from the individual to the nation, Zionism unintentionally also transformed Judeophobia from the individual level of anti-Semitism into the collective, national level of anti-Zionism.

Anti-Zionist Jews like Chomsky, Judt and Boyarin and their non-Jewish colleagues would presumably insist that individual Jews enjoy full equality in their countries. But by denying that the Jewish people should enjoy the fundamental human right of national self-determination, a right enshrined in the United Nations Charter (although not applied consistently in the case of Israel by the United Nations Organization), these anti-Zionists are denying the Jews a basic human right accorded (in principle, if not consistently in practice, eg., to the Kurds) to all other peoples.

All theoretical considerations aside, and looking at the problem in pragmatic and moral terms: to deny the Jewish people the collective right of self-determination, even while affirming individual civil rights for Jews, is to propose that the Jews return to the emancipatory framework, which culminated in the Shoah. We know what happened to the Jewish people when they were powerless because they had no state and homeland of their own, a time when no country in the world (including the western democracies) saw itself as responsible for taking in and protecting thousands, if not millions, of Jews who might have been saved from extermination. I simply fail to comprehend the purported morality of those (including some Jews) who suggest that the Jewish people, once again, literally bet their lives and the lives of their children and grandchildren on the good will of others, and who would have only the Jews again test with their lives the hypothesis that human nature has fundamentally changed, despite all evidence to the contrary, including renewed Judeophobia in Europe and in the Arab and Islamic world. So long as the human species remains divided into nations and states, on what conceivable moral grounds can one suggest that only one nation, the Jewish people, again be rendered powerless and totally vulnerable, and serve once again as the universal guinea pig of good will and toleration?

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Therefore, even if one supports individual Jewish rights, to deny the Jewish people the basic human right of national self-determination which one affirms for all other peoples, is unfair, discriminatory, immoral and self-contradictory. In short, contemporary anti-Zionism is merely another transformation of old anti-Semitism.

By my suggestion that the transformation of individual anti-Semitism into collective anti-Zionism is a paradoxical by-product of Zionism itself, I explicitly do **not** mean to suggest that anti-Zionism was created by Zionist or Israeli behavior, a thesis that I totally reject. No other country has its very right to exist continually questioned and made conditional upon its behavior. People who criticize European xenophobia (including renewed anti-Semitism), the Chinese widespread repression of dissent and occupation of Tibet, Russian sales of nuclear technology to terrorist regimes like Iran and annexation of the Crimea from the Ukraine, or America's wars in Vietnam a generation ago or more recently in Iraq, or the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons against its own people with hundreds of thousands of casualties and millions of refugees, do not suggest that these countries have thereby lost their claim to exist as independent states and to membership in the United Nations. Only Israel remains subject to such attacks on its very right to exist as the state of the Jewish people and their homeland.

In purely logical terms, someone who denies Israel's right to exist has little basis for criticizing its behavior. Something which shouldn't exist to begin with cannot be either good or bad, and certainly cannot be improved by constructive criticism. Israel cannot behave better if it doesn't exist.

Although they are Jews, Chomsky, Judt and the others, are not the first professors to be anti-Zionist and even anti-Semitic. The eminent British historian, Arnold Toynbee, referred a generation ago to the Jews as a fossil and as "the appendix of history". Professor Judt, also a historian, wrote an article entitled "Israel: The Alternative" in the *New York Review of Books* (October, 2003), in which he concludes that "Israel, in short, is an anachronism." That's pretty much the same conclusion that Toynbee reached, but without the British understated humor. Toynbee, however, was talking about the Jews (and therefore also about Israel) whereas Judt is talking about Israel (and therefore also about the Jews). This is the moral and intellectual arrogance of scholars who develop a map of history, according to which the road should go to the left. But when they actually travel on the road, and it goes to the right, they conclude that the road is wrong, and not their map. Or as one of my professors warned us against grandiose intellectual theories: "Never let the facts get in your way."

Judt, although a historian, refers to Zionism in terms of 19th century European nationalism, which he (like so many Europeans) saw as anachronistic and obsolete. He seemingly had not read Arthur Hertzberg's masterful introduction to his anthology *The Zionist Idea*,{21} in which he argued that Zionism cannot be understood as a European type of nationalism, because the two basic elements of European nationalism, namely territory (i.e., the group lived on their historic territory) and language (i.e., the group spoke and were defined by their distinctive language) were missing in the case of the Jews, who by and large did not live on their ancestral territory, and who did not speak their historic language Hebrew (although they used it for religious and literary purposes). Therefore, Hertzberg suggested, Zionism should be understood not as nationalism in the European sense, but as "secular messianism", that is, as a secular, this-worldly and practical implementation of the traditional messianic Jewish impulse of national restoration in Zion. Judt's reading of history failed to recognize that the building blocks of multi-culturalism remain national land, language and culture: there cannot be multi-culturalism without cultures, which are inherently national. Nevertheless, again, only the right of the Jews to maintain their distinctive national and religious culture is called into question.

Let us look at some of the facts. Judt, like many other anti-Zionists, claimed that Israel is anachronistic in our post-modern era of the global village, because it is "a state in which Jews and

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the Jewish religion have exclusive (sic!) privileges from which non-Jewish citizens are forever excluded." In fact, there is only one country in the entire Middle East which is a secular democracy and which does **not** have a religious test for citizenship or public office, and that is Israel. Granted that it's not likely that someone named Mustafah or Christopher is likely to become Prime Minister of Israel anytime soon. However, that is not a function of law, but of social and political reality - - just as it is in the U.S.A., which nobody claims has an ethnic-religious constitution, and which since 1776, until the election of Barack Obama in 2008, never had a president who is not white, and has still never had a president who is not a male Christian (nor, with the exception of John F. Kennedy in 1960, a president who was not a Protestant). Israel, unlike the U.S.A., has no constitutional requirement that its president be native born, and yet the American law is not considered racist, whereas Israel is accused of racism. Israel has a long way to go to improving the status of the Arab citizens, even at a time when they more vocally and vehemently identify with their Palestinian brethren, but important first steps have been made. Israel has had a Druse member of the government (under Barak) and has a Druse major-general and other senior officers in the army. There is a more or less proportional number of Arab members of the Knesset (Parliament), and Israel was the first country in the world in which Arab women received the right to vote.

This is not to say that Israel has made no mistakes. A balanced perspective, however, suggests first of all, that Zionism and Israel, despite all their failures, have had at least some successes. Nevertheless, even if this reading of the situation were far too rosy, it would not affect the fundamental premise that the Jews have the right to national self-determination in their own state, a premise increasingly questioned and denied by more and more people (especially, but not only, in Europe), who affirm the right of self-determination of every group in the world, except of the Jews.

To judge by the hostile world-wide media attention to everything Israel does, and by frequent United Nations condemnations of Israel, one is tempted to suggest another transformation from individual Jews to the Jewish nation. The Nazis used to say, "Die Juden sind unser Unglück",{22} "The Jews are our misfortune," in order to blame them for all of Germany's problems. Perhaps today the unstated but implicit anti-Zionist motto has become, "Israel ist unser Unglück", "Israel is our misfortune" – if only Israel would somehow disappear, the world's problems would be solved, as if there weren't a few other groups in the world who claim to be suffering, but whose causes (unlike the Palestinians) do not attract such world-wide media attention and support in the United Nations.{23} What about the Tibetans under Chinese rule, the Muslims in India and China, the Basques in Spain, the Catholics in Northern Ireland, the Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey, the Christian and animist Africans in Sudan, all kinds of groups in the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, and the Native Americans and Afro-Americans in the U.S.A.? Israel is thus continually singled out for a double standard of criticism, to which no other country is subjected. In short, just as previously the individual Jew was denied his rightful place in society, today Israel is denied its rightful place among the family of nations.

Prof. Judt said that "Israel is an oddity among the nations." That's probably true, but not for the reasons he thought. There is no other nation which has faced what the Jewish people have faced, from the ashes of the Shoah to the continuing struggle of Israel to survive, against all odds, and in the process, to remain as faithful as possible to moral ideals.

V. CONCLUSION

We began with Maimonides. Let me conclude with the words of another great medieval Jewish philosopher, Judah Ha-Levi (1085-1140). In his fictional dialogue between a Jew and a king, the Jew says that the Christians and Muslims preach humility but practice conquest, whereas the Jews do not conquer. To which the king replies that the Jews don't have the power to conquer, and if they had the power, they would also kill.{24} Ours is the first generation of Jews in nineteen

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centuries to face Ha-Levi's test of the responsibility of power. We now have a state, an army, the power to kill. To use the phrase of my late friend and colleague, the philosopher Emil Fackenheim: the Jews have returned to history. How, then, are we using our power? Is it true, as many think, that power corrupts people, or, rather, could it not be that people corrupt power?

We have not always done a very good job, and there is certainly much room for improvement. But no other nation has, or could have done, as well under the circumstances. And there is no other country whose very right to exist is predicated on its being perfectly righteous. So I take Judt's insult as a compliment. Israel is indeed "an oddity among the nations." It's not the first time Israel has been cursed as odd. The Torah records the story of Balaam, who was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse the Jews as an odd "people who dwells alone, and is not counted among the nations."(Numbers 23:9). That curse became a blessing. This nation, with all its faults and failures, and however odd or anachronistic it may seem to others, has alone survived among all the ancient peoples of our part of the world, by "dwelling alone," and by refusing to assimilate to the culture and morality of other nations. It will continue to do so, notwithstanding the new anti-Semitism posing as anti-Zionism.

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[1] The letter was written in 1172. An English translation by Boaz Cohen was published in Abraham Halkin's edition of the Arabic text and three medieval Hebrew translations (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1952).

[2] Diodorus the Sicilian, *Bibliotheca* Historica1:1-2, cited in Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1974), Vol. 1, p. 183.

[3] Cicero, *Pro Flacco* 28:66, cited in Stern, *op. cit.* Vol. 1, p. 198.

[4] Tacitus, *Historiae* V:5:1, cited in Stern, op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 26. It should be noted that the Roman antipathy towards the Jews also prompted the Jewish historian Josephus (c. 37 – c. 97 C.E.) to compose a defense of the Jews and Judaism, "Against Apion"

[5] Ahad Ha-Am, "Ha-Adam Ba-Ohel", 1892, in *Kol Kitvei Ahad Ha-Am* (Tel Aviv, 1965), p. 53.

[6] Count Stanislaus de Clermon-Tonnerre (a Girondist member of the National Assembly), 23 December 1789, cited in Raphael Mahler, *A History of Modern Jewry 1780-1815* (New York: Schocken, 1971), p. 32.

[7]*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (New York: Grove Press, 1965), pp. 277-284.

[8] The citations which follow are from Leo Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation: An Appeal to his People by a Russian Jew* (Berlin: 1882), English translation by D.S. Blondheim (New York: Masada, 1939).

[9] Pinsker, *ibid*, p. 8.

[10] Pinsker, *ibid*, p. 12.

[11] Pinsker, *ibid*, p. 16. [12] Pinsker, *ibid*, p. 17. [13] Magna Carta, trans. W.S. McKechnie, in *Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 3rd Edition, Vol. 1, pp. 416-427.

[14] Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation*, p. 11.

[15] Pinsker, *ibid*, p. 30.

[16] Theodore Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* (1896); *The Jewish State*, trans. Jacob Alkow (New York: American Zionist Emergency Council, 1946), p. 149.

[17] Herzl, *ibid*, p. 153.

[18] Herzl, *Altneuland*, in *Gesammelte Zionistische Werke* (Berlin: Juedischer Verlag, 1935), Vol. 5, pp. 291-292; English translation by Lotta Levensohn (New York: Herzl Press and Bloch, 1959), p. 169, cited in *A Herzl Reader*, coompiled by Benjamin Jaffe (Jerusalem, 1960), p. 176.

[19] Pinsker, *op. cit.,* p. 12.

[20] Mordecai Kaplan, Diaries, 28 June 1917, recording a speech he gave at the New York Y.M.H.A. in support of the American involvement in World War I against Germany. Kaplan (1881-1983), an American rabbi who taught for decades at the (Conservative) Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, was the founder of the Reconstructionist movement. The passage is found in *Communings of the Spirit: The Journals of Mordecai M. Kaplan – Volume I: 1913-1934,* edited by Mel Scult (Detroit: Wayne State University Press and Reconstructionist Press, 2001), pp. 118-119. On the widespread and ingrained antipathy towards Jews in German society – an antipathy that long preceded the Nazis but enabled them to employ ordinary Germans from all walks of life in murdering Jews – see Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996).

[21] Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (New York: Doubleday and Herzl Press, 1959).

[22] The phrase was originally coined by the German historian and politician Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896), and was adopted by the Nazis.

[23] In certain respects, Israel's lonely and precarious status in the United Nations is reminiscent of Friedrich Duerrenmatt's play "The Visit" (1956), in

which a rich lady returns to the central European town in which, years before, she had been abandoned and wronged by her lover. To take revenge, she offers the town one billion marks "in exchange for justice", i.e. to kill the man. Gradually the townspeople turn against the man – all the while insisting that, of course, they are motivated by justice and not by the money. Is it entirely cynical to wonder whether contemporary antipathy to Israel and support for the Palestinians (especially in Europe), supposedly in the name of purported justice, is really totally principled and unmotivated by Arab oil and business interests in the Middle East?

[24] Judah Ha-Levi, *The Kuzari* 1:114. An antiquated English translation by Hartwig Hirschfeld (1905) is available in paperback (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

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